

Moving Journal

The Rise of a
New American Cinema,
1959-1971

Jonas Mekas

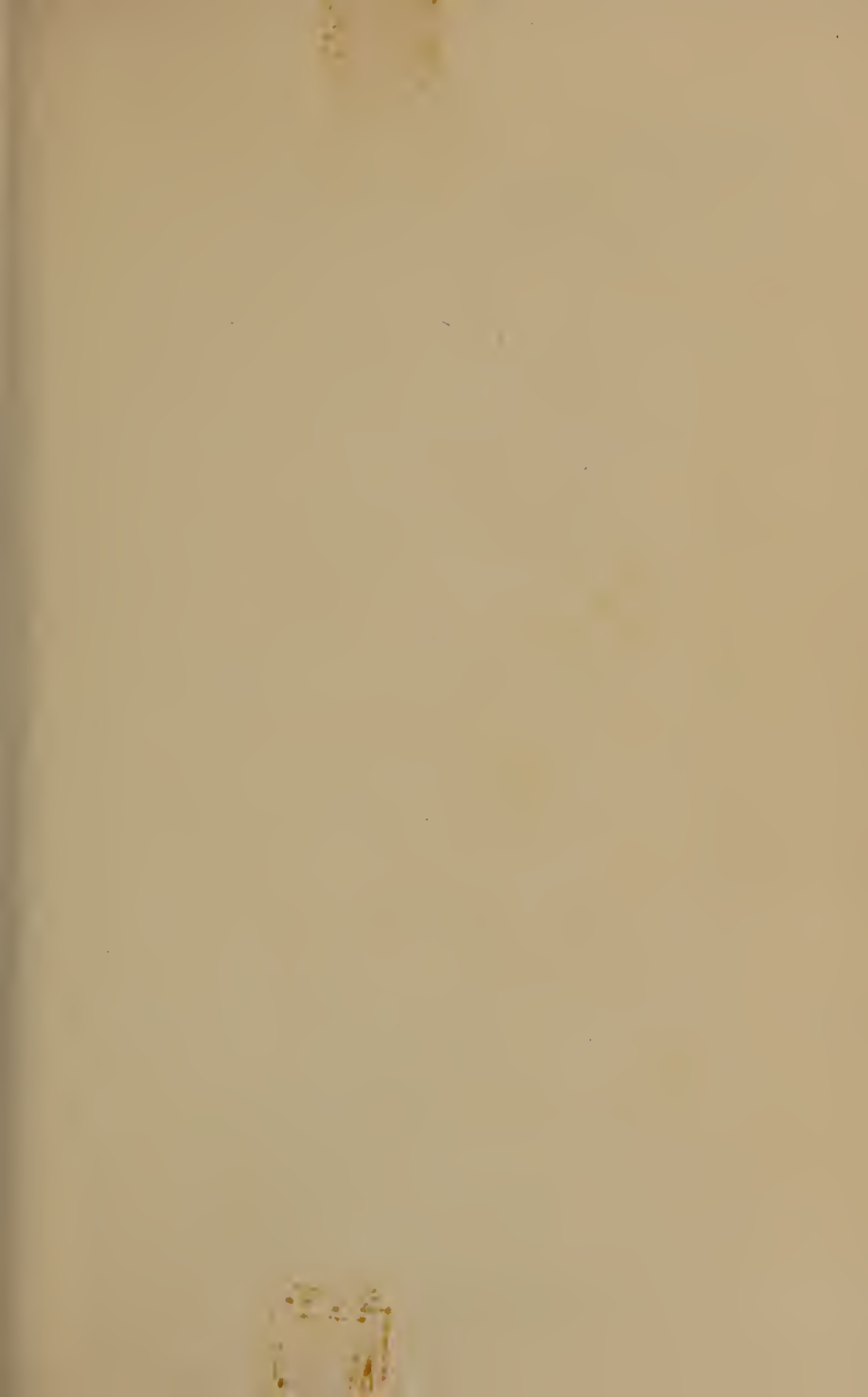
"It is not my business to tell you what it's all about. My business is to get excited about it, to bring it to your attention. I am a raving maniac of the cinema."

—Jonas Mekas

The readers who already know the work of Jonas Mekas will rejoice at this collection of the best of his *Village Voice* pieces from the past decade. Those who do not know him yet but who love film will find here great treasures of perception and analysis. Mekas involves himself deeply in the films that he loves, and then writes about them in *Movie Journal* with great wit, clarity, honesty, and grace, and with the widest humanism. He can illuminate the film he is discussing, penetrating with equal facility the holy terror of Andy Warhol, the mystical vision of Brakhage or Markopoulos or Jack Smith, the silence of Antonioni, the despair of Kurosawa. Sometimes he can illuminate the moviegoers, too, explaining deftly just why we see a film one way, often persuading us to a revision, to a new way of seeing. Mekas is a unique and vitally important film critic.

He is a good deal more than that, as well. Through his passion for beauty and honesty in film, he has evolved a virile new aesthetic, a way of watching movies that requires a temporary surrender of the ego in order to embrace with joy and freedom the sensual poetry of the new

(Continued on back flap)



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JOURNAL

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1959-1971

JONAS MIEKAS

The Macmillan Company, New York, New York

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INTRODUCTION

Excerpt One from my True Diaries:

November 8, 1958. I am a regionalist, that's what I am. I always belong somewhere. Drop me anywhere, into a dry, most lifeless, dead, stone place where nobody likes to live—and I'll begin to grow and soak it, like a sponge. No abstract internationalism for me. Nor do I put my stakes on the future: I am now and here. Is this because I was uprooted from my home by force? Is that why I always feel a need for a new home because I don't really belong anywhere but there, in that one place, which was my childhood and which is gone forever?

That year, sometime during the summer of 1958, I decided to make another run for life. My first act toward it was to cut out my tonsils. . . . Somewhere, in the gardens of the Western Civilization, in the forced labor camps, I had caught a chronic cold, and I was told to get rid of my tonsils, or else. . . . So I did. As I was leaving the gates of the hospital, still groggy, I took my second decision toward liberation: I decided to drop my job at the Graphic Studios where I was working five days a week. Instead, I took a part-time job at Cooper Offset, two hours every day, for eighteen dollars a week, and I became practically a free man ready to explore Whatever It Is.

I felt very free. Almost as free as fifteen years earlier, in 1944, after completing college: then, too, I felt free. I thought I should

be a writer and live from writing. I felt life opening in front of me like a huge flower. But two months later I found myself in the wet suburbs of Hamburg, in a forced labor camp, together with Italian, French and Russian war prisoners, slaving for the Third Reich. It took me another fifteen years and many fragments of many different languages and countries to end up on 515 East 13th Street and again declare my total independence.

As my third act, I went to see Jerry Tallmer, at *The Village Voice*, and I asked him why there was no regular movie column in his paper. He said, why don't you do one? I said, O.K., I'll have it tomorrow. My first column appeared on November 12, 1958, and a by-line said, "Movie Journal begins this week as a regular feature in the *Voice*." And that was it. What I did not realize at that time was that with this act I almost voluntarily got myself into the same situation as in 1944: I became a slave of the New Cinema, working in its forced labor camps, digging its ditches.

This collection of Movie Journals, this book that you are holding in your hands, represents approximately one third of the columns I did for the *Voice* since November, 1958. Some of the columns are reproduced in full, others in excerpts. Here and there are slight changes, a word dropped, or syntax improved. These changes were needed either a) to bring to the original manuscript state the places distorted by the typesetters (the early *Voice* issues were notorious for the printer's mistakes) or b) to polish my English here and there. Most of the columns or parts of the columns that I eliminated from this collection were either badly written or uninteresting or dealt with Hollywood or European art films which have been discussed by other writers better than I have. In preparing this collection I stuck to the core of my basic preoccupation of this period, which was with the independently made film and the related Expanded Cinema, which since has become known as the New American Cinema, and sometimes is also called the Underground Cinema.

When I began writing my Movie Journal, it was the very beginning of the New American Cinema. Cassavetes had just completed *Shadows*. Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie were shooting *Pull My Daisy*. The film bug had already bitten us, and the air was becoming more and more charged with energy and expectations. We felt the cinema was only beginning—with us! So that though I had intended, with my first columns, to become a "serious" film critic

and deal “seriously” with the Hollywood film, very soon I discovered that my critic’s hat was of no great use. Instead, I had to take a sword and become a self-appointed minister of defense and propaganda of the New Cinema. Nobody took the new film-maker seriously. The non-narrative cinema was not looked upon as cinema. My colleagues either ignored it or hit it right between the eyes. The best time to kill something is when it is too fragile to defend itself. Those who give birth to life or things of art are vulnerable during the birth periods. That’s why animals hide in inaccessible places when they give birth: they try to get as far as possible from the Established Movie Critics. . . .

As is illustrated in these columns, very soon after I started my Journal, I had to drop the critic’s hat and become practically a midwife. I had to pull out, to hold, to protect all the beautiful things that I saw happening in the cinema and that were either butchered or ignored by my colleague writers and by the public. So I kept running around my chickens, cackling, look look how beautiful my chickens are, more beautiful than anything else in the world, and everybody thinks they are ugly ducklings! Since I had to do plenty of cackling, I couldn’t afford wasting any of my space writing on commercial cinema. I invited Andrew Sarris, my co-editor on *Film Culture* magazine, to do that part of the job. We divided the field.

Looking back through twelve years of my *Voice* columns, I am amazed at the correctness of my critical judgment. I have no regrets, I have no corrections to make. The masters remained and will remain masters, and history will remain history.

An excerpt from my True Diaries:

May 23, 1960. Why do I do this, why do I do that? Why do I write my *Voice* column, why do I publish *Film Culture*? Why don’t I just make films, they ask me. Why do you do so many things at once? All those questions! It’s like being on a swing: first I have to move the swing; then I swing with it, and then it swings me, and then I am also swinging the swing. Where does the swing begin and where does it end, and what is, really, the swing?

Third excerpt from my True Diaries:

June 25, 1962. After a long night of thought, I decided to leave *The Village Voice*, to end my journalistic bit and go to other things. It’s beginning to interfere with my work.

I went to the *Voice* today with this idea. But the first thing I heard, when I walked in, was "Jerry Tallmer is gone. He went to the *Post*."

I thought there was a small warning of fate in this. It was I who spent a sleepless night trying to make a decision; it was I who made the decision to leave: but somewhere the numbers of dice got all mixed up and Jerry left instead of me! That's a weird irony. So I think I should stick a little bit longer. I cannot leave the *Voice* today. So I said nothing and went home.

Fourth excerpt from my True Diaries:

March 2, 1964. This is a farewell note.

I have been thinking of giving up my Movie Journal for some time now. But kept finding excuses.

My excuses have run out.

I have built and fed a strange creature in my columns. Sometimes I don't know if it's real or imaginary.

There is no doubt that I can be of use to the independent film-makers. I am a fanatic and I can do much. But it is my fanaticism that is also my danger. I have a tendency to impose my own dreams and visions on others. Some of my observations and fantasies have been blown up out of proportion and have become directives pulling others in their orbits and winds. I have become a force, a leader, even a saint . . .

It is time to dissolve all forces and all orbits and all saints.

Even art can enslave man, take away his freedom. I feel today that only that art is sacred which has no "ideas," no "thoughts," no "meanings," no "content," but is simply beautiful; serves no other purpose but its own beauty; it just is, like trees are.

Underground cinema won't get anything from public success. Popularization drags beauty down.

I am tired of force and action.

It is very easy for a man, and I am talking about myself, of course, to begin to feel that he is needed and important.

It is unimportance that I am after.

My argument for continuing my *Voice* column went like this:

But shouldn't I simply be a humble servant of the film-makers and do my duty, do at least some good to my fellow humans? Are you telling me that my freedom is more important than to serve men? Aren't you like one who leaves people and retreats to the Himalayas, busy with himself? It's your egoism that is guiding you, not the sense of freedom.

It's so easy to think that what I am doing is needed!

Really, nothing is needed.
That includes this column.

I wrote this on March 2, 1964. But the next week, I did another column for the *Voice*. Why do you think I did it? Ha, I am not going to tell you that! To find out that, you'll have to read my True Diaries, where everything's explained . . . But if you're keen enough, Dear Reader, you'll find it all answered in this collection of my Movie Journals.

JONAS MEKAS

1959

February 4, 1959

CALL FOR A DERANGEMENT OF CINEMATIC SENSES

Every breaking away from the conventional, dead, official cinema is a healthy sign. We need less perfect but more free films. If only our younger film-makers—I have no hopes for the old generation—would really break loose, completely loose, out of themselves, wildly, anarchically! There is no other way to break the frozen cinematic conventions than through a complete derangement of the official cinematic senses.

February 25, 1959

MAYA DEREN AND THE FILM POEM

The Very Eye of Night, Maya Deren's latest film, was premiered at a recent retrospective show of her films at the Living Theatre, then given two further command performances at the Cherry Lane.

It would be unjust even to attempt to review the film in this narrow space. One can describe the plot and a few situations of the usual dramatic motion picture. But it is impossible to capture in words a film which is, basically, a poem, and which affects us not by its story but through its visual associations and symbols.

As in our contacts with literature, certain areas of feelings are

often pushed into the background by too long an exposure to "sober," epic forms like the novel. Poetry asks for more sensitivity. So the sober ones say: What is all this about Maya Deren's films? What is all this fuss about Brakhage, Maas, and Richter?

But to me, *The Very Eye of Night* is a very thought-out film, clear and crystalline. Maya Deren differs from most of the other experimentalists through her clarity of purpose, clarity of images, universality of symbols. Every poet works in a specific area of feeling, and the area in which Maya Deren digs is not so much her own personal subconscious as a universal subconscious. Passed through her own temperament, the images and symbols acquire a midwinter-sky clarity, with the shining blade of a ceremonial knife sticking out of the moon's blood.

The Very Eye of Night is best understood in the context of Miss Deren's whole work, as we trace her inner journey through the space-time breakings, through the modern myths imagery, black-white rituals. The movements and tensions of her films seem to be predestined. The unfolding, growth, and climax of *Meshes of the Afternoon*, now reinforced by Teiji Ito's score, have something of the tragic predestination of Greek tragedy, while the suspense is trembling on that blade of a knife. Although *The Very Eye of Night* is less tense, it has the same tragic predestination of the stars.

With all the depth of Maya Deren's content, we are caught, first, not by the intellect of her films, but by the intensity of their visual rhythms, since she is an artist using cinema in its purest sense. The intricacy of the various levels of her thoughts and the under-structures of the movies are consciously known only to Maya Deren herself. To us they are hidden beyond these crystal tense black-white images—a hidden snare of her imagination waiting there in the film's psyche to catch us at the right moment in the right way and work slowly into us.

Since we are nourished on the epic picture only, I have no illusions that film poetry will ever be understood and felt by very many. Most of the time poetical feelings are considered weak and unmanly. The farthest that our "sober" audience can go to meet poetry is in a narrative poetic picture like the Polish *Two Men and a Wardrobe*, because "it has a story to tell," or because "it is a straightforward film."

But during the showing of Maya Deren's films at the Living

Theatre, the place was bursting with people—sitting everywhere on the floor, standing by the walls, on the stairway—a most unusual and exultant moment for a film poet to experience in this sober world.

August 12, 1959

WHAT THE DEVILS WILL DO TO THE
DISTRIBUTOR OF *LOLA MONTES* IN HELL

I'd give much to know which circle of Hell our film-distributors will go to, especially the distributor of Max Ophuls' masterpiece and crowning achievement, *Lola Montes*. In all probability, Lucifer will force this distributor to write, again and again, in the blazing heat of Hell's midsummer, his new title, *Sins of Lola Montes*, invented in a moment of mundane inspiration. That will not be all. I think he will also be forced to eat, frame by frame, all the sixty-five minutes of the film that he cut out, and I bet he will vomit it out before he finishes the last frame. So that he will have to start from the beginning again.

But more than that—at the same time he will have to restore the film to its original shape—the film which he, in his short earthly life, has dubbed and cut and mixed all up and, as H. G. Weinberg put it, “twisted ass-frontwards.” But since this distributor is blind as a bat, he will never know how to do it, as he never knew in his life what *Lola Montes* was all about. So the little devils will come around and they will tear out chunks of his flesh, exactly sixty-five minutes of it, and will twist him all around, with his poor back part frontwards.

The brothers Sanders, however, may get away with all that, being young and inexperienced—for massacring Feodor Dostoevski in their film *Crime and Punishment, U.S.A.* At least their attempt to transfer Dostoevski to modern America was well-intentioned. But, again, as we all know, Hell is paved with good intentions too. And then, maybe it was not even their idea, but someone else's.

Still, the first film of these two young and talented brothers has a visual freshness and directorial imagination that often goes beyond the grasp of the usual contemporary Hollywood. Its main

failure is in its dialogue, which, when translated, sounds like bad dubbing or Sammy Davis, Jr., singing in Chaliapin's voice. You can not transplant Dostoevski to modern America without changing his dialogue and his plot completely. Only the central idea should be left.

This is why Anouilh or Cocteau get away with the old Greek myths in their plays. In *Orpheus* or *Antigone*, although recognizable elements of the plot are retained, the central ideas are explored from completely different, contemporary, and personal angles. So, instead of just repeating them, Anouilh or Cocteau add to the old myths, expand them, revitalize them, and make them meaningful again. The Sanders film does almost the opposite: It shrinks Dostoevski to the size of a midget.

As I said, however, youth forgives and is forgivable. But not the premeditated massacre of *Lola Montes*.

October 14, 1959

ON NEW MOVIEHOUSE ARCHITECTURE

When I went to see *Pillow Talk*, I was given a program printed and laid out like a menu. So I knew immediately that I was going to get a dish, with a lot of Technicolor cream on top, and that I could sit, relax, and dream with all the pleasures of a full belly. The psychology of the new Murray Hill Theatre is that clever.

However, I noticed a few contradictions. After I walked inside, holding onto that menu, I found myself in a place that was lit up in a dreamy, bluish, Turkish-bordello sort of light. As soon as I sat down, two black sticks suddenly descended upon the screen and went back again where they had come from, with—to my great amazement—nothing particular happening. After I got used to this wonder of subliminal architecture (and after I had briefly reflected upon the sad fact that the children of the UN executives are so underfed that the Murray Hill Theatre had to raise money for them), the film began. Looking at the most impressive leg I have seen in a long time—which, by the way, belonged to Doris Day—I felt that slowly I was descending into a dream-world.

But not quite. I did not know the Murray Hill Theatre was following the Brechtian estrangement technique. They got the most uncomfortable comfortable chairs they could find and they squeezed them together as tightly as they could—you know: another chair, another buck, and I can't blame them—so that during the movie you would be constantly reminded that you are in a "real" theatre: no false illusions, no false dreams. Which, I think, is clever.

Still, after a while (if you've heard about Pavlov's experiments, you know why) I managed to concentrate on the film, which, for Hollywood, is not bad at all. It is a comedy, by the way. The director and the writers managed at least to be economical, direct, and to the point with their clichés. The designer was doing everything to make the movie look visually "modern"—that means to keep it in Madison Avenue designing styles.

To modernize its content they also threw in—very ingenious, indeed—occasional references to the "beatniks." That made it really work. And that made me finally understand something I have been feeling for some time now: That there is a basic difference between "beatnik" and "the beat." Whereas "beat" means—you know what it means—check Kerouac and Norman Mailer's essays, the word "beatnik" is the bourgeois, outsider's conception of "beat," a product of uptowners, tourists, Judge Leibowitz, the films like *Pillow Talk*, etc.—not a description, but a mental projection that carries all the crap of their crooked vulgar imaginations.

November 18, 1959

PULL MY DAISY AND THE TRUTH OF CINEMA

Alfred Leslie's and Robert Frank's *Pull My Daisy* has finally been premiered at Cinema 16, and those who saw it will now (I hope) understand why I was so enthusiastic about it. I don't see how I can review any film after *Pull My Daisy* without using it as a signpost. As much of a signpost in cinema as *The Connection* is in modern theatre. Both *The Connection* and *Pull My Daisy* clearly point toward new directions, new ways out of the frozen officialdom and midcentury senility of our arts, toward new themes, a new sensibility.

The photography itself, its sharp, direct black-white, has a visual beauty and truth that is completely lacking in recent American and European films. The hygienic slickness of our contemporary films, be they from Hollywood, Paris, or Sweden, is a contagious sickness that seems to be catching through space and time. Nobody seems to be learning anything, either from Lumière or from the neorealists: Nobody seems to realize that the quality of photography in cinema is as important as its content, its ideas, its actors. It is photography that is the midwife, that carries life from the street to the screen, and it depends on photography whether this life will arrive on the screen still alive. Robert Frank has succeeded in transplanting life—and in his very first film. And that is the highest praise I can think of. Directorially, *Pull My Daisy* is returning to where the true cinema first began, to where Lumière left off. When we watch Lumière's first films—the train coming into the station, the baby being fed, or a street scene—we believe him, we believe he is not faking, not pretending. *Pull My Daisy* reminds us again of that sense of reality and immediacy that is cinema's first property.

One should not misunderstand me: There are many approaches to cinema, and it depends on one's consciousness, sensitivity, and temperament which style one chooses, and it also depends on which style is more characteristic to the times. The style of neorealism was not a sheer accident. It grew out of the postwar realities, out of the subject matter. It is the same with the new spontaneous cinema of *Pull My Daisy*. In a sense, Alfred Leslie, Robert Frank, and Jack Kerouac, the film's author-narrator, are only enacting their times in the manner the prophets do: The time expresses its truths, its styles, its messages, and its desperations through the most sensitive of its members—often against their own consciousness. It is therefore that I consider *Pull My Daisy*, in all its inconsequentiality, the most alive and the most truthful of films.

November 25, 1959

SHOOT THE SCREENWRITERS

There is no doubt that most of the dullness of our movies is concocted in advance in the so-called heads of the so-called script-

writers. Not only the dullness: They also perpetuate the standardized film constructions, dialogues, plots. They follow closely their textbooks of "good" screenwriting. Shoot all scriptwriters, and we may yet have a rebirth of American cinema.

December 23, 1959

ON FIGHTING UGLINESS WITH UGLINESS

I sat down to write this column in a gloomy mood. It is Christmastime; there is something in the air, some kind of ideal. And all this ugliness around me, all these ugly films! And through my window I can see a corner of the Women's Prison.

Still, I have to write.

You can go and suffer through the heavy unimaginativeness of *Black Orpheus* and make your life still more miserable. Or you can go to *Aromarama*, a travelogue through China, accompanied with smells. You can smell the orange, you can smell the pine tree, you can smell the harbor. You walk out full of concentrated smells, and you gasp for fresh air; or you rush to wash out your hair and take your suit to the cleaner. Still, all this is fun: You pay your money for it. All this would leave nothing but a memory of a practical joke, if the distributor hadn't added to the film an anti-Chinese commentary to make it anti-China propaganda. Which is ugly, ugly, ugly, and cannot be killed with any smells.

Kramer's *On the Beach* and Kobayashi's *The Human Condition* are more documents than films. The first reminds us of the absurdities of our own militarists (today's headlines: "U. S. Informs NATO It Leads Russians in Nuclear Arms, Will Keep Edge" . . . "Youths in Jail Get Military Classes"); the second reminds us of the atrocities of the Japanese in Manchuria. As such, both pictures make their points.

But then I thought:

So what? Don't we have enough ugliness already? And don't we know these things already? Why always fight ugliness with ugliness, stupidity with stupidity, displaying still more and more of it? Why not create something beautiful to fight the ugliness? Not that I am for escapism (although there is nothing wrong with it). René

Clair was not an escapist in *A Nous la Liberté*. And Chaplin never was. No poet ever is. Neither are tulips, willow trees, Louise Brooks, or cranes. But they fight ugliness just by being there, by emanating beauty, peace, truth.

Suddenly I am all tired of it, of all these films, banal films, realistic films. I want to go out into Washington Square and look at trees. Even the hanging tree emanates life.

Crowther, in his review of *The Human Condition*: "What's more, the Japanese dialogue is abrasive on unaccustomed ears. . . ."

1960

January 13, 1960

ON KUROSAWA AND *DRUNKEN ANGEL*

The year begins with Akira (*Rashomon*) Kurosawa's *Drunken Angel* at the Little Carnegie.

Drunken Angel is a dark, moody poem. *Drunken Angel* is full of desperation and Humphrey Bogart cynicism and cruelty and misery. *Drunken Angel* is a hymn to the desperation of man—an angry hopeless song about a desperate, angry landscape of human hope and sickness. *Drunken Angel* is a bubbling mud puddle in the very heart of man, with diseases and hideous nests of mosquitoes, oozing gases and garbage, degradation and misery.

It is about a doctor? a bum? a saint? a drunkard? a man? "All angels are like me. Look at me!" he shouts. He shouts his words out angrily, with no more patience left. He has reached the bottom. He is no longer afraid; he has nothing to lose. He is fighting the puddle, alone. Sweating, shouting, dirty, drunk, unshaven, stinking—he knows the only thing left is to persist, to insist. The puddle is there, it will probably always be there. But so will be the man. So he picks up a stone and angrily throws it into the puddle. And it disappears into its ugly womb, as do the flowers and the garbage and the mosquitoes.

Drunken Angel is a film of contemporary Japan and contemporary man anywhere as seen by an artist whose love and compas-

sion have led him to desperation. And we feel, from every image, from every gesture, that it hurts him. The film itself becomes an angry, desperate stone that Kurosawa swings into the very face of man. And gray, muddy shadows and flashes of light run trembling across the screen, forebodingly, like an oozing subconscious—a dark, black song of man.

But it shines. Even through mud and sickness, the beauty and love and truth shines from the stone cast by Kurosawa into the face of man.

January 27, 1960

TWO VERSIONS OF *SHADOWS*

It may seem to some that enough has already been said about John Cassavetes' *Shadows*. After seeing it again last Tuesday at the Film Center, in its original version, and after comparing the exultation of this audience with the perplexity at Cinema 16, I definitely feel that the real case of *Shadows* is only just beginning.

I have no further doubt that whereas the second version of *Shadows* is just another Hollywood film—however inspired, at moments—the first version is the most frontier-breaking American feature film in at least a decade. Rightly understood and properly presented, it could influence and change the tone, subject matter, and style of the entire independent American cinema. And it is already beginning to do so.

The crowds of people that were pressing to get into the Film Center (*Pull My Daisy* was screened on the same program) illustrated only too well the shortsightedness of the New York film distributors who blindly stick to their old hats. *Shadows* is still without a distributor. Distributors seem to have no imagination, no courage, no vision, no eyes for the new.

Again, I stress that I am talking about the first version of *Shadows* only. For I want to be certain not to be misunderstood. I have been put into a situation, one which a film critic can get into only once in a lifetime (I hope). I have been praising and supporting *Shadows* from the very beginning (see Cassavetes' letter, *Village Voice*, December 16, 1959; Ben Carruthers' letter, December 30, 1959), writing about it, pulling everybody into it, making enemies

because of it (including the director of the film himself)—and here I am, ridiculously betrayed by an “improved” version of that film, with the same title but different footage, different cutting, story, attitude, character, style, everything: a bad commercial film, with everything that I was praising completely destroyed. So everybody says: What was he raving about? Is he blind or something? Therefore I repeat and repeat: It is the first version I was and I am still talking about. (Here is the stay-away identification marker: the second version begins with a rock-and-roll session.)

I have no space for a detailed analysis and comparison of the two versions. It is enough to say that the difference is radical. The first *Shadows* could be considered as standing at the opposite pole from *Citizen Kane*; it makes as strong an attempt at catching (and retaining) life as *Citizen Kane* was making an attempt at destroying life and creating art. Which of the two aims is more important, I do not know. Both are equally difficult to achieve. In any case, *Shadows* breaks with the official staged cinema, with made-up faces, with written scripts, with plot continuities. Even its inexperience in editing, sound, and camera work becomes a part of its style, the roughness that only life (and Alfred Leslie's paintings) have. It doesn't prove anything, it doesn't even want to say anything, but really it tells more than ten or one hundred and ten other recent American films. The tones and rhythms of a new America are caught in *Shadows* for the very first time. (*Pull My Daisy* does it too, perhaps better, but it came out one year after *Shadows*.) *Shadows* has caught more life than Cassavetes himself realizes. Perhaps now he is too close to his work, but I am confident he will change his mind. And the sooner the second version is taken out of circulation, the better. Meanwhile, the bastardized version is being sent to festivals and being pushed officially, while the true film, the first *Shadows*, is being treated as a stepchild. It is enough to make one sick and shut up.

February 10, 1960

ON FRIENDSHIP AND HOMOSEXUALITY

Whenever there is an extremely close friendship between two men in a film, the scriptwriter and the director nowadays always

join forces to provide enough homosexual motivations. Is it true that nobody can conceive of any other kind of friendship between two men any longer? That would be pitiable.

February 17, 1960

ON WESTERNS AND 42ND STREET

Go to 42nd Street, where you can always find a Western. The Times Square Theatre, which shows Westerns exclusively, is always full, day or night. A sad, lonely crowd, made up usually of older people. It's like an old people's home, a hundred per cent male. The American Western keeps them company. They sit there, in the midst of all that poetry sweeping grandly across the screen, dreaming away.

ON NUDIST MOVIES

You can also see the nudist film *Garden of Eden* on 42nd Street. On my way out I asked for half of my money back because I was gypped: I was shown only one-half of what was happening on the screen, namely, only the rear ends of the leading characters and the rear ends of all the extras. The fronts were either covered with towels or cut off somewhere at a very unimaginative level. The funniest thing, however, was the puritanism of the nudists themselves: Their eyes remained lifted stoically on a horizontal line which was somewhere about five feet above the ground. What will power!

I left the theatre, thinking: There should be a monument erected somewhere to the first man who thought about covering his nudity. He was certainly a man with real aesthetic sense and vision. I was appalled by the ugliness of most of the nudists shown in the movie (at least, judging from their backs). It wouldn't be a bad guess to say that at least ninety-five per cent of all human beings are hopelessly ugly. They may as well keep themselves covered, and good.

March 9, 1960

ON ANTI-WHITE FILMS

During the screening of *Cry of Jazz* at Cinema 16, and during the symposium that followed, everybody took it for granted that this was a film about jazz. It is not: It is about the Negro way of life. It has also been reproached scornfully for not having anything to do with film art. Correct! But art is not always the intention of human actions. It should be clear to everybody by now that there is also a cinema of ideas, and that perhaps only one of every thousand movies has a direct contact with art. It has also been stated that *Cry of Jazz* is an anti-white film. I don't know if it is. But then, what if it really is? It's about time somebody made one.

March 23, 1960

DOWN WITH THE DISTRIBUTORS

Down with the distributors! Until now the film-maker was always at the mercy of the distributor. If the distributor says your film is no good, it is no good; if he says your film is O.K., you are one step closer to obtaining a theatre. Or, as has been done so often, he takes your work and begins to chop it into pieces until it bleeds. What American and European movies we see and in what shape we see them depend on the taste and the fancy of the distributor.

April 6, 1960

LIONEL ROGOSIN AND COME BACK, AFRICA

In almost a week's time, three films heralding the new generation of American film-makers have opened in the city: Bert Stern's *Jazz on a Summer's Day* (Fifth Avenue Cinema), Lionel Rogo-

sin's *Come Back, Africa* (Bleecker Street Cinema), Frank and Leslie's *Pull My Daisy* (New Yorker). The American New Wave—or, to avoid confusion, let us call it the Ninth Wave—is on the march.

Come Back, Africa could not come out at a more timely moment. It is an unusual film, whichever way you look at it: as a document, as a personal expression, as a piece of propaganda. And above all it is a young film.

We know Rogosin already from *On the Bowery*. We know, more or less, his approach: an approach which combines fact with fiction. The acting, most of the time, is improvised on the spot, the dialogues are real, and so are the faces and situations. Even if we know that some of the situations were staged and some of the dialogue imposed, they still contain all the freshness and roughness of life. The very amateurism of the cast becomes a part of the movie's truth and authenticity. And then there are scenes which are simply great. One is the discussion among a group of African leaders concerning their situation, which becomes a discussion of the human condition in general. And the scenes in the mines, the huge Eisenstein compositions of the workers walking down the shaftways. And then there is the final scene, a death scene, where the man does nothing but pound the table with his black fist, just this simple physical action, nothing else, which I think is about the best scene of grief and anger I have ever seen in the movies. Usually, and it is the same in theatre as well as in film, these emotional scenes are very embarrassing—they seldom succeed. Here it works. It works so well that the sound of this pounding fist becomes more than an expression of grief: It becomes the sound of the dark, beating consciousness of a waking Africa.

Any of the new directors of the Ninth Wave—Rogosin, Casavetes, Frank, Morris Engel, Leslie—are better film authors than the preceding generation (Ritt, Lumet, Aldrich, etc.); meaning that we see in their films more personal authorship and much less of the producer. On the other hand, none of them is very familiar with film theory or film history. Neither are they intellectuals. They are, rather, emotional, unpredictable men who follow their own intuitions and visions, with little respect for any accepted conventions. And we know that the best of American cinema has been created by such emotional “ignorants,” Griffith not excluded.

Lionel Rogosin is typical of the new American film-makers of the Ninth Wave. No intellectual of any sort, he nevertheless seems to have an inborn immunity to the clichés of the official cinema. By sheer intuition he is navigating American cinema into fresher, unexploited grounds.

May 11, 1960

HOW TO TRANSCEND ART

In literature, we have Joyce, and we also have Spillane. No intelligent man will ever confuse the two, although he may enjoy both. No intelligent man will attack Spillane for not being "literature." That wouldn't make sense. But a man who attacks a Hollywood movie for not being film art is a man of high artistic standards . . .

The young works of the New American Cinema are criticized by audience and reviewers for their roughness and for their technical imperfections. Do we read books only because they are perfect works of art? In *Yugen No. 6* there are some thirty poems by some twenty young poets, and they are all good. Now it would be stupid to say that there are today—and in one magazine—twenty good poets. As a matter of fact, there isn't a single Blake in this magazine. Nevertheless, there are some great things in *Yugen No. 6*. And in the same way there are some great things in *Come Back, Africa*, *Jazz on a Summer's Day*, *Shadows*, and even in such a bad movie as *Private Property*. Art feeds on margins, we could say. As *Yugen* is the living frontier of the New American Poetry, so these movies are the living frontier of the New American Cinema. (An interesting "frontier" movie was *Too Soon to Love*, directed by Richard Rush, which came out and promptly disappeared. Look for it.)

Someone said to me: "I slept during *The Would-Be Gentleman*—there was no cinema in it." If he had gone with the intention of seeing the Comédie Française, he would have had a good time, as I did. But he went to see film art. He couldn't take it for what it was: a filmed play. He had to look for something else. Others cannot take *Jazz on a Summer's Day* for what it is: They too have to look for a written script and dialogue (as one of the daily reviewers did).

Oh, if we could just sit, open-eyed, completely noncritical, and be anti-art, anti-cinema for ten minutes, going through a sort of Actors' Studio "seeing" lesson—we might start a revolution in ourselves.

The other day, my friend Leo Adams, who is a sort of Zen master and lives on Lake Erie, came in to see *Come Back, Africa*. His New York host, a city mouse, still unenlightened and full of ideas about art, walked out on one long discussion scene, totally bored. "Shame on you," said Leo, "I thought you were beyond art," and he sat through the scene, getting things from it that only he knew—completely happy, absorbed, taking the right things for the right things and the wrong things for the wrong things, as only a Zen master could.

June 23, 1960

ON *THE SAVAGE EYE*

This is only an imaginary movie made by imaginary film-makers.

The background of the film-makers: Thirty years ago they were socially minded men who wanted to improve the world. By now they have given that idea up. Now they look at the world with cynicism and disgust. Like most of the generation of the 30's, they have understood the changing of man only as an outward manifestation. If, by now, they have familiarized themselves with Freud or Jung, they have done so only from the popularizing books and various psychologistic blurbs about father, mother, childhood, love, etc.

In any case, we can imagine a few of them getting together to make a movie about America. Since they mistrust fiction, they will begin by photographing real-life situations. They will shoot, for instance, a religious gathering, where the believers go through their open-hearted confessions, mystical passions, and trances. Since the movie-makers sincerely believe that religion and mysticism are bad for the lucid mind, they will slant the essence of this gathering by presenting it as ridiculous circus fare. It will be cruelly funny, as most private passions are when they are blown up out of their proper context and dragged into the blazing sunlight to entertain the outsider.

Then they will film a few scenes at a homosexual party, with men dressed as women. This—so their social minds tell them—will reveal another corruption of 20th-century man. In no case should a homosexual be shown as emotionally honest and sincere. Neither can there be any sadness or tragedy in his life. He is a freak.

They will then photograph a striptease hall. Being puritanical, healthy, and pure-minded, they will expose the “dirtiness” of all this striptease business. Striptease can mean nothing but a degeneration of sex. Just look at Paris. They will expose it with the same cynical disgust they expressed toward homosexuality. To them, there is nothing complicated about men or women. They know all the answers.

They will take many other scenes like this from real life. To tie everything together, they will introduce a heroine. To give a modern touch, they will make her into a Freudian character. By that our authors mean they will let her constantly talk about mother, father, childhood, love. That will give the movie some real psychological depth. They will also write a poetical commentary to it. Everybody can write poetry if they just try. Then a thick layer of loud music will be poured over it, and the cake will be ready to serve. The critics will acclaim it as one of the most truthful movies ever made. Everybody will swallow it whole—the cake, the platter, and the wrapping paper as well.

They will call this tutti-frutti *The Savage Eye*.

September 22, 1960

ON SHOOTING GUNS OF THE TREES

From the diary of *Guns of the Trees*:

July 29: Shooting the scenes with Gregory and Frances on the beach. Since it was decided to have planes in the background, we chose Idlewild Airport beach—a forbidden place for outsiders. The only way to get to it is by water. We took two beat-up boats from Sarris and transported the equipment and actors. The weather was against us. Smog as never before. Eating our eyes. Visibility—zero. Still, we managed to shoot some footage.

In the evening we found our boats stranded deep on shore by the retreating tide, and it took us some work to get them back into the water. All wet, full of salt and sand, Al and Sheldon took the boats back to Sarris, with Alice riding on the bow. The waves were too high and we didn't want to risk our equipment. The rest of us smuggled ourselves and the equipment out of the airport with the help of a friendly truck driver, hiding on the floor of the truck, bumpy like hell.

July 30: We planned to leave for the Catskills around seven A.M. We wake up: raining as on a doomsday. Now, sitting home, looking at the window. Called up the airport: the same weather in the Catskills. Then Edouard had to go to the hospital, to check his foot. Yesterday, shooting on the beach, jumping around, he stepped on a big rusty nail. Cannot walk. Danny will have to drive. We should be leaving in the afternoon.

. . . *Guns of the Trees*, as it looks now, will be sponsored by my friends. I said to myself: I will test their friendship with the most difficult test of all: money. Very few can stand this test, but some are holding.

. . . Last night, scouting for locations on Long Island, we went an extra twenty miles to the home of Mr. S., just to get a meager meal, coffee, and cake (which we got only because one of their brat children happened to have a birthday)—we even had to play baseball with the children—all for one small meal. What a way to make films!

August 3: We set up our cameras by a small lake on Long Island. Just before we were ready to start shooting, a cop came and told us to move. Private property. Belongs to a movie-theatre owner, with a name like Calherin, or something.

On the way home, stopped a second time by cops, for passing a stop sign. Too tired to see all the damn signs. We got away by persuading the cops that we were French tourists on our way to Mexico.

Got terribly hungry. No bread, no nothing. Stopped at Mr. A., in Great Neck, but he himself had nothing. Bought some food in a store and ate in front of a synagogue, late at night. A rabbi came out to check, so we fell on our knees, pretending we had come to pray, shouting lines in five different languages, including Latin, which, as we later realized, has nothing to do with Hebrew. In any

case, we finished our meal in peace. Sheldon went to one of the houses nearby for bread, and succeeded in getting some: They thought he was one of the college boys trying to do something crazy to get into one of the fraternities. They did not believe he was really hungry.

August 4: Edouard keeps harping that Sheldon needs more discipline. He has to do what he is told, he has to obey without questioning, etc. And it is very true. Still, I believe it is all wrong. It wouldn't be wrong in Europe, but it is wrong here. Because one of the main characteristics of Sheldon's generation (he is twenty-one) is their disobedience, their disrespect for officialdom, their anarchy. This generation is by necessity a generation of irresponsibility, disobedience. More than that: I think these "negative" characteristics should be encouraged, developed further. The official system is too strong yet. It will take plenty of disobedience and irresponsibility to knock it out of balance.

Edouard says we should have chosen a *German* cameraman!

August 5: Late last night, searching for locations, we found ourselves in Hoboken. What a sad place to be at night. Unbelievable. I wondered who can live here, in this dead, black city, with long monotonous streets, with a bitter harbor smell floating in the air. But we had a cheeseburger for thirty-five cents which tasted much better than New York sixty-cent cheeseburgers.

. . . No money. All the footage shot during the past three weeks lies undeveloped, piled up on the floor. I don't even know what I have there. Every time I hear the word money—and it happens at least ten times a day, the cursed thing—my chin droops and I look for a chair to sit down in. However, this only proves once more that films are not made with money. Films are made with belief, passion, enthusiasm, persistence, etc.—anything but money.

August 6: It's raining, morbid, dark. This is the second day without shooting. Depressing. Time is being wasted. The days drag. We are far behind our schedule. I am trying to organize actors for tomorrow, for rehearsals, so that we can start shooting at least by Monday.

October 6, 1960

ON FILM TROUBADOURS

Films will soon be made as easily as written poems, and almost as cheaply. They will be made everywhere and by everybody. The empires of professionalism and big budgets are crumbling. Every day I meet young men and women who sneak into town from Boston, Baltimore, even Toronto, with reels of film under their coats—as if they were carrying pieces of paper scribbled with poems. They screen them at some friend's loft, or perhaps at the Figaro, and then disappear, without making a big fuss about it. They are the real film troubadours. This is about the best thing that has happened to cinema since Griffith shot his first close-up.

Harold Humes, who is shooting his first feature film around the Village, is suing the New York Police Department for brutality. The police can really push you around. I think there should be a law that no man could join the police force unless he has either a university degree in the humanities or has spent a few years in an Oriental monastery.

November 13, 1960

ON RENOIR AND BEAUTY

And then comes Jean Renoir's *Picnic on the Grass*, which has neither big drama, nor intricate adventures, nor breathtaking thrills—and it carries you away and you are drugged with it, dizzy, drunk with beauty itself.

If ever a film was beautiful, *Picnic on the Grass* is. Its scenery is beautiful. Its landscapes, its trees, its rivers. And more: Its people are beautiful. Not that they are simply beautiful to look at (which they are), like Elizabeth Taylor; they are beautiful from inside. They radiate as Pierre Auguste Renoir's paintings radiate with sun and those little bells of laughter. Jean Renoir has always been the director of the beautiful in actors. There is nothing ugly about him. Some people fight evil with the atom bomb. Renoir fights it with beauty.

And then there is all that youth, there is all that freshness. Renoir has never had any large pretensions to cinema, to art. He always broke the rules, like one of his early film characters, Boudu. He simply lives, sings, jokes, dances, fools around like a drunk Kerouac, in the grass, and in the woods, and he has done so already for forty years, forever himself a New Wave, discovering the movie camera for the first time.

What he says is beautiful. And the way he says things is beautiful. What does it matter what the film is about, its theme, its plot? It is about love, sun, trees, beautiful women, summertime, a picnic on the grass. What does any plot mean in art or life? The details, the subtleties, the nuances are what matter. Not what one says—"You are beautiful" or "I love you"—but how one says it. It is the style that matters, the way Renoir does things, how he looks at things—it is always this *how* that is beautiful, in Renoir, and it is this *how* that is his art.

I hear the critics did not like it. Who are the critics? Critics like to talk big—poor nearsighted things! They do not see beauty even when it is there.

When I left the theatre (Paris Theatre) I didn't want to look at the streets. Neither did I dare to look deeper into myself. I drove silently through the autumn night and darkness.

November 17, 1960

ON FEMININE SENSIBILITIES

About *The Sin of Jesus*: Here is another film with a woman as the leading protagonist. There must be some meaning to this. Perhaps a reaction to the long reign of unmanliness of the automation executive? The only remaining sensibilities worth portraying in art seem to be those pertaining to women and homosexuals. So the homosexuals and women are becoming the heroes of the modern arts. Who wants books or films on executives? *The Sin of Jesus*, like *The Savage Eye*, *Another Sky*, or *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*, is a hundred per cent a woman's movie. Or, more correctly, the woman as man sees her. Or, still more correctly, the fate of a woman, shown through the eyes of a woman, as conceived by a man. I heard women burst into tears during the screening of *The Sin of Jesus*.

1961

January 12, 1961

THE CREATIVE JOY OF THE INDEPENDENT FILM-MAKER

Newspapers and critics are looking for waves. Let them look for them, goodbye, goodbye! There is a new cinema, and there was, for a good fifteen years, the experimental cinema, but critics did not see it. The reason is simple: They do not know what to look for. As in that Zen tale:

It's too clear and so it's hard
to see:
The man once searched for a
fire
with a lighted lantern;
had he known what fire was,
he could have cooked his rice
sooner.

The French *nouvelle vague* is really not so new—and not so different from the rest of the commercial French or any cinema. If they are so conventional at twenty, imagine what they will be at forty!

The most original new American movies never even intended to compete with the commercial cinema. Beginning with *The Quiet One* and all the way down the line through *On the Bowery* and *The Sin of Jesus*, this cinema is an outcast, an “outsider” cinema,

and its authors know it. They are not after another Hollywood; Hollywood is doing its job well without them.

I have often spoken against professionalism. *Next Stop 28th Street* is a good example of what I mean. In this film the bleak, sad poetry of the subway is caught as nobody has caught it before (except Peter Orlovski), as no Hollywood with no ten tons of lights and studio sets could ever catch it. Oh, the helplessness of the professionals, and the creative joy of the independent film artist, roaming the streets of New York, free, with his 16 mm. camera, on the Bowery, in Harlem, in Times Square, and in the Lower East Side apartments—the new American film poet, not giving a damn about Hollywood, art, critics, or anybody.

January 26, 1961

RENOIR AND PLOTLESS CINEMA

There is a new book by Ezra Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* (Simon & Schuster). Goodman quotes D. W. Griffith as saying: "The simple things, the human things are important in pictures. There are supposed to be only seven or eight plots. They are relatively unimportant. The most important thing is humanity." The old man of cinema knew it all the time.

It is an important point, this plot business. It almost makes the whole difference between entertainment and art, between purely commercial cinema and author's cinema. Crazy about the plot, the critics almost killed *Picnic on the Grass* and *Another Sky*, two of the best movies to come to town in a long time. Kurosawa's *Drunken Angel* they did not even notice. Now they are trying to kill Buñuel. The critics prefer plot, the artist prefers the regions beyond plot.

The masterpiece of the personal, "plotless" cinema is Jean Renoir's *Rules of the Game* (at the 8th Street Playhouse). And it is in *Rules of the Game* that we see the superiority of Renoir over Bergman. Cinema vs. theatre. Whereas Bergman sustains his scenes through the dramatic climaxes, Renoir avoids any such dramatizations. Renoir's people look like people, act like people, and are confused like people, vague and unclear. They are moved

not by the plot, not by theatrical dramatic climaxes, but by something that one could even call the stream of life itself, by their own irrationality, their sporadic, unpredictable behavior. Bergman's people do not have a choice of free movement because of the imposed dramatic construction; Renoir's people have no choice because of the laws of life itself. Bergman's hero is the contrived 19th-century hero; Renoir's hero is the unanimous hero of the 20th century. And it is not through the conclusions of the plot (the fake wisdom of pompous men) that we learn anything from Renoir; it is not who killed whom that is important; it is not through the hidden or open symbolism of the lines, situations, or compositions that Renoir's truth comes to us; but through the details, characterizations, reactions, relationships, movements of his people, the *mise-en-scène*. Gradually, as the film progresses, plotless as it is, the whole nerve system of the pre-World War II French aristocracy is revealed to us, sickening as it is.

And that is the secret of the art of Buñuel and Renoir. The very last image of *The Young One*, with Zachary Scott standing there alone by the water's edge, the burning patch of sun behind the trees, and the overgrowth of the trees—this in itself is worth more than all the New York film critics and their papers put together. Our film critics are butchers of the human and the beautiful. And so are their papers.

February 9, 1961

MARILYN MONROE AND THE LOVELESS WORLD

Marilyn Monroe, the saint of Nevada Desert. When everything has been said about *The Misfits*, how bad the film is and all that, she still remains there, MM, the saint. And she haunts you, you'll not forget her.

It is MM that is the film. A woman who has known love, has known life, has known men, has been betrayed by all three, but has retained her dream of man, love, and life.

She meets these tough men, Gable, Clift, Wallach, in her search for love and life; she finds love everywhere and she cries for everyone. She is the only beautiful thing in the whole ugly desert,

in the whole world, in this whole dump of toughness, atom bomb, death.

Everybody has given up their dreams, all the tough men of the world have become cynics, except MM. And she fights for her dream—for the beautiful, innocent, and free. It is she who fights for love in the world, when the men fight only wars and act tough. Men gave up the world. It is MM that tells the truth in this movie, who accuses, judges, reveals. And it is MM who runs into the middle of the desert and in her helplessness shouts: “*You are all dead, you are all dead!*”—in the most powerful image of the film—and one doesn’t know if she is saying those words to Gable and Wallach or to the whole loveless world.

Is MM playing herself or creating a part? Did Miller and Huston create a character or simply re-create MM? Maybe she is even talking her own thoughts, her own life? Doesn’t matter much. There is so much truth in her little details, in her reactions to cruelty, to false manliness, nature, life, death, that she is overpowering, one of the most tragic and contemporary characters of modern cinema, and another contribution to The Woman as a Modern Hero in Search of Love (see *Another Sky*, *The Lovers*, *Hiroshima*, *Mon Amour*, *The Savage Eye*, etc., etc.).

It’s strange how cinema, bit by bit, can piece together a character. Cinema is not only beautiful compositions or well-knit stories; cinema is not only visual patterns or play of light. Cinema also creates human characters.

We are always looking for “art,” or for good stories, drama, ideas, content in movies—as we are accustomed to in books. Why don’t we forget literature and drama and Aristotle! Let’s watch the face of man on the screen, the face of MM, as it changes, reacts. No drama, no ideas, but a human face in all its nakedness—something that no other art can do. Let’s watch this face, its movements, its shades; it is this face, the face of MM, that is the content and story and idea of the film, that is the whole world, in fact.

February 16, 1961

ON ROSSELLINI AND HAWKS

A few heresies:

After seeing again Rossellini's *Europe 51* and *Voyage to Italy* (released here as *Strangers*) during the New Yorker's Forgotten Cinema series, I came to a firm conclusion—something that I believed all along: that all critics were simply stupid when they dismissed Rossellini's Ingrid Bergman period. Bergman was never greater than in Rossellini's films, and this includes *Stromboli*. Rossellini himself was never better than in these films, plus the unreleased *India 59. Generale Della Rovere*, which everybody is praising so much, when compared with any of the Bergman-period films, including *Stromboli*, is a big step backward. One more thing: I would give ten Ingmar Bergmans for one Ingrid Bergman.

More heresies:

I think Howard Hawks is one of the two or three greatest American film-makers alive. At least, he is not lesser than the Orson Welles of *Touch of Evil* (which is much superior to *Citizen Kane*) or the Hitchcock of *Psycho*. I firmly came to believe this after seeing nine of his films in the New Yorker series. I will have more on Hawks in some coming issues. Now I say only this: Hawks' *Air Force*, for instance, is a much, much greater film than Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevski*. *Nevski* is pretentiously pompous, like all operas, and unbelievably unreal, when compared with the true clean beauty of *Air Force*.

March 2, 1961

ON IMPROVISATION AND SPONTANEITY

"Painting—any kind of painting, any style of painting—to be painting at all, in fact—is a way of living today, a style of living, so to speak."

—WILLEM DE KOONING

Whenever I mention *Shadows* or *Pull My Daisy*, I can hear

groans from the best minds of the last generation. This is not art; there is no conscious creation here; this is a spontaneous mess. Maya Deren (*Village Voice*, July 21, 1960) summed up the attitude for everybody: This spontaneous creation “reminds me of nothing so much as an amateur burglar in a strange apartment, turning all the drawers onto the floor, cutting up the mattresses, ripping off the backs of pictures, and in general making one ungodly, clumsy mess in a frantic search for a single significant note.” Whereas, in true creation, she said, “one begins with a concept, a magnet charged with conviction and concentration.”

The modern American film, however, is, like poetry and prose, created by new men with new sensibilities. It is Marlon Brando, James Dean, and Ben Carruthers who best express the new style of film acting.

In the old school of directing, the director imposes his own will upon the actor. Charged with conviction, as Maya Deren says, the director takes an actor, like any other raw piece of material, and begins to build from it a contraption of his own.

But it is this type of directing that is butchering our cinema, our theatre, and our actors.

You can still do things like that in Europe and get away with it. The European school of stage and film acting, compared with Brando, Dean, and Carruthers, is an antique. But we understand it and we forgive it: it is antique, but it is not immoral. The soul of a European is full of deep grooves, molds, forms of past cultures. He may even die with his grooves, without escaping them. That is his fate.

It is a different situation in America. Anyone, in any art, who perpetuates molds, who holds onto old styles of acting, or writing, or dancing, commits an immoral act: instead of freeing men, he drags them down.

But it is not easy to drag down the new generation (by which I mean a great part of the postwar generation). A European director, working for the first time with a group of young American actors, immediately notices their constant questioning, soul-searching, always watching sensibilities.

The new American man, lost and shaky, searching, fragile, groping in an uncertain moral landscape, resists any attempt to use him in a preconceived, thought out manner, in any creation

which begins with a clear conception of what one wants to do, because he knows that most of what we know is wrong.

I have been watching S. I think that S. is half-asleep even when he is most awake. His normal state of living is a sort of half-sleep. And that is what his generation is (he is twenty-one). He is sensitive, receptive. Many things can be projected upon him, he catches ideas. But it works as with a hypnotist's medium: He is almost without will. And one wonders what is going on in this half-sleep of his generation, in this amoebic existence, why the laws of life wanted it that way. One thing is clear: It is not dead or dying matter. Just the opposite: It is a bundle of potent, latent, sleeping energy, very alive. Is there something being projected into this sleeping subconscious, something which will save America and mankind? Something which cannot be projected and cannot grow anywhere else, not in the subconscious mind of businessmen and generals? Since this generation is least protected, most passive, it is most suitable for breeding the most fragile, most subversive, secret flowers of good and evil. . . .

Nobody can therefore blame the younger generation for being oversensitive, for not trusting anyone else's will, for being too concerned with itself, with truth, sincerity. The young actor of today doesn't trust the will of a director any longer. He doesn't think that the part he is playing is only a part, and he only an actor. He merges with his part entirely, it becomes a moral problem for him, and a problem of existence. Thus, he doesn't trust any will but his own, which nevertheless he knows is so frail, so harmless—no will at all, only distant, deep waves, and motions and voices and groans of a Marlon Brando, James Dean, Ben Carruthers—waiting, listening (the same way Kerouac is listening for the new American word and syntax and rhythm in his spontaneous improvisations; or John Coltrane; or Alfred Leslie). As long as the "lucidly minded" critics stay out, with all their "form," "content," "art," "structure," "style," "clarity," "importance," and all that crap—everything will be all right; just keep them out. Because this new soul is still budding, going through a most dangerous, most sensitive time. Keep out all those strong wills with their preconceived, worked out ideas.

Even the animals hide themselves before giving birth. And women, they can almost hear through the walls . . . it is a highly

oversensitive and private matter. And it is the same with the “total subconscious” of a country, a continent, a race, painfully going through its birth: American culture began with the groans of James Dean and Brando and Carruthers. It is nonsense that we have to uphold the “American way of life”: There was no true American way of life until James Dean—there was only a bastardized Europe. It is true that the new man is in a mess. And so is his art. (“Natural processes are *uncertain*, in spite of their lawfulness. Perfectionism and uncertainty are mutually exclusive”—Wilhelm Reich.) But he is not in a frantic search for a “single significant note”—he doesn’t even care about significance—he is in search of the meaning of life itself.

April 13, 1961

ON MARLON BRANDO AND ROMANTICISM

I am in accord with Jerry Tallmer (*Playboy* article) that Brando is no longer what he used to be. But for what he is, I’ll give my arm! The new Brando towers over the other performances of 1961 as the old young Brando towered over performances of 1951. A different Brando, yes, but long live the different Brando!

With *One-Eyed Jacks* Marlon Brando gives cinema one of its most romantic landmarks. Its cruel romantic beauty has no equal in recent movies. If the French New Wave romanticism is expressed through lovers and nihilists, Brando’s romanticism is classical: He is a romantic brooder, a Hamlet standing on the ocean shore, listening to the waves and meditating on violence, revenge, love.

One-Eyed Jacks is a tragic case. Brando himself has best described (in the *Herald Tribune*) how the film was taken away from him and brutally butchered. One can see very clearly how the reduction from four to two hours has ruined the film. We know from Brando’s past acting that the best of it happens when there is no action or “plot.” The best of *On the Waterfront*, *The Wild One*, *The Fugitive Kind* are the bits in between the action. It’s there that every little word, every little motion, every silence suddenly becomes charged with expression. Brando’s acting is restrained, understated explosion.

What the puritanical Hollywood cutters did was to trim Brando's movie down to the bone, to its main action. The flesh went out. What we see are only the peaks marking the plot progression. We see the fist hitting—but anybody can execute the action itself, there is no acting necessary to hit. What we don't see is how the fist decided to hit, through what decisions it went, what hesitations, agonies. All that disappeared into the Hollywood wastebaskets.

The images themselves have something of a steel-blue clarity. And there is something big, large about the whole movie. One watches this film and knows: It is not the product of a small heart. One feels its boundless energies; a grandiose, ambitious plan; a huge dream at work—even if what we see is only a distant rumbling of what it could have really been if. . . . But in the gloomy nights of the Hollywood cutting rooms, if one stops and listens, one can still hear the curses of the dead Stroheim, with his bald neck, alone in the dark, trying to put together his butchered masterpieces, his broken heart. . . .

May 25, 1961

ON FIDEL CASTRO

My own conception of peace has nothing to do with that of the pacifists. I am a belligerent pacifist. For me, the greatest peace act, for instance, was Fidel Castro's offer to exchange his war prisoners for bulldozers. An act, almost a stroke of genius, that makes all war acts absurd. Just think what is more peaceful: To see five hundred bulldozers in the fields or to stare at a thousand war prisoners before you and nourish the thoughts of war? Only the most twisted minds can see in Castro's act "cynicism" and "Nazism," as some of our big newspapers wrote.

ON THE NEW DOCUMENTARY LANGUAGE

Dan Drasin's *Sunday* is a report on the Washington Square police action against folk singers.

Drasin's spontaneous camera, zooming in and out and around,

caught the riot that Sunday with an authenticity and aliveness that puts it head and shoulders above most of the reporting that is going on today in film and television. The main reason for his success—I am happy to say it—is that he turned his back on all the accepted techniques of our professionals in his use of camera and of sound. He lost the slickness but he gained truth and the dynamic of life, both in sound and image.

June 29, 1961

IN DEFENSE OF ACTION FILMS

Navarone insults your intelligence? There you go, always searching for ideas. The best intelligence today is no intelligence at all, if you know what I mean. No intelligence is better than false intelligence. So enjoy the mountain dangers. Enjoy the man in action. Explosions. Ocean storms. Close escapes. Gregory Peck. Simple things like that.

As for cinema, let's not fool ourselves. *Village of the Damned*, *Underworld U.S.A.*, or *Mad Dog Coll* has as much of it (in any case, not less) as any "art" movie you see today. Ideas? How many ideas does a man need? Count. Some ideas are useless. If you want ideas, the right ones, don't fool yourself: Go to India or China, study Sanskrit. Go to India and get lost, as Allen Ginsberg says. Don't read anything after 300 B.C., after Plato—it will only confuse you more. Unless it's the new American beat poetry, written after A.D. 1950 (Diane di Prima's new book, *Dinners and Nightmares*, for instance). Or watch old slapstick movies, pure Zen.

Yes, there are a few films which enrich our understanding of man and ourselves in a more realistic or, one could say, scientific manner. *L'Avventura*, for instance, or *Ashes and Diamonds*, or *La Dolce Vita*. But that doesn't give you the right to deny the other cinema, other kinds of knowledge, the knowledge gained through slapstick or a murder story, to name but two.

Some of you wonder how I can like *L'Avventura* and *Mad Dog Coll* at the same time. Yes, it is strange indeed. I will tell you my secret: It is my way of psychoanalyzing myself by embracing everything. It is the immorality, the dishonesty of man that I detest, not man himself.

July 13, 1961

ON VALUES, GODARD, AND A WOMAN'S TOE

Two weeks ago a letter in *The Village Voice* criticized me and the New Yorker Theatre for not liking "value" movies. "What they dig is sensation," the fellow wrote. "They hate anything with value."

I have this to say: he and I simply have different values. And I am no exception. The New Yorker and the Bleecker Street Cinema are no exceptions. If your correspondent would take a good look around, he would surely find that a great number of his own friends begin to avoid "values." As a matter of fact, values have suffered from inflation; they are not worth more than popcorn and peanuts, those values. Yesterday I read a review of Ginsberg's *Kaddish* in one of the "value" papers, *The New York Times*, and I almost vomited. Today I heard on the radio that the best values are at Bloomingdale's.

In any case, from my angle, which is a sort of crooked one, the sensation and the emptiness which the "cultured" writer abhors have many values. *Breathless* is empty, *Breathless* is immoral, they say. But, say, what other recent movie has succeeded in freeing itself from dubious values as perfectly as *Breathless*, both in form and content?

Breathless shows only the surface, it's true. It shows only the most basic actions: reactions. No past, no future, only the present interests Godard, its maker. Not culture but a woman's toe is the value respected in this movie. No pretensions. No deep layers of lies and self-delusions. Everything reduced to the basics. The hero is split open, like a potato. Look at it, learn from it.

Breathless is pure, moral, and true. It doesn't impose anything on man and it doesn't distort man: It studies man, humbly, without pretensions. Godard, like a scientist monk, distills and synthesizes the modern way of life and pronounces his own moral verdict. *Breathless* is science and art—it is cinema at its best, and Godard's projection of his image of the only moral man of the 20th century.

September 7, 1961

ON THE CLASSICAL BEAUTY OF
HOBOKEN (BLUE) MOVIES

I put aside my Gérard de Nerval, not a wise thing to do, and went to see *A Cold Wind in August*, a new movie by Alexander Singer (at the New Embassy).

Two different worlds. Gérard de Nerval: beauty, subtlety, truth. Alexander Singer: banality, simplification. *Cold Wind* is so much better than many other movies, so much less sentimental and so much more honest. Still, I could not bridge the difference between Nerval and Singer. . . .

O.K., I thought, this movie was intended to be a good sex movie and nothing else. But I could not drive from my mind the memories of what I will call here "the Hoboken movies": pornographic movies. I can remember many Hoboken movies which begin the same way as *A Cold Wind in August*: A woman at home alone; she picks up the phone, calls a television mechanic to fix her TV set; the mechanic comes; the action begins. And this is likewise the plot of *A Cold Wind in August*. It is a Hoboken movie, only so stretched out and so much less "daring." The only good thing one can say about its author is that he did not turn it into a "problem" movie but stuck to his sex movie idea to the end—which is a landmark in Hollywood sex movie making.

Still: Where am I? I asked myself. What does *Cold Wind* have that any Hoboken movie doesn't? Art? Nonsense! Realism? Real actors? Yes, Lola Albright gets her neuroticisms down excellently as the seductress. But I have seen still better actors in the Hoboken movies, actors from the streets, true realism. . . . The Hoboken movies are so much more realistic, uncompromising, spontaneous, to the point. Compared to any Hollywood sex movie, Hoboken movies are pure cinema.

The Hoboken movies, it will be said, are the products of sex perverts. But whose products are Hollywood sex movies? They are products of dull, disguised, hypocritical, sickly, sissy perverts masquerading as "artists." I prefer direct, pure perverts to "bourgeois" perverts and businessmen.

No doubt there is craftsmanship and a certain intelligence in *A Cold Wind in August*. But everybody has a certain intelligence. I remember a Hoboken movie about three lesbians I saw a few years ago, with camera work and compositions that made one think of Eisenstein and Tisse. And no Hoboken movie would show a seventeen-year-old boy so stupid as the "hero" of *Cold Wind*. Here again the superiority of the school of Hoboken film-making is obvious.

Adult films! Look—have they never seen any Hoboken movies? Whom are they fooling? Why don't we have a Hoboken film festival next year? There's a project for our new mayor.

I should never go to movies, I said, on leaving. I should go home and read Gérard de Nerval—or I'll be drowned by the halfway banalities, including those of halfway sex and halfway art. It is all around me in various disguises, whispering in sweet voices, floating in sickly, slimy vapors.

October 26, 1961

ON STAN BRAKHAGE

This is Stanley Brakhage week—there having been two evenings of his films at the Provincetown Playhouse and one at the Charles Theatre. Brakhage was present at all of them to "explain" his work. He left the hills and came to New York to show what he's been doing in his exile; he's been living in Denver, Colorado, for the past four or five years.

Since his first screening at the old (uptown) Living Theatre, seven or eight seasons ago, Brakhage's name has been closely connected with avant-garde film-making in America. He has always been its most controversial member; his name has been used and is still being used by many to denounce the entire experimental film movement. Just a few issues ago the *Film Quarterly* denounced him violently as an amateur and a charlatan. The *New York Film Bulletin* boys have described him in no better terms. Even those who used to praise his earlier work, both critics and friends, have turned against his later efforts, regretting the "loss" of a "talented" artist.

After having had the chance to see most of Brakhage's recent

films, I feel I am ready to put on paper my own feelings, reactions, and pronouncements about his work.

To infuriate the *nouvelle vague* critics, I will begin by stating that Brakhage is one of the four or five most authentic film artists working in cinema anywhere, and perhaps the most original filmmaker in America today.

I will say, further, that Brakhage's last three films, *Anticipation of the Night*, *The Dead*, and *Prelude*, are among the most beautiful movies made in the past few years, head and shoulders above anything that has yet come from any *nouvelle* or *vieille vague*.

Brakhage's work is a far more advanced cinema, true cinema, cinema with a small and/or capital "C," author's cinema, personal cinema—whatever name you choose—than *Hiroshima*, *Mon Amour*, for instance. If we talk about the true personal creation, the true experimentation, one which is also a deep experience of art, we have to talk not only about Resnais or Antonioni but also, and perhaps above all, about the work of Stanley Brakhage.

There are only one or two other film artists working today (and you'd be surprised to hear their names) who can transform reality into art as successfully as Brakhage. A landscape, a face, a blotch of light—everything changes under his eye to become something else, an essence of itself, at the service of his personal

vision. To watch, in *The Whiteye*, a winter landscape transform itself, through the magic of motion and light alone, into pure poetry of white, is an unforgettable experience.

I will say, further, in opposition to his critics and friends, that Brakhage has continuously changed, developed, grown. *Desistfilm*, *The Cat's Cradle*, *The Whiteye* are among the landmarks of his first adolescence. *Anticipation of the Night* sums up the themes, techniques, and style of his second period, and puts an end to the adolescence. In *The Dead* we find the first masterwork of a mature Brakhage, with a style that has the clarity of crystal and a content that breaks through the lyrical barrier and enters the mental and the mystic.

In *Prelude*, the new Brakhage reaches his highest peak so far and gives to modern cinema one of its authentic and incontestable masterpieces, a film that is a poem, a metaphysical thought, a visual symphony, I don't know what—it is beyond description in words, it is all cinema. After seeing *Prelude* someone exclaimed: "Now all the *nouvelles vagues* can take to the hills and stay there."

But it is Stanley Brakhage who is going back to the hills, back to Colorado, to continue his work, one of our most original and least understood film artists leaving it to all the hacks of cinema to enjoy money, recognition, fame. That is the ironical and perhaps eternal position of the artist in a decaying civilization.

November 9, 1961

ON MONUMENTALIST CINEMA AND FASCISM

I sat through Stanley Kramer's *Judgment at Nuremberg*, through the four hours of it, and I didn't walk out. Later I thought: Why didn't I walk out? Why did nobody walk out? The movie is as pretentious, as false in its messages, as styleless, as pompous as any of Kramer's previous films.

On my way home I kept thinking about these things. It was Chabrol (of *The Cousins*) who had said that there are no big and no small themes, there are only big and small directors. One could add to this that the smaller the director, the bigger the themes he takes.

And the acting. . . . All characters in Kramer's film could be easily interchanged. It wouldn't make any difference who plays whom, under Kramer's direction they all become alike. They are only pronouncing the big words of that great thinker, that great historical and legal mind, Stanley Kramer.

Still, I sat through the whole thing, watching those dead, huge, unimaginative images. But later, as I walked along Broadway, I suddenly knew it: I had seen this picture somewhere before. There is something about it, in its composition, its pace, its self-righteous, pompous monumentalism, that I have already seen in Mussolini's statues, in Stalin's portraits, in Goebbels' architecture. It is exactly the same. And if anyone needs any explanation about why anyone else sat there, in Nazi Germany, listened to all the big lies and didn't do anything about it, this picture is an explanation. Anyone who can sit through *Judgment at Nuremberg* without walking out, anyone who can be carried away by the pompousness of Kramer, could equally be carried away by the pompousness of *any* absolutist.

November 16, 1961

ON NOUVELLE VAGUE

In the current issue of the *New York Film Bulletin*, R. M. Franchi refers to the films of Maya Deren and Stanley Brakhage as "pure rubbish."

The *New York Film Bulletin* fails to see that the *nouvelle vague* grew out of a concrete necessity to revive the French cinema. Before the coming of the *nouvelle vague* the French cinema was wallowing in vague dreams and sentimentality, formally and thematically. Thematically it still wallows in them. But formally the *nouvelle vague* gave the French cinema new guts.

The American cinema has different needs and is doing it in a different way, through its independent film-makers and through its film poets. American film-makers do not have to follow the *Cahiers*. After all, much of the *Cahiers* aesthetics rests on American cinema that is already history. America already had its Manny Farber. It also had its Hawks, its Walsh, its Lang, and its Welles. It even had its Ulmer and its Donen. The French didn't have

them. But then, why should they have? They had their Clair, their Ophuls, their Vigo, their Renoir. You just can't transplant styles from country to country, like beans.

November 23, 1961

AN INTERVIEW WITH JEROME HILL

Jerome Hill's *The Sand Castle* starts its Village run this week at the 8th Street Playhouse. Since I'm getting fed up with film criticism, I'll give the floor over to the film-maker himself. After all, who knows the work better than the author? Here are my notes from a talk with Jerome Hill:

Carl Jung has this stone, with the signs written on it [showing a photograph on the wall], which is divided in four quarters and contains excerpts from old Greek writings. That is his mandala, he says. Everything that he knows is there, he says. Is *The Sand Castle* my mandala? Yes, it could be looked at that way. Everybody has his own mandala, everybody has his own rhythm and pattern of life. Why do children build castles? Jung: Every child, in his games, acts out the myths.

What is the film about? It is about building and destruction. Really it is about the searching for and finding of reconciliations of opposites (Jung's "individualization process"). All these gags in the picture at which people laugh are examples of destinies being reversed: Lady who loves sun ends in shadow; girl who likes shadow ends in sun; painter who is too anxious to copy nature slavishly ends in abstraction; the fisherman, through being too prudent, loses everything; the father rescues his doll instead of his baby; and it is the nun who destroys the cloister.

Beach? Water? The beach is no man's land; it can't be controlled and it's subjected to the rhythm of the tides. A perfect stage for the fates.

Yes, there is a villain. Mother is the villain. She does nothing but tell what not to do . . . completely negative attitude.

The boy is in his own world, separated from the others. They seldom touch each other. The girl is his extension. The shells? They stand for the voice of the personal (not collective) unconscious.

Jung? "Anyone who has insight into his own action, and has thus found access to the unconscious, involuntarily exercises an influence on his environment. It is an unintentional influence on the unconscious of others, a sort of unconscious prestige, and its effect lasts only as long as it is not disturbed by conscious intentions."

The film was shot in California, for under \$50,000. Because of the beach noises, it was shot silent, directed by megaphone, like the old silent films. Godard did the same with *Breathless*. When you work with nonactors, this is the best way to guide the movement, the rhythm.

Another theme: our inability to communicate. The protagonists have difficulty in hearing. They watch through field glasses and through sun glasses; the photographer through his camera; portable radios speak for their owners. And the little girl who talks most talks only nonsense.

In dream, the opposites unite, the destinies are reversed. The choice of color for the dream sequence was purposeful. Huxley says that all important dreams are in color.

Hill's next film: a feature—*Identical Twins*. Two women born under the same astrological sign: Because of their different attitudes toward life, one can benefit from what happens to her, the other cannot.

Previous films by Jerome Hill: *Grandma Moses* (1951); *Albert Schweitzer* (1958). An exhibition of Hill's paintings is coming to the Carstairs Gallery. His posters designed for the Spoleto Film Exposition were exhibited at the Bleecker Street Cinema last month.

Journalistic questions:

What films do you like? "*La Notte*, by Antonioni. A perfect example of a director reducing his stars to nonactors. And he reduced the lighting to nonlighting."

What was last book you've read? "*Jane Austen's Persuasion*."

What do you read in your bathroom? "*Schulz's Peanuts*, in the Dell edition."

December 7, 1961

ON FAILURES

Even when Kurosawa is bad, as in *Throne of Blood*, he is still an exceptional film-maker. Even a failure by Kurosawa has extraordinary imagination and craftsmanship. We are often unjust to the secondary works of our artists. That also goes for Louis Malle's *Zazie* (at the Paris). The fact that the film is a failure means nothing. Didn't God create a failure, too? Just to see how Malle is trying to break out of his usual form, how he is expanding his film vocabulary, is an experience. It is to the credit of the new French directors that they dare to swing to the sides to try the unexpected.

ON THE PESSIMISM OF ROBERT FRANK

Robert Frank's second film, *The Sin of Jesus*, is being shown on the current program of Cinema 16 (together with Peter Kass' *Time of the Heathen*). This was my fifth viewing of the film. I have to admit that when I saw it the first time, I thought I didn't like it. Then I went to see it again, and liked it. Later, with each viewing, the film grew and grew. Now I consider it already a classic.

In *The Sin of Jesus* (the fact that it is based on a short story by Isaac Babel I consider of very little importance), Robert Frank continues his documentation of the soul of modern man. Unlike *Pull My Daisy*, his first film, which relied much on free improvisation, the new one is completely controlled.

No, I do not exaggerate much if I say, or rather repeat, that *The Sin of Jesus* will go into film history as one of the most pessimistic films ever made. Its pessimism is its main virtue. "If your aim is high, it should be you that comes through the most," says Robert Frank. The pessimism of the film is his own: It is his own soul that he is revealing, his own unconscious. But we know that when it comes to true creation, it is the most personal art that is also the most universal. Self-expression of an artist is a univer-

sal act, it expresses a universal content. The lonely woman's (Julie Bovasso's) accusing and desperate cry in the dark, doomed New Jersey fields is an expression of the desperation of our own existence.

Without any digression, in an almost documentary manner, Frank concentrates on the truthfulness of his content; on the landscape in which even spring looks like autumn; on the tragic mask of Miss Bovasso; on his blacks and whites. There is not a single note of hope in *The Sin of Jesus*. Neither snow nor spring branches nor the wind betrays any hope. The white crown of the flower is a smile of death. The spring wind is a threat. And it is this pessimism, this desolation, or doom, or desperation, that is the true content of the film. It is the inner landscape of 20th-century man, a place that is cold, cruel, heartless, stupid, lonely, desolate—this obtrudes from Frank's film in crying, terrifying nakedness. There is not a single lie here, only the facts of our souls. Robert Frank is as much a documentarist as Robert Flaherty in *Nanook*. There are movies which are tested by the audience. *The Sin of Jesus* is one of those few movies which test the audience. As for the pessimism of Robert Frank, we should ask, with Nietzsche: "*Gibt es einen Pessimismus der staerke?*" Isn't there a pessimism that opens the eyes of our self-knowledge?

December 21, 1961

A RENDEZVOUS WITH THE FBI

"I dreamed J. Edgar Hoover groped me in a silent hallway of the Capitol . . ."—ALLEN GINSBERG in *Guns of the Trees*.

Two days after the Cinema 16 screening of *Guns of the Trees* I received an early morning telephone call.

"My name is Schwartz, from the FBI," said a voice at the other end of the phone. "I want to ask you a few questions."

Schwartz. A good name, I thought. FBI. I was sort of thrilled. I remembered the novels of Mickey Spillane. Adventure. We agreed to meet on Avenue B. I had always wanted to meet an FBI agent. Or a detective. I wondered if I'd be able to spot him on the street.

Spot him I did; there was no mistake about that. Nobody could have missed him on the Lower East Side. A face right out of a Carol Reed movie, with black hat and raincoat.

"You don't have to talk to me, you know," said Mr. Schwartz, as he flashed his card.

"I don't mind at all," I said. "I'm thrilled. I'm glad."

Still, I looked around. I felt I was entering a dark conspiracy. And although I knew I wasn't guilty of any crime, I felt the huge power of the entire State Department behind this Carol Reed man.

Mr. Schwartz didn't waste any time: "Have you seen any Soviet citizens lately?" he asked.

"Yes," I said. There was no point in denying my contacts with film-makers or film critics of any country.

"Did you see them professionally? You know, as a photographer?"

I looked at him. There was a queer smile on his face. It was very clear what he was driving at: photographs, secret documents, cameras—all the spy stuff. I remembered *Five Fingers*.

"No," I said. "I saw them on personal matters."

I thought that was vague enough. Mr. Schwartz walked along silently for a moment. It was cold. He looked into a coffee shop, but I preferred the cold morning air.

"Did they ever offer you any money?" he asked suddenly.

Money! I had better deny it, and fast, I thought. This was a dangerous question.

"No," I said. "I haven't received any money from any Soviet citizen and you needn't worry about it, if that's what you're afraid of."

That should do it, I thought. It didn't.

"I have information that you've received money from Soviet citizens in this country," said Mr. Schwartz.

We walked on silently. If he doesn't believe what I say, why does he bother asking me, I thought. It was insulting. What had seemed at first an innocent adventure, a game, suddenly became disgusting.

"I'd be glad to get some money from somebody," I said. "I could use some."

The joke didn't come off. Mr. Schwartz was waiting for a direct

answer or a sudden confession. I had made a mistake, I thought. You should never say that you need money—that may be proof that you accepted money. You are forgetting your movies, I thought.

“You are avoiding the answer,” said Mr. Schwartz. I found myself wondering: Is he recording, taping down what I say? “But the question is ridiculous,” I said.

“It’s my duty to find out the facts,” said Mr. Schwartz.

“But how are you going to do that if you don’t believe what I say? It’s useless,” I said. “You are wasting taxpayers’ money with useless investigations.”

“Do you pay taxes?” the agent asked.

I shut up. Hell, I said to myself, he may dig into my taxes. He probably has a book on me, ten inches thick.

“Did you receive the money, yes or no?” insisted the man from the FBI.

I was in it, but good. I wanted to say “No,” but the sound disappeared in my mouth. My “No” was completely meaningless by now. I knew that if I said “No” it would sound exactly like “Yes.”

I saw the East River in front of me. But I smelled the Un-American Activities Committee, the Gestapo, the NKVD, and all the secret agents, cops, and armies that I’ve already been through—The Flies of the 20th century.

“No,” I said, “I refuse to answer this question. I think I’ve had enough of this. And then to tell you the truth, I hate agents. All agents.”

I stopped. I looked at Mr. Schwartz and could clearly see that he no longer had any doubt: I was guilty. I had refused to answer; that meant I was evading the truth, that I was guilty. I had received money from Grigori Chukhrai, perhaps, or Sergei Bondarchuk, or Tatjana Samailova.

“Yes, I hate agents,” I said. I thought I would repeat it for the sake of the East River. “And then, do you think that by answering yes or no, it would change anything? Do you mean to tell me that you will burn my file after this? My answer will change nothing. Once you satisfy your suspicions you’ll stick to them. So I may as well tell you right here and now that I refuse to cooperate with the FBI.”

Suddenly I felt like a crusader. "Who is going to tell me what to do and say? I'm free to exchange whatever artistic knowledge I have with whomever I please—whether he's Russian, Greek, or Chinese. My knowledge is universal."

"No," interrupted Mr. Schwartz. "I'm the one who knows what you can and what you can't tell to others. I'm paid for it, this is my profession, this is my field. I am the authority on it."

That shut me up. I was astounded.

"But I'm an artist," I said, "and you're only an FBI agent. I have knowledge that is not available to you. I have knowledge of the arts and human experience. I myself will decide how and where to use my experience and my knowledge. O.K.? You should think about it, I'm telling you this as one human being to another."

"You are wrong," said Mr. Schwartz.

The street was cold as Hell. The chimneys of the Con Edison plant were cold. The agent's face was cold.

Suddenly everything seemed so stupid. Here I am, walking with an FBI agent on this cold December morning, on the Lower East Side, with Christmas wreaths hanging in the store windows, talking to him, trying to prove something—to prove what?

"O.K.," I said finally, "I admit it. I'm working in a huge munitions factory and I have files and files of secret materials and I am selling them for money to the Russian film-makers—you know, one has to eat. . . ."

We walked on silently now. Communication was breaking down rapidly.

"This is stupid," I said. "I'm going home."

Mr. Schwartz didn't look at me.

"Do you refuse to cooperate?" he asked. The voice was cold as metal. "You don't want to help the government? You know, you are making a mistake by not cooperating."

"Yes, I refuse to cooperate because the whole thing makes no sense. That's what you should say in your report."

The agent turned away and walked toward Avenue A. I bought a loaf of bread and walked home. What the hell did he want, I thought. What is behind all this? What kind of scheme? How the hell do they get such ideas? And how many people, how many are being harassed like this, every day, with stupid suspicions, senseless questions?

Or perhaps I'm guilty? Maybe I've sinned in my sleep? And who left the tip after that vodka with the Russian director (I don't dare mention his name now)? Or perhaps I revealed the secret about the size of our Cinemascope screen? You never know. I was searching through my memory.

The telephone rang. Is it tapped? Has it been tapped for weeks now? I thought I heard a strange click in it. I sat by the table. The telephone rang again. I stared at it.

1962

January 4, 1962

PRAISE TO MARIE MENKEN, THE FILM POET

I shall begin the year by praising the poet.

The Marie Menken retrospective last week at the Charles Theatre was an important event for all those who care about cinema. I didn't see any of the daily or weekly film critics at the screening; I never see them at any important screening of experimental or poetic works. Archer Winsten, the only critic who came, walked out on Menken after the first two films. The pleasure was left entirely to the audience. The audience is more ready to learn and to explore the unknown than our critics.

The work of Marie Menken, as presented at the Charles, was consistently poetic and consistently good. Four of her films, *Arabesque*, *Bagatelle*, *Notebook*, *Glimpse of the Garden*, must be counted among the best that can be found in film poetry today.

Film poetry has gone through several historical periods. There was the French avant-garde: Cocteau, the symbolic-Surrealist period; there was the American experimental period of the 40's: Maya Deren, Harrington, Anger, Maas—mythology, Freudian symbolism; Brakhage and Menken represent the spearhead of the third period, a film poetry free of obvious symbolism and artistic or literary influences, a poetry where the filmic syntax achieves a spontaneous fluidity and where the images are truly like words

that appear and disappear and repeat themselves as they create clusters and blotches of visual meanings, impressions.

The work of Marie Menken is the opposite of prose (drama, episode, story) film. There are works of fiction which contain poetry; but there is no good poetry, and particularly no good lyrical poetry, that contains prose—and Marie Menken is a lyrical poet. The structure of Menken's filmic sentences, her movements, and her rhythms are those of poetry. She transposes reality into poetry. It's through poetry that Menken reveals to us the subtle aspects of reality, the mysteries of the world and the mysteries of her own soul.

Menken sings. Her lens is focused on the physical world, but she sees it through a poetic temperament and with an intensified sensitivity. She catches the bits and fragments of the world around her and organizes them into aesthetic unities which communicate to us. Her filmic language and her imagery are crisp, clear, wondrous. There are moments in *Arabesque* and in *Notebook* that are among the most inspired sentences in filmic poetry.

Does Menken transpose reality? Or condense it? Or does she, simply, go direct to the essence of it? Isn't poetry more realistic than any realism? The realist sees only the front of a building, the outlines, a street, a tree. Menken sees in them the motion of time and eye. She sees the motions of heart in a tree. She sees through them and beyond them. She retains a visual memory of all that she sees. She re-creates moments of observation, of meditation, reflection, wonderment. A rain that she sees, a tender rain, becomes the memory of all rains she ever saw; a garden that she sees becomes a memory of all gardens, all color, all perfume, all mid-summer and sun.

What is poetry? An exalted experience? An emotion that dances? A spearhead into the heart of man? We are invited to a communion, we break our wills, we dissolve ourselves into the flow of her images, we experience admittance into the sanctuary of Menken's soul. We sit in silence and we take part in her secret thoughts, admirations, ecstasies, and we become more beautiful ourselves. She puts a smile in our hearts. She saves us from our own ugliness. That's what poetry does, that's what Menken does.

There are poets who are only beginning to sing. You see their

clumsy sentences, vague or muddy imagery, unsure movements. Gropingly, searchingly they move across the screen. Marie Menken's work is evenly finished and mature. There are very few unfinished or unsure lines in her language. The ten films shown at the Charles represent the work of her life, and this work, these sixty minutes, place her together with the very best of our contemporary poetic cinema.

"True poetry can sometimes be acceptable to the mass of the people when it disguises itself as something else. But, in general, ours is a civilization in which the very word 'poetry' evokes a hostile snigger or, at best, the sort of frozen disgust that most people feel when they hear the word 'God.'"—George Orwell.

January 25, 1962

THE CHANGING LANGUAGE OF CINEMA

Wasn't That a Time, the second film of Michael and Philip Burton (their first was *Journey Alone*) will be shown on January 29 at the New Yorker Theatre, together with *Operation Abolition* and *Operation Correction*. The Burton film, as some of you know by now, criticizes the Un-American Activities Committee by showing some of the effects of its investigations. We see folk singer Pete Seeger being taken to jail; we see Carl Braden, the integrationist who is serving a one-year jail sentence for contempt of Congress; we see Barbara Sherwood, the wife of William Sherwood who committed suicide when called before the Committee. This film will help undo some of the wrongs done by *Operation Abolition*, that ugly, two-headed baby of J. Edgar Hoover & Co.

Wasn't That a Time is an important film. During the past five years I have been constantly arguing, often making a fool of myself, for the cause of the new cinema (and the new man). There are still people who think it doesn't exist—neither the new cinema, nor the new man. They are getting gaga about the New Wave, but they don't see a much deeper revolution that is taking place right here, they don't hear the sounds of a new cinematic language being developed by the experimentalists and docu-

mentarists in New York, in Boulder, in San Francisco. Said the Italian director, Vittorio De Seta, after seeing *Pull My Daisy*, *Sunday*, and Stan Vanderbeek's films: "These are the first films I have seen that are about man as he is today, not as he was in the past. This is modern cinema."

The change began with *In the Street*, with James Agee, with Sidney Meyers, with Morris Engel, with Stanley Brakhage. But it had to wait until a few years later, until the technology caught up with the temperament of the new man, until the coming of Ricky Leacock, Don Pennebaker, a score of young TV documentarists (brothers Al and David Maysles and Nicholas Webster being three of them), the portable synchronous cameras.

Cinema is beginning to move. Cinema is becoming conscious of its steps. Cinema is no longer embarrassed by its own stammerings, hesitations, side steps. Until now cinema could move only in a robotlike step, on preplanned tracks, indicated lines. Now it is beginning to move freely, by itself, according to its own wishes and whims, tracing its own steps. Cinema is doing away with theatrics, cinema is searching for its own truth, cinema is mumbling, like Marlon Brando, like James Dean. That's what this is all about: new times, new content, new language.

Wasn't That a Time continues the evolution started by *Primary*, *Pull My Daisy*, *Sunday*. It tries new steps. It is not afraid to look ugly. It dares turn its back to art. There is not a single "composed" frame anywhere within it. No "nice" stills to put on your wall. No editing of ideas. Everything comes from the subject matter. The truth is what matters. The new film-maker is a child of his times: He has had enough of prefabrication, false intelligence.

Even the mistakes, the out-of-focus shots, the shaky shots, the unsure steps, the hesitant movements, the overexposed and underexposed bits are part of the vocabulary. The doors to the spontaneous are opening; the foul air of stale and respectable professionalism is oozing out.

What the old, smart generation thinks important the new artist finds unimportant, pretentious, boring—and what's more, immoral. He finds more life and "importance" in small, insignificant, secondary details. It is the insignificant, the fleeting, the spontaneous, the passing that reveals life and has all the excitement and beauty.

I am tired of the snobs and pretenders who accuse the new filmmaker of shaky camera work, of poor technique in the same way they accuse the modern composer, the modern sculptor, the modern painter of sloppiness and poor technique. I have pity for such critics. They live in the past. They miss the rhythm, the spirit, the essence of the times they live in—the changing times. It's fine to love antiques. But their antiques are fake, like fake Vermeers. And I am not even interested in explaining this to them any longer. They are hopeless.

I will, rather, spend my time in heralding the new. Mayakovsky once said that there is an area in the human mind which can be reached only through poetry, and only through that poetry which is constantly awake, changing. One could also say that there is an area in the human mind which can be reached only through cinema, through that cinema which is always awake, always changing.

Only the cinema that is always awake, always changing, can reveal, describe, make us conscious of, hint at what we really are or what we are not, what we hate or what we need, or reveal the true beauty; only this cinema has the proper words for it. Burton's film is part of such cinema. It catches contemporary reality by its very tail—and that is as close as we can ever get to it in a documentary reportage film. To go beyond the tail is the domain and—how do we say?—the business of art.

February 18, 1962

ANTONIONI AND *LA NOTTE*

La Notte, a film by Michelangelo Antonioni, director of *L'Avventura*, is opening this Monday at the Little Carnegie. Around the corner, at the Carnegie Hall Cinema, Alain Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad* will open in another week. That means, cinemawise, this will be the richest block in town.

La Notte is the most advanced work yet of the novelistic cinema. Antonioni *shows* people and life, instead of *telling* about them. That's what Tolstoi said about *War and Peace*: I don't tell, I don't explain—I show, I let my characters talk for me.

The film marks a new phase in Antonioni's work: until now, it was psychology that was in the foreground; with *La Notte*, social and political ideas enter his work. One could say he begins to connect the psychological facts of his characters with the social and political ideas of our times. Instead of being satisfied with description—as until now—of the inner states of modern man, he begins to inquire into their causes. His work gains another dimension.

"Maybe she is a lucky one," says Mastroianni, referring to the nymphomaniac whom he meets at the hospital. Moreau: "Why?" He: "She is not responsible for her acts." It is at the beginning of the consciousness of this responsibility that the film finds both of them.

A helicopter passes the window—without the statue of Christ, however. A publisher's cocktail party. Moreau escapes it. She walks through the decaying suburbs of modern Milan, the walls peeling off as if touched by some radioactive disease, side by side with the new, modern buildings.

She longs for real contact with someone. Her eyes are always searching. No contact is possible—not with the gas station attendant; not with the man sitting in a store, behind his glass window; not with the cab driver; not with the J.D. gang. She runs away from the gang, stops, looks back, wishes to be caught by something real, unknown.

In the empty suburban fields the amateurs are playing with rockets. "Want to go to the moon?" Huge blocks of threatening walls. He stands in the balcony, an abstract dot in the maze of windows, trying to make contact with another window, another dot on another balcony. Balconies stare out with their sad eyes, begging for affection.

Eroticism. It's Antonioni's recurring theme. The girl in the hospital. The girl in the field preoccupied with her breasts. A grotesque nostalgia of nature. Love is gone. Moreau presses her face to the tree trunk, remembering the place of her first love, long ago. Now the place is dead, cluttered with rusty abandoned railroad tracks.

He doesn't react, he doesn't see her. His life is suspended in a dead, motionless spot where nothing makes sense any longer: Only the boredom remains. Her new dress provokes only an auto-

matic remark, a nod. The sight of her nakedness provokes only a kiss on a cheek. As she turns to him with expectation—a contact, at last—he extends his hand for a Martini and walks away. Instead, they watch the acrobatics of eroticism in a dance club.

“They are all dead,” he remarks, entering the all-night party, a line which sounds like Dante’s inscription on the gates of Hell. In the garden a cat sits motionless, staring at a piece of sculpture.

Moreau? Isn’t she the embodiment of the latent consciousness as she walks there, silently, on that deep night, thinking her secret thought? She breaks wide open only once, during the rain. Nature is still the strongest true contact left, and it breaks her open. For a brief moment she lives again. But what she says remains a secret, we will never know it, it remains in the closed car, behind the wall of a heavy rain.

And Monica Vitti, the enigmatic smile, the melancholic child? “I am not intelligent, just wide awake.” And then: “Who wants to be young?” He: “Oh, melancholy of a dog!” and “Only now do I realize that only what you give out comes back to you.” But he doesn’t know how to give. “Not that I don’t know what to write about, but how to write it,” he says.

“Our age is cowardly and anti-philosophical,” he says. “It doesn’t have the courage to say what’s of value and what’s without value. As far as democracy is concerned, to give you a simple definition, it means: Let things happen as they will.”

They embrace, early in the morning. A jazz band is playing in a deserted garden of the industrialist’s villa. They embrace in one more attempt at contact, in the open fields, under a pale, sad, morning light, in an embrace of desperation or despair—I don’t know yet which—as the film closes.

Where does Antonioni stand with this film? He stands where all great artists at his age have stood:

Midway upon the journey of my life I found myself in a dark wood, where the right way was lost. Ah! how hard a thing it is to tell what this wild and rough and difficult wood was, which in thought renews my fear! So bitter is it that death is little more. But in order to treat of the good that I found in it, I will tell of the other things that I saw there.

February 22, 1962

PRAISE TO THE ARTIFICIALITY OF HOLLYWOOD

That's what I like about Hollywood: its inventive artificiality. The best of Hollywood films are "made" in the true sense of the word. They are artificial from beginning to end. Watch Ford, or Sirk, or Minnelli. Hollywood started rolling downhill when it began listening to the critics yapping that Hollywood films are not realistic, that they do not portray life "as it is." Whenever a Hollywood-trained and Hollywood-minded director falls into the trap of "realist" cinema, he becomes an empty bore, another Zinnemann.

ON CENSORS AND *THE CONNECTION*

Talking about decency: I cannot understand the big fuss our censors are making about Shirley Clarke's film *The Connection*. They say there is a certain four-letter word in it, repeated twenty-five times. And they say that word may corrupt our youth. Now I have seen the movie already four times—but I haven't heard such a word. Since neither the censors nor *Variety* (which encouraged the censors) ever dare mention "the word," I have no idea what word they are talking about. Could it be the word "jazz"? In Moscow they say that jazz is corrupting their youth. The word "cowboy" appears about twenty-five times, but it has more than four letters. The word "sister" has six letters. There is a word "sheet" that appears three or four times, and there is a word "sheet" that appears another three or four times; the first one has six letters, the second one five. I am immensely intrigued by the whole thing, and the identity of "the word" keeps me in suspense.

March 1, 1962

STAN VANDERBEEK, THE SATYRIST OF THE BOMB AGE

There was a retrospective show of films by Stanley Vanderbeek at the Charles last weekend. Vanderbeek is one of our few genuine

film artists—a poet, a clown, a laughing man of the Bomb Age. Someone—as in Victor Hugo—split his lips, so that he is always laughing now, even when he may be crying. It was The Bomb that split our lips.

Vanderbeek needs no gimmicks of “mature” or “forbidden” subjects. Censorship is never a problem to an artist: Censorship is a problem of businessmen. *Days and Nights*, Vanderbeek’s movie based on limericks, for instance, makes all talk about forbidden subjects ridiculous. Vanderbeek made his film just the way he wanted, without making any fuss about it.

March 15, 1962

RESNAIS AND THE COMMERCIAL AVANT GARDE

Alain Resnais’ *Last Year at Marienbad* is many things. But it is neither a great nor a revolutionary film. It is a very well made film, a beautiful piece of craftsmanship. It effectively uses many devices introduced by the experimental cinema. One could discuss at length many successful techniques which Resnais employs. To me, however, the main importance of *Marienbad* is that it provides the missing link between the commercial dramatic film and the experimental, poetic cinema. One might say that Cocteau provided it long ago. But that is not exactly true. Cocteau was never commercial when he was good; he was commercial only when he was bad. Resnais is commercial when he is good.

For the critics and movie-goers not familiar with the experimental cinema, *Marienbad* is the “furthest out” cinema. This shows how little our critics know about what is going on in modern cinema. Had they known Maya Deren’s *Ritual in Transfigured Time* or *Meshes of the Afternoon*—both made fifteen years ago—they would have found little that is revolutionary in *Marienbad*. Not to mention *Ten Days That Shook the World*. And you can see Resnais’ famous short flashback used best in *The Raven*, a picture made in 1916. I am by far not a purist, and my interest in history is limited. I believe that once a certain technique is discovered, it can be used and perfected by others—like a new word in a vocabulary. But I become uneasy when the “newness” of Resnais is

blown out of proportion. Resnais himself has modestly stated that *Marienbad* is "an old film," and that is much closer to the truth.

"Who is further out than Resnais?" you will ask. I have a surprise: Stanley Brakhage, Marie Menken, Robert Breer. In Brakhage's films (*Anticipation of the Night*, *The Dead*, *Prelude*), we find not only a more subtle cinematic form but also a more advanced cinematic technique. I was told by my spies that Resnais saw *Anticipation of the Night* at Brussels four years ago, and was much taken by it. It is in *Anticipation* that we find the most perfect fusion of past and present, the constantly flowing, moving camera, brushing past objects and faces, which makes up the main beauty of *Marienbad*. When you watch *Anticipation* or Menken's *Arabesque*, you can hear Robbe-Grillet's lines: "I walk again through these corridors, through these gardens. . . ." The big difference is that there is not a word pronounced in those films, no Robbe-Grillet. Whereas *Marienbad* begins and ends in the brain of Alain Robbe-Grillet, who wrote the script.

One of *Marienbad*'s virtues is its theme. It is new, it is thought-provoking. It is a sort of horror film on persuasion. And that's how it should be taken. No doubt there are various symbolic meanings which one could read into it. But what theme, what idea, what thought could survive long in the pages of *Vogue*, in that chic and frozen world which is the world of *Marienbad*? It soon ends up as an abstract, decorative pose. At best, *Marienbad* could be called "poetic" in terms of its being bad prose. I believe it was Robbe-Grillet himself who did the worst to the film: He sentimentalized it with his commentary. There is plenty of false psychology in it. Which means that for Robbe-Grillet *Marienbad* is a step back into the morass of "bourgeois" psychologism—just the thing he is avoiding so successfully in his writings.

I can see the historical importance of *Marienbad* as a forerunner of a commercial experimental film. But that's all. Bergman forced the critics and audiences to think. Antonioni took the plot away from them. Resnais breaks way from the realist tradition, goes into the subconscious. And that is his greatest contribution to the contemporary dramatic film. The next step is the experimental poetic cinema.

As it is now, I still prefer the pure experimental poets like Kenneth Anger, Stan Brakhage, Marie Menken, and Robert Breer

to the commercial-experimental cinema of Resnais. Their work makes me see the world and myself in a new way, and the beauty of it sends me into ecstasy. This is modern cinema, and it is a cinema that is human in the most essential way. *Marienbad*, in comparison, is a frozen, pretentious ornament, full of postures, declamations. Its forced intellectualism is sick. When I watch it I feel as if I am being pulled back into the abstract, impersonal hell which is the end product of western civilization and from which my generation is making a desperate and perhaps last attempt to escape. That's why, to me—and I risk the making of many enemies this time—*Marienbad* is only a beautiful piece of craftsmanship gone awry. It is not a blueprint for the future, not a beginning; it is an end, a stone in the cemeteries of the dead.

March 29, 1962

ON JEAN VIGO

Today I will praise Jean Vigo, the great poet of the screen, the author of *Zéro de Conduite* (at the Bleecker Street Cinema). No use talking about bad films, no point in searching desperately for one inspired frame amid a heap of celluloid. Here is a man whose each frame, each scene, each idea was inspired. Every image of *Zéro de Conduite* bears the imprint of an inspired imagination and the temperament of a genius.

What can I say to you about this film? That it is a masterpiece? Or that Vigo sings as no one else has ever sung about childhood and school days? *Zéro de Conduite* is an autobiographic poem, a pedagogical satire, a psychological tract, a memory of childhood, and an act of rebellion.

And why is it that all great art is so simple, so direct, so unmistakably true, so unmistakably great, without any complicated plots, meanings? One thing about the *Zéro de Conduite* plot: Instead of adhering to a surface scheme, it follows an unpredictable inner logic. Vigo reaches straight into the most personal experience, memories, images. Vigo shoots straight into the bull's-eye, as only a great artist—a genius—can. He sings with images that are very simple, but that tremble, nevertheless, with a tre-

mendous inner force, and are open to as many interpretations as there are human memories, childhoods.

And how poor, miserable, even harmful, seem all other films which we see daily—confused, sentimental, impure, cluttered with false experience, half-experience, half-truths; whereas every image of *Zéro de Conduite* is a full truth, a full experience.

Those faces of children in *Zéro de Conduite*! In no other film have I seen faces like these. Those eyes, those motions, those smiles, those countenances, always ready for mischief. None of the sweet, sugary faces that we usually see in films about children. Even the boy in *L'Atalante*—how alive he is, his characterizations, his sitting, his standing. Vigo's children are young animals. The children of *Shoeshine* or even *The 400 Blows* are sweet little puppies when compared with the children of Vigo. I grew up with the children of Vigo, I recognize each and every one of them.

So here I am—with no more space left to praise *L'Atalante*, Vigo's dramatic attempt (*Zéro de Conduite* is not a drama, it is a poem, a documentary, a vision, I don't know what). Dated in parts, yes; but, again, the performance of Michel Simon, isn't that something stupendous? And the photography of the young Boris Kaufman? That live camera, not afraid of natural lighting, shadows, sun—a camera which complemented so perfectly the inspired visions of Vigo? Oh, all those unfinished projects that Vigo left, dying at twenty-nine, from tuberculosis!

Just imagine: The New York State Education Department wanted to cut out chunks of *Zéro de Conduite*, afraid of the naked behinds of little children. Only the persistence of the Bleecker Street people saved Vigo's film from those mad scissors. What ignorance! What confounded arrogance! O.K., we don't give a damn about our living artists; but, hell, shouldn't we pay some respect to our dead artists? If chopping Vigo is education, then our state education is run by morons and schlemiels.

April 26, 1962

ON RESNAIS' NIGHT AND FOG

New York's daily film criticism feeds itself on good films: It slaughters them, cuts them into pieces, and then devours them.

It has just devoured Jean Cocteau's *Testament of Orpheus*. What this beast doesn't know is that Cocteau is a poet, and you can't devour a poet. There will be a terrible belch one day. To use Cocteau's own words: "The poet knows one or two terrible secrets." His film will live despite the critics.

The beast of New York has also just devoured another film, Resnais' *Night and Fog*. The method used was silence. Just think about the space given in the past three weeks to the most trivial movie products, while we have yet to see a single paragraph on Resnais' film, the best playing in New York today.

Night and Fog is not only Resnais' best film, it is a shattering document, a brilliant piece of cinema by any standards. It says about men and war all that the headlines attempt to hide.

Even the theatre in which it is being shown seems to be ignoring it: *Night and Fog* is not listed in the time schedules of the 55th Street Playhouse; neither is it mentioned in the theatre's recorded telephone information. On the day I went to see it, it was projected on a wrong-sized screen, and not even this wrong-sized screen was properly adjusted: One foot of the movie on the right side was projected on the curtain, while the left was naked at the edge so that the image blurred out. Do our theatres really hate films that much? I may have to switch to TV.

May 10, 1962

ON FILM DOODLES AND CARMEN D'AVINO

In this world full of gloom, Carmen D'Avino's films (we saw his retrospective show at the Charles Theatre two weeks ago) are like playful soap bubbles. They are little films, and they are beautiful in a small, personal, special way. They become beautiful when you forget all the big gloomy ideas and begin to look at the designs he put into them, the care, the love, the elaborate ornamentation. *The Room* is perhaps the classic example of this playful genre. But they are all films which do not take themselves too seriously: spoofs, doodles. A doodle is a doodle, as is its nature, and there is nothing wrong in being a doodle; some doodles are better than some people. Not every film has to be big and serious and Great Art and all that.

In short, Carmen D'Avino, the doodler of MacDougal Street, has his own special place in cinema. In his own little corner he sits unnoticed, very silent, makes his little films and has a good time. It is this happy good-time feeling that we get when we look at them, if we are unpretentious enough to take them for what they are and not for what we want them to be.

ON FILM CRITICISM

Perhaps it is the words "critic" and "criticize" that mislead us so often. Whoever put it into our heads that a critic should "criticize"? I have come to a conclusion: The evil and the ugliness will take care of themselves; it is the beautiful and good that need our care. It is easier to criticize than to care; why choose the easy way?

If the critic has any function at all, it is to look for something good and beautiful around him, something that can help man to grow from inside; to try to bring it to the attention of others, explain it, interpret it—and not to clutch at some little pieces of dirt, or mistakes, or imperfections. As if those little mistakes and imperfections really matter in the end.

June 7, 1962

THE NEW HUMOR

I have been noticing for some time—as many of you have also been noticing—that with the coming of beat and Zen, America began to regain its sense of humor. Which means we are saved. Look around. There is humor in the happenings; there is humor in the new cinema (*The Flower Thief*, *Pull My Daisy*, the films of Vanderbeek, Breer, Zimmerman, etc., even in *The Connection*—or sit through one of the Charles Theatre's film-maker's festivals). There is humor in the new poetry and prose (Burroughs, in *The Naked Lunch*, has about the best sense of humor since Mark Twain; or read Gregory Corso's *American Express*; or Tuli Kupferberg). Visit the Castelli or Green galleries for a period of time; or listen to the new music (that of La Monte Young, for example). There is humor everywhere—a Chinese sort of humor,

with a touch of wisdom, something like: Who the hell am I, why should I take myself so seriously? There is humor even in Walter Gutman's *Wall Street Newsletter*.

ON GREGORY MARKOPOULOS

The Ingram Merrill Foundation just gave Gregory Markopoulos a grant with which to complete his new feature, *Twice a Man*. Markopoulos' name is not new to those who have followed the experimental-independent cinema for the past decade. His trilogy, *Psyche-Lysis-Charmides*, which I saw again a few weeks ago, remains one of the classics of experimental cinema. There is poetry, sensitivity in his work that is very personal, very special. He puts into his films those delicate feelings and thoughts of which most of us are either afraid or unaware.

I have heard people laugh through his films. And whenever I looked into their faces, I saw vulgarity, snobbery, or fear of the feelings revealed on the screen. Pure beauty and delicacy insults us; the vulgar, the crude have become too much a part of our souls. It makes no difference to us—food or art—we approach it like pigs.

June 21, 1962

DID YOU KNOW . . .

Did you know that Paris is the capital of France? Did you know that Renoir made *Picnic on the Grass* with the money he got from the American re-release of *La Grande Illusion*? Did you know that the Bleecker Street Cinema is showing both these films June 22-25? Did you know that the name of the little black cat in the lobby of the Bleecker Street is *Breathless*?

Did you know that the New Yorker Theatre is bringing in a D. W. Griffith film festival? Did you know that the Charles Theatre will have another of its Film-Maker's Festivals, June 28-July 4? Did you know that for every customer that has ever come to the Charles Theatre the management has paid 50 cents out of its own pocket?

Did you know that it took Orson Welles four years to make *Othello*—that he and his cast were simultaneously working for other producers so as to get the money for their own film? Did you know that Welles stole unexposed film stock from other producers wherever he could, shot *Othello* on it, and was sued for the stealing? Did you know that *Othello* will play at the Bleecker Street Cinema after the Renoir program?

Did you know that Jules Dassin made another very bad film called *Phaedra*? Did you know that President Kennedy has seen *Casablanca* four times? Did you know that I was beaten up in a bar because somebody did not like *Guns of the Trees*—that I have been threatened with fists by another stranger for praising *Bonjour Tristesse*? Did you know that *The Connection* was clean enough to screen at the White House but that it makes the New York censors blush girlishly?

Did you know that Jerome Hill is in the middle of a new comedy, *Identical Twins*? [finally titled *Open the Door and See All the People*] That Shirley Clarke is shooting her second feature, *The Cool World*? That I have never read *Lolita* but that I do read every issue of the Wagner Literary Magazine?

Did you know that Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player* is opening at the Fifth Avenue Cinema next week? Or that I consider *Shoot the Piano Player* the funniest gangster movie ever made? Did you know that the June issue of *Commentary* carries an article by Harris Dienstfrey on the New American Cinema? That the silliest article ever written on experimental and underground cinema appears in the July issue of *Cavalier*, written by Rudy Franchi? Did you know that I will give Franchi ten bucks if he will name to me at least one experimental film in which the subject matter is sex ("subject matter usually sex"—Franchi)?

Did you know what Luis Buñuel once said? He said: "I like all men, but I don't like the society that some men have created." And did you know that Franco sent a telegram of congratulation to the Japanese admiral who destroyed the American fleet at Pearl Harbor? I read this in an article by Salvador Madariaga in the June issue of *Atlas* magazine.

Did you know that Howard Hawks' *Dawn Patrol* is the most poetic, most beautiful film I have ever seen on the life of pilots, planes, the poetry of the clouds? Did you know that the best film

magazine published in England is not *Sight and Sound* but *Movie*, and you can subscribe to it from 3 Antrim Mansions, London N.W. 3? Did you know that Stan Vanderbeek is having a program of experimental comedies (films by Breer, D'Avino, Drasin, etc.) on Monday, June 25, at the Maidman Theatre, 416 West 42nd Street, continuously, starting at seven P.M.? That a retrospective show of Ian Hugo's work will be presented at the Charles Theatre this Friday and Saturday midnight? That in 1938 the State of Wyoming produced one-third of a pound of dry edible beans for every man, woman, and child in the nation?

June 28, 1962

ON FILM CRITICISM AND ON MYSELF

I would like to have a small conversation with some of my readers. What is all this anxiety that I am not a film critic? Do you really want me to fall that low, to become a film critic, one of those people who write reviews? Don't you know that any reviewing is senseless, meaningless? Don't you know that anything that moves on the screen can have some meaning for someone in the audience, even if that someone is an old man who has been blind for the last thirty years—that a real review of a film should be written in as many different versions as there are viewers, with complete analyses of their lives?

Didn't you know that, when you think about it, I have almost unlimited taste! I can enjoy the poetry of Brakhage, the silent movies of Griffith and Eisenstein, the movies of Hawks and Ulmer, the pornographic flicks of Hoboken, the films of Vanderbeek, the psychiatric movies shown at Cinema 16, the Westerns shown only on 42nd Street, and, depending on my mood, practically anything that moves on the screen? I had one of my most exciting evenings of cinema while watching somebody's home movies taken with an 8 mm. camera on a trip across the country.

So don't be so snotty. Because it is the easiest thing to criticize. But try to live without criticizing! The trouble with our cinema is that we have film critics and film reviewers. We are taking our newspapers too seriously. It is a disaster.

July 19, 1962

TAYLOR MEAD AND *THE FLOWER THIEF*

Taylor Mead of *The Flower Thief* (directed by Ron Rice; at the Charles Theatre) is the happy innocent, the unspoiled idiot. He has a beautiful flower soul. He will go to heaven like all children do. The idiot and the child are unspoiled by the conventions, laws, and ideas of the world. The idiot today is the only character through which a poet can reveal the beauty of living. Salinger chose children. The entire beat generation chose idiocy. The idiot (and the beat) is above (or under) our daily business, money, morality. It is bad, it is pretty bad when we have to learn from the idiot, but that is exactly where we are today. All wise men have gone mad.

That's why *The Flower Thief* is one of the most original creations in the recent cinema (or any other art, for that matter). That is why to me it is a much more beautiful movie than *Marienbad*. There is nothing revolutionary about it, no world-shaking techniques. It is the simplest, the humblest movie there can be. It is almost as innocent and idiotic in its techniques as it is in its content. It is like Taylor Mead himself: You take him as he is or you reject him as he is; you can't improve upon his imperfections or his idiocy (child's mind, one critic said), you can't criticize him. *The Flower Thief* is one of those few films in which the sloppiness is part of its content: It is difficult to criticize it on technical grounds without destroying its very content.

I have seen the film in three different versions, a two-hour-long version, a forty-five-minute version, and now a seventy-minute version. It always works, no matter how long or how short it is. A small part of it is still like the whole of it. It is very much like those Renaissance or medieval tales which go on and on, with no end. The time element is purely physiological, how much you can take of it at a time.

So there he is, Taylor Mead, the idiot, the child, the poet, the modern hero, Ron Rice's child, walking across the screen, slowly, step by step, in his sport shoes, no hurry, no urgent business, no stock markets to crash, no telephones to answer. He walks across

the garbage cities of the western civilization with his mind pure and beautiful, primeval, unspoiled, sane, a noble idiot, classless, eternal. I imagine Diogenes very much like Taylor Mead, sitting there in his old barrel, enjoying the sun.

The absurd, sad beauty of this film, its poetry and its humane-ness should do something good to us, it should move our corrupt little minds and hearts, we should learn something from its pure wisdom and innocent beauty, it should make us sad. I can't believe that we are completely gone. I know, I will be accused again. The right camp—those who talk about ideas, cinema—will say again that I am misleading the new American film-maker, that I am leading him into the daisy fields of irrationality. But that is where the only beauty is left, that is one chance we have to take. I also believe in the mind—but the mind of the poets. I belong to the new left, one which believes in visions more than bread.

August 2, 1962

ART AND POLITICS, OR THE BOOTS OF INTELLECT

Politicians and social workers, instead of doing their job where they should—there is plenty to do—are always trying to climb on the artist's back: We want positive heroes, art must be positive, art must lead!

Poetry has a hundred mouths. A poet can sing about roses, or he can rage against kings and gods. But whichever he does, he does it from his own will. He knows that whatever he says is positive, even when it is negative; he knows that, in the very end, civilizations perish because they listen to their politicians and not to their poets.

Dear readers: Shoot your presidents, if you feel like it. But don't walk with your boots across the flowered fields of the unconscious.

Because of the social (etc.) confusions, Rick Carrier's film, *Strangers in the City*, was massacred by the reviewers. They could not take it for what it is: a fiction. They said Puerto Ricans are not like that. They went through all the true-to-life business. Ironically, it was the film critic of *Time* magazine who understood

what the film was about; he understood that style and content are more important than plot; that the plot of a film is not its content; that Carrier's film is not about Puerto Ricans, but about crime, passion, and misery.

Now the innocence of *The Flower Thief* is beginning to madden the social workers. *The New York Times* understood it; *Newsweek* understood it; but not David McReynolds. McReynolds, like most of the engaged left, lacks a sense of humor and a sense of poetry.

McReynolds is a knowledgeable man and he could tell us much, if he would talk about things he knows—if he'd attempt, for instance, to interpret the meanings and implications of *The Flower Thief*, the reasons for a work of art like this being made, etc.—if he'd try to understand *The Flower Thief*, instead of denying it. However, he chose to denounce the film on technical, historical, and aesthetic grounds, where he knows nothing, or much too little. Thus he does a disservice to himself and the public.

The logic of McReynolds' denouncement goes like this:

I slept through *The Blood of a Poet*, therefore it must be a bad film.

I think *The Flower Thief* is badly photographed, therefore it is badly photographed.

Poetry is poetry only if it is understood by all.

Only that poetry is good which makes one laugh.

If I don't understand a work of art—its meaning, its form—it can't be my fault: It is the fault of the work itself, or the artist.

I liked *Never on Sunday*, therefore it must be a better film than *The Flower Thief*.

I saw some experimental movies in Los Angeles ten years ago, therefore I can talk on cinema with authority.

Because, all things being equal (democracy of truth), my opinions on film aesthetics, film history, and film techniques must be as good as those of Ron Rice or Jonas Mekas—in this case, my opinions must be *better* than theirs, for they could not see that *The Flower Thief* is a bad film!

Surely McReynolds has more to say than that!

It is fine to sleep through *The Blood of a Poet*. But, then, one should keep silent when the talk is about poetry. The boots of intellect can be as heavy as those of soldiers.

August 9, 1962

TO MARILYN MONROE, WHO IS BEAUTY ITSELF

It was Shirley Clarke who said to me one day: "You know, in *The Connection*, the lines really do not matter. They talk, talk, talk, but really it is not important what they say. When they saw the movie at Cannes, they understood it without knowing what the actors were talking about. They understood the images, the voices, the faces, the movements—the cinema."

Saturday night I sat in the lobby of the New Yorker Theatre, and while Marilyn was dying, I was defending her, for the last time. Because what people do when they watch *The Misfits* is listen to those big lines and they don't see Marilyn. How can they do that, I thought, listen to those lines and not see the beauty of MM herself, the little bits of screen reality she creates—fragile, yes, but true and beautiful, more beautiful than any other reality around them? Even when she is pronouncing the lines, I watch her and I see on her face something else, not what the lines say, something of much more importance than the lines. The lines are empty, big, ugly; much of the movie itself is ugly. But the reality created by MM is beautiful, with a touch of sadness. She never learned enough actor's "craft" to cover her true feelings, true embarrassments, true beautiful self; she kept her "amateurishness."

And I thought, sitting there while she was dying, listening to the silly talk, that it is not only her they are misunderstanding: They are misunderstanding the cinema itself. They never take images as they are: They always want something else, something that fits into their image of cinema. They don't like beauty by itself: It must always be tagged to something else, something more important. They did not love you for what you really were. Only some teenagers did, perhaps.

Last week I mentioned Visconti's episode in *Boccaccio '70*. I don't think there will be many who will agree with me, but I say this episode is a small masterpiece. It is a very simple, unpretentious piece, with no big poster ideas, no advertised emotions. It is like MM again: its true virtues are there, very innocently, unob-

trusively, in the decor, in the faces, in the reactions, movements, little details. The content of Visconti's picture is entirely in its images and its style. Words are there, too, but these words do not really matter: their music is more important than their meaning. When I saw it first, I thought it was too insignificant, too small. Instead I spoke about Fellini's immense screen sense (more screen than cinema). Then several weeks passed by and I forgot Fellini. But Visconti's episode keeps growing in clarity, in truth, in memory.

The artists are doing their job well: It is our critics who are letting the people and the artist down, not giving enough of themselves to understand, to interpret the works of art.

Oh, we all think we know everything about art. Only the artists themselves are not sure.

MM, I don't remember the plots of the movies you were in. I don't remember their dramas. But I do remember you. I remember you standing by an open window—you were babysitting (you see, I don't remember the name of the movie, but I see you clearly, there, like some impression of my own life)—a teenager alone in the evening, perhaps on a Saturday evening, with music coming in, in a big city, and in America. . . .

Now you are dead, with your hand clutching a phone, with your face down, newspapers said.

And the cops came, and they put their hands on you and they wheeled you out. And again they will misinterpret you, and again they will talk about the phone, the pills, the underwear, and the socks on the floor—the Big Hollywood Film Star Tragedy—and they will not see how really beautiful you always were, how much purer and more delicate than all their reality.

September 27, 1962

ABOUT THE CHANGING FRONTIERS OF CINEMA

While I was in Vermont raking leaves and working on *Hallelujah the Hills*, I entrusted my column, as I have often done before, to Andrew Sarris. We are old friends, Andrew and I, and I consider him one of our best film critics. However—and I don't

hold this against him—his interest, at least until now, has been directed to the commercial cinema alone.

Despite its youth, cinema has split into a large variety of genres and forms. Even in literary criticism we often find that the fiction critics have an insufficient knowledge of modern poetry—and vice versa. There are very few critics who have the knowledge and love of all genres and forms of literature. The same is true in cinema. We have critics who specialize in dramatic (what is usually called “commercial”), documentary, or poetic (“experimental”) cinema. We have at least three or four critics who can write with authority about the commercial film, but there is only one critic who is familiar with the history and the aesthetic problems of the poetic-experimental film, and this man is Parker Tyler. The young P. Adams Sitney (of Filmwise) may become another in time—but that’s all.

When a critic whose field is commercial cinema gives a passing look at the experimental-independent film and declares, as Andrew did, that it is worthless, there is not much that one can say about such a statement. All one can say is that our film critics are no better than our literary critics. They all, occasionally, like to make big statements about the things they know nothing about. Or they wave the flag of tradition and universal standards, the police sticks with which they club the head of anything that looks unfamiliar and not so cleanly shaved. *The New York Times Book Review* keeps smashing, in a similar way, the new American writing.

It is unfamiliarity with the creative processes of art as a constantly changing manifestation of man’s spirit that has, recently, provided us with foolish statements about the so-called New American Cinema. (I may have to drop that name! When I used it first, I didn’t suspect that fools would make a flag out of it.) The independent cinema is not, as Andrew says, “a primitive movement,” but the 10th Street (or what 10th Street used to be) of cinema—the living, exploring, changing frontier, the Vietnam of cinema. Thank God it is not a movement—it is a generation. The Charles Theatre is only one of its small galleries, one small battlefield. We need many more of them.

Since the early 40’s, when the entire generation of experimental film-makers came into being in San Francisco and New York,

there hasn't been so much bustling in the film underground. Even the mistakes of some of these film-makers are more interesting than the successes of many a Hollywood or *nouvelle vague* director today. Minnelli is a solid director. And so is Hawks. But it is Rice, Brakhage, Menken, Breer, Leacock who are waging the real revolution of new cinematic forms and content.

October 4, 1962

THE CONNECTION AND THE UNCERTAINTY OF MAN

Nothing happens in *The Connection* (at the new D. W. Griffith Theatre). They talk, they goof, they play jazz. No ideas arise, no dramatic climaxes occur—or, if they occur, they are of little importance, they don't change anything. That is where the meaning (or one of the meanings—one which interests me at the moment) of *The Connection* is: In that nothingness, in that unimportance. It shows something of the essence of our life today only because it is about nothing. It doesn't point at truth—it sets truth in motion, it suggests it.

In a closed, ripe culture a man can be expressed through dramatic plots, symbols, metaphors, verbalized ideas: There is a clear code of values and symbols. We don't live in such a culture. Those few who have thought about our times with intuition know that man is going through a transitional period; that the achievements of socialism and democracies in the objective, practical reality are misleading, incomplete, and tragic in their one-sidedness; that the most intuitive modern artists have repeatedly said this in their work; that this transition is painful; that there are subtle searchings for subjective and metaphysical truths going on silently in the anguished subconscious of man.

Beneath the supposed meaninglessness of *The Connection*, beneath all walking, talking, and jazzing, a sort of spiritual autopsy of contemporary man is performed, his wounds opened. The truths which would have slipped through the hermetic forms of the classical drama were caught by the supposed formlessness of *The Connection*. Fake external dramatic clashes would have led us away from the true drama; big pronounced ideas would have

hidden our true uncertainty; even the metaphors would have become lies. For the questions which the generation of *The Connection* is asking are not yet answerable (neither are the questions themselves clear enough to be put into words). So we have to sit out this period of in-between, and we can do absolutely nothing about it, in a way, but accept waiting and watch how some of us get butchered, meanwhile, or get mad. (Jacques Rivette, in his beautiful film *Paris Is Ours*, which you will see this season at Cinema 16, shows the same happening in France; it is everywhere, that nameless dread.)

Some of us try to do something. But we end by either making more bombs or protesting against them. When we sit alone, however, and we think silently, we really don't know why we do this or that, or what we are really against or for, or which is the real cause. Still, we have to do it.

So—where was I?—this film (like the play), this moody, suffering new art, really is not a forecast of disaster, but a joyous sign that there is a deep despair going on somewhere in us—that not everything is so air-conditioned (as we used to say) and dead in man—for we know that the deeper our despair, the closer we are to the truth, to the way out. *The Connection*, thus—like most of the new “nihilistic,” “dadaist,” “escapist,” etc., art—is a positive art, one which doesn't lie or fake or pretend about ourselves. It reaches beyond the naturalistic, pragmatic, surface art and shows something of the essence.

Not everybody's ready to hear or to feel what *The Connection* is saying, to experience what it really is—nor do we exactly know what it is really about. Each of us will pick up different things from it. This film, which is, on the surface, about nothing, which pronounces no ideas, deals more with nonsense than with sense, and has no particular action or drama; this film suggests, intuits the true ideas, the true action, and the true sense.

There are many other ways to say something about man; it may also be true that *The Connection* is not pure cinema (as it was not pure theatre) or that it would have been better to shoot it in Harlem, etc., etc., but that has little to do with what I am talking about. Nor is it of essential importance. It is through the variety of artistic forms and artistic objects—both perfect and imperfect—that the totality of man's inner and outer existence is subtly and

complexly revealed to us, our consciousness of ourselves furthered. The aesthetic experience is intermixed with many other experiences so that, in the very end, the man who watches the work of art remains his own measure. Because, really, nobody can judge the artist—perhaps only another artist, but even that is not so.

October 11, 1962

OPEN LETTER TO THE NEW YORK DAILY MOVIE CRITICS

Last week you butchered what may be the best film—and certainly is one of the best films—made in this country this year, *The Connection*. You have completely misled the American audiences with your bloody columns. You have made no effort to understand a work of art the beauty of which could make you cry. You stared at the screen, but you didn't hear its voice, you didn't see its images. As far as cinema goes, you are deaf, blind, and dumb.

You dismissed *The Connection* because of its content (“drab,” “offensive,” “odd,” “crude,” “sick,” “vulgar,” “shoddy,” “sordid,” “disagreeable,” etc.)—but you have no idea what its content (or what the content in art in general) is or what it means. You dismissed it because of its techniques, style, and form—but you have no idea what style, form, or technique in cinema (I don't even want to mention modern cinema) is. Your reviews are complete jokes, but your publishers sell them to millions, you get paid, buy eggs and bread, grow children.

The film-makers know their masters. They pay respect to D. W. Griffith. They don't object to criticism of their work. Criticism in art has a function. Some criticism is art. The work of one artist is a critique of the work of another. But what function and, tell me, what criteria are behind a criticism which dismisses *The Connection* and, on the same page, praises a third- or fifth-water Hollywood or foreign movie? Why is *Cleo from 5 to 7* so much better than *The Connection*? There must be some kind of very subtle measuring tool that our critics have and about which I know nothing. Or is *The Longest Day* really a much better description of war than *The Connection* is of peace? Or why is *Convicts Four* better than *The Connection*? If you can excuse yourselves in all

these cases, I tell you, I don't even want to read what you have to say: To describe your criteria I could use the same word *The Connection* uses for heroin.

Why don't you admit that you are washed out, that you can't cope with modern cinema—why don't you pack up and go home? Our theatres and our distributors should ignore your worthless and misleading scribblings; they should stop quoting your blurbs. They should, instead, quote—if they need quotes—our poets, writers, painters—artists, men of taste and intelligence who, although no film critics, have at least some feeling and understanding for what's going on in the arts today, what's going on in man's heart.

My God, you even criticize Gelber's language! Did any of you, really, ever, write a single creative line? All you write is your own vanity and ignorance. The beauty and humanness of the films you butcher should melt you, should destroy your vanity, open you up for life. Instead you clutch your axes, you put on your butchers' aprons, and you go to your bloody work. Now, just think a moment: Do you really know what it's all about, do you really know the meaning of "drab," "offensive," "odd," "crude," "sick," "vulgar," "shoddy," "sordid," "disagreeable"? I have seen you, sitting there in the preview rooms, I have seen your faces, and I have asked myself often: Are these the people who tell America what to see and what not to see? Are these the people who pass judgment on beauty and truth?

No matter what you write, the works you butcher will be here after you are dead and gone. *The Connection* will remain, Cocteau's beautiful *Orpheus* will remain, Brakhage's *Anticipation of the Night* will remain.

Really, I don't even know why I am talking to you here and in anger. I know very well that tomorrow, and a year from now and ten years from now, I will pick up a paper, and I will see somebody else's work butchered by your vanity, pretentiousness, and ignorance. I only wanted to shout it out, to clean my system, and then I go back to the Vermont hills and see how the leaves are falling down. There there are no newspapers—only the wind, sometimes, brings a stray scrap from somewhere, a brown and decaying piece of newspaper, turning back into earth, with no word readable or meaningful.

October 25, 1962

ON LIGHT AND LOLA

The reviews of Demy's *Lola* (at the D. W. Griffith Theatre) did not improve my low opinion of the New York film critics. *Lola* is beautiful. What else do you want? Isn't that enough? Where are your eyes?

Lola was photographed by the cameraman of *Breathless*. It uses natural light as no other film does—the beauty of light as it falls on faces, windows, objects, streets: The light by itself and in itself becomes the most important element in this film, its essence. *Lola* is a film about the beauty of light.

November 15, 1962

SEARCHING FOR MOVIES IN VERMONT

Back in town. So many movies to see! One evening last week in Vermont, after a good day's shooting, we suddenly felt a desperate need to see a movie. So we asked a man whom we saw walking down the road where we could go and see a movie. "A movie? I haven't seen a movie in fifteen years," said the man, "but I hear you can see one in Chester." So we got into the car, and we went to Chester, fifteen miles away.

When we came to Chester, we found it was an election day, they were electing a governor or something, and the movie house was closed. So we zoomed to the next town, another fifteen miles away, to Springfield.

When we came to Springfield, we were told that the town's movie house burned down a year ago, and they felt so relieved that nobody had bothered to rebuild it. So we asked a gas station attendant if he knew where we could see a movie. "Movies?" The man looked suspiciously at us. "I haven't seen a movie in fifteen years. I am always here. But I hear you can see movies in Bellows Falls." We thanked him, and away we went, another fifteen miles, to Bellows Falls.

After landing in the middle of a cemetery, we finally found a moviehouse, but there was an hour's wait until the movie started (they were playing *Best of Enemies*, and it didn't sound too appetizing); so we said let's go to Brattleboro, maybe we can find something there.

It was late when we reached Brattleboro, but our eyes lit up. There was a tremendous double bill there: *Vampire and Ballerina* and *Tower of London*. We missed the vampire movie, but we could still see the second half of *Tower*. We rushed in. For a good five minutes we absorbed with our hungry eyes the huge screen, we listened to the voice of Vincent Price, booming Shakespearean tragedy across the theatre and across a dozen slumbering, chewing viewers. After five minutes we felt we had had enough. Our hunger for movies was well satisfied, and we decided to go home. We drove a good fifty miles through the beautiful Vermont night, looking at the stars, and we had a good night's sleep.

But here I am, back in New York, in the city of movies.

I found our critics hated *Paris Belongs to Us*. Even Eugene Archer didn't like it. I tell you: *Paris Belongs to Us* is a very, very good film, perhaps the most intelligent of all *nouvelle vague* films. If one knows how, one can read from this film more about the mind and heart of Europe 1962 than from any other movie or any book. Go and see it. The mastery of the director over his material is superb. Go and see it three or four times, until it begins to work on you—and then you'll say: My God, this is a great film, the critics are nuts.

ON SECONDARY WORKS OF GREAT ARTISTS

Mr. Arkadin closed its first run. But the talk is still going around the town. Some say it is great. Others say it is not as good as *Citizen Kane* or even *Touch of Evil*. As I see it, what does it matter? When it comes to a true artist, what does it matter if one work is a bit less good than the other? Wouldn't it be ridiculous to reduce Picasso to one great (or perfect) painting or William Carlos Williams to one single perfect poem? What fool would do such a thing? If we can learn anything from all the talk about the author's cinema, it is this: A minor work of a true artist takes an important place in the totality of that artist's life work and must

be approached with as much love as his masterpieces. You always have to remember that the artist doesn't exactly need you: it is you who could profit even from his minor work, if you come to it with love. End of sermon.

November 22, 1962

IN DEFENSE OF 42ND STREET

You fools who look down on Westerns, who go only to "art" films, preferably European—you don't know what you are missing. You are missing half of the cinema, you are missing the purest poetry of action, poetry of motion, poetry of the technicolor landscapes.

I hear some zealous people want to clean up 42nd Street. What would we do without our movie joints, our hamburgers, our secret places? Clean places! We need more shadows, that's what I say. There we can cultivate forbidden virtues and forbidden beauties. Man needs unnecessary, unclean corners. And so we need Aldrich, and Westerns, too. I prefer the confusion of emotions to the decadent, closed, hopeless clarity and cleanliness of materialists and rationalists. Blow, you winds of anarchy, confusion, we need you badly!

But where am I? I am losing the thread of thought here, I am out in the fields again.

December 13, 1962

ANTONIONI AND *ECLIPSE**

While film critics are out of the field, this is my advice: Any film, good or bad (good/bad for whom?), deserves to be seen. Don't let newspaper reviewers choose your films, don't let them decide what is good or bad for you. Anyway, audiences are ahead of the critics.

Next week, Antonioni's *Eclipse* is scheduled to open (at the

* This column appeared during the New York newspaper strike.

Little Carnegie). I rush to tell you that *Eclipse* is a film of disturbing beauty, and it crowns the trilogy begun with *L'Avventura*. It could even be said that it is Antonioni's most "controversial" film—controversial like all art which breaks out of the usual path. "What happened to Monica Vitti?" the critics will ask, as they asked about the girl in *L'Avventura*. The heroine disappears, but the movie continues. "How can a movie continue without its heroine?" they will ask.

You have heard much about the silence in Antonioni's films, particularly in *La Notte*. *Eclipse* is still more silent. There is a gradual disappearance of dialogue from *L'Avventura* to *Eclipse*. So they say Antonioni rediscovered silent cinema, he is going back to the true principles of cinema. They look at it formalistically. But Antonioni's silence has nothing to do with principles of cinema: Antonioni's silence comes from his content, is part of his content, or, simply, *is* his content. His people become more and more silent as the trilogy progresses, as the introspection of the characters increases. They haven't lost communication. Antonioni's films aren't about communication, as all critics have conspired to insist. His films are about people, about *us*, who don't have anything to communicate, who don't feel a need to communicate, whose human essence is dying. Antonioni's films are about the death of the human soul.

At the end of Antonioni's trilogy, people stare into each other and their surroundings, and the surroundings and the objects stare back at them, with a cold, unmerciful eye. Man and objects have become equals—it is a terrifying state for man, but that's where he is, and that's what Antonioni says. The image of man in 1962 presented in this film of breathtaking visual beauty is a fearful lunatic silence of a trapped animal, of a man at the dead end, the time when man looks to the heavens for signs of change: He can't continue as he is.

I knew what Antonioni would make after *La Notte*. I don't know what he will make after *Eclipse*. There is no way back for Antonioni, and the solutions for man have not yet been revealed. So we can either 1) get angry (from thinking about it), 2) try blindly unpredictable roads (anarchy, improvisation, chance), or 3) retreat into solitude (Zen, etc.), minding our own business. The mind is hopeless.

1963

February 21, 1963

THE HUMOR OF ORSON WELLES AND *THE TRIAL*

Orson Welles' *The Trial* (at the new RKO Art Theatre, on 23rd Street near Eighth Avenue) is not Kafka. But then, if you want Kafka, why go to the movies? I have read everything by Kafka, and I think he is a great and prophetic writer. I have seen everything by Orson Welles, and I think he is a great and prophetic filmmaker. *The Trial* is Orson Welles. It is Orson Welles' variations on the theme of Kafka's novel.

This is a new and different Welles, much more unpredictable, much more open. What strikes me in particular about *The Trial* is Orson Welles' humor. The older Welles grows, the more he indulges himself in his macabre, belly humor. We saw bits of it in *Mr. Arkadin*. We saw more of it in *Touch of Evil*. In *The Trial*, this humor runs through the entire film. It is a medieval sort of humor, reminding one of Bruegel. It gives a special quality to this doomsday fable of fate and justice. It is a humor that comes from the belly: jovial, abundant, exuberant. Orson Welles shakes when he laughs, and the cinema shakes with him.

There is a shot in the film that lasts five or six minutes, in which we see a lame woman dragging a huge trunk, with Joseph K. trying to talk to her. It is about the best piece of absurd cinema around. I think it surpasses most of the absurd theatre I have seen.

The Trial was shot in a huge abandoned Paris railway station. The inventiveness and spontaneity with which Orson Welles used his fantastic location to enhance his content and his images, the way he incorporated into his film whatever junk he found in the station, is worthy of a genius. The world of *The Trial* is a huge and absurd junk yard, a fantastic conglomeration of junk and decay. It is a great piece of junk art, worthy of the Castelli or Green galleries.

One of the basic differences between Kafka and Welles becomes most apparent toward the end of the film. Kafka was a pessimist; Welles is an optimist. We are responsible for the world, says Welles' Joseph K.; we cannot condemn the entire universe because of the mistakes of a few people. Welles' final statement is made through the closing image of the atomic mushroom hovering over the lonely garbage dump in which Joseph K. dies.

After seeing *The Trial*, one cannot but think about the banality, simplicity, and fragility of most contemporary films, even when they are well made. Welles' film moves like a huge and unpredictable steamroller, building up speed as it goes along, and it is all a magnificent piece of film-making, from a magnificent human being.

Whereas in his earlier films Orson Welles was often too careful about art, acting as its servant, now he rolls freely, not giving a damn who will say what about his movie, laughing at the world's foibles and describing its years with the rhetoric of a prophet. *The Trial* is the most spontaneous of all Welles' films, the most unpredictable, a sort of *Flower Thief* of his own. It shows Orson Welles' inexhaustible imagination which is always ready for a new adventure.

February 28, 1963

ON IMMEDIATE SENSING

I have often been asked to explain what there is in a silly movie like *Touch of Evil*. They say it is a stupid movie. Or what is there in the meaningless, stupid, absurd movies of Ken Jacobs or Jack Smith? Our thinking is still so literary. We have no immediate sense of the image itself, no immediate experience of the image,

what's happening in it. We are immune to the content and non-verbal intelligence that come from the immediate experience of the sensed moving image and which cannot be translated into words or ideas or concepts. Oh, the beauty of the silly, stupid, meaningless, absurd, idealess, etc., movies! How the true values have been distorted! Pity us and our culture. But things are beginning to change. Movies, this anti-verbal, anti-idea art, came just in time to save our irrational, nonconceptual, immediate sensing.

ON SPYING

A half-hour 16 mm. documentary has been produced by the Committee to Secure Justice for Morton Sobell (940 Broadway, New York 10), the man who has been imprisoned for thirteen years now on a charge of conspiracy. I personally don't see why governments imprison people for spying. Every government in the world is keeping spying organizations, supported with tax money. So what is all the fuss about spying? As far as I can see, spying is no crime anyway, it is more a question of manners. And then, I think every government is there to be overthrown, and I am constantly engaging myself in a total conspiracy, if you know what I mean. I think I am more dangerous for the governments than Morton Sobell, I really do.

March 14, 1963

CHRISTOPHER MACLAINE AND *THE END*

What is *The End* all about? It is not my business to tell you what it's all about. My business is to get excited about it, to bring it to your attention. I am a raving maniac of the cinema. Here is a great film before you. Here is a film that moves as art; as thought, as an experience. It successfully combines a number of different searches and drives of modern cinema, it explores and pushes its boundaries into new lands of experience.

No doubt the impurity of *The End* as cinema could be discussed endlessly. But who cares if this is pure or impure (both terms are completely irrelevant and senseless)? Whatever it is, it's there, and it does wonders, if you just let wonders happen to you

(most people don't). No movie, no painting, no piece of music encompasses all that an art can do or be. Each work of art in a given period opens a different window to man's soul (psyche, being, It). MacLaine's contribution to this is an important one, his window is wide open and clear and full of wonderful light, and music of the spheres is coming in. One can feel behind the film's images and its sounds the movements of a complex and beautiful spirit, the movements which lead you to your own unexpected, exalted, chance discoveries. The beauty of *The End* is stronger than the crooked sillinesses of governments, the blabberings of sociologists and politicians. The job of beauty is to make us more aware of our own being and to beautify us (our souls, our beings, It). If the new art of the dying dinosaur called Europe is nothing but respectable, square, stale entertainment, *The End* is part of that new art, and it all comes from the American underground, which contains visions and movements of new life.

March 28, 1963

SIX NOTES ON HOW TO IMPROVE COMMERCIAL CINEMA

NOTE ONE: 1. Announce the production of a movie, *The Masacre*. 2. Choose the location (a large empty garage in the Bronx or, better still, in an out-of-town place such as Poughkeepsie). 3. Invite *all* movie critics on a "critics' junket" to observe the shooting. 4. Place all movie critics on the set. 5. Machine gun the critics. 6. Announce completion of the shooting.

NOTE TWO: 1. Take a finished print of the film *Exodus*. 2. Put it into the film developing machine. 3. Redevelop it. 4. Dry it. 5. Project it to the audience.

NOTE THREE: 1. Take a print of the film *Last Year at Marienbad*. 2. Install an instant cutting blade into your projector. (There could be two different variations of this: a) when the blade is placed above the gate and cuts the film before it is projected; b) when the blade is placed below the gate and cuts the film after it is projected. Several other variations are possible.) 3. Project the film before the audience. 4. Collect the pieces of film cut by the blade. 5. Distribute the pieces to the people. (The pieces could

also be blown into the audience by means of a special wind machine.)

NOTE FOUR: 1. Shoot a feature-length "independent" movie at an approximate budget of \$1,200,000. 2. Invite the producers and guests for a special screening. 3. Project the original negative through the instant cutting projector (see Note Three). 4. Distribute the pieces of film to the audience. (This method solves all "distribution problems.") 5. Thank the audience.

NOTE FIVE: 1. Take a print of the film *Gone With the Wind*. 2. Cut out every second foot. 3. Splice the remainder. 4. Run it through a tank of black ink. 5. Dry it. 6. Open the windows (preferably on both sides of the auditorium, to create enough draft). 7. Project it (for music use Brandenburg Concertos 3 and 4).

NOTE SIX: 1. Announce a 15-million-dollar production of *Destruction of Hollywood* (or *Flames of Hollywood*). 2. Rent the largest Hollywood studio. 3. Rent all the motion picture equipment available in Hollywood and place it in the studio. 4. Blow up the studio. 5. Announce the completion of *Destruction of Hollywood*.

SUGGESTIONS (made by Doc Humes): Project Preminger's movie *Exodus* backwards. Do the same with any new movie by Ingmar Bergman.

April 11, 1963

THE RIDICULOUSNESS OF FILM JURIES

For seven years now the Film Institute of City College has been giving the so-called Robert Flaherty Awards for the best documentary film of the year. When I heard that *The Showman* [by the brothers Maysles] was submitted, I knew that at least one film would be worth seeing. But when the jury (Herman Weinberg, Sidney Meyers, Lewis Jacobs, Dwight Macdonald, Amos Vogel, Arthur Meyer, and myself) was called to select the winners, we found that the Institute had already prescreened the seventy or so films which were submitted for the awards. We were shown only ten of them. And *The Showman* wasn't among those ten. When I

inquired about *The Showman*, I was told by the Institute that I could see it, but I couldn't vote on it. So I sat through nine contrived, old-fashioned documentaries. The tenth was a film by Leacock, his magnificent documentary of football—I don't know how it was passed by the Institute—but it was immediately eliminated by the jury, after one minute of viewing, before I was able to open my astonished mouth. It was then and there that I realized the jury wasn't much better than the Institute.

To complete the fiasco, the self-appointed committee for the selection of American documentaries for the Cannes Film Festival (television section), National Educational Television, rejected *The Showman*, finding it not worthy of Cannes. Instead, America will be represented at the Festival by a dozen contrivances. I think that film-makers should ignore these self-appointed preselection committees in New York and Washington. Film-makers should insist on their own right to submit their films to festivals.

As for the Flaherty Awards, the word is *fiasco*. The awards, founded by one of the freest spirits in cinema, Hans Richter, have degenerated into the most conservative, backward academicism. The documentary film in America has completely changed during the past three years. Educators will have to pull their pants up high to understand what's going on in cinema today. The documentary film (as well as other film genres) is breaking out of the academic, classical frame and is learning to speak a new, spontaneous language of the midcentury.

It is time for a good blast. It is time to burn down film institutes. Film schools are for fools. If a film like *The Showman* or Leacock's work is being rejected as not worthy of consideration, then somebody has to say: ENOUGH, OUT WITH YOU! LET'S CLEAR OUT THE STINK, OPEN THE WINDOWS—AH, IT'S A GOOD BREEZE!

April 18, 1963

FLAMING CREATURES AND THE ECSTATIC BEAUTY OF THE NEW CINEMA

Walked out of the following movies: *Five Miles to Midnight*, *The Balcony*, *Lazarillo*, *Mondo Cane*, *The Playboy of the West-*

ern World, The Pillar of Fire, Four Days of Naples, Fiasco in Milan, Grown Up Children.

My new wave of walk-outs is the result, mainly, of my recent trip to the Eastman Museum in Rochester, where I saw really great movies. Like Chaplin's *The Kid*; or Murnau's *Tabu*; or Buñuel's *L'Age d'Or*; or Von Sternberg's *Docks of New York*—really great movies.

Jack Smith just finished a great movie, *Flaming Creatures*, which is so beautiful that I feel ashamed even to sit through the current Hollywood and European movies. I saw it privately, and there is little hope that Smith's movie will ever reach the movie theatre screens. But I tell you, it is a most luxurious outpouring of imagination, of imagery, of poetry, of movie artistry—comparable only to the work of the greatest, like Von Sternberg.

Flaming Creatures will not be shown theatrically because our social-moral-etc. guides are sick. That's why Lenny Bruce cried at Idlewild Airport. This movie will be called pornographic, degenerate, homosexual, trite, disgusting, etc. It is all that, and it is so much more than that. I tell you, the American movie audiences today are being deprived of the best of the new cinema, and it's not doing any good to the souls of the people.

8 MM. CINEMA AS FOLK ART

You know what? It is the 8 mm. movie that will save us. It is coming. You may think I am crazy. But I know people, very talented people, shooting their movies on 8 mm. The day is close when the 8 mm. home-movie footage will be collected and appreciated as beautiful folk art, like songs and the lyric poetry that was created by the people. Blind as we are, it will take us a few more years to see it, but some people see it already. They see the beauty of the sunsets taken by a Bronx woman when she passed through the Arizona desert; travelogue footage, awkward footage that will suddenly sing with an unexpected rapture; the Brooklyn Bridge footage; the spring cherry blossoms footage; the Coney Island footage; the Orchard Street footage—time is laying a veil of poetry over them.

THE MOZARTS OF CINEMA

Not long ago I saw five or six short movies made by an eight-year-old film-maker, David Wise. He lives on 13th Street. There were movies made by children before, movies made in kindergartens, schools, under the supervision of teachers, as group projects, as therapeutic exercises. David Wise's movies have nothing to do with education. His work consists of bits and moments of free creative expression. It is still young and fragile, but through the names of his teachers (they are no educationalists, but first-rate artists, such as Len Lye, Francis Lee, Stan Vanderbeek) one can see budding a private lyrical imagery, a world that is a small wonderland when you get into it. I felt as if I were walking through a warm spring rain; I felt the green smell of the buds in my nostrils. Spring is here, spring is here. Gone is the cold rationalism of Len Lye, or the modern abstractionism of Francis Lee. What we see is the awkward, budding lyricism of the young David Wise. Music had its wunderkinder—why not cinema? Cinema, too, needs its Mozarts. Now is the time to begin making movies, before we learn how to read books, before our senses are corrupted by good and bad literature.

I hear some people say that I exaggerated the "degeneration" of the Flaherty Awards, etc. I am for exaggerations! I am surrounded by such a deep layer of mediocrity that I have to shout really loud to succeed in stirring at least somebody to move, one way or another. Most of the time I don't even care where they will move or how right I am. Right or wrong is not my business. As long as we move somewhere, no matter where, we have a chance of arriving somewhere. Now we are nowhere.

May 2, 1963

THE IRRESPONSIBILITY OF MY COLLEAGUE FILM CRITICS

Perhaps you have noticed that most of the time, lately, I have been writing about movies which you can't see anywhere. I think it is a very bad state of affairs when the best of contemporary cinema cannot be seen at all. Cinema needs its own Armory Show. As a film critic, I have a question in my mind: Should I ignore this

cinema because the critics and the theatre are ignoring it? Should I write only about commercial movies, as other critics do?

I happen to know the depth and scope of the revolution in form and content which is going on in the film underground today, and I can't be silent about it. My colleagues, writing on cinema today, go by Sarris' (who happens to be the most intelligent among them) definition of cinema: Cinema is "what most people are thinking of when they propose 'going to the movies.'" "

Now, what do the majority of people mean when they say "literature," "music," or "painting" today? I don't think a responsible movie critic can go by people's definition of cinema. That's why I go back to the underground. I know that the majority of you cannot see this cinema; but that is exactly the point: It is my duty to bring this cinema to your attention. I will bark about it until our theatres start showing this cinema.

ON THE BAUDELAIREAN CINEMA

There are many good reasons for barking about it. Lately, several movies have appeared from the underground which, I think, are marking a very important turn in independent cinema. As *Shadows* and *Pull My Daisy* marked the end of the avant-garde-experimental cinema tradition of the 40's and 50's (the symbolist-surrealist cinema of intellectual meanings), now there are works appearing which are marking a turn in the so-called New American Cinema—a turn from the New York realist school (the cinema of "surface" meanings and social engagement) toward a cinema of disengagement and new freedom.

The movies I have in mind are Ron Rice's *The Queen of Sheba Meets the Atom Man*; Jack Smith's *The Flaming Creatures*; Ken Jacobs' *Little Stabs at Happiness*; Bob Fleischner's *Blonde Cobra*—four works that make up the real revolution in cinema today. These movies are illuminating and opening up sensibilities and experiences never before recorded in the American arts; a content which Baudelaire, the Marquis de Sade, and Rimbaud gave to world literature a century ago and which Burroughs gave to American literature three years ago. It is a world of flowers of evil, of illuminations, of torn and tortured flesh; a poetry which is at once beautiful and terrible, good and evil, delicate and dirty.

A thing that may scare an average viewer is that this cinema is

treading on the very edge of perversity. These artists are without inhibitions, sexual or any other kind. These are, as Ken Jacobs put it, "dirty-mouthed" films. They all contain homosexual and lesbian elements. The homosexuality, because of its existence outside the official moral conventions, has unleashed sensitivities and experiences which have been at the bottom of much great poetry since the beginning of humanity.

Blonde Cobra, undoubtedly, is the masterpiece of the Baudelairean cinema, and it is a work hardly surpassable in perversity, in richness, in beauty, in sadness, in tragedy. I think it is one of the great works of personal cinema, so personal that it is ridiculous to talk about "author's" cinema. I know that the larger public will misinterpret and misunderstand these films. As there are poets appreciated only by other poets (William Carlos Williams was such a poet for many years), so there is now a cinema for the few, too terrible and too "decadent" for an "average" man in any organized culture. But then, if everybody would dig Baudelaire, or Sade, or Burroughs, my God, where would humanity be?

June 13, 1963

ON TWICE A MAN

This Saturday at the Gramercy Arts Theatre (138 East 27th Street) at 7, 9, and 11 P.M., a new film by Gregory Markopoulos, *Twice a Man*, will have its first public screening. The showings are being arranged by the Smolin Gallery, as a benefit for the completion of the sound track of the film.

I had a look at Markopoulos' film last week. Last week I also saw Fellini's new film, *8½*. I was walking, later, through midtown and along the harbor, and I could feel how, one by one, Fellini's images began to disappear from my mind. It was terrible. Right there the film was slipping into oblivion.

But I still see the images of *Twice a Man*. The film keeps growing in my memory. Gregory has put into this film so much of himself and so much of unseen, fresh-born lyricism. There are sequences which take your mind away, they are so rich, so splendid; they burst out into bouquets of colors, meanings, sensuousness, and poetry.

There is the cinema of improvisation, of spontaneously caught reality, the "cinema of truth"; Gregory's cinema is completely the product of his own imagination, all handmade, piece by piece. His new editing techniques enable him to lace into the film a second level of imagery, which pulsates like thoughts. In a sense this is a revolutionary—or, better, revelatory—film in what it does with cinema. But then, every original work of art is revelatory. I think Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* is a revelation. And so is *Blonde Cobra*. And so will be Boultenhouse's *Dionysius*. These are the artists who do not imitate or go with currents. They are creating from their own currents, ten thousand fathoms deep.

MORE ON MOVIE RENAISSANCE

A renaissance is on the way in film underground. New works of startling and glorious beauty are appearing. This is one of the beautiful periods of the American cinema. There are about twenty low-budget features in the making in New York underground at this moment. And when I say low budget, I mean *low*. Jack Smith's film, *Flaming Creatures*, certainly one of the most beautiful and original films made recently anywhere, was made with \$300. That is the freedom of the underground film-maker.

With the new blossoming of film-making, there is an equal upsurge of audience interest in underground cinema. You have to see those millions of people trying to get into the LENA Arts Festival last weekend at St. Mark's Church. It was fantastic and beautiful to see it happening.

You may have noticed that the Monday midnight screenings at the Bleecker Street Cinema, held by Film-Makers' Co-op and Film Culture for the past few months, have been cancelled. You may be wondering what happened and why. The truth is, we have been thrown out. The Bleecker Cinema people did not like our movies. They thought the independent cinema was ruining the "reputation of the theatre." Dig that!

Surely we have no intention of hiding in the underground all the time. We intend to keep coming up, to bother you—your thoughts, your senses, your happiness, your contentment, your eyes and your noses: We have plenty to tell you and plenty to show you, shameful and glorious things.

June 20, 1963

HOW TO MAKE MONEY WITH GOLD

Suppose I am the producer of *Cleopatra*. Suppose I have 40 million bucks. I would buy a huge lump of gold with that money. I would put that rock of gold in Radio City, and I would let in anyone who wants to see it for five dollars. It would be the purest way of making money with money. Why go through all the trouble of making a movie?

July 25, 1963

WHY WE AREN'T ANGRY YOUNG MEN

In the July 13 issue of *The New Yorker* magazine, we were presented as angry underground film-makers. Which was very nice. But the truth is, we love the world and we hate nobody. If the Establishment understood this, it would see something of what's really happening: That our new poets, film-makers, painters differ from those of, say, England (even in England it may not be true any longer) in at least one quality—they have given up hating. They have learned that it really doesn't matter who rules—a king or a president—both are equally capable of evil and stupidity. Mailer was insistently and patiently silent at Carnegie Hall on all questions that were thrown mercilessly at him about the South and the Negro. There is a longing for a deeper, more essential (and more existential) change of man: the change of man's heart.

The films of Ken Jacobs, Jack Smith, Ron Rice, Brakhage, etc., and the writings of the new poets have no anger similar to that of the British "angry young men." Ginsberg had some of it; but even he has given it up—he washed it down in the waters of the Ganges. "Anger is hopeless" is Allen's message from India (November 16, 1962). And then, *Howl* was more sad than angry. There is a great sadness in the *Howl* when you read it again.

Underground cinema, yes. But the truth is that the whole change of man's mind and heart is happening underground (in the lower, not very much respected regions). High above ground there is too much unnecessary noise going on.

ON WOMEN IN CINEMA

Talking about the changes: There are new things coming to cinema, too. Very important things. They are closely connected with what I am talking about. It is not a coincidence at all. Women are coming to cinema.

The cinema of big production and heavy equipment was a very masculine occupation (and art). The search for new sensitivities dethroned the mechanical aspect of film art, adapted cinema for an effortless (as much as it can be) self-expression which culminated in *Blonde Cobra*, *Flaming Creatures*, and the 8 mm. cinema.

"I don't believe in women directors," said Sarris the other day. And he was right. I mean, he was right until now. For now cinema has become accessible to all. Now new sensitivities are coming to cinema.

Naomi Levine has just finished her first movie. It is like no other movie you ever saw. The rich sensuousness of her poetry floods the screen. Nobody has ever photographed flowers and children as Naomi did. No man would be able to get her poetry, her movements, her dreams. These are Naomi's dreams, and they reveal to us beauty which we men were not able to rip out of ourselves—Naomi's own beauty.

Storm De Hirsch, the poet, closeted in a secret New York loft, for three months now has been editing her first feature. I myself, belonging to the Spies For Beauty, Inc., a humble monk of the Order of Fools, was allowed to peek at her film, and I couldn't believe what beauty struck my eyes, what unseen sensuousness.

Barbara Rubin, from the Order of Fools, bursting and burning with hallucinations, shooting her first movie, with the excitement of a holy nun, feverishly engaged to rip out fragments of veiled revelations from her subconscious and the world, the sensory experiences and visions of the sad loveless century, pouring her heart out.

Linda Talbot, getting drunk on Vermont imagery, teenager visions.

No, Marie Menken is no longer alone, her flower heart blooming over the Brooklyn roofs.

I tell you, you'll soon see how little we have seen of the world on screen; that the cinema is endless, beginningless, continuous; that there will be new beauty coming; that the classics are all right, but that they are classics, and that there are new things that concern only us, and they concern us so feverishly that they drive us crazy and we have to say them, our own way, and through our own temperament, or we bust.

August 1, 1963

ON UGLINESS AND ART

My brain is melting away. It must be close to 200 degrees in the shadow where I sit, in a midtown loft, trying to type on a borrowed typewriter.

Lindsay Anderson was finished before he started making his movie. I mean *This Sporting Life*. He is full of hate toward football and toward women. How can he describe or get to the essence of something which he hates so much? He throws at us violent close-ups, fists, faces, but says nothing about what he wants to say. He is so full of anger or something that he misses every time. No love in his movie. Anderson did not get close to his subject: He got all bundled up in it, but he didn't really get to it. His movie adds more ugliness to ugliness, which has nothing to do with art. Film-making in itself is no virtue. It is much better to lie on your back and count the clouds. Art embraces ugliness. Art does ugliness in with a kiss. Art sleeps with ugliness. I'm telling you something about art. That's what the heat does to my brain. It is getting worse.

ON THE ART OF JOHN FORD

Before my brain melts away completely, I have to finish this column. There are many things to say. For instance: The John

Ford series at the New Yorker Theatre showed clearly what a magnificent man Ford is. One of his virtues may be that he makes no fuss about film art. He simply has it in him. He is just doing his job. Like a good carpenter. Like Manny Farber. Once you realize that to practice life is more important than to practice art, you are O.K. The reverse can also be true, if you know what I mean.

Ford doesn't look for big, important themes. He goes around and around his two or three little themes, each time digging deeper, or looking at something from a different corner of his memory eye; each time polishing something inside himself to a greater clarity. Like a bug, with no hurry, with no other motives, with no "self-expressive" designs, he keeps making these great movies. They are there to look at, to enjoy, to put your own heart into if you want. See *Donovan's Reef*, his latest work. Imagine digging out a movie like this from under the sands of the Nile, say, two thousand years old! What a lightness of hand, what carelessness, what easiness of form, mastery of tools. It looks almost like nothing, like no art at all. This man, Ford, may be having his own troubles, but he looks like one who has had a glimpse or two into man's happiness, even if it really happens only when he is making his great movies. But that makes no difference.

I, however, see no happiness at all: I feel miserable in this heat, and I see no way out unless I creep into the icebox, lock myself up there, and thus end my life, senselessly but cool.

August 8, 1963

CHANGING TECHNIQUES OF CINEMA

There are a few technical things which are only expressions of inner growings, searchings, and breakings out, but which should be noticed here.

MOVEMENT: Movement can go now from complete immobility to a blurred swish vision to a million unpredictable speeds and ecstasies (Brakhage's work, for instance). The classic film vocabulary allows (or recognizes) only the slowly, respectably Brooks-Brothers-suit paced camera movements—the steadiness, the immobility which is called a "good," "clear," "steady" image.

It is this respectability, this immobility of spirit that prevents the European cinema, for instance, even the best of it, from breaking out into the really new sensibilities, the new content. There is nothing in the new European cinema which hasn't been said by writers long ago. Here is the ridiculousness of Grove Press, which is dragging into cinema by force the written, over-worked ideas of their European writers. It is ridiculous even if they are good writers. Grove Press writers will keep cinema (and men) tied down to the old sensibilities. Grove Press, leave cinema alone!

Some American film-makers have freed motion. The camera movement can now go anywhere—from a clear, idyllic peacefulness of the image to a frenetic and feverish ecstasy of motion. The full scale of our emotions can be registered, reflected, clarified—for ourselves, if for nobody else. The camera can be as feverish as our minds. We need this fever to escape the heavy pressure of a suspicious culture. There is no such thing as a “normal movement” or a “normal image,” a “good image” or a “bad image.” (I don't have to tell you that all this goes radically against the accepted aesthetics of our classical and professional cinema.)

LIGHTING: It can go now from the “properly” exposed and lit image to a complete destruction of the “proper”; from a complete whiteness (wash-out) to a complete blackness (*Blonde Cobra*, for example). Millions of nuances are now open to us, the poetry of shades, of over- and under-exposures. This shows that something good is happening in some of us, otherwise we wouldn't see this happening in cinema at all.

These new happenings in our cinema reveal that man is reaching, growing into new areas of himself, areas which were either deadened by culture, or scared, or sleeping. Add to what I already mentioned the complete disregard of censorship, the abandoning of taboos on sex, language, etc., and you'll have some idea about the scope and freedom of what's going on. More and more film-makers are realizing that there is no one single way of exposing (seeing) things; that the steadiness or sharpness or clarity (and all their opposites) are no virtues or absolute properties of anything; that, really, the cinema language, like any other language and syntax, is in a constant flux, is changing with every change of man. Often unnoticed, often misinterpreted, man's growth continues.

Sometimes he grows silently for so long that when his growth manifests itself in an overt action, it shocks some of us with its unfamiliar, angelic beauty.

August 22, 1963

**ON CENSORSHIP, THE MAYOR'S OFFICE,
AND THE UNDERGROUND**

Friends and citizens:

We want you to know how we feel.

When the Film-Makers' Showcase moved into the Gramercy Arts Theatre, we thought now we'll be able to continue our work in peace. Cinema needs its own workshop, a place where we can screen our unfinished and finished work, test our ideas, and study the work of our colleagues.

We were wrong.

The censors and the licensors are on our backs. They have interfered with our work. They have disregarded the fact that most of the films screened are unfinished works-in-progress and cannot be submitted for censorship or licensing. They are following blindly the dumb letter of bureaucracy.

They say we are corrupting your morals. We would be glad if we could. It would do good to some. Those must be very sick souls which can be angered by beauty; shaky and suspicious are the morals which can be upset and "corrupted" by beauty.

Let's not be ridiculous.

Censors of City and State:

LEAVE US ALONE.

There are loud talks going on in Washington and in the Mayor's office about helping culture and the arts. There is even an Office of Cultural Affairs in New York, a branch of the Mayor's office. When we called this office and asked them to get the censors off our backs, we were told, hastily, the office being very busy with culture, to write a letter. We say: To hell with letters. We have written too many of them. You know very well, without any letters, what all this is about. All that we are asking is: Get the censors and licensors off our backs. We are not in the business of

making money: We are running an experimental film workshop, and we don't care what the bureaucrats say we are doing.

There are the commercial theatres selling vulgarity under your blessing. We are concerned with beauty. Our work is uncommercial, uncompromising, and priceless as all things of the spirit are. But that is no reason for you to be afraid of us. These would be terrible times if the film-makers had to hide their films from the police and some of the best of our artists had to show their work only in secret undergrounds. That would be terrible. But that's where we find ourselves today!

Don't tell us we are "underground." We, truly, are closer to the sun, throwing light into the sad darkness, joy and love and beauty into the dark undergrounds of human misery.

City, State: Do something for the arts besides talking and having offices for arts and culture. Do one little thing; then we'll trust you. Don't set your artists against yourselves for no reason. You'll need them. You need them already.

We are not talking in anger, even though we may sound so, we are only demanding what we know belongs to us: our joy to create and experiment without some legislative bureaucrat bothering us, under whatever pretext. We are not even demanding: We are only reminding you that neither as men nor as artists can we grow by compromises. But that's what you are asking from us. You are telling us to go into the rat holes, stay away from the public. You are asking your artists to sell themselves out, to give up, to go to Hell.

September 12, 1963

THE UNDERGROUND AND THE FLAHERTY SEMINAR

I spent a day at the Flaherty Film Seminar in Brattleboro. This year it was devoted to a retrospective of the so-called *cinéma vérité*, the documentary-like cinema. The work of Leacock and the brothers Maysles took a prominent place. A number of film-makers and film critics were gathered, from Canada, France, the U.S.A.

The very fact that a retrospective of this sort could take place reminds us that the *cinéma vérité* is only one passing stage of

cinema and that some people are already beyond it. There must have been a strong need in man during the past five years or so to stress the surface, "plastic" aspects of truth. There was too much mistrust and fear of what's going on deeper inside. We stuck to observations of the crust movements, letting the unconscious wander by itself for a while.

I have seen a number of French, Canadian, and Italian films recently which reveal an attempt to go beyond the *cinéma vérité*. But they seem to wind up in another dead end. Instead of plunging into the unknown, they stick to the same familiar surface. They fragment it, they abstract it still further by fast cutting and optical tricks, as if trying to find the soul with the help of a microscope. Like Jutra's film shown at the seminar. From their fear to plunge into the unknown, some film-makers become circus dogs. They perform various tricks, they can walk on their hind legs and play with six balls on their noses—they will do everything but face themselves.

We took *Flaming Creatures* and *Blonde Cobra* to the seminar, two pieces of the impure, naughty, and "uncinematic" cinema that is being made now in New York. The only cinema that I think is doing something new and good today. It was a late midnight screening. Midnight screening in Vermont! My God, we felt like underground even at Flaherty's. But a few souls saw our work and were shaken by it. Others just walked out and slept peacefully, dreaming *cinéma vérité*. Nobody should disturb those who sleep, unless it is a fire or something. We'll disturb you some other time.

Jack Smith: "Movies aren't just something like I came to; they are my life. After *Flaming Creatures* I realized that that wasn't something I had photographed: Everything really happened. It really happened. I—that those were things I wanted to happen in my life and it wasn't something that we did, we really lived through it; you know what I mean? And it was really real. It just was. It just was almost incidental that there was a camera around. In other words, if it had happened before the camera was invented, it would have gone on much the same way it did."

SUGGESTION: Organize 1-million-dollar film production. Shoot it with the lens cap on. Submit it to the Cannes Film Festival.

September 19, 1963

THE FUNCTION OF FILM CRITICISM

What is the total sum of autumn? What is its content, form, purpose? Its style, certainly, has unity. But what does it amount to? Eh, but what did the summer amount to, with all its greenery and flowers and sun? Fountains of red and brown will shoot out soon. That's what the summer amounted to.

And you ask me about movies. I don't know what any movie amounts to. I am looking more for some light behind it, behind the images; I am trying to see the man.

It was Barbara Wise who said to me the other day—and she was right: The film critic should not explain what the movie is all about, surely an impossible task; he should help to create the right attitude for looking at movies. That's what my rambling is all about, nothing more.

Where was I? Yes, rambling. I will tell you the real truth: All that I have learned in my life (and I have seen many movies) amounts to this: Leaves are falling every autumn. I will be there with my camera when they fall.

ON LOSEY

I was unhappy with the Losey movie, *The Servant*, because it didn't move anywhere. The difference between, say, Brakhage's or Smith's work and the work of Losey is that whereas Stan's or Jack's creative acts are part of their intense inner movements, and whereas Stan and Jack use their art to propel themselves forward, the work of Losey—and I may be very wrong—seems to me like the work of a man who stopped somewhere and who looks now at his past, behind his shoulder, and reflects upon it, meditates, turns it around and around, while he himself remains on one spot. It is classical, static, Apollonian art. Brakhage's art or Smith's art gives me an impression of rough chunks of something huge that is looming in front of them which they keep breaking with their fingers and with their hearts, trying to move further; sharp and often painful chunks. After each new piece, after each new work, they

are a little further than they were before, although they may not know more about the past (Losey does).

ON ANDY WARHOL

It doesn't have to be a great or a complex work of art to be a witness of a passionate movement forward. Andy Warhol, for instance, is in the process of making the longest and simplest movie ever made: an eight-hour-long movie that shows nothing but a man sleeping. But this simple movie will push Andy Warhol—and has pushed me, and a few others who saw it, some of it—further than we were before. As simple as it is, it is a movement forward that carries others with it. Therefore it is beautiful like anything that is alive. Anything that is alive is beautiful—that is my statement for the week.

Oh, cinema! This is what Roland Kirk said the other night at the Village Gate, and I thought it worth remembering: "Some people have eyes, but they have no ears."

September 26, 1963

ON GODARD AND RATIONALISM

Jean-Luc Godard's new film, *Vivre sa Vie* (at the Paris Theatre, translated as *My Life to Live*), is the most beautiful film playing in town. As in *Breathless*, Godard is telling a very simple, straight story, and he stays with his story. He goes about his filmmaker's business with an amazing ease, simplicity, and lightness.

Two things bothered me. First: The film seems to me too well and too carefully planned, with no holes for air, for unexpectedness, too studied. Second: Anna Karina, the prostitute, has a discussion about the nature of words, mind, and love. In one very beautiful scene, Karina says that she feels responsible for every single one of her smallest acts. "I lift my hand—I am responsible; I say a word—I am responsible." Both Karina and "the philosopher" then talk about the importance of mind and the need for exerting control over every word and act. A conscious thought must precede every word.

This bothered me, because it is this predominance of mind (intellect, reason) that is holding France and most of Europe in a deadly grip. Cogito, ergo sum. In America the mind was cracked open by the beats. Man doesn't always know, nor does he have to know, what he will say next before saying it. Neither words nor acts should come out dead, killed by premeditation.

I feel that Godard's film, although very beautiful in its images and its formal conception, fails in its thought. I would rewrite Karina's lines something like this: "I lift my hand; the movement will cause something; it was caused by something. I say a word; it was caused by something; it will cause something."

C. G. Jung, in *Symbols and Transformation*: "No man can change himself into anything from sheer reason; he can only change into what he potentially is."

My "attacks" on mind have often been misunderstood. I have nothing against mind. How could I! All I am trying to say is this: We disagree on what mind is and which mind man needs today. I say we have had enough of the "conscious" mind; now we need the "unconscious" mind. Unless we want our boat to go down. It is clear from Godard's philosophical references that he is still talking about the same conscious mind, be it Kant's or Sartre's. The tragedy of Godard and Karina will be (and perhaps is) that they were never told (or they didn't take it seriously) that there is the other mind (or minds) which has (have) little to do with consciousness, logic, "thinking." When we get hung up on our brains, we begin to fall off balance, as we are falling now. It is time to descend into the mind of the "lower regions" (the intuitive mind, the Burroughs mind, the Henry Miller mind, the Jack Smith mind, the Allen Ginsberg mind, the *Book of Changes* mind, the madman's mind, the fanatic's mind, the Dionysus mind).

October 3, 1963

MORE ON MARKOPOULOS AND *TWICE A MAN*

Very humbly, at the Gramercy Arts Theatre on East 27th Street, a new feature-length film by Gregory Markopoulos, *Twice a Man*, is opening this Friday. I say humbly because *Twice a Man* happens to be the most important and most beautiful film to open

in New York this year, and it deserved the most beautiful theatre. But then perhaps the Gramercy Arts *is* the most beautiful theatre, because there is no commerce in it.

I have told you on other occasions and I'll say it again now—this being still more valid after the New York Film Festival—that *Twice a Man* is one of the very few truly beautiful films and a joyous event in cinema. In our banal and miserable times it restores a belief in poetry and visions. In our too rational and too literal world, Gregory's cinematic language captures and reveals to us movements of nonliterary intelligenc. He demonstrates anew, in a most beautiful way, that editing remains one of cinema's glories. His film pulsates with sensuous imagery, and blooms and fountains of color burst out in magnificent and glorious ecstasies. Stop looking for cinema beyond the Atlantic: The most glorious cinema today is being made here in your own home. Our art theatres, our film distributors, our film investors, and our movie critics (and this means you ALL): WAKE UP, WAKE UP!

October 10, 1963

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARKOPOULOS

Gregory Markopoulos' new film, *Twice a Man*, is drawing large crowds to the Film-Makers' Showcase at the Gramercy Arts Theatre. And it is very seldom that a film provokes such intense discussions when it is over, for and against, as those after Markopoulos' film.

I have been often complaining about the backwardness of *The New York Times*. The *Times* became again the only major newspaper that chose to dismiss a major new film only because it didn't have big commercial backing to push it through phony publicity campaigns. It is not a question of a bad or a good review, an intelligent or an unintelligent review: It is a question of the whole attitude toward the uncommercial cinema. To *The New York Times*, cinema is not an art yet (despite Bosley Crowther's Lincoln Center Film Festival editorial), it is only a commerce. How else explain the fact that a major world newspaper doesn't see a need to review a work such as *Twice a Man*?

Q: What keeps your heart beating, Gregory?

A: Today the artist must be a revolutionary. He cannot believe in anything. He believes in revolution and in his own art. He is neither God nor Devil. He believes in his demon.

Q: How do you survive, Gregory?

A: Today in order to live you have to sell something. And in order to sell you have to be commercial. I have nothing to sell. I denounce commercialism, which sends the Muse away. Commercialism in the arts is the curse of the Devil. It is an integral part of today's society.

Q: What's the way out?

A: Nothing short of revolution can restore to man that divine spirit which he has been denied in our society. As a film-maker and a human being I am devoted to this ideal.

As a film-maker I believe that the only hope for motion pictures is the experimental film. It is very depressing to observe at Lincoln Center in such films as the sad experience of *Muriel* by Resnais, and the more terrible *Sweet and Sour*, the continued perversion of the avant-garde in the commercial motion picture. The two can never merge. It is the responsibility of the avant-garde to remain eternally revolutionary.

Q: Is there anything one should know before seeing *Twice a Man*?

A: No. There is nothing esoteric about *Twice a Man*. I refuse to discuss the spirit of *Twice a Man*. It would be a mockery to discuss it. People ask me what it is about, and it cannot be explained. It can only be experienced. One is either capable or not capable of experiencing *Twice a Man*—or anything else, for that matter. The content is simple, direct, and uncompromising.

Q: You use actors?

A: The actor in my films is my instrument. I am not interested in his analyses or interpretations. The film carries the action, and the actor is a passive object. I act upon him by bringing him to life with light and camera. One of the advantages of working as an experimental film-maker is that I do not have to contend with the inflated ego of the modern actor. We wish for great actors when we know perfectly well that today great actors do not exist at all.

Q: Did you have a script?

A: I consider *Twice a Man* to be my most mature and unprece-

dented work. Although I collected notes for nearly four years, I chose to discard and ignore them. After completing the film I felt that the imagery was so vivid and said so completely what I was trying to say that I decided to dispense with the notes that I had collected over a period of four years.

Q: What are you after, Gregory?

A: I am trying to speak in an original language, to create an original language; I search for myself, for new means, for new techniques, for new visions, for new perspectives. I'm different for the sake of being different.

Q: Is cinema your love and your death, Gregory?

A: I believe that cinema is a supreme art. The other arts have become old. Certainly, for me, the theatre is dead. Cinema remains the youngest of the arts and contains the elements of eternity: meaning poetry. Within the experimental film is being discovered an extraordinary language which eventually will be the basis of that language which shall be spoken in the future. Within cinema there are contained the fantastic shadows of those parts of our senses and visions which we are still incapable of using or realizing, senses and visions which shall belong to that unknown species that will inherit the real Earth.

October 24, 1963

ON *BLONDE COBRA* AND *FLAMING CREATURES*
(FROM MY TAPE RECORDED DIARIES)

Storm De Hirsch: In *Flaming Creatures* there is this male homosexuality angle. But Jack Smith covers a great deal more. He covers the whole aspect of the male-female situation, including his mother. I thought of Burroughs. It gives you an idea, if you saw Burroughs on the screen. But I have a feeling that he got beyond Burroughs. . . . And you know where this comes through also, it's in the hysteria of his laughing in *Blonde Cobra*. Jack was not acting? It's more than acting. It's torment. And there is no infatuation with the idea of "making films" with Jack. He is beyond it. He is shaken inside.

JM: Jack already gave up films long ago. Like Zen archers, he

shoots, he aims past the target, past the cinema, or "beyond." It's then that he hits: by forgetting cinema.

Louis Brigante: Then you hit the bull's-eye.

SDH: He takes chances—whatever happens. It is honest, whatever it is. In Smith it's this measured madness, derangement—but there is sanity in the madness, which is the thing. There is the derangement by drugs; but this is something else. There is a distinction there. It is a very magic mind of derangement. What other films did he make, besides *Flaming Creatures*?

JM: *Scotch Tape*. He appeared in *Little Stabs at Happiness*. Then in *Blonde Cobra*. It was photographed by Bob Fleischner, edited and sound prepared by Ken Jacobs, acted and spoken by Jack Smith. Jack also acts in Ron Rice's *Queen of Sheba Meets the Atom Man*.

SDH: *Little Stabs* I feel is a part of *Blonde Cobra*.

JM: Because they are united by Jacobs' editing. Jacobs is more conscious of form, perhaps. There is this structure of editing—the rhythm of spacing between the images and the blanks and Smith's voice; there is a very formalistic "anti-film" structure in *Little Stabs*, similar to the *Blonde Cobra* structuring. I recently saw the rough cut of Jacobs' new film, *Star Spangled to Death*, a three-hour movie he has been shooting for the past seven years, and I was surprised to find in it the beginnings of *Scotch Tape* and *Blonde Cobra* and the beautiful earliest work of Jack Smith where he does as good a job as the early Chaplin—which I know is a big statement, but you'll see some day it's true.

LB: Where would you show *Flaming Creatures*? I mean, to whom? At this moment?

JM: At the Gramercy Arts Showcase. But even there. . . . But the way I think, even if it will speak to only five or ten people, it should be shown, because those five or ten are very important.

You can do "crazy" things in films today, like they do mad things in happenings. These are healthy "fantasies," and it is acceptable. Crazy, that's O.K. For laughs, they think. Even if they can't get to like Pop Art, for instance, they can accept it for a laugh. But not what Smith does (or Burroughs, for that matter). It disturbs them deeply somewhere, they can't stand it, it angers them, shames them. A healthy and wholesome, normal craziness they want: entertainment.

SDH: The theatre of the unwholesome. . . . The unhealthy cinema. . . .

JM: Not that these films should be pushed into their throats. There are gradations. Not everybody's at the same stage of development and sensitivity. But to those who are ready and whom it would help to grow and to develop, it should be made available.

SDH: Certainly there is a whole school of poets, too . . . of course, Baudelaire is there . . . They all had this problem. In Italy Pasolini attempted to do something like this, in his own way. He was called a pervert and a communist, and he was arrested for his sequence in *Rogopag*.

LB: He could never reach the openness that can be reached here, though. Only partly because it is New York.

JM: In Europe they still think that you can do something only in a form which could speak to everybody, which is a lie. By restricting form you restrict content. You work within the accepted mode. In New York we gave up such thinking. But this gained freedom puts on us a huge demand to go all the way out (or in). And very few of us are doing that at this moment. We are still too locked up in ourselves, too hung up on something or other.

SDH: You get some visions from Rome or Paris, too, but not this kind of thing. (I am talking about cinema.) You don't get that sense that someone's morality is being passed.

LB: Even if they break the traditional form, it is still a form. They cannot go beyond, into formlessness.

JM: Instead of ending with form, they begin with a form, that's the sad part of it.

LB: Yes. Here, Smith creates form, too, but it comes out of formlessness.

SDH: Comes out of a chaos, really.

October 31, 1963

ON CINÉMA VÉRITÉ AND THE TRUTH OF THE HUMAN VOICE

*"Now we can film anything. But it is necessary to have a theme."
—Pierre Juneau to Jean Rouch (Gazette Littéraire de Lausanne)*

One of the differences between the French-Canadian school of "cinéma vérité" (Rouch, Brault, Juneau) and the American (Leacock, Maysles) is that where the French-Canadians start with a theme, an idea, Leacock starts with a man, his character, his actions. For Leacock, I'd paraphrase Juneau's comment like this: "Now we can film anything. But it is necessary to have a man."

It is the man that comes through in *Eddie Sachs*, *Football, Crisis*, *The Showman*. These films do not sell solutions or ready-made opinions about the men they show. Certainly these are not full portraits: That would take a lifetime. These films will remain fragments of the men they show. And it is up to us, from the material we see, to gain some understanding of the people portrayed in these films.

However in *The Lonely Boy*, a Canadian film, right from the very beginning there is the morality of the film-maker sticking out like a sore thumb, disapproving of his own subject. Maysles said to me: "In *Lonely Boy* they have no respect for man. The film-makers were not humble enough."

It is becoming clear that only now have we the first really "talking" cinema. More than that. We have national, untranslatable cinemas. We all thought that cinema could break through the language barrier. We were mistaken. Or partly mistaken. Now there is a cinema which is becoming as difficult to translate as good literature: Rouch, Marker, Brault; Jack Smith, Ken Jacobs, Bob Fleischner, MacLaine; Leacock, Maysles. "Word" or, perhaps more exactly, the human voice has come to cinema.

Cinema used words and voices since its beginnings. But it was always a stage voice, a mechanical voice, a literary voice. The human voice with all its nuances was kept out of cinema, as if not worthy of it. If it got there, it was more by accident, in third-rate movies. Voices in bad movies are always richer and subtler. Cinema suffered under a "literary" complex. Only now, with the films of Leacock, Rouch, Brault, and Smith, is the aural beauty of the human language being discovered. Cinema is more sure of itself as an art and is no longer afraid to be "impure," to look like "nonart." It is no longer possible to translate the work of these film-makers with subtitles. The voice, the cadence, the color of the voice is too much a part of the form and content and style of their work.

Alain Resnais, in *Image et Son*, number 161:

Some ideas have too long a life. For instance the idea that "a good film music is one which you don't hear." Or that "a good commentary shouldn't be noticeable." I prefer a commentary which passes by unnoticed to a painful, outrageous, bad, loud commentary; but there is no reason why, because we are "in a movie theatre," we shouldn't attach importance to the word and the voice. I'd go so far as to say that if one day somebody would show me a movie in which the images would consist of nothing but streaks and clashes of light, and the soundtrack would consist of nothing but words rhythmically integrated with the light, I'd say: This is cinema.

I remember our first screening of *Blonde Cobra*, when we suddenly became aware of this new situation: We knew that we had just seen a work of art, a film of tremendous poetic strength and richness which brought cinema to the level of the best "poetry maudit." There was no question about that. But there also was no question that *Blonde Cobra* had integrated the word and the voice so perfectly and permanently that the film became untranslatable; that it will never be the same to a Frenchman, or an Italian, as it is to us; that, in the future, there will be painful attempts to translate this film, and they will fail, as all translations of poetry fail.

Nevertheless, one aspect will remain accessible to all (and this aspect may be more important than the literal meanings of words): that is, the voice quality, its emotional nuances, its dramatic colors, its "soul." In *Blonde Cobra* the meaning of what the voice is saying may escape one, but the nuances of the voice will not. It will be there with its fantastic richness, adding to the film another dimension. There will always be another extreme, the abstraction of the human voice (*Twice a Man* provides the most brilliant example of this until now). But the poetry of the human voice will remain here to enrich the cinema as much as the human face does.

November 7, 1963

ON MONEY

Either you make films or you make money. Both can become distorted obsessions. Both can work for man and against man.

It is easy to make money if you set your mind to it, and if it's in your stars. Not so easy to make films. Art goes even against stars.

All film-makers need money. All other people need money. I have been surviving for the past five years on \$400 a year. That is the price of my independence.

Film-makers are constantly attacking those who have money (and those who do not) for money. They take it for granted that other people should give them money because they are artists. I know film-makers who, instead of freeing themselves from money, live in a constant paranoia of "I don't have money."

We do not make an attempt to bring those who have money closer to our work. We don't really lack money: we lack people who really believe in what we are doing. A man who has money is like any other man who has no money: He is a man first, and a man who has money second.

Hollywood and off-Hollywood independents raise their money by persuading their investors that their films will make money. They work on the basis of "a sound business investment." I hear the same "business talk" among the low-low-budget film-makers.

At least once a week I am present at one or more money-raising, "persuasion" meetings where film-makers try to pull or almost drag someone into something. And they get angry when the attempt fails. I see the same ugly thing again and again.

We know that art can make money too. But it doesn't have to. That's not what art is all about. We ourselves help to distort the understanding and experience of art from its very beginning, from the very first stages of our work. One who begins by compromising will end so. I have learned that much.

Let's stop doing it.

We know that the true meaning of art is not how much money it brings in. So why do we lie to ourselves? What it brings is the aesthetic pleasures, the ecstasies of the soul. Our sponsors/investors must understand that man needs these things even at the expense of losing money. And it is up to us to explain this.

It is the human aspect, the ritual aspect, the growth-of-man aspect that is being forgotten. We all talk about how art needs money, but we fail to serve our own art, we fail to make an effort to explain the meaning of art in man's life. Or is it possible that we have forgotten it ourselves?

For a long time I carried in me a hate for money. I thought that money was the root of all evil. Then I came to understand that men (both dead and alive) are the root of all evil; that money is only the earth metal.

Now I believe, as I have said many times before, that films (art) are not made with money: Films are made with and by people. This remains unchanged.

One great piece of art by itself could change the whole society, if that society would know the meaning of art. The truth is: Neither critics nor artists are helping the society to grasp the ritual meanings of art.

But there are works of art being created today—in painting, music, poetry, and cinema—that will counteract all evil in the world, the bomb, the politicians, the newspapers.

If we'd only believe in it, money will come by itself.

“He who shall teach the child to doubt
The rotting grave shall ne'er get out.”

—BLAKE

November 14, 1963

ON GREGORY CORSO AND DEATH

Happy Death, a “film in progress” (death is always progressive) by Gregory Corso and Jay Socin, had its first show at the Film-Makers' Showcase. Gray, white, out-of-focus, washed-out death. On the sound track Gregory was making comments, graveyard talk, talking about death most of the time—and not always favorably, often taking a stand for life. Death will get him.

As Corso shows, or as it comes through in images, it is not a very happy death, what we see. It is more decay than death. There is more decay than death in the world today, it seems. No, there is not much happy death around. Not even sad death. In any case, more sad than happy. All that decay. Like rotten teeth, or bad mouth smell. It is not death: Most of the time it is dying alive. All those houses, posters, graveyards, and things that Corso shows: They really never lived. Or if they lived, what sad lives those were.

Corso caught it, or some of it, because you can never catch all

of death. It doesn't matter. Death came through, in Gregory's movie, limping on one leg, in rags, with its scythe not too sharp any longer, a blunt, rusty piece, as if there were no money for a new one, so it prefers to let things and humans decay by themselves, die a slow, ugly, cancerous death.

When I walk the streets now, I see more decay than I saw before Gregory's movie. It made me more conscious of decay around me. I wish one could stimulate the awareness of life somehow. Or stimulate life itself. Unless you take death as some kind of life too, which some people do.

ON SCORPIO RISING

Kenneth Anger's new movie, *Scorpio Rising*, is about the motorcycle-riding death. It is a brilliant movie by a brilliantly



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at The Gramercy Arts Theatre,
138 E. 27th St. (near Lex.)

Mon., Nov. 11th at 7:30, 9:15, & 11:00 pm

THE
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KENNETH ANGER







SCORPIO RISING

a masterpiece of brutal sexual power and brilliant color imagery;
 Anger's latest work, a film on motorcyclists



Fire Works

the classic experimental film on sado-
 masochism and masturbation.



Also shown will be: INAUGURATION OF THE PLEASURE DOME,
 EAUX D'ARTIFICE, and PUCE MOMENT.

obsessed film-maker. What is the movie about? Motorcycles. Scorpios. Brando. Death. Fetishes. Brute force. It is many things. Slowly, without hurrying, in poisonously sensuous colors,

Anger shows, or more truly lets the subject reveal by itself, bit by bit, motion by motion, detail by detail, belts, knobs, chrome, chests, pedals, rings, boots, leather jackets, rituals and mysteries of the motorcycle youth, steel and chrome perversions.

It has a strange fascination, this world that so many of us do not know. "Evil works, evil really works"—*Blonde Cobra*. Evil attracts. Scorpios attract. The pull of fascist strength, muscle and steel and speed. Didn't we all want, sometimes, to ride the streets like black steel devils?

Oh, and there is the world of things of spirit, of love, of subtle emotions, of meditation, of flowers. We wonder if one denies, or strengthens, provokes the other.

Anger does not moralize or stress or take stands: He only presents the theme, as a poet, fully and roundly, so that after Anger there is nothing to say on the subject, everything is in his movie, hinted, suggested, much more than what we see in it after the first or second viewing. He put it under the sign of Scorpio and left it there, which is a moral in itself, I guess. Scorpio rises. Scorpio will always rise as long as there are stars in heaven and man on earth.

December 5, 1963

ON ANDY WARHOL

Strange things have been going on lately at the Film-Makers' Showcase. Anti-film-makers are taking over. Andy Warhol serials brought the Pop Movie into existence. Is Andy Warhol really making movies, or is he playing a joke on us?—this is the talk of the town. To show a man sleeping, is this a movie? A three-minute kiss by Naomi Levine, is this art of kissing or art of cinema? If it is not cinema then what is it? What is it a forecast of? What is really going on in man (or in this man)? What kind of strange signs, mutterings, messages are these?

Or George Landow. A feature-length movie where you see nothing but a man talking to himself and with himself, on a four-ways-split screen—is this cinema? Two hours of variations on a man talking (we don't hear his voice)—is this all that it means, or

does it mean something beyond itself? Neodada? Neoletterism on screen? What makes Landow do what he is doing?

ON DICK HIGGINS

Last Monday a few hundred people sat through a two-and-one-half-hour movie by Dick Higgins called *Flaming City*. Two hours of almost pure nothing, people doing nonsense things, making faces, jumping up, showing their teeth, rolling on the ground, or performing other purposeless activities. Yes, there were the streets of New York, too, the beaches, the parks in their most beautiful summer green. That's all.

Yes, but was that all? It never is. We vaguely feel the glimpses of unfamiliar beauty, of movements that are not easy to grasp yet. But all this will be past and history some day, and a part of each of us. These are only forecasts of subconscious streams that are carrying something, doing something, meaning something, and whatever happens in man is beautiful if you know how to look at it.

JOSEPH CORNELL, THE POET OF THE UNPRETENTIOUS

Talking about beauty: It is Joseph Cornell who is the real poet of dailiness, of the unpretentious, of the anti-art film. Those lucky few who came to the Cornell screening two Mondays ago saw the most unpretentious beauty the screen has nearly ever seen. I don't know if it is a compliment to Cornell (I think it is) to say that he is the Robert Flaherty of the home (and anti-art) movie. He makes these little insignificant movies. Most people do not even think they are movies: They are so artless. And ah, how much love there is in Cornell's movies! Love for people, for flowers, for the summer girls, for the little tree leaning in the dark corner without sun, for the birds in the sad park trees. St. Francis would have been a friend of Joseph Cornell.

David Wise, whose film *Short Circuit* was shown not too long ago at the Film-Makers' Showcase, will be lecturing at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia, on December 13. David Wise, who will soon be nine years old, follows Dwight Macdonald on the university's ReVue film series. He could teach old Dwight a thing or two.

1964

January 16, 1964

FLAMING CREATURES AT KNOKKE-LE ZOUTE

The Vikings, I was told, avoided the Knokke-Le Zoute coast, a lonely and desolate place to be caught in. I don't remember if I saw the sun during the week I stayed there. In any case, I am not sure about it.

I went to the Third International Experimental Film Exposition as one of the jury members. By now most of you know what happened: That I had to reject the jurorship, that I had to take a stand against censorship. Last week's report in the *Voice*, although fragmentary, covered some of the occurrences at Knokke.

I myself am not so sure about what really happened at Knokke during that stormy, confused, disappointed, sad, desperate week. It did different things to each of us. And there will be conflicting reports about it for years to come, about the flames over Knokke-Le Zoute; about how we smuggled *Flaming Creatures* into the projection room in the can of *Dog Star Man*; about our screenings in the hotel cellar amidst dusty old furniture, cobwebs, old newspapers; about how, on New Year's night, we stormed the Crystal Room and took over the projector, how the lights were cut off, and how I ran to the switchboard room, trying to push off the house detective, holding the door, trying to force the fingers of the bully who was holding the switch.

"People, do you want to see the film?" Barbara Rubin shouted from the projector platform, fighting like a brave general.

"Yes!" answered the people.

It is too confusing what went on after that. Much pushing and shouting as the switch changed hands between me and the cop. It was about this time that the Minister of Justice arrived. The riot was getting more and more out of hand. The Minister made an attempt to explain the Belgian law. But when we asked if there was such a law forbidding the showing of films, he said there was no such law. "Then fuck you!" shouted Barbara to the Minister of Justice of Belgium. We made another attempt to project *Flaming Creatures* right on his face, but the light was cut off again. Later I was told that the Minister of Justice in his speech gave his word that the Belgian laws on this matter will be changed. The morning papers picked up the promise.

Since the affair of *Flaming Creatures* has been blown across the world by now, and since there will be much more on the subject, I should tell you one thing. Our actions (by "our," I mean Barbara Rubin, Paul Adams Sitney, and myself) at Knokke-Le Zoute were motivated by our feelings against the suppression of any film or any aesthetic expression. During our press conference, as well as on other occasions, we made it clear that we were not fighting for this particular film, but for the principle of free expression.

It has become very clear, after the experiences at Knokke, that it makes no sense to hide art under a film society membership or other cloak. To look for ways of getting around the law, instead of facing it and provoking it directly and openly, is dishonest. That's why bad laws exist. If Knokke left any lasting impression on me, it is the realization of the dishonesty of artistic "freedom" that is relegated to clubs, societies, membership groups. That includes the Love and Kisses to Censors Film Society. Some Belgians told me: "We thought that there was no censorship in Belgium. Now, after Knokke, we know that there is."

Besides the fact that the American films were about the only interesting films at the festival, the thing that contributed most to the prestige of the American film-makers was the protest-solidarity letters from Vanderbeek, Markopoulos, Anger, Breer, and Brakhage, defending Jack Smith's right to be together with other film-makers. It was not easy for these film-makers to withdraw

FAMING

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from Jack Smith's
Normal Love

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their films from the exposition—each one of them had an excellent chance of getting the money prizes. But they did what they felt they had to do. It is this gesture that put them heads above other film-makers and astounded the festival.

Both Sitney and I agreed that, apart from the American films, there was only one genuine film-maker at the festival: an Austrian, Peter Kubelka. He had a ninety-second film, *Schwechater*, and it was a small masterpiece. The rest of the European, Asian, South American entries were outdated, derivative, banal, imitative, amateur works.

One of the reasons for this sad state of affairs, we soon noticed, was that the films were almost a hundred per cent “sponsored” films, be it by government, public (or art) organizations, or film companies. It is a lesson for American film-makers to remember. Let’s keep our art free of any sponsorship, whoever the sponsor may be. From our conversations with the film-makers at the festival we soon realized that they couldn’t grasp the idea that Smith or Brakhage or Anger could make films with their own money (borrowed, stolen, etc.); that a film could be made with \$100. It became clear that unless the European, Asian, South American film-makers realize this fact, there is little hope for truly personal creation in their work.

I went to Belgium to gain some perspective about the poetic, independent, “experimental” cinema. I thought I had blown up out of proportion the American contribution to the poetic cinema. Now I have gained that perspective. Even if I take into consideration the possibility that some of the more advanced works did not pass the hard heads of the selection jury (as *The Flower Thief* and *Blazes* didn’t), I have to resign myself to the sad fact that the only truly creative work in cinema is being done by Americans.

How *Scorpio Rising* missed the prize, nobody knows. One of those strange mistakes that juries commit. Together with *Twice a Man*, *Window Water Baby Moving*, *Scorpio* was the festival’s most liked, most discussed, and best received film. The festival winner itself, *Die Parallelstrasse*, was a boring, heavy, pretentious German movie. I could not sit through it. But it had enough pretentious “seriousness” to please a very socially and message-conscious jury.

Agnes Varda came to the *Flaming Creatures* screening in our

crowded hotel bedroom. She made an immediate attempt to leave the room. But the room was too crowded, and she couldn't leave without stepping on somebody's head. She stayed to the end, defending herself behind a screen of occasional remarks, laughter, dismissals.

(One of the most revealing experiences I had was during a screening of *Flaming Creatures* to a group of New York writers, upper-class writers who write for money, who expected to see another "blue movie"—I had never met such violent reactions, such outbursts of uncontrolled anger. Someone was threatening to beat me up. They would have sat happily through a pornographic movie, which they were expecting to see and which the host had promised them that night—but they could not take the fantasies of Jack Smith. *Flaming Creatures* unmasked them and made them face themselves in a way that only art can. That is the difference between pornography and art.)

Having plenty of time to play around at the festival, I made one good friend: Varda's five-year-old daughter. We had a good time together. So the last day of the festival I mentioned it to Varda. I thought she'd be happy. Instead, I noticed that her face became pale. For a moment I couldn't understand the fear I saw in her face. Only slowly did it dawn on me that she took me for a sex maniac. After all, I am showing that dirty, transvestite movie in my room. And there is the Flaming Barbara with me. Sitney, I was told, got about twenty proposals from fags who were swamping the fest and who couldn't exactly figure out what's behind that beard. And there were rumors going on about the nightly orgies taking place in my hotel room. . . .

The jury saw *Flaming Creatures* and a big discussion followed. They thought that *Flaming Creatures* was a documentary! (At least Klein and Mazetti thought so; Vesely thought it was simply a dirty movie.) Americans must really live like that, they thought. A wild image of America we left in Knokke-Le Zoute, I tell you. No wonder a State Department man was sitting next to our table wherever we went. I wonder what perverted thoughts were in his head, or what went into his report.

January 30, 1964

ON ANDY WARHOL'S *SLEEP*

What does Warhol's *Sleep* do? What doesn't it do? Is it cinema? Is this the ultimate extension of Pop Art? The slowing down, stretching a detail to its limit, to what maximum effect? Using the screen as a sounding board for the viewer's dreams, fantasies, thoughts? An exercise in hypnosis? Test of patience? A Zen Joke? If it makes you angry, why? Can't you relax and take a good joke? Running? Where to? Searching for Art in *Sleep*, doesn't it betray our own pompousness? Why do we go to cinema? It abandons the usual movie experience for what? Pure cinema, no fake entertainment, no fake stories, isn't that something worth trying? Does this bringing down to absurdum mean that we have to start from scratch, to forget all previous movie experiences? Doesn't it remind us that there is not much sense in rushing? Doesn't it remind us of the secret, almost unnoticeable motions, variations? What was wrong with those few who sat through all the six hours of the movie? Were they sick, or were they capable of satoris and delights which we are not capable of enjoying? What did it do to them, what did it really destroy or start in them, what did it germinate during those six hours which we missed—an experience which we missed in our silly (and/or sick) haste? All these questions and many more you could hear in the lobby of the Gramercy Arts Theatre last weekend, during the screening of Andy Warhol's monumental *Sleep*.

HOW RON RICE GOT LOCKED UP IN A MADHOUSE

On Friday I received a telephone call from Howard Everngam, a friend of Ron Rice. "Can you do something?" he said. "They put Ron into Bellevue." So I called the hospital. It took me a long time to reach the proper number, but finally I got through. "No, nobody can talk to Rice today. And nobody will be here until Monday. Come in Monday," they told me.

I didn't wait till Monday. I went the next day.

What had happened was that Rice went to Bellevue to visit one of the stars of *Normal Love*, who was committed to Bellevue for no great reason—for reasons we should all be committed, more or less. Ron told me (approximately):

I walked in and brought my camera with me. I was talking to her, and there was the sun pouring in through the window, and it was sad and beautiful. So I said to her: "Stay by the window, I will take a few shots." "Okay," she said. So we started shooting. Suddenly I hear screams: "He is shooting! He is shooting!" I thought these were other patients, but no. It was the nurse screaming like mad. She grabbed the camera and tried to pull it out of my hands. I kept shooting. The nurse kept screaming and pulling the camera and shouting for more help. A few guards came running. Okay, I said, I will walk down with you and out. But there, in the corridor, while we were walking, on the very end of the corridor, there were three sad women sitting, with their heads down, sad and beautiful, so I had to take a picture and I pushed the button. "Stop him! Stop him! He is shooting!" screamed the doctor. "You can't do that, you can't do that!" So they tried to take my camera away from me. I locked my hands around it and said: No. You can't do that. This is my property. When I saw three other guards ganging up on me I put the camera on the table and said: "Okay, here it is." I took the film out, I wrapped it up, sealed it in the film can, and said to the guard: "Whoever will take this film to *The Village Voice* will get a hundred dollars reward." Then, before I had time to think, I saw the doctor filling the blanks on cards, and in no time I was there, together with all the other sad and beautiful creatures, in this most terrible place of all. They kept giving me pills and things, against my protests and against my will. They can really butcher you here without anybody knowing it, and I am still all dazed and not myself. There was not a moment of peace during the twenty-four hours I spent in that place. Even when I tried to sleep or read Mailer's *Esquire* piece, I couldn't. People kept coming to me, asking for matches or other things. Some people were left tied in the bags, screaming in the middle of the corridors. The place is as noisy and crowded as a subway.

No doubt, soon someone realized that somebody had made a blunder with me, and they tried to get rid of me and fast, because I said that if they keep me longer I will send hundreds of people with cameras here and they will be really exposed on the world screens, with all the ugliness and inhumanity that is going on in this place.

Rice told me all this as we were leaving the hospital Saturday

afternoon. Bellevue kept the film. In the safe, they said. The doctor gave Rice the usual farewell sermon: "If we are letting you out, don't get an idea that you are better or more normal than you are. . . ." Ron promised the doctor to have a special screening of his films for the Bellevue doctors. "It's about time," he said when the doctor was wondering why he should see Ron's films. All this time I kept shooting with a hidden 8 mm. camera, and if I got anything, you'll see it at the Gramercy Arts in a newsreel entitled *Ron Rice at Bellevue*. (A show of Rice's films is coming to the Gramercy Arts soon.) We left Bellevue. Outside the sun was shining. Inside was the sadness, dirt, ugliness, the unbelievable sadness of people mistreated, mishandled, and unloved as only human beings can be unloved.

February 6, 1964

ON THE EXPANDING EYE

Is our eye dying? Or do we just not know how to look and see any longer? The experiences of LSD show that the eye can expand itself, see more than we usually do. But then, as Bill Burroughs says (I quote from memory): "Whatever can be done chemically can be done other ways."

There are many ways of freeing the eye. It comes more to removing various psychological blocks than to really changing the eye. We never really look at the screen directly; we are separated by a misty ocean of our inhibitions and "knowledge." Experiments which Brion Gysin is doing in Paris with his "flicker machine" (read *Olympia* magazine) show that without the help of drugs, with a light flicker (even with your eyes closed), you can see colors and visions you were not able to see before and the memory of which (as with LSD) remains after the "experiment." A series of blocks has been removed. As Professor Oster, who is conducting similar experiments in Brooklyn, says (again from memory): "The eye is inhibited. In some cultures more, in some less. We do not properly use the moire patterns of the retina, because we think it is not practical. Our practical culture has reduced our vision." Salvador Dali believes that "the Greek and

Arab artists had this training of the eye, of releasing the inhibitions of the eye. Only after the burning of the library of Alexandria, the education of the eye was gradually neglected.”

We say the single-frame technique in Markopoulos' film *Twice a Man* bothers our eyes. People have told me, after seeing Robert Breer's film *Blazes* or after Stan Brakhage films, that they have headaches. Which is very possible. Others among us, those who have been watching these films more often, feel that the movements are too slow—we could take so much more. Our eye has expanded, our eye reactions have quickened. We have learned to see a little bit better.

But still our eyes are so limited! Some people can still see sprites and pixies. I saw an item in a recent issue of *The New York Times* about a woman in London who can read colors with her fingers. Brion Gysin writes:

What is art? What is color? What is vision? These old questions demand new answers when, in the light of the Dream Machine (flicker machine), one sees all of ancient and modern abstract art with eyes closed.

Writes Stan Brakhage (in *Metaphors on Vision*):

Imagine an eye unrul'd by manmade laws of perspective, an eye unprejudiced by compositional logic, an eye which does not respond to the name of everything but which must know each new object encountered in life through an adventure of perception. How many colors are there in a field of grass to the crawling baby unaware of Green? How many rainbows can light create for the untutored eye?

Writes Ian Sommerville (in *Olympia*):

I have made a simple flicker machine: a slotted cardboard cylinder which turns on a gramophone at 78 rpm with a light bulb inside. You look at it with your eyes shut and the flicker plays over your eyelids. Visions start with a kaleidoscope of colors on a plane in front of the eyes and gradually become more complex and beautiful, breaking like surf on a shore until whole patterns of color are pounding to get in. After a while the visions were permanently behind my eyes, and I was in the middle of the whole scene with limitless patterns being generated around me. There was an almost unbearable feeling of spatial movement for a while, but it was well worth getting through, for I found that when it stopped I was high above earth in a universal blaze

of glory. Afterwards I found that my perception of the world around me had increased very notably. All conceptions of being dragged or tired had dropped away. . . .

All these loose thoughts concern the new film language that is developing, a new way of seeing the world. Louis Marcorelles, one of the editors of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, wrote me a week ago, talking about the New American Cinema: "Suddenly, I can't look at the ordinary cinema any longer, even when it is signed by Godard." Yes. But mostly even critics are blind. We have a number of talented men and women creating a new cinema, opening new visions—but we need critics and an audience capable of seeing these visions. We need an audience that is willing to educate, to expand their eyes. A new cinema needs new eyes to see it. That's what it's all about.

February 20, 1964

ON THE MYSTERY OF THE LOW-BUDGET "ART" FILM

The new important event on the New York movie scene is the opening of the 55th Street Playhouse as the first commercial theatre devoted exclusively to the showing of "experimental and avant-garde" movies. With the low-budget film showcases appearing all over town, someone had to start something bigger, for the uptown people.

Somewhere around Hollywood, often disguised as "independents," there are the old-school directors such as Ford, Fuller, Hitchcock, Donen making first-rate entertainment movies on million-dollar budgets, movies like *Donovan's Reef*, *Underworld USA*, *The Birds*, *Charade*. On the other extreme, there is the low-low-budget underground cinema with its own bustle of creativity. In the middle is stuck the \$100,000 to \$400,000 movie, the so-called American "art" film, movies like *David and Lisa*, *The Balcony*, *The Greenwich Village Story*. It is this middle that is the most anemic and unimaginative. Variety says there are about two hundred low-budget "art" movies waiting for distribution. I have seen a good number of them, and the best ones are dogs. American cinema remains in Hollywood and the New York underground. There is no American "art" film.

There are attempts being made to bring some fresh blood into the "art" movie. Under the guidance of Harold Humes, a large number of American commercial novelists-writers have organized into Filmwrights International. Grove Press, similarly, is organizing European "avant-garde" writers. The idea is to push their work into cinema, to improve the "art" movie. Several big Hollywood producers are buzzing between Los Angeles and New York eyeing the new possibilities. Yes, there are books—or "properties," as they say. But where are the film-makers? Where are the new directors? And what young director of real talent wants to rehash novels for cinema? None that I know. If there is any hope for the American middle-budget movie, it will come not through the adaptations but through original creations, as was the case with *Shadows*, or is the case with *Hallelujah the Hills*. The origins and virtues of all true creations are in the personalities of the people who make them.

EMERGENCE OF THE UNDERGROUND STAR CINEMA

I see no hope in organized middle-budget "art" movies. But I see new developments in the so-called underground cinema that is joining directly with the other, Hollywood cinema. A new entertainment cinema is developing. Andy Warhol's *Tarzan and Jane Regained Sort Of* is one example. Uneven, sometimes good, sometimes bad, it is as good an entertainment as any half-successful Hollywood movie, and it is much more entertaining than any middle-budget movie you can find. The work of Ron Rice and Jack Smith is an entertaining cinema too. *The Queen of Sheba Meets the Atom Man* and *Flaming Creatures* are films for the joy of large audiences. The fact that these films are also works of art means the same thing as that Chaplin's films are also works of art. Taylor Mead's performance in *Queen of Sheba* really can be compared to the best work of Chaplin, Keaton, or Langdon, establishing him as one of the screen's great performers. (To many this statement will sound like an insulting exaggeration, but time will prove me right: I walk ahead of myself, you see.)

It is this cinema that is developing a new set of stars and is, in great part, a star cinema. There is a new crop of intensely talented people appearing in these films, men and women playing themselves, as they are, exposing their far-out sensibilities, tempera-

ments, imaginations. Taylor Mead, Beverly Grant, Winifred Bryan (who is as fantastic and beautiful a discovery as were Garbo and Dietrich); or Naomi Levine; or Andy Warhol's sleeping man, John Giorno; or the flaming creatures, Francis Francine, Joel Markman, Mario Montez, or Shirley; or Bruce Byron (*Scorpio Rising*); or Peter Beard and Ben Carruthers; or Jack Smith himself, who is next only to Taylor Mead: all talented, intense, obsessed and possessed, each one with a completely different world which they impose upon the films in which they appear. One could analyze them separately, if one wanted, and through them—they being most subtle extensions of our own subconscious—we could discover and understand our own selves, our good parts and our evil parts, our healthy parts and our sick parts, because there is plenty of sickness that is oozing out through them in strangest and manifold forms: cruelty, masochism, perversions of any possible kind; and only bits of lyricism and gentleness. There is really so much that one could say or see in/about these movies. Our artists are doing their job well; it's our critics who are not doing their job at all.

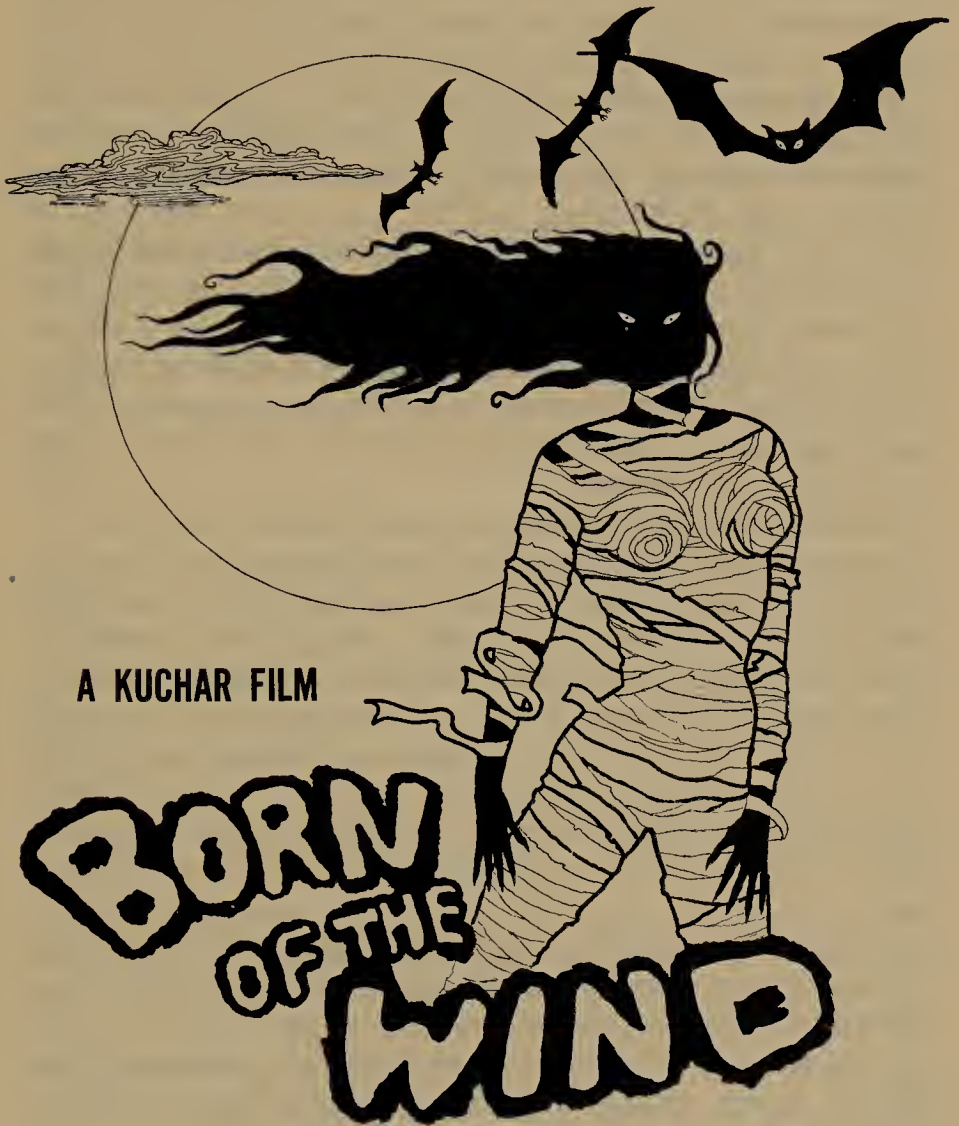
So I hope that once the underground cinema reaches the 55th Street Playhouse it will have at least one meaning: It will be more widely seen for what it is. At one stage or another any art begins to repeat itself, to die, when it achieves what it had to achieve. The time comes for a larger number of people to see it and measure it against their own souls. As for the artists themselves, this means at least one thing: To go to other directions and places, to make another leap forward (or inward) and thus leave the public (and friends) and the 55th Street Playhouse far behind again; to descend to yet another underground level while our earlier work is being analyzed, butchered, or washed out to hang and dry in the lower and upper towns as part of the old.

March 5, 1964

AN INTERVIEW WITH KUCHAR BROTHERS

Two weeks ago I wrote about a new kind of star cinema that is coming from the underground. Hollywood keeps complaining that

there are no new faces. They are searching in the wrong places, that's their trouble. The underground is full of new faces and bodies. There is the Kuchar brothers' movie festival going on at



the New Bowery Theatre. See the amazing gallery of the most fantastic creatures gathered in the Bronx, the lushest and sexiest cast of new faces. The Kuchar brothers have arrived on the movie scene. Here is the most macabre sense of humor at work. . . . Here is the Pop Cinema at its best pop. . . . Here are banality and

corniness transposed into their grotesque opposites. . . . Here is the new entertainment cinema that even Ivan Karp says is great. . . . And all in 8 mm.! I had the following conversation with the brothers Kuchar:

Question: Why are you wasting celluloid, why are you making movies? Anybody can make a movie!

Mike Kuchar: I love to make movies because it's the bread and butter of my life. But if I was to lose my arms and legs or go blind I'd throw myself on a bread slicer. There's more to life than just movies. . . . There's still radio.

Question: Have you anything to say about your fantastic cast?

Mike Kuchar: Some film-makers are afraid to work with a big cast because they think that the group will get out of hand. But we love working with a lot of people. You can round them up like cattle and make them stampede to moments of cinematic glory. Animal instincts are unleashed and watching a film with a large cast is like going to the zoo.

Question: How did your film career really start?

George Kuchar: We're twenty-one now, but for many years our films have been scorned. At the age of twelve I made a transvestite movie on the roof and was brutally beaten by my mother for having disgraced her and also for soiling her nightgown. She didn't realize how hard it is for a twelve-year-old director to get real girls for his movie. But that unfortunate incident did not end our big costume epics. One month later Mike and I filmed an Egyptian spectacle on the same roof with all of the television antennas resembling a cast of skinny thousands. Our career in films had begun.

Mike Kuchar: At a special showing we prepared in high school for the Newman Club (a Catholic organization), our work was screened and labeled "Violent—Devilish!" The teacher was very nice, but she couldn't tolerate all the bludgeoning, stabbings, and climactic hatchet slayings that punctuated the program at frequent intervals.

Question: How is your work received now?

George Kuchar: Last week *A Woman Distressed* was played at the New York 8 mm. Club and mistakenly labeled a tear-jerker on their program sheet. The only one that shed a tear after the movie went off was me when it was criticized viciously as "sex-loaded"

and "in bad taste." It wasn't sexy, but it was in bad taste, like they said. Their words rang with truth. I must have been depressed when I made that film. Coming home from the showing I prayed and began making plans for a film all about goodness. A film that will mirror the godliness of man and woman. I came across the idea of a beautiful ballerina who dances not for fame but only to please God. Suddenly the story began to change and I pictured her doing a leap and accidentally falling out the window. With both legs paralyzed she marries another dancer who loves her terribly. He becomes famous and she gets jealous. One night her mind snaps, and she saws his legs off after chloroforming him. To my horror the story had transformed itself from a mirror of God to a cesspool of human hatred and insanity. I walked down the subway steps and as I entered the train the ending of the film came to me: The ballerina's invalid husband kills her by ramming his wheelchair into her while she's cooking pot roast and her hair catches fire.

After discussing that screenplay with the two actors I chose for the parts, we unanimously decided to ditch it since it got way off the theme of God and love. So we arrived at a story that hit closer to home. One about a nun who's addicted to show biz and becomes a rock and roll sensation, leaving the church and God only to return with renewed faith after a series of incidents. It will touch on the theme: Does God punish the hurt?

Question: Your latest movie, *Lust for Ecstasy*, is being premiered at the New Bowery Theatre. Tell the people something about it.

George Kuchar: In my new film, *Lust for Ecstasy*, Donna Kerness overflows with passion and flesh in this, her most mature performance since *A Tub Named Desire*. Bob Cowan plays a part he is best suited for: a twisted and demented fiend wracked between the border of normalcy and moral decay. Also in the film is Cynthia Mailman, and her portrayal of a girl with deep religious yearnings will make you long for the early years when we were pure and good and everything that we did was honest. But now the devil has smashed us with his crowbar of evil. I find it very stimulating to film smashed people trying to cope with each other.

Lust for Ecstasy is my most ambitious attempt since my last

film, *A Town Called Tempest*. I began filming *Ecstasy* during Indian summer and from then until now I have undergone emotional upheavals. So has the script. The actors didn't know what was going on. I wrote many of the pungent scenes on the D train, and then when I arrived on the set I ripped them up and let my emotional whims make chopped meat out of the performances and story. It's more fun that way, and then the story advances without any control until you've created a Frankenstein that destroys any subconscious barriers you've erected to protect yourself and your dimstore integrity. Yes, *Lust for Ecstasy* is my subconscious, my own naked lusts that sweep across the screen in 8 mm. and color with full fidelity sound.

March 12, 1964

ON OBSCENITY

The police, licensors, censors, district attorney detectives, and criminal courts finally got interested in the arts. The arts are really jumping in this town. That's what I call action. Mayor Wagner and Governor Rockefeller have obviously learned something from the Russians. They are on the warpath against rats and artists. The Living Theatre is still closed, and the spiders are inside spinning their fancy laces. The poetry readings have been clubbed all over town. Now the independent film-makers are under attack: the Pocket Theatre, the Gramercy Arts, the New Bowery Theatre, the Film-Makers' Cooperative.

The Co-op screenings have been and will continue to be unlicensed because we do not believe in licensing works of art. It is very possible that most of our films could safely pass the censors. But that's not the point. There are other works which wouldn't pass, and we are not willing to sacrifice a single one of them. Co-op distributes not only *Flaming Creatures*; it also distributes other "obscene" films such as Ken Jacobs-Fleischner's *Blonde Cobra*, Brakhage's *Window Water Baby Moving*, Rice's *Queen of Sheba Meets the Atom Man*, Genet's *Un Chant d'Amour*, Naomi Levine's *Yes*, Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising*, Barbara Rubin's *Christmas on Earth*, the work of Andy Warhol, and others that may make the censors blush.

There is nothing surprising about the fact that suddenly this

wave of "obscenity" has flooded the arts. It's just that artists have become a little bit more frank. At least they are trying to be more frank. This is only the beginning, the very first blabberings of frankness. One need merely glimpse the Oriental religious and temporal art of the past to realize that ours is still in its infancy. We can see small outbursts of it in some of the recent art shows; in poetry; in *Fuck You* magazine; in cinema; with the opening of LeRoi Jones's play *The Eighth Ditch* at the New Bowery next week, in theatre. Let's admit: All men, including the judges and the police and the district attorney, are naked under their clothes, and they make love in at least two dozen different ways.

Thus, we can state the following, just to let you know how we feel about all this:

UNDERGROUND MANIFESTO ON CENSORSHIP

Works of art are above obscenity and pornography—or, more correctly, beyond what the police understand as obscenity and pornography. Art exists on a higher spiritual, aesthetic, and moral plane.

The new American film-maker does not believe in legal restrictions placed upon works of art; he doesn't believe in licensing or any form of censorship. There may be a need for licensing guns and dogs, but not works of art.

Likewise, we refuse to hide our work in restricted film societies, private clubs, or membership groups. Our art is for all the people. It must be open and available to anybody who wants to see it.

The existing laws are driving art underground.

We refuse to accept the authority of the police to pass judgment on what is art and what is not art; what is obscenity and what is not obscenity in art. On this subject we would rather trust D. H. Lawrence or Henry Miller than the police or any civic official. No legal body can act as an art critic.

Hollywood has created an image in the minds of the people that cinema is only entertainment and business. What we are saying is that cinema is also art. And the meanings and values of art are not decided in courts or prisons.

Art is concerned with the spirit of man, with the subconscious of man, with the aesthetic needs of man, with the entire past and future of man's soul. Like any other art, like painting, music, or

poetry, our art cannot be licensed or censored. There is no one among us to judge it. We have not only the Constitutional right but, more important, the moral right to communicate our work to other people.

To consider *Flaming Creatures* obscene by a few extracted images, taken out of context, and to make a criminal case thereof, without making an attempt to understand the work as a whole or the true meaning of the said details, is indeed a narrow, naive, and unintelligent way of looking at things.

The detective from the District Attorney's office who arrested us last Tuesday with *Flaming Creatures* told us that he was not interested in the film as a work of art; he also admitted that he was not competent to judge it. He said he was looking at it strictly as a matter of "duty": He was looking only for "objectionable" images according to his interpretation of the law.

That is O.K., as far as the duty of a hired man is concerned—but what the hell does this have to do with truth or justice? The meaning and essence of a detail in a work of art can be understood only if grasped in the context of the whole.

It is our duty as artists and as men to show the best work of our contemporaries to the people. It is our duty to bring to your attention the ridiculousness and illegality of the licensing and obscenity laws. The duty of the artist is to ignore bad laws and fight them every moment of his life. The duty of the citizen and artist is not to let the police and the law abuse the rights of the people, both the Constitutional rights and the unwritten moral rights.

We say that the courts, by taking these decisions into their own hands, are abusing man's basic freedom of expression as described in the Constitution and gained by man in the thousands of years of his spiritual development.

All works of art, all expressions of man's spirit, must be permitted, must be available to the people.

Who—when even the best of our artists, the best of our art critics disagree about art (and I am certainly a better authority on this than any policeman or any court)—who among you dares pose as judge of our art, to the degree of dragging our art into the criminal courts? In what times do we live, when works of art are identified with the workings of crime?

What a beautiful insanity!

March 19, 1964

REPORT FROM JAIL

A few notes on my second arrest:

The detectives who seized the Genet film, *Un Chant d'Amour*, did not know who Genet was. When I told them that Genet was an internationally known artist, I was told it was my fantasy.

I was called by the detectives "pink," and was introduced to other cops as "pink," because the covers of the two books I had with me, *Reviews of Modern Physics* and *Poetical Works of Blake*, had red covers.

At the Criminal Court, before being squeezed into a 10-by-20-foot room in which sixty people were standing for three to four hours, I was told to leave the books outside. I put down the *Reviews of Modern Physics*, but I kept Blake. The guard told me to put the book down. "The book could be used as a weapon," he told me. I told him that it was Blake, and that he would have to take it from me by force. The guard ripped the book from my hands by force.

During my Kafkaesque journey into the womb of the Tombs, the traces of civilization and humanity were fading out. While I was walking toward my cell, I was pushed on my back by the cop. I told him not to push me since I was not resisting. For this remark, the cop kicked me full force in the back. When I reminded him again not to use force, I was pushed again.

Somewhere in the process my name became "Mexas." When I attempted to correct it, since it was difficult to respond to another name, I was told to keep quiet, because my name really should be spelled "Schmuck."

When I placed all my belongings on the table and stood there, naked, the cop took my writing pen and threw it into the garbage can. "Why did you do that?" I asked him. I went to the garbage can, picked up the pen, and placed it back on the table. For doing this I was shouted at and threatened with beating.

Upon my release, on bail, I asked for my belongings, which included my keys, and was told to come another day. I am still sleeping in other people's places.

I have been shouted at, ridiculed constantly; I was told that they will make a statue of me in Washington Square; that they will make "a mashed potato" of me by the time they are through; that I was "dirtying America"; that I was fighting windmills. One of the detectives who arrested me told me, at the theatre, that he did not know why they were taking me to the station: I should be shot right there in front of the screen.

The judge, mind, the judge himself was making snide and idiotic remarks about "art," with his tone of voice and grimaces implying that art was the most unnecessary, stupid, and low thing. It would be another matter if we'd been accused of murder!

This is just a small taste of justice at work, and it makes me puke. The time is here for a total change. But nobody really believes it will or can be done. The corruption is almost total, from top to bottom. Nevertheless, "'Tis not too late to seek a newer world."

March 26, 1964

ON SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Yes, the social engagement! It seems the artists are changing the direction of engagement. It took a long time (for some of us) to see something we knew from the very beginning: That it is no use criticizing the existing order or the bad state of man's soul; that you can't change or improve or save man from outside; that the real work must be done inside; that others can be reached only through the beauty of your own self; that you can't protect humanity by "changing the world"; one change can be as bad as another (since the world began, man keeps changing the world); that the work, therefore, the real work must be done first in your own self (my self); any change must begin within you (me); that only the beautiful and truthful souls can change the world and bring or transfer beauty and truth into the others; that, further, a single brush line can do more for man, exalt his soul and reach and change him more deeply than all the socially-morally conscious art; that there is the beauty of the souls which manifest themselves in pure and absolute forms, colors, tones, movements, and that

man always knew about it but keeps forgetting it and then remembering it again, and we are beginning to remember it again.

Thus I welcome the new American film comedy; I praise the useless, disengaged art.

April 9, 1964

ON GOODNESS AND CINEMA

Only the expensive, glossy, loud movies have a chance of getting immediate approval from the reviewers. More humble movies are left to chance. *Open the Door* (made by Jerome Hill) happened to hit the bad chance. It is not loud; it is not glossy; there is not much action in it. Above all, it is full of goodness and charm.

Goodness, however, is boring to most of us (and the movie reviewers are not different from us). Evil is exciting. Death, murder tickle our nostrils. Evil is like red pepper. We go to movies to get the taste of the seven sins. But goodness bores us; quietness bores us; simplicity bores us. Even love bores us, unless it is perverted. All pleasures have become perverted, on the border of self-destruction. The words "amateur" (from "love") and "home" are used to describe something bad.

But I could tell you that some of the most beautiful movie poetry will be revealed, someday, in the 8 mm. home-movie footage—simple poetry, with children in the grass and babies on mothers' hands, and with all that embarrassment and goofing around in front of the camera. There is a poetry in home movies, and *The New York Times* is an ignorant paper anyway.

It is the goodness and humility of the man behind *Open the Door*, of a humble artist making his movies, minding his own business, and having good fun—something that comes from every image of the movie—this is what I have to weigh against the arrogance and pretentiousness of the reviewers. And whom do you think I'll choose?

April 23, 1964

ON LAW, MORALITY, AND CENSORSHIP

What's good about what happened?

How to uphold man's absolute freedoms, and how to get out of the fruitless and impotent situation we have been pushed into by the law and its interpreters?

This is what becomes clearer and clearer as I keep thinking about the events of the past few weeks.

It is good that film-makers and poets have provoked the law. It was the most confused area of the law, the civil liberties area, that was challenged, the laws which every moron can use against whatever he thinks is not to his taste or morality.

Nothing but improvement of the law, or the clarification of its interpretation, can come out of this, in whatever small measure.

The law, or perhaps more correctly, its interpreters, have directed their blows against that avant garde of the arts through which most subtle expressions of man's spirit are being communicated, caught; the delicate budding points of spiritual and aesthetic activity are being hurt.

Under the existing laws, it is the commerce, the grosser activities of man's spirit, its extreme material manifestations, the Hollywood movie (or the Broadway theatre), that is able to withstand the blows; the personal, lyrical, uncommercial expressions bend or break. Darwin triumphs.

It is time to become more aware of these two extremes of man's activity, to try to understand their natures and their functions. On one side, there is no reason why the laws concerning business and commerce (through licensing, the obscenity laws, and the public entertainment laws) should be used to drive the subtler activities of man's spirit down through the manholes; on the other hand, there is also no reason for the more advanced, avant-garde fringe of humanity to mislead or confuse those who are not yet ready: Everything has and takes its time, even man's spiritual growth.

There is really no such thing as art for everybody. Each of us is in a different stage of development. Neither Genet nor Jack Smith

intended his work to be literally for everybody. When a poet says "everybody" he means those who are ready for it. Poets know that force is of no use when it comes to matters of spirit. But to those who are ready—and who is to tell us who is ready and who is not?—our art should be accessible. It is a small price that we have to pay for exercising total freedom: the privilege of displeasing a few.

The law treats the commercial film and the avant-garde/ amateur film the same way. As if a film by Brakhage or Smith would reach (or be intended to reach) the same number of people as a film by Preminger or Ford. The law people say: "Oh, suppose these films were seen by everybody. Suppose anybody from the street walks in. . . ."

The truth is, there is a natural preselection that takes place in the audience. Not "everybody" reads *The Village Voice* where the avant-garde screenings are announced; only certain people, with certain aesthetic and social preoccupations, with special sensitivities and interests, come to see avant-garde cinema. Each sticks to his own.

To deprive these people of their cinema is to mistreat the minority parts of the society. It is a discrimination as bad as that of racial or religious minorities. It is part of the deeply inbred "anti-intellectual" drive. Should the "wide" and "normal" public have more rights to their "entertainment" and their "art" than the "avant-garde" minority to theirs?

The most touchy aspect of this "problem" is, no doubt, the interest (probably well motivated) of the State and the City to exercise control over business, to keep a good grip on commerce. (The current "clean-up" of the city for the World's Fair, a fact which is hypocritically being kept from the public, is directly connected with commerce.) Since the avant-garde fringe is neither business nor commerce, although mistakenly treated as such at this moment (not only by the civic servants but also by the artists themselves), it is this area, the nature and the needs of the avant-garde fringe, that must be analyzed and properly understood before we can do anything about it.

To differentiate the commercial "public" arts from the avant-garde fringes of the arts—in this specific case, the separation of the commercial cinema from the experimental cinema—it may be

necessary to establish one guiding definition, for the good of the film-makers as well as for the guardians of the law.

The term "amateur," used in the Cocteau-Markopoulos-Tyler-Brakhage meaning as the "lover" (from the Latin *amare*, "to love"), may be of timely use here. It is the personal, amateur, home-movie aspect that is being stressed here. No sharp lines could or should be drawn between the two poles (as there is no real dividing line between prose and poetry); however, for practical reasons and for purposes of definition, we should be aware of the two extremes of our art.

"Amateur" cinema is almost literally one-man creation, like painting or poetry—as opposed to the complex involvement of a large number of people in a "professional" movie.

"Amateur" cinema has no producers: The film-maker usually is the sole author and sole producer, as opposed to the practices of the "professional" cinema as a big business.

"Amateur" film screenings are usually one- or two-shot screenings, as opposed to the continuous runs of the professional films. (The recent attempt of the 55th Street Playhouse to commercialize avant-garde cinema ended in financial disaster.)

It is this cinema, the amateur cinema, the home-movie cinema, that should be beyond the present licensing, obscenity, and other related laws, if the City and the State don't want to lose their artists.

It is not big business that needs the protection of the law; the avant-garde arts need it.

How all this should be done and written into the law, I do not know; but once we know where the crux of the problem is, we'll be that much closer to a solution. It is well known, for instance, that no commercial theatre can exist with the number of people that attend avant-garde screenings, audiences of fifty to a hundred and twenty-five people, as opposed to the minimum requirements of a commercial theatre of a thousand people per week.

What this means is that the avant-garde cinema is outside of the commercial theatre; it doesn't pay. It always has been relegated either to galleries or to one-shot screenings in lofts and legitimate theatres. The City, instead of fighting us, should give us one of its empty buildings. Then we could have free screenings for everybody.

In other words: One-shot screenings can be considered neither business nor a moral threat to society. It is in this area that the law must be changed, without the City or the State or the Country losing any control over business or the moral "safety" of the people.

(Anyone who thinks that changes of the law or corrections of the law would bring a golden age to the avant-garde arts—which is equivalent to the death of the arts—is grossly mistaken. For the true avant-garde is always on its guard; it continually questions man's status quo, never leaving us in complete peace, in a safe balance. The true avant-garde can never be trusted.)

The "amateur" versus "professional" concept will have other, psychological implications. The artist will be continuously reminded that he has two wide choices which the angels are holding for him: the personal, subtler world of experience or the more ambitious, more expensive, more popularized forms and manifestations of the human spirit. Man needs both, and he must be allowed to choose either of the two or any spot in between. Too many young artists, however, are ruining themselves, misled by commercial ambitions.

No matter what happens with the obscenity and licensing cases in which we got entangled—whether we win, lose or break even—I see only profit for everybody. A wide-scale transformation and transvaluation is on its way. The independent filmmakers are getting some clarity about their work, their audiences, their true friends, their true directions.

The most important of all these clarities is that the 16 mm. cinema is moving toward the 8 mm., private home cinema. Underground cinema will soon invade the Beautiful American Home. The Film-Makers' Cooperative, though badly crippled, is working on an ambitious plan to reduce its films to 8 mm. and to place them in bookshops and record shops, side by side with your LPs. Soon you'll be able to buy prints of the films you like for three to five dollars for your own library, like books, like records, like tapes. Our movies, like letters or books of poems, will go across the borders of countries, thus making all film import and film custom laws obsolete; our films will be screened in galleries free for everybody, for no profit other than beauty; our films will be screened in every home. This is a development that nobody fore-

saw, neither the police nor the Mayor nor the District Attorney nor the film-makers themselves.

A new era is coming to cinema. We are fighting our "cases" in the courts, but we do not exactly know any longer why we are fighting them, because the methods and ways that got us into trouble are outdated, outworn. They are falling to dust as we are holding onto them. Life outdistances us. Liberty is here, beauty is here, for all of us: It can never be attained in the courts. Our true swords ("tongues"), really, are our films.

April 30, 1964

ON PURITY AND ON ANTI-ART AS ART

Last Saturday Dick Higgins' new film, *Invocation of Canyons and Boulders*, was screened in one of the secret showcases of the underground cinema. Because of the persecution of the arts in New York, very few people knew about the screening. There is not much that we can do about it.

Higgins' movie is a five-foot loop showing a close-up of a man (Higgins himself) chewing some imaginary object. The film started at 8 P.M., and at 1 A.M. when I left it was still running. *Invocation* is Higgins' Satie movie. A single image motive repeated innumerable. Together with Andy Warhol's packing boxes show at the Stable Gallery, *Invocation* is the purest attempt to clean art from any or all historical, aesthetic, thematic, ornamental claptrap, to regain the lost eye consciousness.

Invocation is a Tibetan prayer wheel, a hypnotic device to free your mind. So many artists are trying to impose on us one thing or another; it is a joy to find somebody who wants nothing.

Critics will call Warhol's and Higgins' boxes and movies anti-art, which, in a decadent understanding of art, they are. But in the pure sense of that word and in the magic sense, Warhol and Higgins are the true artists; they are very aware of what the real diseases of art are. Knowingly or not, both are moralists; both are preoccupied, in their very casual and silent ways, with the purity of their art, which means purity of man.

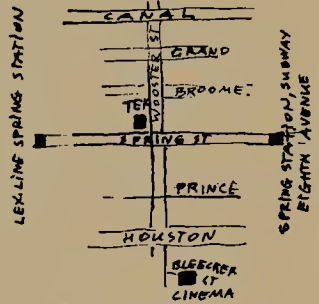
May 14, 1964

MORE ON CENSORSHIP

Neither the commercial film-makers nor the motion picture organizations have come out in support of the independent film-makers in their fight against film licensing and censorship. Licensing and censorship are good business.

At the expense of business, we have to defend freedom of expression. To make the commercial film-makers see what they are doing, to wake them up, we have to hurt their business.

THE SPRING IS HERE! THE SPRING IS HERE!
 THE FILM-MAKERS' CINEMATHEQUE MEETS SPRING
 WITH **SONGS** & HOME MOVIES
 BY **STAN BRAKHAGE**
 PUT CLOSE TO THE GROUND YOUR
 EAR AND LISTEN UNTIL YOU HEAR
 THE STEPS OF SPRING
 MARCH 20 - MARCH 30 at the FILM-MAKERS' CINE-
 MATHEQUE, 80 WOOSTER ST. FOR DETAILS SEE
 OUR WEEKLY ADVERTISEMENT IN THE VOICE..



I propose this: Pickets and sit-ins must be organized in front of every commercial theatre that shows licensed films. There is nothing else that we can do to persuade them to join our fight, to stop supporting the unconstitutional law of licensing works of art (films). We cannot win this fight alone. We have the passion but, despite the optimism of Amos Vogel, we have no money. Freedom costs money. Neither the Film-Makers' Co-op nor the Poets' Theatre can fight the licensing laws if it costs \$15,000 to take the case to the Supreme Court. It costs \$15,000 to prove you are not guilty, so you better say you are guilty, my boy.

FOR AMOS VOGEL: Don't wait until the right time comes; nobody knows the time. Do what your conscience tells you to do: That's the right time. There is no democracy of conscience: One should go against the whole world, if needed. Follow your heart's logic as you did in your youth: It's your reasoning, your "maturity," your "public" sense that are betraying you. ("The need to be

right—the sign of a vulgar mind.”—Camus Notebooks, 1937.) Follow the other twenty-seven senses (Brakhage says that’s the last scientific count; but Storm De Hirsch says there are more). When you started Cinema 16, in your younger, “unreasonable” days, you went against the world; the focus of your eyes was narrowed, to see better; the blurry margins were cut off by your passion; you did not care whether New York was ready for avant-garde films or not: You knew you had to do it, and you did it.

BRAKHAGE BUYS 8 MM. CAMERA

Stan Brakhage, after his complicated odyssey in New York, New Jersey, Illinois, trying to settle down near New York and everywhere refused because of four children, etc., etc., found himself again in Silver Spruce, Boulder, Colorado (c/o Collom), penniless, dusty, but not hopeless, ready to work again. I saw *Dog Star Man* parts 2 and 3, and they are absolute masterpieces. Writes Brakhage: “Yesterday I went out with my last \$30 in my pocket intent upon replacing the editor and splicer which was stolen from our car in New York City that last night there while we were all viewing films together; and I came back, instead, with a complete set of 8 mm. equipment purchased for exactly \$30 at an opportune sale of same in a Boulder auction. There wasn’t a single piece of 16 mm. editing equipment available, at any price, in Boulder, but I returned with what serves to remind me of several statements I’ve made in the past several months: I’ll meet my friends in living rooms by way of 8 mm. home movies even I can afford to own and show over and over again to the fulfillment of amateur vision, that is: of engagement leading to marriage, that is: of love to be lived with, that is: of love within.”

May 21, 1964

ON SURREALISM AND CARL LINDER

At a special press preview last Tuesday, a new film by Carl Linder, *The Devil Is Dead*, was shown. The press was shocked and confused. Few realized that a new film poet had arrived.

I have seen Linder's earlier work, *The Black and the White Peacock*, *The Telephone Dolls*, and *The Allergist*. Although surreal, all three were predominately "happening" films. However, from film to film one could see how the feeling of horror and nausea increased. In *The Devil Is Dead* Linder seems to have reached deepest into his unconscious and expressed it clearest. He has made himself as unashamedly nauseating as he could. It is the poetry of a sick, bad dream that he has put on film. Memories of Max Ernst, Masson, Bosch, Leautreamont.

The Devil Is Dead is almost an anthology of all classic surrealist imagery, seen through new eyes and with a new feeling. I don't yet know what is Linder's specific contribution to surrealism. One thing is clear, though: Linder is an artist with far-out and scary sensibilities. It is also evident that he has mastered the techniques of dream cinema: He expresses himself clearly, his surrealist content is splashed in sure strokes. I don't know what it all means; I don't know why man has to vomit out his unconscious in such a shocking way. But Linder did it, and since Linder is an artist, there must be a reason for him and for us which we must attempt to grasp.

NO NECKTIE—NO JUSTICE

At the Monday (June 18) hearing on *Flaming Creatures*, Jerry Sims and I were shouted at by the judge (William Ringel) and threatened with contempt of court (they can put you in prison for it) for not wearing neckties. I have seen everything: People jailed and killed because of their race, their religion, nationality, political creed, or simply for a murder—but never yet for not wearing a necktie! As I watched the judge shouting in rage at Jerry Sims, my life ran through my mind, and this seemed to top all my experiences of horror. Jerry Sims, truly one of the most innocent and defenseless people I know, was trembling in fear. (He has only one suit, and I noticed he came to the court cleaner than ever.) I am still in a state of shock that a man can be treated like this, that such a horrible thing can be permitted—legally—in the courts. I demand from Judge Ringel a public apology to Jerry Sims—nothing else can correct this inhuman act. Injustice and mockery of people must have become commonplace in New York courts,

an accepted part of "justice." Nobody reacts to such acts with horror and rage, which is to me an incredible fact. How true Linder's movie now looks to me, what horror surrounds us, inside and outside. Truly, *The Devil Is Dead* is a lullaby when compared with the chamber of horrors that is Manhattan's Criminal Court.

May 28, 1964

ON THE STATUS OF FILM CRITICISM IN NEW YORK

I have been harping on this for some time. But it should be restated here again. It is about time that our newspapers (such as the *Herald Tribune*, the *New York Post*, and *The New York Times*) add writers to their movie staffs who are able to understand and write about the poetic cinema (the new cinema is predominantly poetic). The same newspapers assign a science book to a science reviewer, a book of poetry to a poetry reviewer, and a book of prose to a prose reviewer. What reasoning, then, is behind the fact that both the novelistic and the poetic cinema are reviewed by the same man? (A man who is completely ignorant of the poetic cinema.) Whatever the reasoning may be, it is at least thirty years behind the times and betrays the attitude that cinema is not an art, that cinema is only entertainment, that one film is just like another.

It has been proved beyond a reasonable doubt by now that neither the *New York Post* nor the *Tribune* nor the *Times* reviewers know what to do when faced with a poetic (experimental, avant-garde, etc.) film. The limit of their vision and understanding of cinema has been most clearly demonstrated in their reviews of the various short films presented at the World's Fair, where mere technical competence was taken for poetry. The true poetry of the art they are supposed to be dealing with, cinema, escapes them without notice: Be it Markopoulos, Brakhage, Zimmerman, or Rice, they are being dismissed, butchered, or simply mocked.

The very best examples of the poetic cinema, what could be called its masterworks, receive a dog's treatment. I could cite here *Twice a Man*, *Prelude*, and *Chumlum*. All three were dismissed here with the back of the hand. Yet all three films were acclaimed

by the London *Times*, *Les Temps Modernes*, and *Les Beaux Arts* as belonging among the most important works of modern cinema, revolutionary in their language and content. I don't see why our film-makers should always look for recognition abroad. There is no reason at all to treat them the way they are being treated now by our movie reviewers.

Judith Crist particularly seems to be proud of her visual blindness. She exhibits her ignorance publicly, like a flag, again and again. Her piece in the *Tribune's* avant-garde issue was a disgrace to that newspaper. (She went so far as to attribute to me and Markopoulos statements we never made—which is bad journalism.)

I have often been accused of concentrating too much on the new cinema, forgetting Hollywood and Antonioni. I should state here that my actions, most of the time, are calculated (not by my brain but by my intuition). I myself brought Andrew Sarris into the *Voice* to cover the novelistic cinema, which he knows better than anyone else in this country. Together we are attempting to give as complete an image of the cinema of today as we can: both the old and the new. I have noticed that *The Nation* has done a similar thing lately: there are fresh voices appearing besides the mossy voice of Robert Hatch. Immediately, *The Nation* became a living magazine as far as cinema goes.

So let other newspapers and magazines allow some fresh air into their dusty pages. *Tribune*, *Post*, *Times*: Bring your movie pages up to date. Respect cinema and your own readers. Shake your mossy bones. See: The trees are all green and in leaf, life is going on, winter is far behind us.

June 18, 1964

ON THE MISERY OF COMMUNITY STANDARDS

A verdict was passed in the New York Criminal Court last Friday that Jack Smith's film *Flaming Creatures* is obscene. A similar decision was passed by the Los Angeles court on Kenneth Anger's film *Scorpio Rising*. In practical terms, what this means is this: From now on, at least in these two cities, it will be a crime to

show either *Flaming Creatures* or *Scorpio Rising*, either publicly or privately. In fact, if Kenneth Anger or Jack Smith were to be caught watching his own film, he could be prosecuted. The projector and the screen, seized along with the film and which were the property of New York film-makers, will be likewise disposed of as tools of crime.

During the trial, we had offered—through ourselves and through Lew Allen, Willard van Dyke, Herman G. Weinberg, Susan Sontag, Shirley Clarke, Joseph Kaster, Allen Ginsberg, Dr. E. Hornick, and Dr. John Thompson—to explain some of the meanings of *Flaming Creatures* and to give some insight into the meaning of art in general. The court chose to ignore us; it preferred to judge the film by what it called “the community standards.”

Now, this term, “community standards,” the meaninglessness and ugliness of which could be matched only by such terms as “senior citizen” or “media of communication,” proved to be the most important aesthetic criterion in the courtroom.

It was so utterly unbelievable and silly that I couldn't even take it as an insult. We took it as a comedy.

Artists of all times, as well as artists of today, have been and are engaged in fighting the “community standards,” in uplifting man's soul, in pulling man upwards—even if it has to be done by pulling him up by his ears.

The community standards of today, like those of yesterday, are low and vulgar. The community sits flat on its ass, like a sick duck. The artists, prophets, saints, and fools have kept reminding man about his wings and about the ever open gates that lead into the Arabian Nights and Paradise.

To measure art by “community standards” means to measure art by the standards of those forty people in Brooklyn who stood and watched their own neighbor being killed: This is the community standard.

The fact that the courts are measuring art by what they call community standards, and the very fact that they are measuring it at all, testifies that even our courts have fallen into the ditch of the community standard level. For it shows a complete ignorance of what art is, or how to look at art, or what art's true meanings and origins are; in truth, it reveals the ignorance of what man is.

It is the community that should be measured against art, if anything, and not the reverse. The innocence and beauty of Jack Smith is so far above the so-called community standard that his work should be a privilege to view in our courts.

Art of any given time is created by the young, the middle, and the old generations. These three voices, these three generations, have different things to say to the humanity of a given time—there are always at least three voices to listen to. There are many more, really.

All three generations continue their dialogue with the world simultaneously. No voice of any one of the three should be proclaimed over any other; each of the three voices has its own wisdoms and visions to relate to man.

Jack Smith's unconscious touches and crosses our own unconscious (and consciousness) at many different points (no man is alone): It touches and reveals something of all the living and dead generations.

Jack's (or Kenneth Anger's) film is not only a key to himself: It is a key (one of many) to the emotions, qualities, fears, dreams, abundances, needs of the souls of all men.

Artists sum up their times, their races, and catch in their hair the branches of the future. The meanings of *Flaming Creatures* and *Scorpio Rising* should be taken as our own depth meanings, as analyses and forecasts of the things to come to us.

Really, all these things in *Flaming Creatures* and *Scorpio Rising* of which we are so afraid are here already; the artists saw them through their third eye and registered it all on film.

We should thank Jack and Kenneth for being forecasters, for bringing to our more blunt senses things—some ugly, some beautiful, but all part of ourselves—things that we wouldn't otherwise see.

Art is ritualistic in its origins and meanings and forms; works of art are there to enjoy, to decipher with our own third eye, to interpret, to grow with them—they are our keys and our blossoms.

The judges and the police who burn these keys and messages of the gods are burning *our* libraries of Alexandria. They are committing monstrous acts against man. Consciously or unconsciously, they are the true instruments of evil.

Whoever suppresses a work of art for whatever reasons builds another armor, another cancer in the subconscious of man; he deprives mankind of its deeper knowledge of itself; he takes away a part of its soul; he prevents man from further growth toward heaven; he keeps man in darkness and vulgarity.

That is the real crime against man: the crime against his soul. These are the real consequences of the trials of *Flaming Creatures* and *Scorpio Rising*.

The thing, however, is that we should not pass judgment (nor can we) on the judges themselves: It is enough that we know the consequences; for the laws of life are such that one cannot commit a crime against another man's soul without committing a crime against one's own soul. As for *Flaming Creatures* and *Scorpio Rising*, they are being screened by angels in heaven with the perfumed projectors of eternity.

June 25, 1964

SPIRITUALIZATION OF THE IMAGE

There are very strange things happening in cinema. And the strangest thing is that there is really nothing strange about it.

First there was the static image of a train pulling into a station (if we begin there). Then there were filmed plays. Then there were stories and slapstick fantasies. Then the poets did away with plots and stories. The poets of the 60's did away with most of the representational image itself. The camera now picks up glimpses, fragments of objects and people, and creates fleeting impressions, of both objects and actions, in the manner of action painters. A new spiritualized reality of motion and light is created on the screen, as in the work of Brakhage or Jerry Joffen. In *Dog Star Man* Brakhage abandons the frame itself. He plants bits of color film in the very middle of a black-and-white frame, his frames become mosaics. Gregory Markopoulos introduces single-frame editing. Commercial TV introduces subliminal, repeated single-frame images. The flash-and-glimpse reality that we see through the windows of cars and jets has become our daily visual experience. Our eye is undergoing physical changes. Gysin is creating visionary images with the dream machine.

You have heard about the destruction of the screen, about the experiments you can see even at the New York World's Fair: multiple screens and multiple images. You have seen multiple and hand-held projectors, multiple screens, and the fusion of live and screen action at Judson Church during the "Fantastic Gardens" evening. Those who have been especially lucky have even had a glimpse of the work of Harry Smith, the greatest wizard working in animated cinema since Melies—his multiple images, slides and projectors, his magic, cabalistic space cinema.

Film stock itself has reached its limits (and I am not talking about the images on tape). Brakhage made *Mothlight* without a camera. He just pasted moth wings and flowers on a clear strip of film and ran it through the printing machine. Storm De Hirsch got rid even of the film: she made her film *Divinations*, at least two-thirds of it, on 16 mm. tape, by punching, carving, and painting on it, by working on it with tiny instruments that she carried out of a surgical operation room.

Naomi Levine painted and scratched and put so many things on her movie that it cannot be printed, although it runs through the projector. It will remain the only copy—no prints will be made. The same is true of Barbara Rubin's movie *A Christmas on Earth*—it too will remain in its original. It is the same as in painting: No reproduction can ever re-create the original. The film-makers are no longer interested in making dozens of copies. They feel that the original film is the only true film and no print can ever match the original. Markopoulos, Ken Jacobs, Jack Smith do not even edit with work prints: They work directly with their originals (and it is not only a question of money).

Going still further:

Nam June Paik, Peter Kubelka, George Maciunas have made movies where they did away with the image itself, where the light becomes the image. Kubelka's white light film has given me one of my strongest visual experiences.

Going still further: Reports have reached me that Gysin and Balch and Barbara Piccolo in London or Amsterdam or somewhere—it doesn't matter where—got rid of film, projectors, and cameras: They are working with smokes and vapors. Dali is working on contact lenses which will throw color images on our retina while we sleep.

It is from here that we are only one step from the absolute cinema, cinema of our mind. For what is cinema really, if not images, dreams, and visions? We take one more step, and we give up all movies and we become movies: We sit on a Persian or Chinese rug smoking one dream matter or another and we watch the smoke and we watch the images and dreams and fantasies that are taking place right there in our eye's mind: we are the true cineasts, each of us, crossing space and time and memory—this is the ultimate cinema of the people, as it has been for thousands and thousands of years.

This is all real! There are no limits to man's dreams, fantasies, desires, visions. It has nothing to do with technical innovations: It has to do with the boundless spirit of man, which can never be confined to prescribed screens, frames, or images. It jumps out of any matter of any dream imposed upon it, and seeks its own mysteries and its own dreams.

An Interview with Naomi Levine:

Sheila Bick: "Do you want to be in the movie, Naomi?"

Naomi Levine: "No, I am a movie."

July 2, 1964

MORE ON WARHOL'S *SLEEP*

I received a letter from Mike Getz, manager of the Cinema Theatre in Los Angeles, reporting on the screening of Andy Warhol's movie *Sleep*:

Amazing turnout. 500 people. *Sleep* started at 6:45. First shot, which lasts about 45 minutes, is close-up of man's abdomen. You can see him breathing. People started to walk out at 7, some complaining. People getting more and more restless. Shot finally changes to close-up of man's head. Someone runs up to screen and shouts in sleeping man's ear, "WAKE UP!!" Audience getting bitter, strained. Movie is silent, runs at silent speed. A few more people ask for money back. Sign on box office says no refunds.

7:45. One man pulls me out into outer lobby, says he doesn't want to make a scene but asks for money back. I say no. He says, "Be a gentleman." I say, "Look, you knew you were going to see something strange, unusual, daring, that lasted six hours." I turn to walk back to

lobby. Lobby full, one red-faced guy very agitated, says I have 30 seconds to give him his money back or he'll run into theatre and start a "lynch riot." "We'll all come out here and lynch you, buddy!!" Nobody stopped him when 30 seconds were up; he ran back toward screen. In fact, the guy who had said he didn't want to make a scene now said, "Come on, I'll go with you!!"

I finally yelled at him to wait a minute. Mario Casetta told crowd to give us a chance to discuss it. Mario and I moved into outer lobby. Thoughts of recent football riot in South America. People angry as hell, a mob on the verge of violence. Red-faced guy stomps toward me: "Well, what are you going to do?"

"I'll give out passes for another show." Over two hundred passes given out.

Decided to make an announcement. "Ladies and gentlemen. I believe that *Sleep* was properly advertised. I said in my ads that it was an unusual six-hour movie. You came here knowing that you were going to see something unusual about sleep and I think you are. I don't know what else I could have said. However—[shout from audience: "Don't cop out!! Don't cop out!!"]—however. . . ."

Sleep continued on. Projectionist kept falling asleep. People are not able to take the consequences of their own curiosity. Woman calls at 11. "Are you still there?" "Sure, why?" "I was there earlier. Heard people in back of me saying this theatre's not going to have a screen very much longer so I left." Fifty were left at the end. Some people really digging the movie.

ON DREAM MACHINES

Lili Vincenz, from Washington, D.C., sent me the following notes in connection with my mention of the flicker and dream machines:

When I was small I used to rub my eyeballs with eyes closed when in bed at night. The fantastic patterns generated by the pressure on the eyes delighted me often; it was a great game. The more pressure applied, the lighter and brighter the colors, until it was a splendor in yellows and whites in perpetual motion, so bright finally that it was "blinding." Then I added my imagination to the procedure and "projected" objects into the color masses. I saw beautiful baroque interiors or flowers or shining castles. Once, when in need for a birthday present for my mother, I scientifically went to work, noting the particulars of the images before my eyes. It was a delicate tree with an aura of green and purple hues radiating from the center. I memorized the

design and colors and as faithfully as possible reproduced everything on wood, sawed it out with my jigsaw, and made a round wall plaque. It still exists. It didn't lose by being transcribed from imagination to reality.

A few minutes ago I tried the procedure again, with no specific goal in mind, however, except the one of seeing. I sat near a lamp and varied the pressure on my eyes also moving my face toward and away from the lamp. The effects were beautiful—as usual. The nearer the lamp, the brighter the colors (releasing the pressure, incidentally, causing extraordinary, luminous contrasts of light and dark). By moving my head and “playing” on my eyes, I must have approximated the effect the flicker machine had on Mr. Sommerville [see “On the expanding eye,” p. 118]. When I finally opened my eyes, a wonderful surprise awaited me. I was under water, seeing everything in a hazy, illuminated blur. Or was I inside an impressionistic picture? It took several minutes for my normal vision to return, but I didn't mind waiting and enjoyed wandering around in the bright haze.

July 19, 1964

AN INTERVIEW WITH STORM DE HIRSCH

A determined pixie woman, Storm De Hirsch, went to Rome, got mad, grabbed a camera, and made a feature-length movie. She had never touched the camera before. Then she cut the film in pieces, hid it in trunks, smuggled it back to New York, closed herself in a midtown loft, didn't show herself for a year, then came out with a finished brand new movie, *Goodbye in the Mirror*. The film was shown out of competition at Cannes. The Locarno Film Festival saw the film, liked it very much, and invited it to represent the United States at this year's festival. Storm's film will be shown at Locarno on the 27th of this month. I caught Storm on her way to the plane, waving her ponytail, and we had the following conversation.

JM: How did you come to make *Goodbye in the Mirror*?

SDH: Seemingly, it grew out of a series of personal notes and observations that I made while on a visit to Rome in 1961. But actually it wasn't until later, while the shooting of the film was under way, that I realized it had been germinating for a long time and stemmed from a poem I had written called “Geography of Home.”

JM: How does it go? Pushkin used to remember by heart every poem he ever wrote.

SDH: Well, it's a rather long poem, but it begins like this: If no more locked against/the self/to lodge the enemy/which way is home?/Through stained glass/sea green and tenderly/the compass needle/trembling/sensitive as beast/to scent/quivers indecisively. . . . The remainder of the poem has to do with a weighing, a questioning of the choice of destination in terms of the north, south, east, and west of an inner world.

JM: You are not going to exchange your writing for cinema?

SDH: No. I don't think a poet lives by any boundaries. Images can be expressed by the individual in many ways, words, pictures, plastics, happenings, etc. When I was in Amsterdam, I was told you weren't considered a poet unless you painted. As a matter of fact, I'm writing more than ever. A new collection of my poems will be out in September. And I've just finished a play.

JM: Phooey. The theatre. Phooey.

SDH: Not really. Essentially, it's still film for me, my play. You see, I don't happen to have any feel for "theatre" as such, except as theatre of the soul. And my play deals with this. Now I'm looking for a director with a soul. He'll probably have to be a filmmaker. . . . At any rate, a poet.

JM: Hurray for theatre of the soul. Cinema of the soul. Cinema of happiness. Down with theatre of the absurd. Down with theatre of cruelty. Are you ready for another film?

SDH: I have several in mind, but what I want to do next is a feature in and around New York. I'm very anxious to get started on it, as soon as I get back from Locarno and lay my hands on some money.

JM: Who is your favorite film-maker?

SDH: Myself, first. Then comes Jack Smith, Bergman, Markopoulos, Antonioni, Vittorio De Seta, Ken Jacobs, Fellini, and you and your brother.

JM: One of your short films, *Divinations*, was made without the use of the camera.

SDH: Somebody once asked Bill De Kooning about his early black and white paintings. Was there any particular "artistic significance" in his not using color? And De Kooning replied that the only reason he had painted in black and white was simply that he

couldn't afford to buy colors. In my case, I wanted badly to make an animated short and had no camera available. I did have some old, unused film stock and several rolls of 16 mm. sound tape. So I used that—plus a variety of discarded surgical instruments and the sharp edge of a screwdriver—by cutting, etching, and painting directly on both film and tape.

JM: What's the name of your new book of poetry?

SDH: *Twilight Massacre*.

JM: Can you quote me a few lines?

SDH: This is one of the shorter poems in the book, called "Open Letter": "Once I knew a man who said/he had a bird that sang grand opera/in his soul./But this is hard to believe/because the world in the window/is made of glass/where the king sits/cold and naked as an icicle/and whenever I hear a sound in the river/I think I hear the city/cracking up./I know what happened to the man./But what will become of the bird?"

July 30, 1964

WARHOL SHOOTS *EMPIRE*

Andy Warhol is unquestionably the most productive film-maker in the world today. In less than a year he has completed fifteen movies, most of which are features: *Sleep* (six hours), *Eat, Kiss, Haircut, Naomi and Rufus Kiss, The End of Dawn, Salome and Delilah, Tarzan and Jane Regained Sort of, 13 Most Beautiful Boys, Blow Job, Dance Movie, Dinner at Daley's, The Rose Without Thorns, Soap Opera*, and *Empire* (eight hours).

Last Saturday I was present at a historical occasion: the shooting of Andy Warhol's epic *Empire*. From 8 P.M. until dawn the camera was pointed at the Empire State Building, from the 41st floor of the Time-Life Building. The camera never moved once. My guess is that *Empire* will become the *Birth of a Nation* of the New Bag Cinema.

The following are excerpts from a conversation with the Warhol crew—Henry X., John Palmer, Marie Desert, and the poet Gerard Malanga:

John: Why is nothing happening? I don't understand. Henry:

What would you like to happen? John: I don't know. Henry: I have a feeling that all we're filming is the red light. Andy: Oh, Henry!!! Henry: Andy?! NOW IS THE TIME TO PAN. John: Definitely not! Henry: The film is a whole new bag when the lights go off. John: Look at all that action going on. Those flashes. Tourists taking photos. Andy: Henry, what is the meaning of action? Henry: Action is the absence of inaction. Andy: Let's say things intelligent. Gerard: Listen! We don't want to deceive the public, dear. John: We're hitting a new milestone. Andy: Henry, say Nietzsche. Henry: Another aphorism? John: B movies are better than A movies. Andy: Jack Smith in every garage. Marie: Someday we're all going to live underground and this movie will be a smash.

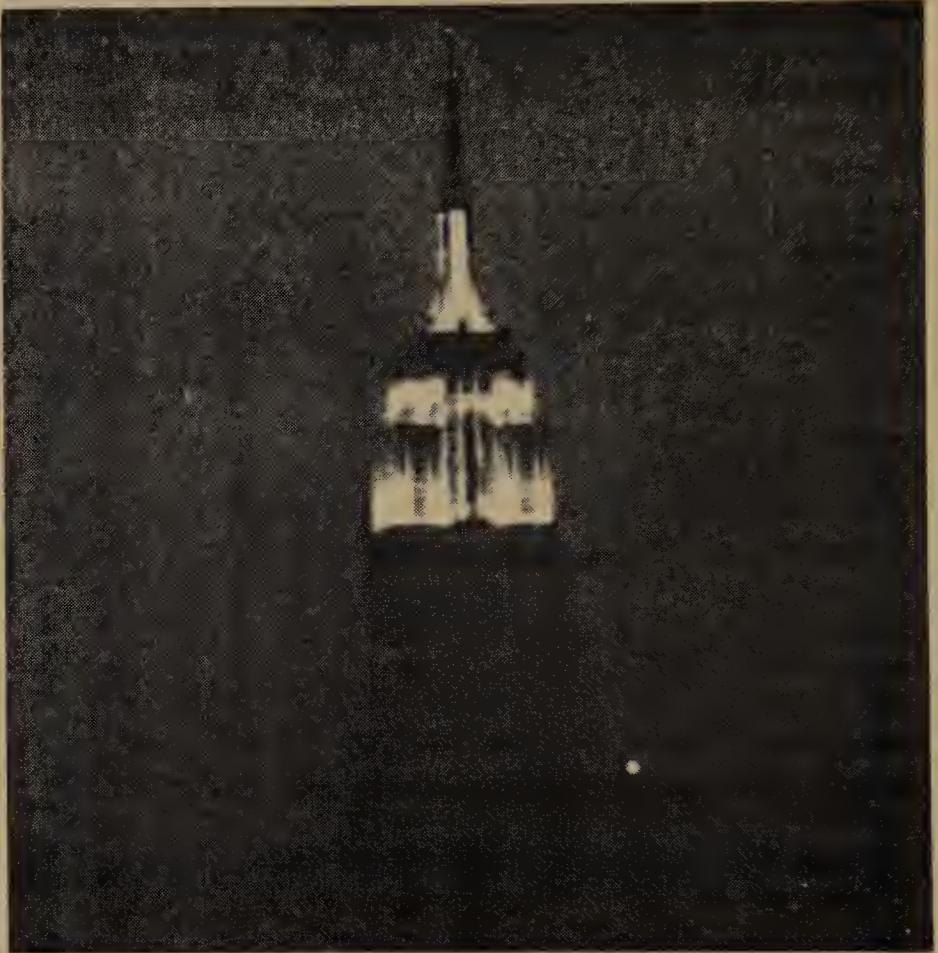
John: The lack of action in the last three 1200-foot rolls is alarming! Henry: You have to mark these rolls very carefully so as not to get them mixed up. Jonas: Did you know that the Empire State Building sways? Marie: I read somewhere that art is created in fun. Jonas: What? Gerard: During the projection, we should set up window panes for the audience to look through. Andy: The Empire State Building is a star! John: Has anything happened at all?! Marie: No. John: Good! Henry: The script calls for a pan right at this point. I don't see why my artistic advice is being constantly rejected. Henry to Andy: The bad children are smoking pot again. John: I don't think anything has happened in the last hundred feet. Gerard: Jonas, how long is this interview supposed to be? Jonas: As much as you have. Andy: An eight-hour hard-on! Gerard: We have to maintain our cool at all times. John: We have to have this film licensed. Andy: It looks very phallic. Jonas: I don't think it will pass. John: Nothing has happened in the last half-hour. John: The audience viewing *Empire* will be convinced after seeing the film that they have viewed it from the 41st floor of the Time-Life Building, and that's a whole bag in itself. Isn't that fantastic? Jonas: I don't think the last reel was a waste. Henry to John: I think it's too playful.

AN INTERVIEW WITH ANDY WARHOL

Jonas: Tell me something about the Empire State Building.

Andy Warhol: No matter how the visitor comes to New York

. . . by land, by sea, or by air . . . one of the first landmarks he can see is the Empire State Building soaring more than a quarter of a mile into the sky above Manhattan. The tallest building ever erected by man . . . 1,472 feet or 448 meters . . . this towering



achievement is a magnet which attracts people from every corner of the earth to marvel at its beauty and the breathtaking glory of the view of the world's greatest city.

Jonas: How is the building's tower lighted?

Andy Warhol: Empire State Tower is bathed in light from dusk until midnight—more than 125,000,000 beam candlepower shines on top of world's tallest building.

Each year the Empire State Building plays host to many Heads of State and other dignitaries and celebrities. Had you been here

on the right days in the past, you might have seen Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip of England, or the King and Queen of Thailand, or the Princesses Birgitta and Desiree of Sweden, or Queen Frederika of Greece, or even your favorite movie actor.

Jonas: What do people think about this building?

Andy Warhol: "Empire State . . . one of U.S.A.'s seven engineering wonders"—*Time* magazine; "The unbelievable Empire State Building"—*Reader's Digest*; ". . . see New York from the top of Empire State. There's nothing like it"—Dorothy Kilgallen; "From Empire State you can see 50 miles"—Allentown *Sunday Call Chronicle*; "No visitor should miss Empire State"—*The New York Times*; "Empire State's best view is at night"—*Glasgow (Scotland) News*; "Empire State's view is breathtaking"—Britain's Queen Mother; "New York's most visited building"—NBC.

Jonas (to the readers): Andy Warhol's next film will be *Warhol Bible*—a film version of the Old and New Testaments. The complete version of *Warhol Bible* will run thirty days.

August 13, 1964

ON CINÉMA VÉRITÉ, RICKY LEACOCK, AND WARHOL

With the Direct Cinema series, the Gallery of Modern Art—the Huntington Hartford museum—has inaugurated its film screenings. Direct Cinema, a term introduced by Louis Marcorelles, is beginning to replace the earlier cinéma vérité term. It describes that cinema which is taken "directly" from life, as opposed to filming staged events. The new term is less confusing than the old one at least in one respect: Reality, staged or not staged, is true in itself. As Chris Marker has said, "*Vérité n'est pas le but mais, peut-être, la route.*" (The truth is not the aim—it is more likely the way.)

The Direct Cinema began in Canada, France, and the United States at the same time. In France, Jean Rouch and Chris Marker (and, later, Reichenbach, Morin, Rosier); in Canada, Brault, Juneau, Koenig; in the United States, Leacock, Pennebaker, Maysles. In each country Direct Cinema took a different national character. Chris Marker, for instance, is the pure mind, in the best

Cartesian tradition (like Resnais and Bresson). He is always seeking the truth behind the surface; organizing and bending his visual materials to illustrate his own philosophy, his own ideas on what "really is" (his idea of Siberia, of Cuba, of China, etc.). Canadians are no philosophers; in most of the Canadian Direct Cinema films the directors are following a moral attitude. There is always a bag of oats in front of the horse.

Leacock, Pennebaker, and Maysles, in their public statements, and to the best of their abilities in their work, try to keep their own ideas and morals out. They insist that the ideas should come from their materials. Most of their films have been badly marred, in that respect, by added commentaries and moralistic editors. Whatever the flaws, the beauty and originality of Leacock's and Maysles' work are in its being not about ideas but about people.

The passion of Leacock, Maysles, Brault, and Pennebaker for the Direct Cinema has produced many side developments. The new camera techniques and new thematic materials have influenced a number of low budget independent features. Stanton Kaye's *Georg* is the latest inspired application of the Direct Cinema techniques to a staged event.

It is the work of Andy Warhol, however, that is the last word in the Direct Cinema. It is hard to imagine anything more pure, less staged, and less directed than Andy Warhol's *Eat, Empire, Sleep, Haircut* movies. I think that Andy Warhol is the most revolutionary of all film-makers working today. He is opening to film-makers a completely new and inexhaustible field of cinema reality. It is not a prediction but a certainty that soon we are going to see dozens of *Eat, Haircut, or Street* movies done by different film-makers, and there will be good and bad and mediocre *Eat* movies, and very good *Eat* movies, and someone will make a masterpiece *Eat* movie. What to some still looks like actionless nonsense, with the shift of our consciousness which is taking place will become an endless variety and an endless excitement of seeing similar subjects or the same subject done differently by different artists. Instead of asking for Elephant Size Excitement we'll be able to find aesthetic enjoyment in the subtle play of nuances.

There is something religious about this. It is part of that "beat mentality" which Cardinal Spellman attacked this week. There is something very humble and happy about a man (or a movie) who

is content with eating an apple. It is a cinema that reveals the emergence of meditation and happiness in man. Eat your apple, enjoy your apple, it says. Where are you running? Away from yourself? To what excitement? If all people could sit and watch the Empire State Building for eight hours and meditate upon it, there would be no more wars, no hate, no terror—there would be happiness regained upon earth.

August 20, 1964

ON "PEOPLE'S MOVIES," OR THE DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN MELODRAMA AND ART

There are some very beautiful images in *Marnie*. Dark, moody color. I wonder how many beautiful shots are needed to make a trip to a movie worthwhile. One, perhaps. One never knows why one goes to a movie. I mean people's movies. What is a people's movie? A movie that is made—so they say—for everybody. But some of the most precious things are not for everybody. Like precious stones. You have to know stones. I like Brakhage's *Dog Star Man*: It is for an audience that knows what they see.

To make movies for everybody, you have to reduce movies to either the lowest basics or to the highest basics. One cannot make any rules about art, both people's art and elite art. Like: Everybody can equally enjoy a sunset, or a beautiful tree. At least theoretically, art for everybody is possible without being banal.

Most of the avant-garde film-makers go to see people's movies. Saturday night you can see Jack Smith slinking along 42nd Street. Brakhage is addicted to Westerns. Good family entertainment, good time. A few nice images, sometimes. Not much meat; soft melodrama. And it is true: There is no, or little, art in them. But then, some say, art is not always the aim. We say, the most important thing is to live. But as soon as you say "live," you begin to ask, what is living, who really does live? And then you say: Yes, to live also means to grow, to become a more perfect man. Then we begin to see the steps of spiritual development; and then we begin to find a place for aesthetic experience also.

And it is at this point that we begin to see the difference be-

tween *Marnie* and Brakhage's *Dog Star Man*; the difference between a few pastels and a visual symphony that flows through you and lifts you and polishes you and opens you up and makes you more receptive to other subtle movements, colors, experiences. And it is then that the situation is reversed: *Marnie* becomes a child's work, food for milk teeth; *Dog Star Man* becomes the true people's movie, for those who are grown up and can begin to bite into meat.

But others say: What right do you have to disturb the peace of those on 42nd Street who sit there in people's movies and are completely happy? But I have spent much time on 42nd Street, we all have, and we have seen many faces there, and I have seen the sadness on those faces, and stupor. Which, I guess, is very pompous of me to say; it may even mean that I think that I am better and happier than they. Which is not exactly so. Since it is becoming more and more clear to me that both those who sit through Brakhage and those who sit through *Marnie*, when you speak to them, or watch them, you later find out that they are really hiding their real selves, using both *Marnie* and Brakhage to hide themselves, and you really never know what's going on. There are some angels watching *Marnie*, and some devils watching *Dog Star Man*. Despite our developed tastes, and the quickness of the eye, we often remain bastards as human beings, so that one asks: What is all this big fuss about art or no art, when we are all bastards anyway—except those who are angels?

There are times when humanity arrives at a point where it no longer makes any difference: Both truth and beauty pass them untouched; only their sophistication, intellect, quickness of eye—in short, their knowledge—grows, but their hearts remain frozen.

August 27, 1964

ON *LATERNA MAGICA*, SUPERIMPOSITIONS, AND MOVIES UNDER DRUGS

Laterna Magica opened in Prague almost four years ago. For its time it was an advanced experiment combining stage and cinema. By the time the show reached New York, its value had become

purely historical. Everybody's doing it now; the World's Fair is full of *Laterna Magica* shows. Elaine Summers' Judson Church show early this year remains the new, and hardly surpassable landmark in this "total cinema" form.

Laterna Magica, like most other "firsts"—like Cinerama or 3-D—has more to do with showmanship than art. Even as a show, the only excitement in *Laterna Magica* comes in the last five minutes. A roller skater on stage is moving (at least such is the impression) along a street on screen (a street filmed from a fast running car). The moving screen (street) image is flashed against the roller skater on stage (he swings his legs and arms and jumps right and left to avoid the cars, but never leaves the spot, really), and the effect is one of a neck-breaking ride along the busy street—an effect matched only by the early Cinerama shots of the Coney Island roller-coaster rides.

The superimposition is coming back to cinema. It hasn't been used effectively since the early days of Man Ray and Watson. The work of Brakhage remained the work of a lonely giant. In New York, the superimposition came back permanently with Ron Rice's *Chumlum*, with Jerry Joffen, Barbara Rubin's *Christmas on Earth*, Carl Linder's *The Devil Is Dead*, and now Dorsky's *In-green*. There is a whole school of younger film-makers working with superimpositions—Dov Lederberg, Abbott Meader, even Bruce Baillie. One-image cinema has become too slow for the quick eyes of some of the new film-makers. Brakhage has done his work.

I got so bored with *Laterna Magica* that I walked out of it long before it reached midway. After swallowing one Gorky at the Russian Tea Room, I decided to go back to see what I was missing. The show looked much better. Alcohol made my mind and my eyes (on an empty stomach) go blank at moments—there were blank spots in my consciousness, split-second gaps, so that I missed parts of the show. The show became much more interesting that way. My consciousness and my eyes were not so intense in checking what was going on. Life became more "interesting." That's why Chekhov characters always drink—from boredom.

I remember another time when I watched *Marienbad* and *L'Avventura* doped with pot. There, just the opposite occurred. My perception was increased. I could see more than usually. The

movie became tedious. A shot of ten seconds seemed to last ten minutes.

The small point I am making here is this: The cinema of superimpositions is created by people whose perception—by whatever process—has been expanded, intensified (Brakhage is opposed to the use of drugs for the expansion of the mind and the eye's consciousness). Their images are loaded with double and triple superimpositions. Things must happen fast, many things. Lines, colors, figures, one on top of another, combinations and possibilities, to keep the eye working. All this is too much for an untrained eye, but there is no end to how much a quick eye can see.

So here we have two extremes: The slow and the quick, Andy Warhol and Stan Brakhage. There are many faces to cinema.

September 10, 1964

NOT EVERYTHING THAT IS FUN IS CINEMA

A Hard Day's Night took our movie reviewers by surprise. Reviewers liked it. The Beatle fans liked it. Crowther liked it. Sarris said it shook his film aesthetics. The movie will make millions. The Beatles sing sweetly. They behave like nuts. There is something beat about the Beatles.

The movie is beautifully photographed. It uses underground cinema techniques, it swings. It's not locked to one spot, it moves freely.

But neither good acting nor good photography can make a good movie. There must be an artist behind it. There must be a madness of a different kind. Two or three inspired shots remain two or three inspired shots. There is no movie. *A Hard Day's Night* is a sufficiently well-made melodrama about the Beatles.

The Maysles brothers made a film about the Beatles. You have to see the Maysles film to realize what really good photography is, or what cinema is, or what really the Beatles are.

Only one who is completely ignorant of the work of the New American Cinema film-makers during the past three years can call *A Hard Day's Night*, even jokingly, the *Citizen Kane* of the hand-held cinema (Sarris did it).

But why should I argue about it? There are so many people who like *A Hard Day's Night* for so many different reasons. I have said often enough that art is not the only thing in life.

But I haven't said strongly enough, and I may as well say it right now, that art exists. Aesthetic experience exists. *A Hard Day's Night* has nothing to do with it. At best, it is fun. But "fun" is not an aesthetic experience: Fun remains on the surface. I have nothing against the surface. But it belongs where it is and shouldn't be taken for anything else.

October 1, 1964

ON ROBERT DOWNEY

Babo 73 is the title of a new film by Bob Downey (his first film was called *Ball's Bluff*). It is a satire on governments. It takes place in the United States (right spelling). The film was shot around New York and Washington, D.C. (including the White House), during a period of two years. The film had a few private screenings in New York and one public show in Los Angeles, at the Cinema Theatre. Seymour Stern, who saw it in L.A., writes me: "For direct political commentary, this film assumes a role of importance in the current struggle and should be more widely distributed. Not nearly enough people are seeing it. The Cinema's big audience that Saturday night 'ate it up'; the audiences here are hungry for more along this line."

Babo 73 is a crude film. It is badly photographed, badly recorded, and badly edited. There are many scenes that do not work. But there are other scenes which are almost brilliant. Despite the crudeness, mistakes, and failures of *Babo 73*, it is a unique and hard-hitting film.

Much of the crudeness of *Babo* is the crudeness which we find even in the best satirists. Much of Lenny Bruce is crude and vulgar. Even Chaplin, whom one could reproach very little, can be criticized for sloppy photography and editing of his movies, and there are scenes in a number of his movies that do not exactly work. In no genre other than satire do we find so much bad beside good. Vulgarity, bad taste, crudeness of form and style, foul lan-

guage often are part of the social satirist's bag. A satirist can't walk around with clean hands. His job is dirty. He is cleaning the human dump.

And so it is with *Babo 73*. There is plenty of bad taste, vulgarity, shallow philosophizing, and politicking in it. But when it hits right, it hits between the eyes. There are many inspired bits in *Babo 73*, sharp bites at Washington and international politics and Presidential games. There is nothing sacred in *Babo 73*—only the really great satirists have sacred things. Chaplin had some things he held sacred. Swift had. But I am not holding this against Downey—not yet.

October 8, 1964

TOO FAR IN

One of the latest "critical" conventions of the reviewers is to accuse the film-maker of being "too far in." They all found the two Godard films "too far in." It begins to look like these reviewers got so far out of touch with what's really going on (in both life and cinema) that everything that has any life seems, to them, "too far in."

October 29, 1964

ON CINEMA AND DANCE

Two dance programs that took place last week used cinema integrally. The Judson Dance Theatre presented Judith Dunn's *Last Point*. The films were made by Gene Friedman. Two projectors were used to throw images on eight approximately vertical panels, in front of and in between which the dancers moved. Primarily this was a dance, with cinema never stealing the show. The images projected on the panels were quite often images of the dancers themselves, moving outdoors, in the open fields or in the streets. The background merged with the dancers and added new dynamics of space, movement, and light. Often, exquisitely beautiful shades of white covered the panels and the dancers. Judith

Dunn's solo was the best dance piece I have seen in quite some time. I don't know where Miss Dunn came from, but her dance is the best tribute to Erick Hawkins' dance.

On Saturday night at Clark Center, Kenneth King's dance evening took place. *Film Dance Collage*, by Elaine Summers, used a film background (one projector) to merge a group of dancers into a moving pattern. The dim projector lamp added a touch of mystery to this collage of bodies, lines, weeds, fields, buildings, trees, scratches. It reminded one of Ed Emshwiller's film *Dance Chromatic*, but it had a beauty and quality of its own.

November 12, 1964

ON COPS AND THE HUNGRY LIFE OF AN UNDERGROUND FILM-MAKER

Add to the record books: A showing of Andy Warhol's movie *Kiss* was banned at the University of Manitoba (Winnipeg) by the Manitoba Board of Film Censors. The print was seized before the screening and returned to New York.

There is a story about the British inventor of the movies, Friese-Greene. He looked at his invention for the first time, one winter night, alone, and was so amazed to see the image move that he ran out, excited, into the night, caught the first man who was passing by, and dragged him in to see the invention, and they both watched the image move. That was the first audience the movies ever had. Now, the facts of history being what they are, the man whom Friese-Greene caught and made into the first movie-viewer happened to be a policeman! Will movies ever escape this first viewer?

Jack Smith just came back from Mexico where he paid a short visit to Ron Rice (address: General Delivery, Acapulco). From his description, things are pretty bad down in Mexico. Ron is going hungry. A roll of color film in Mexico is \$12 (American). "He is living in a stone age," said Jack, summing up Rice's living conditions. He went there, exiled from New York by impossible working and living conditions, without a penny, searching for peace of mind, disgusted with the police persecution of arts in

New York. They would not even permit him to hold a benefit screening of his work here, and when he did hold one—at the Gramercy Arts Theatre—they gave him a summons. It is almost unbelievable that an artist can be treated like this. And then the newspapers cry that the Russians are sending their poets to Siberia! What hypocrisy! Rice's *Chumlum* has been acclaimed as a masterpiece in Brussels, in Paris, in Stockholm. *Les Temps Modernes* compared it to Fragonard. But the New York police and city bureaucrats will not permit Rice to show his films! They would rather see him starve to death in Mexico. I am ready to take up a gun when I think about this and open a real underground. I may do that one day.

And the foundations. Why should our artists lead stone-age lives, starve in Mexico, when the foundations' money is going to pedestrian and vulgar projects? Stan Brakhage's masterpiece, *Dog Star Man* Part 4, has been sitting for months now, edited, completed, but with no money to make a print (it costs \$450) because all these years no foundation has been interested in helping one of our truly great artists. Why do things like this happen?

This has been part of my dirty job in the past—and I guess it still remains—to keep repeating: Assist your artists! The magazines are full of articles on “underground” cinema. From cheap girlie magazines to pompous and slick national magazines, they sensationalize, they distort, they exploit artists for their own purposes. Our national magazines are still talking about nudity, like small children seeing their naked asses—and they miss the churches and cathedrals and symphonies: They miss the works themselves. *Dog Star Man*, *Chumlum*, *Normal Love*, *The Illiac Passion*—these are the Old Masters of the future Metropolitans. These are the masterpieces of today. So stop blabbering about naked asses. And if you are blind to beauty, if you are so totally blind—be humble about it. Even in your blindness you can still help the artist: Give him the money to make his films. If you have no money—send him food! Be that simple. Don't talk avant-garde.

This is the true story of the avant-garde artist—not the one you read in national magazines: the simple daily survival, not to starve to death. What, then, about buying another roll of film! You, the reader, the public, buy him the film if you really love his work as you say you do!

Here are two excerpts from the annals of the true history of the American arts, year 1964—the history which is not written in the pages of *Newsweek*:

From a letter by Stan Brakhage, dated October, 1964:

But now the goddamned money problem assails us from all sides, an evil wind tearing at our home here—all possibilities of our sustaining ourselves here falling upon us now, forcing me to considerations of the props of lecture-touring (when, actually, lectures are never more than brief patchwork on money leaks), anything to keep from moving whole family again, exhausted as I am, as we all are, from moving, moving, ranging back and forth across this wasted, hellish landscape of the country. . . .

From a note by an anonymous film-maker dated October 29:

I was passing a restaurant. The kitchen door was open to the street. Suddenly a gust of hot food smells surged out into the street. I stopped and drank the smells. It was almost like food. I remembered B. She said she is never hungry, because she is working in a kitchen. I felt suddenly much stronger. Even the weakness in the legs disappeared—for a while, at least. I stood there for a moment, drinking the smells, breathing into the stomach. Then I continued. "You look so drained out," remarked J. at the theatre. I did not think I looked that bad, that my hunger showed that much. It was all illusion, my strength. I went to the water tank and swallowed a few gulps of cold water. It revived me for a while, or at least I thought so. J. laughed: "With water?" he said. But water was good. I borrowed a penny from Jerry to make 15 cents for a token to get home. Yesterday we were crossing the town, L. and I, and I said: "I will treat you with coffee, I still have a quarter." "No," said L., "I will have a coke." Later, as we were walking, he said: "Coke has some cocaine. On an empty stomach it acts like a drug, it keeps me moving—so I prefer coke to coffee."

December 10, 1964

ON GENET AND *UN CHANT D'AMOUR*

The case of *Flaming Creatures*, in New York City Criminal Court, was lost and is being appealed. The case of *Un Chant d'Amour*, however, was dismissed by the District Attorney.

Last month the film was shown in San Francisco by the San Francisco Mime Troupe, and it was seized by the police. Again,

the case was dismissed. In both instances the police felt they had no serious case. However, evil work had been done. This is part of the harassment techniques: The two cases have drained the Mime Troupe and the Co-op of thousands of dollars which could have been used for creative work.

Anyway—in my espionage activities I bumped into the producer of *Un Chant d'Amour*—and assistant to Genet during the shooting of the film. Although he was deeply involved in his own work—as a spy for the Establishment of the Soul on Earth—we had coffee and exchanged a few memories and a few facts. His identity for obvious reasons—and as a comment on our times—has to remain anonymous.

Q: When was *Un Chant d'Amour* made?

A: 1950, if I remember it right. The date is inscribed on the end titles of the film.

Q: What was Genet's function and work on this film?

A: He wrote it, directed it, and kept a close eye on it during the editing.

Q: Who was the cameraman?

A: Jacques Natteau, Jules Dassin's cameraman on *He Who Must Die* and *Never on Sunday*.

Q: Was there a script? Or did Genet have any notes?

A: No, not that I know of. He kept sort of a mental script. He knew in advance what he wanted to do. I don't think he wrote anything. He was shooting every day and night.

Q: Some people who do not know Genet say that the prison guard in the movie is Genet himself.

A: No. Unless it is a symbol of the author, this guard. But I don't think so.

Q: Was the film shot in a real prison or on sets?

A: We had the sets made.

Q: In Paris?

A: Yes. I was running a night club at that time, and we had a large space, and we shot the movie there.

Q: Where did you shoot the outdoor scenes?

A: Outside of Paris, in the forest of de Milly.

Q: What was the connection—if any—of Cocteau with the film? Just to clear the wrong rumors.

A: None at all. He used to come almost every day to watch the

shooting, he was interested. But he had no influence on any of the scenes or aspects of the film.

Q: Do you think this film could be shown in France today?

A: No. No. Regarding censorship, France is one of the most reactionary countries in the world. There are myths about France, about the freedom of the spirit, the French spirit, etc.—this is mythical. The French government today is the most reactionary government in the history of France.

Q: What does Genet think about his own film?

A: It's the author's attitude: he always dislikes his past work. He wants to go further and further with every new work.

Q: Did he have anything to do with the editing of the film?

A: Yes, he worked with an editor, and supervised him.

Q: There was never talk about adding a sound track?

A: No, never. Music, perhaps. But—no.

Q: The film has never been shown publicly in France?

A: No. When the film was finished, the Cinémathèque Française in Paris asked for a print. After they shortened the film by cutting out all the "objectionable" scenes, they wanted to show it, but the showing never took place. It was Henri Langlois. There was never a screening of *Un Chant d'Amour* at the Cinémathèque.

Q: Was the New York screening which got me into the trouble last spring the first screening of the film in its complete version?

A: That's right.

Q: Was the film shot in 16 mm. or 35 mm.?

A: We started shooting in 16 mm., but Natteau was not very satisfied with it, so we switched to 35 mm. The negative is on 35 mm. Parts which we shot on 16 mm. we reshot.

Q: Could you make any comment on the "story" of the film?

A: No doubt the film is based on Genet's own personal experiences in prison. The best interpretation of the film I have found is Ken Kelman's article in *Film Culture*.

Q: Who were the actors?

A: The big actor, the one who looks like Raf Vallone, was a barber, was working in a barbershop. He had a very big family, seven or eight children in one room, and he was an Arab, a Tunisian. He had one or two prostitutes working for him all the time, in the same room—he was a very funny character. The other one, the small one, he was just married when the film was made.

He has also many children now, plus two that his wife brought with her when he married her. Now one of her two premarriage boys is taking care of Genet.

Q: Have you made any arrangements for the distribution of the film in America?

A: Film-Makers' Cooperative has the sole distribution rights to the film. Any other prints that are in this country have been brought illegally.

Q: Did Genet ever make any other films?

A: No. *Un Chant d'Amour* is the only film he made himself.

December 17, 1964

KUCHAR 8 MM. MANIFESTO

Last Friday at the Eventorium a symposium took place. It was called *8 mm.: Avant-Garde of the Future!?* Leonard Lipton (from *Popular Photography*), Al Leslie, Serge Gavronsky, Mike and George Kuchar, and a number of others were on the panel. Here are some of the findings of the evening:

There is no avant-garde. There are no home movies. There is no art. If there is avant-garde, then there is a home movie. If there is no avant-garde, then there is no art and all movies are home movies. Hollywood movies are avant-garde. There hasn't been a decline of Hollywood (not in the past fifty years). Hollywood movies are a beautiful sickness. The dots of grain on 8 mm. are the size of ping-pong balls; if you shoot a tree, one grain makes one leaf. That's why the Kuchars are going to 16 mm. to have bigger leaves in their movies. Eight mm. is good for reproduction, for reaching homes, for distribution—but for the original shooting 16 mm. is better and 70 mm. is still better.

Highlight of the evening was a manifesto read by George Kuchar.

Kuchar Manifesto:

Yes, 8 mm. is a tool of defense in this society of mechanized corruption because through 8 mm. and its puny size we come closer to the dimensions of the atom.

We in this modern world of geological dormanticity are now experi-

encing an evolution evolving around minutenocities. We no longer think big except in the realm of nuclear bombardment, and therefore it is not unusual to find human beings with little things. Eight mm. is one of these little things, but 8 mm. becomes enormous when light from a projector bulb illuminates to a great dimension the abnormalities of the psychotic.

In the hands of a potential pervert, this medium becomes like a sculpture of clay with a base of yeast. Sprinkle a few smatters of liquid upon this sculpture and it will blow up and expand to startling and gargantuan proportions. But, as you will see, the clay shell that envelopes the overall piece of work will crack and make dirt everywhere.

The inner beauty of the work will be revealed while at the same time the film-maker will crack and eventually commit suicide. Looking upon the face of one's own evil is enough to bring the sting of acid to an esophagus that has previously experienced only buttermilk.

That 8 mm. will become avant-garde is a contagious disease-breeder because we are all avant-garde to the point of annihilation, and only when we face the after-effects of total deformity can we then think more clearly and cry because we couldn't concentrate on moral isolation.

Who are we to ask whether 8 mm. will be the avant-garde of the future when only God and the Vatican know for sure? Moral issues of this nature should never be left for the filthy hands of the beatnik to twist into pretzels of degeneracy. Let the beatnik and the frustrated executive twist 8mm. film into his own image and thereby give others a chance to sniff the world of narcotics and total spiritual breakdown.

Having worked with 8 mm. for twelve years, I have seen what it can do to a person. The creative intellect undergoes a great revolt and the bars of restraint are ripped from the casement of sanity until everything is a whirlpool of incandescent pudding. Eight mm. has taught me to think more clearly and to express myself in direct terms. Like my religion, I was born into 8 mm. because my aunt had loaned me her movie camera and then my mother bought me one for Christmas. Now I'm going to make a 16 mm. picture called *Corruption of the Damned*, and I'm making it in 16 mm. because I can't make it in 7 mm. Therefore I'm going up instead of down, which has been the usual trend in my life of wanton pleasures. I enjoyed working in 8 mm. and I'm enjoying 16 mm. and if both were taken from me I'd enjoy vegetating because a life of stagnation is one of disease and only through disease can we realize what sickness is.

December 24, 1964

AN INTERVIEW WITH NAOMI LEVINE

Naomi Levine has many faces. There were times when Naomi was a troublemaker. She was protesting. Peace strike . . . closing of the Living Theatre . . . disarmament . . . movie censorship—she was there, ready for any cause.

At the same time Naomi was painting flowers. Huge, colorful, sad, almost tragic flowers. She still paints them. She paints flowers everywhere she goes.



Then there is Naomi, the underground movie star, the “black lioness,” the “Egyptian broad”; the voluptuous star of Andy Warhol’s *Tarzan and Jane*, in which she took her “famous” soap bubble bath and outdid Hedy Lamarr in her swimming scene, in a Hollywood pool. She descended down the spider webs in Jack Smith’s *Normal Love*, in which she had six legs and looked ominously black; she was served on a plate together with ripe autumn fruits, grapes, and bananas in Andy’s *Dracula* movie; she appeared (incognito) in Barbara Rubin’s *Christmas on Earth*; and she has been kissed and kissing endlessly and at sixteen frames per second in Andy Warhol’s notorious *Kiss* movies.

Anyway, we know Naomi Levine as one of the ten great underground movie stars. (The ten: Taylor Mead, Beverly Grant, Empire State Building, Winifred Bryan, Jack Smith, Jerry Sims, Donna Kerness, Morio Montez, Jane Holzer, Joel Markman, Naomi Levine.)

Now Naomi has become a film-maker herself. Her two movies—*Jaremelu* and *Yes*—were shown on last Monday's program at the Film-Makers' Cinematheque. Since *Yes* is one of cinema's most beautiful pastorales and a manifesto of a desperately romantic soul, I thought the occasion was well worth an interview. So we had the following conversation:

JM: Who are you?

NL: Now I am a marshmallow.

JM: Oh.

NL: Yes.

JM: Why did you make *Yes*?

NL: Because I wanted to make something beautiful.

JM: Why "something" beautiful? Why not something perceptive—or of social consequence—or sexy?

NL: Beauty is all of these things. You see, I went to Puerto Rico and made a demonstration at Rami Air Force Base—and fifteen people lost their jobs and were beaten up and their homes wrecked. So I realized that this was not the way. The way would be to make something, to give something to my world more beautiful and of life than these armaments which are merely ugly and full of pain.

JM: Do you think you succeeded?

NL: That is impossible—maybe here and there—maybe a glimmer, an instant of what I would like to give, of all I experienced. So that I now know where to work from and toward, as a whole. I know—after working with five versions and many editing revisions, etc.—the world of Movie, the world of People, is the way for me to go.

JM: How do you make your movies?

NL: Anything that happens on a set happens—there is no "acting," no method to get what goes on. It's real and it has gone on for me forever. When I kiss I am kissed and I have kissed.

JM: Which film-makers do you like?

NL: Stan Brakhage. His best, most clear, and most resolved

and most beautiful is *Window Water Baby Moving*. Even though the others are good. In *Prelude* and *Dog Star Man*, at times, the technique becomes too out of balance—that never happens in *WWBM*. This is all pretty superficial criticism—it's rather just a comment from me—maybe as I learn more and see more I will be able to say something more explicit. The only person who comes really close to what I want to do is Warhol—it's almost as if he is my machine, almost. Ken Jacobs is disturbing because he has picked two characters—stars—in *Star Spangled to Death* (Jack Smith and Jerry Sims) and been completely able to show their lives and existences for exactly what they were.

All in all, if I were to produce a movie, I would want Ken [Jacobs] for an assistant director; Jack [Smith] to make costumes; Andy [Warhol] to direct camera; Adolfas [Mekas] to write it; Ron [Rice] to make sets; Beverly Grant, Barbara [Rubin], and Frances [Stillman] for female leads; Richard Burton, Truffaut, and Ron Rice for male leads; Jonas for all around spiritual guidance and angel love.

JM: What are you doing now?

NL: I am working on *Contact*.

JM: What do you want to do?

NL: I would like to be queen of Channel 2 or Channel 4—those are the biggest cinema theatres in the world—and I would like my favorite director-cameraman to eat me up.

JM: Who's that?

NL: He's a well-known flower maker.

JM: Do you have a lot more you would like to say?

NL: Yes, I wish I could be interviewed for hours—I love to be asked questions.

JM: If this weren't the end of your lunch hour, Miss Marshmallow, I would go on and on. But now I have to end it right here—Merry Christmas, in case I don't see you.

December 31, 1964

THE DEATH OF RON RICE

It was too shocking, too sudden, too unexpected, the news that Ron Rice is dead. From what? From pneumonia, in Mexico, in

Acapulco. He was buried there, on Christmas Day. It seemed—and it still seems to us—so useless, so wasteful. It was unbelievable, and sounded so much (we hoped) like one of Ron's jokes that some of us didn't believe it to the last minute and kept calling the Co-op, if there was no other, contrary news. But there was no other news.

Only a few weeks ago, in this same column, I put the blame for Ron's hunger and misery on New York City. It was New York City that drove him out this spring, hungry and desperate, to Mexico—the police, the harassment of the artists. "I can't work here," he said. "I have to go."

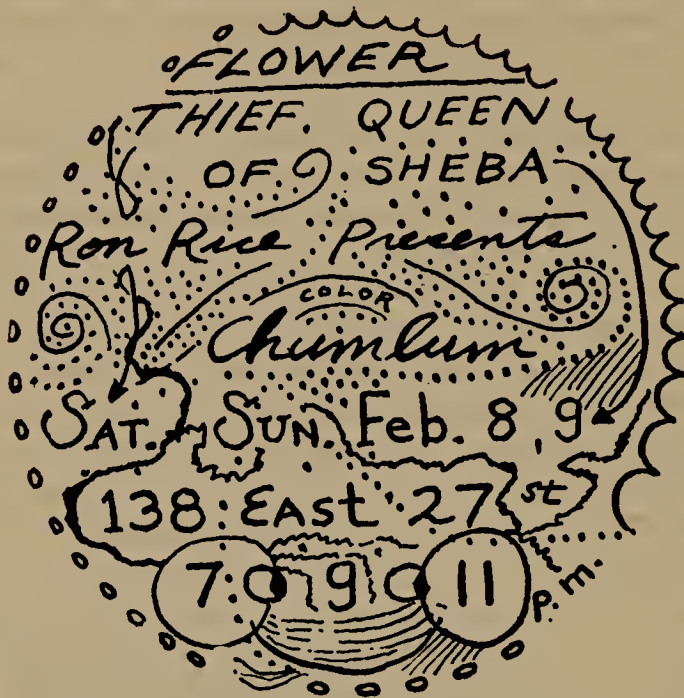
By now Ron has forgiven everybody and doesn't blame anyone; where he is now? He can laugh at New York City, with his usual smile. But I still blame New York for this wasteful death of one of our most beautiful artists. "We must never subscribe to these stupid limitations which threaten to close up the arts—censorship is a narrow thing—man's struggle for self-expression is an eternal thing—born in the sky, free," he wrote from Acapulco.

The small body of work that Ron left will have to be compared now with the work that Jean Vigo left at his own untimely and wasteful death. *The Flower Thief*, *Senseless*, *Chumlum*, *The Queen of Sheba Meets the Atom Man*, and the unfinished Mexican footage that is the totality of Ron's work. Each film is a new departure, each like no other, each breathing the poetry, unexpectedness, and imagination that marked him as one of our most original artists—but a body of work which will remain, now, an incomplete, broken-off passion, a broken-off achievement—

This is no time for a detailed evaluation of Ron's work, neither is it a time for blaming. It is still too unbelievable. Ron's death will make many of us think about our own fates, our own work, our own lives—no artist of Ron's stature, temperament, and beauty can be broken like that without affecting deeply the rest of his generation. Ginsberg's prophetic lines—"I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked"—remain the most realistic lines of our generation.

Only three weeks ago Ron wrote in a letter: "We shot a couple of rolls one day some time ago, since then I've been without film. But not without ideas. In the between time nobody-daddy

dreamed in my head the blueprints for a most fantastic new film. If I only had the materials to go full speed. . . .”



Yes, Ron, all the film is yours now, all the Ektachrome of the world is yours, and the most beautiful colors and spaces and fantasies are yours—now your dreams are coming through—although the best of your work we’ll never see—only some of us, perhaps, will dream it—

P.S. Ron left Amy, his wife, with a child coming next week. She plans to stay in Acapulco until the childbirth. She can be reached care of General Delivery, Acapulco, Gro.

1965

January 7, 1965

THE YEAR 1964

A survey of the independent scene, 1964:

JANUARY: The American film avant-garde establishes a beach-head in Europe, with the New American Cinema Exposition opening in Munich (General P. Adams Sitney in charge). It then goes to Amsterdam, Stockholm, Vienna, London, Paris. In New York, at the Gramercy Arts Theatre, a showing of Andy Warhol's *Sleep* takes place, a historic event.

FEBRUARY: *Flaming Creatures* is introduced to New York via the Gramercy Arts Theatre, and it soon becomes a manifesto of the New Sexual Freedom riders. Elaine Summers presents *Fantastic Gardens* at Judson Church, a landmark of the multiple-screen/multiple-projector cinema.

MARCH: 55th Street Playhouse embarks on week-long showings of avant-garde movies—the first such try by a commercial theatre; the attempt fails. Gramercy Arts Theatre closed by the License Department. Film-Makers' Cooperative moves its screenings to the New Bowery Theatre. Kuchar brothers are introduced and acclaimed as masters of the new pop humor. *Flaming Creatures* seized by the police. New Bowery Theatre closed. Gate and Pocket Theatres closed. Arrests of film-makers. Genet's film *Un Chant d'Amour* introduced to America and seized by the police.

APRIL: A dark period in the New York film underground be-

gins. No screenings for seven months. With no place to meet, filmmakers' spirits go low. Clandestine screenings continue at the Co-op late into the summer, until the Co-op is raided and cops are placed nightly across the street.

MAY: Dick Higgins shows *Invocation* at a downtown loft; Carl Linder premieres *The Devil Is Dead*; Stanton Kaye's *Georg* and Bruce Baillie's *Mass* introduced via Co-op screening. Harry Smith's films introduced to New York—another historic (and clandestine) screening—revealing him as the foremost animation artist working in cinema today.

JUNE: Storm De Hirsch finishes *Goodbye in the Mirror* and *Divinations*; Jack Smith completes shooting *Normal Love*; Washington Square Galleries begin their film screenings and then are closed by the License Department. In Los Angeles John Fles is holding bravely the bleeding California beachhead with weekly shows at the Cinema Theatre.

JULY: Andy Warhol shoots *Empire*, *Dracula*, *13 Most Beautiful Women*, and *13 Most Beautiful Boys*. Ken Jacobs goes into the country, where he disappears for the summer with an 8 mm. camera to bring back most gorgeous footage; Stan Brakhage goes into 8 mm. and produces one of his most amazing series of films, nine until now, called *Songs*.

AUGUST: Nathaniel Dorsky completes *Ingreen*. Gallery of Modern Art inaugurates its film screenings with an excellent series on cinéma vérité; later come series on avant-garde, animated film, Canadian cinema.

SEPTEMBER: New York Festival. Eight mm. invades the Philharmonic (Warhol's *Kiss, Eat, Haircut, Sleep*). First New York screening of Buñuel's *L'Age d'Or*. Alfred Leslie's *Last Clean Shirt* premieres. *The Brig*.

OCTOBER: Bob Downey's *Babo 73* opens on Bleeker Street. Barbara Rubin completes *Christmas on Earth*, the legendary underground masterpiece.

NOVEMBER: Film-Makers' Cinematheque opens its preliminary screenings at the New Yorker Theatre. After seven months of absence, the underground returns, begins to reorganize its forces and its tactics. Naomi Levine's *Yes*, Charles Boultenhouse's *Dionysius*, David Brooks' *Nightspring Daystar* premiere—three important occasions for the new cinema.

DECEMBER: Kenneth Anger completes shooting *Kustom*. New Yorker Theatre sets another precedent by screening on its regular programs Vanderbeek, Breer, Conner, Leslie, Warhol. Marie Menken's *Wrestlers*, *Pop Goes the Easel*, and *Faucets* are screened at the Cinematheque—three films which mark a new period in Menken's creative work and place her on the very top of the active film-makers, together with Brakhage, Markopoulos, Anger, Warhol, Smith. Markopoulos completes shooting *Himself as Herself*. *Scorpio Rising* beats the censors (on appeal) in L.A. Brakhage completes *Dog Star Man*. Ron Rice dies in Acapulco. Andy Warhol shoots *The Harlot* with a sound camera—sound comes to the underground.

GENERAL REMARKS: A new star cinema established itself strongly during 1964. A long line of new stars is blooming on the film horizon: Taylor Mead, Beverly Grant, Paul Kilb, Gerard Malanga, Jack Smith, Jerry Sims, Naomi Levine, Joel Markman, Mario Montez, Baby Jane Holzer, Winifred Bryon, Renee, Donna Kerness. At least two great films were shot in 1964—*Normal Love* and *Himself as Herself*; at least three great films were completed—*Sleep*, *Dog Star Man*, and *Christmas on Earth*; at least one new film-maker came to the front lines of cinema—Andy Warhol. But mostly the year was marked by the clashes between film-makers and the public. In 1964, film-makers left the underground and came into the light, where they immediately clashed with the outmoded tastes and morals of the Establishment, the police, and the critics. During the later months, the absence of screenings resulted in a series of articles in national magazines written mostly by people who had never seen any of the films they were writing about—which created a further confusion. By autumn, however, the tone of the press, the snides, began to change into fatherly friendliness. The fashion was about to be born. The magazines and the uptown decided to join the underground and make it part of the Establishment. These new tactics of the Establishment brought an obvious confusion into the ranks of the underground. The year 1965 starts with the underground directors, stars, and critics regrouping and meditating. There are three choices: 1. to be swallowed by the Establishment, like many other avant-gardes and undergrounds before them; 2. a deeper retreat into the underground; 3. a smash through the lines of the

Establishment to the other side of it (or above it), thus surrounding it.

January 28, 1965

ON THE CINEMA OF HAPPINESS AND ROBERT BREER

Robert Breer's show of kinetic constructions is continuing at the Bonino Gallery. Almost as soon as you walk in you are touched, you begin to feel a pleasant breeze of happiness. There is something happy and good about Breer. I haven't felt as good in a long time as when I stood in the Bonino Gallery looking at Breer's constructions and movies (they are running on 8 mm. in Fairchild's "boxes"). The amazing thing is that all this goodness and happiness is caught so simply and so effortlessly. It's done through abstract lines, through the play of plastic elements, through movements and rhythms. The happiness has its own rhythm, and Breer seems to have caught and re-created it in his work. We look at Breer's work and we begin to smile—lightly, a happy sort of smile, a happy feeling like when you see anything beautiful and perfect. It's through an amazing control and economy of his materials that he achieves this; through the elimination of all the usual emotional, personal, biographical, sick material; by not giving in to temptations.

February 11, 1965

ON THE ESTABLISHMENT AND THE BOOBS OF THE SHANA ALEXANDERS

Some people tell us: Stay away from the Establishment; the Establishment will swallow you; you'll become the new Establishment.

But I reason this way: There is a great beauty in Brakhage, Warhol, Ginsberg, Robert Kelly, Peter Orlovsky, Marie Menken, La Monte Young. If one truly cared for man, one would truly wish and work toward bringing everybody in touch with the

beauty of these artists and their work. Not to make everybody alike, but to make everybody beautiful; to do away with some of the vulgarity and boredom of the Establishment. You can't be in the same room with the sounds and images and words of these artists and remain as you were before, obstinate and cramped.

That's why I am for planting La Monte Young and Brakhage and Robert Kelly in the very middle of the Establishment.

Two months ago I met Allen Ginsberg in the street. "I am going to Harvard," he said. "There is only one thing to know," I said. "You are going to the Establishment." "I will give them something to think about," said Allen.

So Allen Ginsberg went to Harvard and sat there, naked, with Peter Orlovsky, also naked, and talked with the students and the Establishment, and the Establishment started to crack, and Harvard will never be the same.

I am for the Establishment of man's spirit: Man's spirit is always in avant-garde. That's the true meaning of avant-garde.

Do we want our movies to be screened everywhere? Yes, yes, yes! We want our little movies to be screened everywhere—in Radio City, on 42nd Street, and in private homes, in Pittsburgh, and in the Bronx, and in the court rooms, right under the sign where it says "In God We Trust"; 8 mm. movies, 16 mm. movies, Cinemascope movies, and 3-D movies, Ken Jacobs movies, Andy Warhol movies, Linda Talbot movies, Naomi Levine movies, Kuchar movies. We'll surround the earth with film flowers—that's what our movies will do. Marie Menken movies, Kenneth Anger movies, Robert Breer movies: They will melt your hearts. You won't be critics any more, you won't be judges of morals and behavior: You'll be watchers and lovers. That's what we want. We are working toward the Establishment of love and this flickering beauty that is the screen. No, we are not angry at Shana Alexander and *Life* magazine: We can see through their games and their dreams. We want to surround the Shana Alexanders with more and more of our little movies and our big movies until their minds will crack up (in a very beautiful way) and they won't bother about the censors and the protection of morals, and they will stand there, all naked, on the Time-Life Building, sowing flower petals into Sixth Avenue, with their boobs in the wind.

Reading through the articles that keep coming out on under-

ground movies, I often have fears that some of the film-makers may begin to sway to the Establishment and lose their uncompromising sensitivities and idealism. But there is little ground for such fears. For last Thursday, in the middle of one of the Mike Wallace programs, Jack Smith told the interviewer that his questions were Mongoloid, then he put on his shawl and walked out, leaving the place in uproar.

The Establishment is trying to pull us in, into their creepy world, "the place where the rat race takes place," as Jack told the CBS man. But we ain't going to run that race: We have our work to do, we have our movies to make.

February 18, 1965

ON PETER GOLDMAN AND *ECHOES OF SILENCE*

February is creeping slowly through New York. No great excitement can be felt in the air. Not even Antonioni's *Red Desert*, the most beautiful film to open in New York in months, was able to stir any excitement. There is dullness in the air.

But there was an excitement at the Cinematheque's theatre last Monday. There was immense applause after Peter Goldman, a young man of twenty or so, previewed his first feature film, *Echoes of Silence*.

It is not very often that a new film-maker with so much promise comes on the scene. There are several things that are good about Goldman. First, the mastery and feeling that he managed to put into his first work. Second, the freshness he is bringing into the weakest part of the new cinema, the story cinema.

Taking the best from the underground cinema (freedom of subject and technique) and a few good things from the Godard cinema, he tells a simple story of a few friends, how they live, what they feel. In a series of notes, he establishes their relationships with directness and economy; he makes his people come to life simply and believably—more believably than most of the people in the Chabrol or Truffaut cinema. Goldman, even in his first film, managed to escape many dangers of abstraction. Made up of a series of episodes, each preceded by one or two lines of titles (similar to Godard's *My Life to Live*), and by no means perfect

in all its parts and arts—the film has a thematic and formal beauty that is remarkable.

One of the beautiful things is Goldman's handling of "forbidden" subjects like lesbian and homosexual relationships. Usually in cinema they become either trite or sensational. Here they are beautiful and sad. It is a sad world that Goldman is depicting. In introducing his film, Goldman remarked that he went through a period of depression, and that his film is a record of that depression. And it is. But there is beauty in that sadness. The lesbian and homosexual relationships are depicted with poetry, compassion, and truth as in no other film I know. Subject-wise, Goldman leaves many film-makers behind him, even if his film can be easily criticized for technical and formal imperfections.

Our new "art" theatres keep coming out with public statements about how they are interested in the new and "unusual" features. O.K., here is your chance to do something about it. *Echoes of Silence* deserves a public screening in New York, both for what it shows and as a springboard for an undoubtedly promising young film-maker. There are a few other films that are waiting for openings, like Storm De Hirsch's first feature, *Goodbye in the Mirror*, or Barry Gerson's first feature, *The Neon Rose*. None of them is a masterpiece, but each is better and more exciting than many a foreign "art" film. Why should our home directors be pushed into the corner? If you'd allow me to be dramatic about it, I'd say: Art theatres of New York! Why are you killing young American directors?—But I know we'll survive; it will be the art theatres that will go down.

March 11, 1965

MORE ON THE IRRESPONSIBILITY OF NEW YORK FILM REVIEWERS

I have already stated, in earlier columns, that the new film-maker, the new artist, doesn't need any of the articles that are appearing in the national press. The spirit of those articles is wrong; the intentions are wrong, the facts are wrong. Those are the last voices of the dying old press. There will be a new press soon.

Still, as long as we have to go by the old press, and as long as some facts should be brought to the notice of the people, I will keep being concerned about the press.

A complete retrospective of films by Stan Brakhage, running through five evenings, was presented at the Film-Makers' Cinematheque in February. It culminated with *The Art of Vision*, into which Stan Brakhage put six years of work. The film crowns not only Brakhage's work but is the first masterpiece of the new vision. It is a beautiful, visionary, and monumental work. It is a work of art as important as anything by the old great masters; it is a discourse on new vision and new aesthetics; it is, truly, a manifesto of the new vision.

None of the movie reviewers, movie critics, and movie journalists came to any of the Cinematheque screenings. Two special screenings for the press were arranged, and only Archer Winsten of the *Post* showed up. Over a hundred leading art and movie reviewers and critics were invited.

Our movie reviewers, critics, and journalists are not interested in what's going on in cinema. It is almost unbelievable that a film of the stature of *The Art of Vision* can slip by, ignored and unnoticed. I wouldn't give a penny about all this, really, if I didn't feel that it is important that people know about this film and that they see it; if I didn't feel that it is important to open the eyes, to open oneself to the new vision. Man has closed so many doors to himself, to his soul, to his visions, to his mind that he has truly locked himself out. And it's for this reason that the works of art, the works that help to stir man's vision, man's imagination, man's mysteries should be brought to attention. Too much vulgarity around me, so I'm beginning to take a stand against it. Our movie reviewers, the press, radio, TV, our movie critics have become part of a middle-aged conspiracy that keeps all the doors locked. We have to break the doors open.

THE PREMIERE OF *EMPIRE*

The premiere of Andy Warhol's and John Palmer's eight-hour epic *Empire* movie took place at the Cinematheque last Saturday night. It was a glorious event and a glorious day for the Empire State Building. Ten minutes after the film started, a crowd of thirty or forty people stormed out of the theatre into the lobby,

surrounded the box office, Bob Brown, and myself, and threatened to beat us up and destroy the theatre unless their money was returned. "This is not entertainment! This movie doesn't move!" shouted the mob. Oh, what a blind eye! They were threatening to solve the question of the new vision and new cinema by breaking chairs on our heads. The gulf is still widening between the old and the new. The old will fall off by itself soon, like a dead potato. Artists shouldn't waste a single drop of their lives fighting the old: We should continue and concentrate on our creation, on the creation of the new, because the old will die by itself. Truly, the old has died long ago: It is its specter that haunts us.

March 18, 1965

THE MAGIC CINEMA OF HARRY SMITH

Does Harry Smith really exist? Is he a black or a white magician? Who will be the next victim of Harry Smith? What horrors is he preparing, and for whom?

For years Harry Smith has been a black and ominous legend and a source of strange rumors. Some even said that he had left this planet long ago—the last alchemist of the Western world, the last magician.

Then one day, last summer, a year ago, Harry Smith gave up the darkness and appeared in the open. He was still full of evil, hate, small curses, and sneers, but he came out. We began looking into him, peeking into Harry Smith. And we were surprised to find, behind the beard and the curses, a sweet, humorous, and completely harmless man. We found that his little curses were only a protective wall, not an attack on others. The black magic was suddenly gone.

But not entirely.

Soon we discovered where Harry Smith's true magic was. Last Monday, at the Cinematheque, the audience gave Harry Smith a huge ovation. For three hours Harry Smith was pouring across the screen the most beautiful images conceivable. Here was a magician of images, of motion, of rhythms, of color. One of the greatest magicians of cinema alive.

For thirty years Harry Smith worked on these movies, secretly,

like an alchemist, and he worked out his own formulas and mixtures to produce these fantastic images. You can watch them for pure color enjoyment; you can watch them for motion—Harry Smith films never stop moving; or you can watch them for hidden and symbolic meanings, alchemic signs. There are more levels in Harry Smith's work than in any other film animator I know. Animated cinema—all those Czechs, Poles, and Yugoslavs, and Pin-toffs, Bosustovs, and Hubleys are nothing but makers of cute cartoons. Harry Smith is the only serious film animator working in cinema today. His untitled work on alchemy and the creation of the world (none of Harry Smith's movies have titles) will remain one of the masterpieces of the animated cinema. But even his smaller works are marked by the same masterful and never-failing sense of movement—the most magic quality of Harry Smith's work.

Not all his work is pleasant and happy. Some of it tastes of horror. But it is always a total expression of a unique personality, a unique world, both evil and kind—open, lyrical, and paranoiac.

I have to confess that very often I pity Andrew Sarris, my good friend—and I pity all other theorists of the auteur cinema who remain blind to some of the greatest film authors alive. Something is completely wrong with our movie theatre system, with our distribution of works of art—that's where the trouble lies. The balance must be restored. There should be three or four theatres on Times Square playing *Normal Love*, Brakhage, Markopoulos, Harry Smith, Ken Jacobs, Anger. I hope somebody will do something about it—like our honorable foundations, before the devil takes them. As it is now, the New York (and world) motion picture theatre scene stinks; it is so overrun by one type of cinema that it's no wonder at all that our critics know nothing about the best motion pictures of our times. That's the situation of American film criticism and film distribution, A.D. 1965.

April 15, 1965

ON "AUTHORS"

Every work of art has its "author." There are good and bad authors. There are good and bad films. There are no films with-

out authors. There are more bad films than good films. Some bad authors are worse than other bad authors. After seeing seven bad authors, the eighth bad author may seem a good author.

April 22, 1965

ON PERVERTS AND ART

I have been moving around, in and out of town, in and out of myself, with my mind on a hundred things, not being able to sit down by the typewriter; but there are things happening, not great things, but little things; some are great, like the coming of spring, or the coming of Bill Vehr to cinema. Bill Vehr is making a magnificent entrance, we can't complain now that there are no new film-makers. Bill Vehr's movie *Avocado* took the Cinema-theque's audience with its beauty—flamboyant, delicate, and erotic, and a little bit like Jack Smith's, perverted that is to say. Some people will not like it, despite its beauty, because Bill Vehr's world has been inherited from the famous Marquis, born of the fruits of decadence.

For I begin to hear voices shouting: Enough of the pervert art, all this homosexual, lesbian, transvestite, masochist, sadist art. Oh, where is the decent, healthy, normal American art? And *Time* magazine writes an essay on the new pornography; they asked me, three weeks ago, to screen "pornographie," "dirty" movies for them—movies, they said, like those that Andy Warhol or Jack Smith or Kenneth Anger make, and I said O.K. as long as you pay rental, and they were badly disappointed because these were not dirty movies, not blue movies, not what they expected, but the minds of these people crave something dirty, they keep looking for dirt everywhere, they even created a committee now, with big public names, to fight smut (smut is from smith). But it is this committee, really, that is spreading smut; they are planting this ugly and sick idea in people's minds, they say that some things that God has created are smut.

Anyway, since we are talking about the pervert art, we should state here, to the dismay of the healthy people, that it seems that perverts today have more creativity, more visions, more sensitivities needed for the creation of beauty, more than the healthy

artists; and here is something to think about: Something must have gone badly wrong with our healthiness, because somewhere on the way we have lost certain feelings and certain sensitivities. We lost them together with many other things, and now we are stiff and boring, like the Huntington Hartford museum, but even the Huntington Hartford museum is crawling with pervert art.

It is awful when man's sensitivities are being castrated, when man is reduced to one or two kinds of perversions instead of five or seven, when a great part of man is condemned, and very often the wrong part, because we are so goddam blind in our judgments about what's good for us and what's bad. Only a real bastard can say that he is truly healthy, and I ask myself how healthy really are the members of the anti-smut committee and all the others who are throwing stones at perverts? No use even asking this question, because the biggest perversion I know today is our doings in Vietnam, and the biggest pornographic display is the World's Fair of New York.

The real crimes are not seen, and man is doing bad things to himself. Some of the perversions are really sicknesses and some of our healthy deeds are sicknesses, but the moralists are putting everything on the level of right and wrong, so that the real knowledge of what the perversities are and what they do and where they come and where they go is ignored. Society keeps blaming its artists; artists keep mirroring society's soul; and the society says no no no, this can't be us: These are only the artists, it is impossible that we all are perverts. But we are, that is the sad news, the truly healthy man has not arrived yet, and the so-called smut committees are really bunches of perverts, perhaps sicker than the rest of us; we are small people, our art is small, and even our perversions, really, are small when compared with other centuries; only our sicknesses are great, our wars are great.

April 29, 1965

ON FILM REVOLUTION

Here is another column of ramblings. My head is rambling because I have seen a beautiful movie and I have plenty to think

about. My readers, particularly those who think that I am out of my head anyway, I hope will not mind my ravings.

Much has been said about truth in cinema. We even have the so-called "cinéma vérité," the "cinema of truth." I have written much nonsense about truth in cinema myself. There was a time, four, five years ago, when we had too much of one kind of cinema: pale, tired Hollywood cinema. The avant-garde, the independents were sleeping. There was a need to stir things up, to exaggerate things, to talk about "cinema truth," about "spontaneous cinema," plotless cinema, slice-of-life cinema, New York cinema. *Shadows* and *Pull My Daisy* came like a blast of fresh wind, they made us breathe easier; Leacock came; soon the avalanche of the underground started rolling.

But now, I feel, the cinema has been freed from the Hollywood "regime." The film-maker is free from "professional" techniques, from Hollywood subject matter, from plot routines, from Hollywood lighting. I have a feeling that now the independent, underground, experimental film-maker is free not only from Hollywood cinema but from the underground cinema techniques as well. What I mean is that during these last four years, often through anarchy, often through his nuttiness, often through conscious rejection of Hollywood, the film-maker has gained a new freedom. Now he can use any technique he wants. His vocabulary has increased from a Lilliput to, at least, a Webster. If he wants, he can swing his camera around his head; or he can lock his camera down to a tripod; he can overexpose, or use a balanced lighting; he can use 8 mm. or 16 mm. or 35 mm. or any other size he feels like. Don't be surprised at all if within this coming year you see the underground movie-makers going into all possible sizes of cameras and screens. Hollywood has remained frozen and therefore is dying, it cannot be revived even with fresh blood. The underground, however, is coming up, free, strong, and kicking.

ANDY WARHOL AND TRUTH

What made me think about all this, really, is the last two films by Andy Warhol, his two sound movies, *Vinyl* and *Poor Little Rich Girl*. I will come to *Vinyl* some other time—but *Poor Little Rich Girl*, in which Andy Warhol records seventy minutes of

Edith Sedgwick's life, surpasses everything that the cinéma vérité has done till now; and by that I mean film-makers such as Leacock, Rouch, Maysles, Reichenbach. It is a piece that is beautiful, sad, unrehearsed, and says about the life of the rich girl today more than ten volumes of books could say. It was an old dream of Cesare Zavattini to make a film two hours long which would show two hours from the life of a woman, minute by minute. It was up to Andy Warhol to do it, to show that it could be done, and done beautifully. Miss Sedgwick happened to be the most suitable person for such a film, with the proper personality; with a rich, complex, and very open personality, able to relax in front of a camera and be free and not hide anything and reflect everything. It is not an easy part to play, it is not an easy film to make. Nothing much really happens in the film, if we want action. Miss Sedgwick goes about her make-up business, she listens to rock 'n' roll music; she answers a telephone call which disturbs her; she dresses up; she keeps up a continuous conversation with a man outside of the frame; she strolls around in her room. That's it, more or less. But you have to see it—and it was a privilege of those thirty or forty people who stayed at the City Hall Cinema last Monday, after most of the audience walked out on Andy Warhol, expecting another *Empire*—it was the privilege of those few to see, with amazement, how beautiful the film was, and how much could be read into this unbelievably simple film—how rich it really is.

May 13, 1965

ON FLY-BY-NIGHT FELLOWS, OR HOW THE
UNDERGROUND FILM IS INVADING
THE BEAUTIFUL AMERICAN HOME

The openings of *Goldstein* and *Across the River*, two low-budget features, have provoked new outbursts of anger from our daily movie reviewers: How do they dare, these young men, to make movies? What fools are the theatres that show their movies! Either you are a Sidney Lumet or you shouldn't make movies—this was the advice of *The New York Times* to young film-makers.

The truth about all this is that our movie reviewers—Crowther,

Judith Crist, Winsten, Macdonald, Alpert, Kaufman—they all have grown old, as all things do. And it is very normal for old or aging men to prefer quiet, comfortable, familiar cinema. There is nothing wrong with that; there is nothing wrong with being old. I have seen a few beautiful old men in my life and they have been a source of wisdom to me: I know that old age can be beautiful. But these reviewers are grumpy old men, and nobody likes grumpy old men who hate anything that is not of their age.

But, as K. once said, we'll bury them. Last spring the censors, licensors, and cops were running amok. Since then the avant-garde has reorganized itself. What last spring was concentrated in one or two places now has spread out throughout the entire city. In the true underground style it has split into many small pockets. Some have protected themselves legally, using one pretext or another (any law that is used by cops can be used by us). It will take as many cops as there are in the subways now to keep track of us. We have our showcases uptown, and downtown, and midtown, and crosstown; in theatres, galleries, churches, schools, and private homes. We are screening our movies in the very heart of the "enemy," right next to City Hall, and we did it on purpose.

What Crowther calls fly-by-night fellows are slowly beginning to cut down the art theatre audience. Art theatres are still laughing at our movies, but not so loudly as they did a year ago. Soon we'll have more showcases around town than there are art theatres.

The records of the Film-Makers' Co-op, through which most of our work is being distributed, show a few new developments. A revolution is taking place in the country. The only places for showing avant-garde, experimental movies used to be the so-called film societies. During the past two years a completely new market came into being for the avant-garde cinema: art galleries and private individuals. In one of our "angry" statements last spring we said: If you close our theatres, we'll invade the Beautiful American Home, we'll undermine and "corrupt" you from inside! That's what has happened. We are all over the country. Now it's no more the business of the cop to fight the avant-garde: Now it's the federal government that has to step in to stop the arts. There are hundreds of private individuals arranging screenings in their homes and in art galleries. And 8 mm. distribution is coming soon. The figures in 8 mm. *Newsletter*, published by Teachers'

College, show that the yearly sales on 8 mm. equipment doubled from 1962 to 1964.

We like old movies. You can see us at the Museum of Modern Art, on 42nd Street, at the New Yorker Theatre, or by our TV sets. But we don't like it when somebody tries to force on us nothing but one type of cinema, the classical cinema. We know that our "new" cinema will be old someday, our "new" cinema will be just another old cinema; meanwhile, however, we have to do what we have to do, no matter what the movie reviewers say, and particularly no matter what the aging movie reviewers say.

June 3, 1965

THE EXPANDED CINEMA OF ROBERT WHITMAN

Since I sadly remain the lonely historian of the new cinema, I should report here on the various uses of movies at the recently concluded First Theatre Rally: New York, organized by Steve Paxton and Alan Solomon, that took place in a huge television studio on Broadway and 81st Street.

One striking use of cinema was seen in Carolyn Brown's dance piece *Balloon*, with Barbara Lloyd and Steve Paxton (performed May 11-13). In the back of the studio was a balloon approximately 20 by 20 feet, around which and in front of which the dancers moved. The immense balloon served as a screen on which images (newsreels, etc.) were projected. A weather balloon was used, and I was told it took three days to fill it with air from a vacuum cleaner.

On the same program, in his piece *Spring Training*, Bob Rauschenberg used a portable screen tied down to the back of a dancer, on which slides were projected.

For Robert Whitman's happening *The Night Time Sky* (May 14-16) the studio was transformed into a huge tent. There were openings here and there in which certain happenings took place. The audience had to lean or lie down on the ground and look up or upish. Upon the entrance side of the tent and upon the entering audience images were projected—mostly harbor images, ships, people, with harbor and crowd noises on a soundtrack. The feel-

ing one got was of embarking on a journey on an ocean liner. Other images were projected inside the tent. One series consisted of factory images, furnaces, in color. On the top of the tent (inside) colored jewels were reflected—elongated, hallucinatory shapes. At various times, as the people lay down and watched the “sky,” the tent canvas was illuminated blue and green from outside. The television lighting facilities served here perfectly. The feeling was lyrical, quiet, poetic. The climax of the evening was a projection from the center on the “ground” into the tent’s inner peak (dome) of a man sitting on the toilet and unconcernedly going about his crap business, pulling his pants off, revealing himself, pulling his pants on, flushing the water, washing the crap down. Everything was seen as from inside the toilet (under a glass, really), so that the whole messy and unesthetic (at least until now) and crappy business was performed right on the audience’s heads. By some, this was taken as a critical comment on what has happened to the happening theatre in general. Others giggled or laughed, some comfortably, some not.

The most amazing use of cinema, however, was in *Shower* (May 24–26), another piece by Robert Whitman. The piece is just what the title says: There is a shower box and there is a girl in it, naked, naturally, taking the shower. The whole thing is so beautiful and so real that people kept coming back and peeking into the shower box to see if the girl was really there. The amazing effect was achieved by projecting a color film of the girl taking a shower onto the back of the shower box which was made of plastic glass, on the other side of which water was running down. It is really a further extension of what Andy Warhol started with his *Sleep* movie. And it contradicts and dismisses (for good) the statements that the real thing, or something that looks real, cannot be beautiful or cannot be art. It is the old nonsense of the aestheticians. Whitman has used plenty of ingenuity, in building this simple box and getting the amazing tridimensional effect (probably because of the haziness and thickness of the glass). The end result is amazing and it pushes cinema into another field of unexplored and new possibilities.

There was another piece, really a fragment of a piece, from May 24–26, as part of Tony Holder’s *Lightweight* (unless I am confusing the pieces), which provided a very strong kinetic expe-

riencé. A dancer moved around in a small circle in complete darkness, but with a spotlight flickering on and off, with dark and light flashes at possibly one-third of a second intervals, so that in split-second gaps the motions of the dancer weren't seen and when we saw him next, after another fraction of darkness, his hands and the position of the body were slightly changed. The impression created was like a normally photographed (twenty-four frames per second) movie projected at eight frames per second—sort of staccato movements, a kinetic experience of strange power.

Later this summer the Cinematheque is organizing a huge survey of the various new uses of cinema. The leading artists of these new uses of cinema (expanded cinema) will take part. As I have said quite often before: cinema is only beginning. Don't go to Cannes to look for new cinema—come to New York.

June 24, 1965

SHOOTING *THE BRIG*

Since this is summertime and there isn't much else to do, I'll give you the full account of *The Brig*. I thought this should be done as a supplement to the recently published book on *The Brig* and *The Living Theatre*.

I went to see *The Brig*, the play, the night it closed. The Becks were told to shut down and get out. The performance, by this time, was so precisely acted that it moved with the inevitability of life itself. As I watched it I thought: Suppose this was a real brig; suppose I was a newsreel reporter; suppose I got permission from the U.S. Marine Corps to go into one of their brigs and film the goings-on: What a document one could bring to the eyes of humanity! The way *The Brig* was being played now, it was a real brig, as far as I was concerned.

This idea took possession of my mind and my senses so thoroughly that I walked out of the play. I didn't want to know anything about what would happen next in the play; I wanted to see it with my camera. I *had* to film it.

As I sat outside, waiting for the play to end, I relayed my thoughts to Judith and Julian Beck. They were as excited about

the idea as I was. We decided to do it immediately. Actually, we had no other choice: They had to leave the theatre the very next day. David and Barbara Stone, who came to see the play with me, realized that they too had no choice: They got stuck with another production. "I suspected it before coming," said Barbara. "We'll never take you to another play," said David.

Next day I got the film and equipment. The theatre was already locked up by the owner. We got the cast and the equipment into the theatre through the sidewalk coal chute, late at night. (We left the place the same way at three or four in the morning.) We found part of the sets already taken down. The cast put it all back into place. There was no time for any testing of equipment or lights. The lighting remained the same as during the regular stage performance. I placed two strong floods on the front seats of the theatre so I could move freely around without showing the seats. I had three 16 mm. Auricon cameras (single-system, with sound directly on film) with ten-minute magazines. I kept changing cameras as I went along. The performance was stopped every ten minutes to change cameras, with a few seconds overlaps of the action at each start. I shot the play in ten-minute takes, twelve takes in all.

* I remained inside the brig, among the players, constantly stepping in their way, disrupting their usual movements and *mise-en-scènes*. My intention wasn't to show the play in its entirety but to catch as much of the action as my "reporter" eyes could. This kind of shooting required an exhausting concentration of body and eye. I had to operate the camera; I had to keep out of the cast's way; I had to look for what was going on and listen for what was said; I had to make instantaneous decisions about my movements and the camera movements, knowing that there was no time for thinking or reflecting; there was no time for reshooting, no time for mistakes: I was a circus man on a tightrope high in the air. All my senses were stretched to the point of breaking. (I had the camera, the mike, and the batteries on me, a good eighty pounds of equipment in all; the size of the stage didn't permit any other people than the cast and myself; I envied Maysles and Leacock their lightweight equipment.) I became so possessed by what I was doing that it literally took me weeks to get my body and all my senses back to normal.

One of the ideas that I was pursuing—or getting out of my system—was the application of the so-called *cinéma vérité* (direct cinema) techniques to a stage event. I wanted to undermine some of the myths and mystifications of *cinéma vérité*: What is truth in cinema? In a sense, *The Brig* became an essay in film criticism. *The Brig*, the play, was perfect material for such an experiment; the performance was so automatized, so perfectly acted that it moved like a ballet of horror. I threw myself into it, and I used it as raw material, as it happened, as if it were a real event—which, in truth, it was. My approach wasn't too kind to Kenneth Brown's play: I was a parasite sucking on his blood.

The editing followed the same principle. Now I have seen the play, I said to myself; now I have ideas about it; now I can't edit this footage without dragging in my post-thoughts and post-considerations. But there were passages that dragged, I knew, as far as the camera work and the play went. So I said to my brother, Adolfas: You haven't seen the play; you haven't seen the shooting (he was in Chicago at that time, editing *Goldstein*); so now you come and edit it, as a total stranger and without any pity (my brother is a sadist, a very cruel man, and has no heart). I treated Brown's play like a piece of raw material, with no attempt to get into its "true" meanings. Judith Malina almost cried whenever I missed some of her beautiful and subtle touches—they were happening on the left of the stage when I was on the right; and some of the lines were gone; but I said: Don't worry, Judith, don't worry—just think how much we miss in real life. I'll catch what I catch. (Really, I should tell you here that a week later, after the shooting, persuaded by Malina and Brown that a number of "key" lines were missing, we went through great pain and risk to get back into the theatre once more. We rebuilt the set and shot the missing bits. But when I saw the new footage on the screen, I realized that it didn't have the spontaneity of the first night's shooting. I already knew the action, I knew the movements, and often, even against my own will, I began anticipating the action. It turned out lifeless, so I threw the footage out.) Now you take this footage, I said to my brother, and treat it with disrespect and cruelty; cut out whatever isn't worth looking at; forget there ever was a play—we both hate plays anyway; do unto me what I did unto Brown and the Becks.

So that's what he did. We screened the footage and my brother made notes and he cut chunks out of the film. Really, it was more complicated than that. During the shooting, two cameras out of three conked out. Sometimes the film was running thirty frames per second, sometimes twenty. The sound came too fast, or too slow. During the editing we often found that the distorted sound was more effective than the "real"—so we often left it that way; in other places, where lines were important, we used the "protection" sound track, cutting it to little pieces and "tape dubbing"; in other places, again, we overlapped both sound tracks at the same time. (Two sound tracks were recorded during the shooting: one directly on film, magnetic; another separately, on a beat-up Wollensak machine.)

And there I lay, that morning, on the floor, exhausted, waiting for Pierre to come back with the truck, to take out the equipment. Everyone was gone. The theatre was empty and dead now. This was the last time the Becks gave a performance in New York. It was suddenly so sad. I thought I was completely alone. But then I opened my eyes and I saw a girl, seventeen, I guessed, or sixteen, or she could have been fourteen or twenty—I was too tired to figure it out—and she walked around in the empty theatre and I asked her what she was doing, and she said, I live here, I am an actress, and this is my home. But the theatre is closed, I said. I know how to get in, she said. And she showed me her things, in a dark corner, in the cellar, a suitcase, a blanket, and a few books. Then I fell asleep and when I opened my eyes again I saw her sitting there in the dim light of the empty theatre and reading a play. She looked like a stray cat, alone, sad, and small. Then the truck came, and we got out and the rats came back and everything was over. She stepped into the street—we decided to have some coffee—and it was spring slush and she wore thin summer sport shoes and the water came in immediately and took possession of her feet—but she said nothing, she was all part and blood of the Living Theatre, she was the last one to leave it. Watching her there that night I suddenly understood why the Living Theatre survived all these years and why it will survive again: They were as mad as I was; their devotion to their art and their work was fanatic and beyond reason; that girl taught me that, and so far as I know she may be still living there, underground, or in the sewers

—she may not even be real, she may have been the underground angel.

Next day, the literary agents got all upset: Why didn't you ask our permission, they said; you can't do things like that! Film unions jumped on me: How do you dare make a movie without unions! Oh, hell, I said. If anyone still wants to make a "real" movie out of Brown's play, to "adapt" it to cinema—he may as well do it. Brown once told me he had an idea for a million dollar production of *The Brig*, with thousands of prisoners. It should be done. The point of cruelty done by one man to another can never be overstressed. I, myself, I am not interested in adapting plays, I always said so and I am repeating it here again. *The Brig*, the movie, is not an adaptation of a play: It is a film play; it is a record of my eye and my temperament lost in the play. And then, in the first and last place, *The Brig*, the movie, is my gift to the Becks, those two beautiful human beings. My own share in all of this, really, is the pain in the neck which every cinéma vérité filmmaker feels most of the time—and I can tell you, pains in the neck can be as bad as those of the heart.

By the way: The film cost me \$1200 to make.

July 1, 1965

ON THE DEGENERATION OF FILM FESTIVALS

We have all heard by now about the slump in world cinema. Movie critics came home from Cannes and Pesaro with alarming reports. Nothing much seems to be happening in the world cinema, the festivals are boring. The truth, however, is that the festivals have become purely commercial ventures and they no longer reflect the true state of modern cinema. In a year when Stan Brakhage gives us *The Art of Vision*, the U.S. is represented at Cannes by *The Collector*! As far as I am concerned, no film festival in 1965 can be taken seriously if it disregards two such towering contributions to cinema as *The Art of Vision* or the work of Harry Smith. That goes for the New York Film Festival, too—Lincoln Center cannot excuse itself this year for not having 16 mm. projection facilities; that excuse was already used for two

consecutive years. There should be a better excuse this year, or we are going to topple Lincoln Center down.

Really, it may even be good that film festivals are so bad. In their own way they dramatize the whole situation of the contemporary cinema. It speeds up the emergence of film undergrounds. Reports come to me about such undergrounds brewing in Paris, London, Rome. London underground will be opening their own showcase soon. A distribution center, similar to the Film-Makers' Cooperative, is being set up in London. At Pesaro, an international film-makers cooperative was set up for the distribution of independently made features (with Lionel Rogosin as the president).

ON GEORGE LANDOW AND FILM LOOPS

Coming back to New York: I would like to say something about one very small film which I think is a minor (or may even be a major) masterpiece. It is George Landow's loop film called *This Film Will Be Interrupted After 11 Minutes By A Commercial* and which was screened at the Cinematheque last Friday. Loop film is a comparatively new film form and the best film loop I had seen till now was Dick Higgins' *Invocation of Canyons and Boulders*. (George Maciunas is preparing a Fluxus anthology of 8 mm. film loops and you can reach him c/o Film-Makers' Cinematheque.) Landow's loop consists of one foot of black leader and one foot of a middle-close-up of a beautiful girl blinking (one blink). It was shot on 8 mm. and printed on 35 mm. (four 8 mm. tracks) and then split in half (for 16 mm. projection) with one image track fully visible and the other one half cut-off, and with sprockets printed in the middle, with a few edge numbers visible—really, it would be easier to reproduce the film here in full than to describe it. The kinetic and visual experience produced by Landow's film is even more difficult to describe. The first half of the loop the image slides (because of the special way the loop was spliced together); the other part is sharp and in registration. The loop runs (is supposed to run) twenty-two minutes. There is humor in it (the blink); there is a clear sense of form reminiscent of Mozart and Mondrian; there is the richness of image, about the richest frame I have seen in any film when you take in considera-

tion all movements, lines, the beautiful whites, reds, and blacks. It is quite safe to say, with all that we know about cinema as an art, that Landow has created here the first film loop masterpiece. His earlier film, *Fleming Faloon*, is a master's work in its own right.

One thing about Landow and Higgins loops is that there is nothing unnecessary in them; every aspect and every detail is made to work for the whole, beginning with the photographed image and ending with the physical presence of the celluloid itself. Splices usually are never seen, not saying felt. Splicing is considered a boring craft, splices should never be seen. But splice is coming back and asking for its own rights. (Read Stan Brakhage's essay on splicing in *Film Culture* No. 35.) The texture and grain of the film is coming into its own through Brakhage's and Ken Jacobs' 8 mm. work. In Landow's loop you can see and feel the film sprockets, the splices, and even the running of film through the projector—really, it is a particular characteristic of this new film form that it pulls you into a total film experience, all its aspects included. The special difficulty of this form is the fact that the loop is repeated continuously and that only the richness of visual-kinetic content can sustain the eye and the film in time. Film loop is a form—and Landow's loop is a supreme illustration of it—in which nothing superfluous can be tolerated; whatever is on film, including the splicing glue, should be made to be seen and felt as a part of the whole.

By the way, the film was booed at the Cinematheque and it was cut off before its proper time (twenty-two minutes). Someone shouted, and he meant it as a joke: "Another genius was born tonight at the Cinematheque!" But I state it here in all seriousness.

July 22, 1965

ON THE PSYCHEDELIC EXPLORATIONS OF TIMOTHY LEARY, ON CHANCE, STROBE, AND CINEMA

Monday, July 12: Psychedelic Explorations, at the New Theatre, East 54th Street. Timothy Leary opens the evening as "a psychedelic session without chemistry"; Jackie Cassen projects polarized "light sculptures"; acrylic and aniline projections of Don

Snyder; automatic analog projections by Richard Aldcroft; polarized glasses and prisms; slides fade in and out and dissolve into each other; color filters; moving polarized sculptures superimpose over the slides; vague organic and inorganic forms glide across the screen; slowly shimmering mosaics; voice (Leary) reads from ancient Chinese scriptures; electronic music; assorted sounds; stroboscope light flickers upon the screen; Edith Stephen dances in the stroboscope light; a box, a compound of prisms, with colors blinking on and off; Woodstock group (Gerd Stern) projects random movies and some more organized highway footage; two movie projectors, three or four slide projectors, analog projections; the screen becomes a moving flickering collage; a collage sound track; radio, music, voices, nonsense speeches, bits of this and that, at blasting volume.

I liked the part which preceded the program proper—I mean, when the projectors and slide machines were being tested, lights arranged; flashes of unusually beautiful whites; fleeting glimpses of an imperfectly placed slide; the empty slide frame full of light. Like that Oriental musician who went to a Western music concert, I preferred the tuning up period to the real concert. I remember liking a number of movies (both of Hollywood and “underground” breed) in their “rushes,” in their chance order, with the different “takes” growing into strange symphonies—but I saw little in them when they were “completed.” The nonart of “rushes” had more power in their chance state than the “artistically” organized end result: Materials were organized into clichés of art.

The first half of the program, the slide and aniline show, although sometimes pretty, remained on the level of slides. The feeling prevailed that somebody was trying to sell something with these slides. They did not exist for their own sake. It was the sound track, the voice that made the images illustrative, forced a meaning upon them which wasn't there. The voice did not leave our eyes alone to follow the flow of shapeless color and forms as they came, but forced the mind to look in them for something else, even if that something else was vague; the mind was never left “at the mercy of the eye,” as poet Robert Kelly has said about the films of Stan Brakhage. The intention, or the hope, no doubt, was that the words will act upon consciousness (and the unconscious) magically, subliminally. That would have been the effect under

LSD. But the audience wasn't under LSD and the words came in all their distracting superfluity.

The evening made me appreciate Brakhage's work anew. Later in the evening, Dr. Gunther Weil mentioned that the Chinese—or Tibetans—know how to construct rooms lit and proportioned in such a way that anyone who is left alone in such a room is affected the same way: The room makes them cry. The work of an artist involves similar precisions. We saw colors, pretty slides, but they remained pretty slides. An artist's temperament and intelligence was needed to organize them in time and space into "life-sustaining forces" (again using Kelly's expression).

It was the chance and the lack of "artistic" control that gave some life to Gerd Stern's screen collage. The chance meetings and groupings of images and lights on the screen produced a kinetic experience that was new more by the force of science than art. A physical fact, a visual force/fact was there on the screen and we could not ignore it. We had to wrestle with it or leave the place, and it did something to us as we wrestled with it.

The purest kinetic fact of the evening, however, was the projection of the stroboscope light on the screen—the play of white light on the eyelids, the purity and directness of light experience.

Strange, though, that two film-makers who have reached the furthest frontiers of new vision, who have explored the light and the eye most—Stan Brakhage and Peter Kubelka—have never used drugs. More than that: Recently both have taken a clear stand against the use of drugs for the expansion of consciousness. The place of an artist in a society can never be clearly defined. The artist remains above the dailiness of the experience and above the work of the scientists—even if his work has much to do with science.

The Psychedelic Theatre has no great artistic pretensions. Its aim remains expansion of our consciousness—whatever that expression means. I was sorry, therefore, to see that whatever was gained last Monday was consumed and nullified by a small incident. During the first part of the program, which was contributed by the Coda Gallery, a young man was standing by the wall and shooting his own 8 mm. movie. During the intermission, Coda Gallery confiscated the young man's film. They did not want, they said, any footage of Coda Gallery art to be seen in his little movie

because a big movie company was coming to make a real movie about them. Suddenly, on the human level, everything became petty and all kinds of Bosch creatures began creeping into the open. The dreams and illusions of success—possessions, fame, money—these old forces engulfed all other energies and I left the place in a hurry to get some fresh night air. What is the real interest of Coda Gallery, I asked myself as I walked. Expansion of man's consciousness?

Yes, drugs, expanded consciousness! Sometimes, I am afraid, the consciousness is being confused with ability to see more color images, with the expanded eye, with the quickness of the eye. But as the quickness of the hand can be used to thrust a knife into one's heart, so the quickness of the eye, the simultaneity of seeing can be used by both Devil and God—as the consciousness and the soul remain sleeping.

August 12, 1965

ON "PRIVATE CINEMA" OR WHY I AM AGAINST INDEPENDENTLY MADE COMMERCIAL FILM

There is a book that just came out, *The Two Worlds of American Art, The Private and the Popular*, by Barry Ulanov. The jacket says: "The private artist is a man who communicates to one man at a time, a listener particularly congenial to him and to what he has to say. The popular artist, on the other hand, is a man who addresses himself to the largest possible audience and huge box-office returns."

In the chapter devoted to cinema, the author names Hollywood as the example of the popular cinema. The private cinema is *David and Lisa*, says the author. There is never a mention of Maya Deren, Brakhage, Markopoulos, or any other of the avant-garde artists.

I'd like to say something about the so-called low-budget independent cinema. "There is no other way of breaking the frozen cinematic ground than through a complete derangement of the official cinematic senses," I wrote in 1959. Certain notions about cinema had to be changed: Certain notions about the techniques

of cinema had to be destroyed. At that time, any attempt to break away from the conventional cinema, anything like *Shadows*, had to be greeted and pointed out as a step forward—which it was, as was the work of Lionel Rogosin, Morris Engel, or Sidney Meyers (the avant-garde of the 40's and 50's had already reached its end).

Five years have passed since then. Six years. Many things have happened. A revolution took place. The entire new cinema has come into being. Today, to make another film like *Shadows* would mean to step back, six years back.

I have been asked by many people why, although I was the first one to acclaim films like *Shadows* or *Pull My Daisy*, why do I remain silent about most of the independently made features today—films like *Nothing But a Man* or *Across the River*.

My answer is simple. I feel that these films are old and out of tune. The job was done five years ago. Today one has to be much further and much better, thematically, formally, and technically, as far as Brakhage is, as far as Markopoulos is, as Warhol is—or as far as Godard is—if one doesn't want to be boring, that is. Most low-budget features are nothing but bad movies. They have neither historical nor aesthetic value. (The rare exceptions are films like Downey's *Babo 73* which, although technically and formally crude, is new in its content, and therefore has a value; or Goldman's *Echoes of Silence*; or the Olga series which, at least, has girls.)

The only aesthetically interesting work, however, is being done in the personal, private cinema. Today it is absurd to say that *David and Lisa* represents the private cinema. *David and Lisa* is Hollywood. *David and Lisa* is Grade B Hollywood of the 60's.

Brakhage's 8 mm. *Songs* is private cinema; a cinema that can be viewed and appreciated more in privacy than in public.

It is possible, as the time goes, that some of the "private" cinema—such as the abstract works of Harry Smith, for instance—may eventually become a "public" art. Much of Andy Warhol's work may become a public art. But *The Hell and Heaven* feature [now known as *Heaven and Earth Magic*] by the same Harry Smith will never become a "public" art because of the complexity of its content. Humanity always falls into at least two large segments: the pop group—those preoccupied with the grosser emo-

tions, the gross world; and those preoccupied with living a more subtle, more developed inner life (meditation, delights of spirit, etc.).

And then, there is one more aspect to this story. One could safely say that films like *David and Lisa* or *Nothing But a Man* are more simplistic and in a way more popular than, say, some works of Lang, Hitchcock, or Godard, which although conceived as popular works, are executed by a much subtler intelligence and eventually will become part of the private cinema; while *David and Lisa* will simply disappear as all gross things eventually do.

September 2, 1965

THE HUMAN BODY AND CINEMA

What is this "pornography," "obscenity," "blue movie" business?

The human body, unclad and naked, has been often and uninhibitedly (or, truer—aesthetically) portrayed in painting and sculpture. It disappears, sometimes, for a generation or two, and reappears again. It disappeared, partially, with the coming of Cubism, during the period of abstract explorations; now it's coming back. Each time it comes back, it comes as a new discovery, as if the artist had never seen a naked body in his life. He doesn't know how to deal with it aesthetically; subject matter takes over form. Only slowly the balance is regained, the subject mastered, the ways of dealing with it aesthetically are found.

Cinema is entering this naked stage for the first time. The film artist did not know how to deal with the naked body so he stayed away from it. Not that he didn't really know how to deal with it: There was, apparently, no real urgency for it. Cinema had its hands full with the exploration of other aspects and areas of reality. Cinema was looked at as a basically naturalistic art—and who walks streets naked? So he concentrated all his lights, all his shadows, lenses, and ingenuity on the only naturalistically possible open area: the face, with an occasional ankle, or a neck line, or—daringly!—a leg.

The renaissance of the poetic cinema during the last few years broke down the barricades of naturalism. The avant-garde artist, the new poet mastered new techniques and approaches which now

enable him to put on film poetically and filmically some of the "untouchable" reality, including the body. Against the screams of the majority of the public, the artist proceeds to reveal to that public (and to himself) the beauty of the world that surrounds us. We can safely say now that the first and perhaps most important ground work in this area—in the aesthetic use of human body in cinema—has been laid down. It can be seen in the work of Stan Brakhage, Andy Warhol, Ron Rice, Gregory Markopoulos, Robert Nelson, Jack Smith, Bill Vehr, Naomi Levine, Barbara Rubin (and, some years earlier, in the work of Willard Maas). In some of the cases it is being used decoratively, in others dramatically, in still others phenomenologically.

Newspapers and magazines, for their own perverted reasons, have often accused the new cinema of being too preoccupied with "pornography"—by which they mean the human body. Nakedness in most cases is identified with pornography. The poetry escapes them. The beauty escapes them. Venus herself, in cinema, should be glad, they tell us. A culture of penis without Venus.

The public (and the film-maker) should not let themselves be distracted and confused by an irresponsible press. There is a tradition of human body in art, and our work continues that tradition, although with natural and unaccustomed changes called for by the implicit qualities of the film medium. Cinema is (or will be) revealing different aspects of the body from those sculpture or painting reveal. It is true that cinema doesn't yet know all of the aesthetic possibilities of this new subject, in terms of the medium—but the subject is there. As with every newly discovered subject, there is much empty and excited running around—but that doesn't change the historical importance of what's happening, of what's going to happen. It's part of the larger revolution that is taking place in us.

These artists are working with no real precedent—there are no real masters to learn from in their own art, as far as the naked body goes—they are the first masters. Many mistakes are being committed and all for the good. Let the gentlemen and ladies scream: It will do them some good, they have to scream out their own ugliness. Time will pass, like this summer is passing, and they will call us "classics," and our children will be amazed and wonder what all that noise was all about.

September 16, 1965

THE NEW YORK FILM FESTIVAL AS AN ENEMY OF THE NEW CINEMA

The third New York Film Festival is an organized and well sponsored undertaking to prevent New Yorkers from seeing what's really going on in cinema. That's how it looks to me, despite the good intentions of the people involved.

What's so upsetting is the emphasis of the New York Film Festival on the commercial cinema alone.

Nobody is fooled by other film festivals. Everybody knows they are commercial fairs run by mayors and motion picture associations. They even take place in gambling casinos and similar places. But the New York Film Festival takes place at the Philharmonic, the same place where Beethoven and John Cage are being played. Our festival directors travel during the summer to those commercial film fairs and they collect films in those places and present them at the Philharmonic under the pretense that this selection represents the cinema of 1965.

The complete misrepresentation of the American cinema at the New York Film Festival—the exclusion of its most creative part, the avant-garde, the underground cinema—leads us to believe that other countries may be as badly misrepresented as our own.

The perspective film art has been completely lost at the New York Film Festival. To restore that perspective, Brakhage's *The Art of Vision* or the work of Harry Smith or that of Andy Warhol had to be screened—for that's where the art of cinema can be found today. One needs *The Art of Vision* to bring cinema to the level of Cage and Beethoven. The perspective thus restored, all other films could be screened and accepted for what they are.

What it comes to is that the new cinema is being kept out; noncommercial cinema is being kept out; the avant-garde is being kept out. There is an open fear of poetry. It is so much easier to laugh yourself away with a cute, empty cartoon. It's easy to sit through a "serious" realistic or psychological movie (by a "well-known" director): it doesn't really move or disturb us; we are

able to keep a “safe” distance. Whereas poetry asks for our hearts. Poetry is dangerous to our egos. “Those damn film poets!” cried out Pauline Kael during one of the festival symposiums. For the poets are disturbing Pauline Kael; they don’t leave Pauline Kael in peace, they want her to wake up, to change, they want her heart to melt.

IN DEFENSE OF GODARD

Kael dislikes Godard and Antonioni and the underground cinema (except Vanderbeek, she said—he is working more on the surface, on the skin, and thus is less painful). The press attacked Godard for *Alphaville*. The members of the press conference and the symposiums attacked Godard. I never thought I would have to come to the defense of Godard. I thought Godard had enough friends. But at the Saturday symposium, even Andrew Sarris (who remains Godard’s best defender) declared that he thought Godard was (in his last two films) on the wrong track and that he is beginning to detect something ominous about Godard. John Simon, from the *New Leader*, spoke from the audience and called everybody to the posse: Kill Godard—for Godard presents this terrible picture of the future.

Godard’s images are our own subconscious pulled out into the open light of the screen; *Alphaville* is already there, in the soul of many of us, and now we see it before us on the screen and it is ominous—and we hate Godard for showing it to us, for bothering us. “Damn those film poets!” cries Pauline Kael, for somewhere deep she realizes that there is no real protection against poetry, that eventually the poet’s arrows will get her. Instead of saying “How ominous we are,” we say, “How ominous is Godard”—that way we can continue our ugly existences in peace. That is the saddest failure of modern criticism.

Instead, these critics keep telling us: You can’t do this in cinema; you can’t do that; this belongs to literature; this belongs to painting, or science.

Godard is saying: Go to hell. Everything is possible. Or we don’t care about the possible and the impossible. We have things to tell and we’ll tell them and while we tell them we’ll find new ways of telling them, new forms, new poetic figures.

Godard cinema is cinema of ideas. Cinema has been reduced too much to emotions alone. Godard deals with images and ideas. He is obsessed with cinema and ideas. The cinema of ideas doesn't yet exist. Godard is in the vanguard of that cinema. He has to invent many things by himself, as he goes. There are few precedents. Godard cinema is part of the new cinema. He says nothing is impossible. He is expanding the film language. He is alive.

Godard is the man trapped in Alphaville and working his way out. His mind is his own trap, temporarily. But he will come out of it. Most of us will not. That's why Godard will destroy some of us, as *Caution* did. Godard is ominous. Like any stark truth is ominous. Truth destroys untruth. Poets are ominous, sometimes. All poetry is ominous, in a way, if you look at it from Hell, if you are on the side of the Devil. Beware of poets. Shoot the poets. And perish. Or keep them away, keep them at a safe distance by calling them names, like *underground*—underground is our yellow star, poets are the Jews of America.

SUGGESTIONS: See premiere of *Lords of Persia* this Sunday evening at the Hunter Playhouse (68th Street)—the dance of Erick Hawkins teaches us what motion is.

September 23, 1965

WHAT PAULINE KAEI LOST AT THE MOVIES, AND
WHY THE NEW YORK FILM FESTIVAL DOESN'T
INDICATE THE REAL STATE OF CINEMA

If I am taking a stand against the New York Film Festival it's only that I am like Dreyer's Gertrud: I hate the middle roads; I am unreasonable; often, I am destructive; maybe I should be locked up.

I have a few closing remarks on the third New York Film Festival.

Thirteen symposiums took place as part of the festival. Now I know what Pauline Kael lost at the movies: the taste for cinema. Hollis Alpert spent much time trying to persuade us that his reviews are really too intelligent, that cinema does not deserve the intelligence he is giving it. I was glad when Gregory Markopoulos

stood up and, trembling with rage, told him that he was a soulless moron.

Each generation redefines art—and not in books or essays but through the works of art. Cinema of yesterday was defined by the films of yesterday. Cinema of today is defined by films of today. Cinema of tomorrow will be defined by films of tomorrow.

A curious thing: Although I haven't seen any of them at any of the avant-garde and underground film screenings, all critics participating at the symposiums kept stressing their deep concern with the young and new cinema.

In my last column I expressed my doubt that the New York Film Festival really represented the cinema of 1965. I know it did not represent the American cinema. But I am not so sure about the rest. Knowing how commercially minded the world cinema is; knowing that the U.S. (even at this late day) is the only country where there is a film underground—the selection of the festival may be more representative than I thought it was. At least one thing is certain: These were films and film-makers which today's international critical consensus (and I am following "critical" film periodicals in a dozen languages) considers the cinema of 1965. The only question here is: Should we consider these films as the cinema of 1965?

A number of symposiums were concerned with the future of cinema, future of film art, future of film criticism. The panelists did not know where to look for the cinema of yesterday (they were laughing at the auteur theory); they did not know where to look for cinema of today; but they were talking about the cinema of tomorrow. On the symposiums, Andrew Sarris found himself in a position of a professional caught among amateurs; a professor dragged into a discussion of higher mathematics with students in the first grade. He could tell them things, teach them—but he couldn't really discuss anything on a proper level: They wouldn't understand his language. This was my own reason for refusing to participate in the symposiums (I was asked to participate in three of them). There can be no discussion. Not everything in art and aesthetics is ethereal—much of it is simply knowledge of certain procedures, ways, and facts.

Nevertheless, everything ended well this year. Dreyer's *Gertrud* alone and by itself redeemed the festival.

ON DREYER'S *GERTRUD*

Gertrud is as towering a master work in the narrative sound cinema as Brakhage's *The Art of Vision* is in the nonnarrative cinema. From all of the films shown at the festival, it was by far the most perfect artistic statement, the most perfect expression of an artist's moral and aesthetic attitude. Every detail, every motion, every word in *Gertrud* has its right place, its own voice, and contributes to the whole and is beautiful. As Charles Boultenhouse remarked: Even if for nothing else—for its lighting alone *Gertrud* should be considered a masterpiece. It is so far above the other films shown at the festival that it isn't even fair to discuss it within the standards of the festival; it is a masterpiece by the standards of narrative cinema. Every generation states its own position on love. *Gertrud* is Dreyer's statement on love, and it is pure, radiant, and perfect, like a ring. I can't say this about any other film shown at the festival.

October 7, 1965

MORE ON DREYER

Fragments from Carl Th. Dreyer's remarks during his New York visit. Although he maintains an objective attitude toward his characters, as an author should, he nevertheless identifies himself with *Gertrud*. He said he used the same cameraman (Bendtsen) for *Gertrud* and *Ordet*—that's why both films are luminous with the same spiritual light. He gives his cameraman most of the credit for the lighting. Dreyer said he had a very detailed script before he went into shooting. Shooting took eight weeks. Does *Gertrud* really hurt other people in her desperate search for ideal love? He doesn't think so. The film was conceived in the tradition of the Greek drama and *Gertrud*'s passion is absolutist. However, it doesn't lead her into self-destruction. Her old age is full of luminous light. As for the dialogue, he used words in close-up; words are as important to him as images, he said.

ON PIERO HELICZER

Among all the new movies (it has been quiet lately on the underground scene) Piero Heliczer's *Dirt* touched me most deeply. Its beauty is very personal and lyrical. And every frame of it is cinema. I can do no justice to this beautiful work in one paragraph. It was shot on 8 mm. and much of its beauty and its cinema comes from the 8 mm. properties of camera and film. It is all motion. Together with Brakhage's *Songs*, Branaman's abstractions, and Ken Jacobs' not yet released work, Heliczer's *Dirt* is one of the four works that use 8 mm. film properly and for art's sake.

November 11, 1965

ON NEW DIRECTIONS, ON ANTI-ART, ON THE OLD
AND THE NEW IN ART

Not all that's happening at the Film-Makers' Cinematheque this month is or can be called cinema. Some of it has no name of any kind. The first three programs of the New Cinema Festival—the work of Angus McLise, Nam June Paik, and Jerry Joffen—dissolved the edges of this art called cinema into a frontiersland mystery. Light is there; motion is there; the screen is there; and the filmed image, very often, is there; but it cannot be described or experienced in terms you describe or experience the Griffith cinema, the Godard cinema, or even Brakhage cinema.

The medium of cinema is breaking out and taking over and is going blindly and by itself. Where to—nobody knows. I am glad about both: That it's going somewhere, and that nobody knows where it's going. I like things out of control. At some point, the artist will ram his feet into the ground, will stop the medium, and will start taming it, using it to plow the fields of his own imagination—but the bull is still running. People who watch the avant-garde cinema keep asking me: What's new? Who is doing new movies? And it's difficult to answer. For they expect to see or hear more about the same, but what's happening isn't the same. The currents that are moving within us, and are externalized by the artists, are ripe with new impulses and they spurt out in uncontrol-

lable and unfamiliar gushes. So the avant-garde artists themselves sit in the audience, surprised, repeating, "What the hell is happening?"

Now, this current gush, as much as one can generalize at this early (not so early, though) stage, is marked by an almost mystic drive towards pure motion, color, light experience. It has much to do with other arts, painting, sculpture, happenings, environment, music, but the cinema aspects of light, screen (in a number of different forms), image (filmed or produced by other means), motion dominate these works. The surge is wide and intense.

Half-a-hundred different artists are represented in the November show alone.

So the avant-garde artists, who are working in a more classical tradition of cinema, are asking themselves what this new gush of light-motion art will do to their work. Have no fear! cried the captain. No good "old" art is ever invalidated by the "new" art. What it will do, it will help to separate the genuine and intense "old" art from the shallow and half-felt "old" art. In creation, in the present, everybody has his chance. But in time perspective, only art remains.

For a number of years now, the avant-garde artist (in cinema, and in other arts) felt, and publicly insisted, that he was creating something so different from the traditional art that his work, he felt, could be defined as anti-art. And he was right. He had to take that attitude. The artist is always right, even when he is wrong. That attitude was his liberating acetylene wedge to bore into the heart of the always new reality.

But now, with five, six, seven years' perspective, these far-far-out and anti-art works begin to fall into the same thousand-year-old treasury of all art. I realized this suddenly when I watched Nam June Paik's evening. His art, like the art of La Monte Young, or that of Stan Brakhage, or Gregory Markopoulos, or Jack Smith, or even (no doubt about it) Andy Warhol, is governed by the same thousand-year-old aesthetic laws and can be analyzed and experienced like any other classical work of art.

ON JERRY JOFFEN AND THE "PERIOD OF EMERGENCE"

Still, there are aspects that remain ungraspable, unfamiliar to the uninitiated. Take, for instance, something that could be called

the "period of emergence." It has become a part of the new art experience and is an essential part of much of the happenings, Beck-Malina theatre, environment, music (sound), and light-motion art. The edges of where a specific work of art begins and where it ends are blurred out. Really, one could say that a happening of Ken Dewey or the cinema of Jerry Joffen or a "ritual" of Angus McLise fades in slowly into the world, is sustained there for a while, glows, and then it dissolves again imperceptibly.

This causes some annoyance and sometimes anger to the uninitiated into the experience and aesthetics (they are always the same but differently dressed up) of the new art. A great part of the audience walked out before Jerry Joffen's work revealed itself fully; they walked out during the period of emergence, before the work came into its glowing equinox. Being accustomed to traditional (what they think of as traditional) art, the audience was annoyed that there was no immediate art "experience," no immediate aesthetic shock. Those who remained, however, and surrendered themselves and sat into the evening, witnessed (or grew into) the forty minutes of most beautiful, spiritual, almost heavenly cinema experience. Then, again, it slowly faded out.

This art was born from a new attitude to art; which, in turn, was born from a new attitude to life. We are beginning to meditate. Meditation was out of the Western world for about 1,500 years. It is interesting to note, here, in this context, that when you go to some Chinese or Japanese monasteries, where some of the great works of arts are being kept, you have to go through one week, sometimes longer, periods of preparation, waiting for that specific work of art, learning about it, thinking about it, so that when you finally face it, you are completely ready for it and you see it in its full glow. Its glow is your own glow. That is the direction some of the art in America is taking (it's the beat revolution that did it).

The first three programs of the New Cinema Festival represent three different and basic groups of artists. Nam June Paik belongs to the purists, to the "intellectual" wing; Angus McLise is the emotion; Jerry Joffen is at home in both. Paik's program was perfectly designed, constructed, and executed. There was an almost classical simplicity and purity about it. McLise, with all his visual mystico-ornamental flair and the beauty of texture (in

image and sound), didn't seem to be giving much attention either to the general structure or the details of the evening; and his work, despite all-pervading lyrical qualities, had much of the distracting messiness of a dress rehearsal about it. Jerry Joffen, however, has so much personality and artistry that even those parts which failed became somehow integrated and worked perfectly in the total structure of the evening. It has always been in the past that Jerry Joffen's failures were more interesting than some other artists' successes.

Jerry Joffen is a master of destruction. I mean it in a good sense, in the sense of spiritualizing the reality, dissolving time and space. A scene is filmed in two or three superimpositions; then, the screen spiritualizes this superimposition reality further (the screen consisted of several layers of silky and colored materials); this is dissolved further by lights and mirrors. In the very end the reality becomes pure light, pure color, pure motion, pure air. But the amazing thing here is that the presence of image and motion, the feeling of cinema remains in the consciousness of the viewer; whereas in the case of McLise, one vacillates between the theatre, music, and cinema experience.

The same could be said about the use of words. McLise's words, recited as part of the ritual, hung heavily and with a sentimental theatricality upon the stage; Joffen's words were pronounced without any emotion, abstractly, each word parted by time space. The sentence was thus spiritualized, dissolved (similarly to what Markopoulos did in *Twice a Man*).

November 18, 1965

ON THE EXPANDED CINEMA OF JACK SMITH, JOHN
VACARRO, ROBERTS BLOSSOM, ARTHUR SAINER,
STANDISH LAWDER, DON SNYDER, HELICZER,
VANDERBEEK

I will continue with the report on the New Cinema Festival at the Film-Makers' Cinematheque.

The Jack Smith and the John Vacarro evenings had little to do

with cinema. Both pieces were exercises in the Artaud theatre. Cinema was used only as an auxiliary of the theatre. We know, however, that the theatre of Artaud is a theatre of kinesthetic violence, something that, as experience, dissolves into cinema experience.

The Jack Smith piece, *Rehearsal for the Destruction of Atlantis*, as one would expect, was an orgy of costumes, suppressed and open violence, and color. The center of the piece was a huge red lobster, a masterpiece creation of costume and character. Vacarro's piece, *Rites of the Nadir*, was a theatre ritual, less decorative. Vacarro has a first-rate theatre sense. He is a showman, with a sense of timing and pacing. Jack Smith's piece was loose and relied on chance, on coincidences, on conglomerations.

Although the Jack Smith and the Vacarro pieces were presented as part of the New Cinema Festival, they may be—historically speaking—the first successful fusion of the Artaud theories, the happenings and environment experiences, and the traditional theatre (through the spoken word) into a new kind of theatre.

Roberts Blossom's program was an expanded theatre (not an expanded cinema). Two pieces, however, *Duet For One Person* and *Poem For the Theatre* (both danced by Beverly Schmidt) fused the two mediums and produced something, we weren't sure what—Blossom calls it *Film-Stage*. Blossom used the dancer, color slides projected on the dancer and the background; and a motion picture of the same dancer projected on the stage (as the dancer danced).

Arthur Sainer's piece, *Untitled Chase*, was a theatre piece with a film loop projected on the left side of the stage. The loop showed a man chasing another man; a girl in a red dress leaps like a dancer; the man is beating the other man; girl leaning by the man on the ground; man sitting on the ground, looking ahead, "thinking." After three or four minutes of the loop, the same three people come on stage (as the loop continues) and perform what we already saw in the loop, now in more detailed form, with a few emotional splashes of dialogue (they "think," they "worry"). The attempt tended to go downhill, perhaps from lack of form, pacing, or imagination.

Standish Lawder's piece, *The March of the Garter Snakes*, effectively demonstrated that a slide can produce kinetic experi-

ences. He began with something that could be called an old-fashioned slide, and ended with a "moving slide." The motion was produced by inserting drops of color paint between two pieces of glass. After a few seconds, from the heat of the projector, the paint began to melt, to spread, to travel, producing unpredictable and often beautiful (although too "pretty") patterns strikingly effective as "abstract cinema."

However, it is Don Snyder who is the master of the slide art. His show, *Epiphany of Light* (which was a part of the psychedelic theatre, three months ago), demonstrated numerous possibilities of slide dissolves, black and white, and in color (synchronized or counterpointed with sound). Images gradually grew into color symphonies (two slide projectors were complemented by a motion picture projector) that kept one in surprise and amazement. There were attempts at subliminal images, planted occasionally (usually, some Buddhist images).

Snyder's slide art merges completely with the medium of cinema. I should say something about the "prettiness" of some of Snyder's images. Although, like all nature-produced patterns, they are more pretty than they are art, they nevertheless, when seen on the screen, and in motion, produce a kinesthetic experience, a shock of color and motion that should be judged not by the design of a single slide (frame) but by the patterns of visual impulses.

The most dazzling pieces of "expanded" cinema in the true sense were provided by that old Barnum of cinema, Stan Vanderbeek, in his three motion picture compositions: *Movie-Movies* (a choreography for projectors—four movie projectors, three slide projectors, and a flashlight were used; projectionists walked on stage in a ballet of hand-held projectors); *Pastorale: et al.* (a film and slide study for dancers, with Elaine Summers); and *Feedback No. 1: a Movie Mural*. In the latter piece, the theatre became a huge movie mural, with a battery of five projectors—a sound and image experience so unusual and so full of motion and visual impact that we all suddenly said, "Yes, it works! It works!" (meaning the multiple projection cinema). The movie-mural was followed by one of those applauses which, in the newspapers, usually are called "half-hour applauses"—there was so much excitement. The feeling was that we had witnessed something very new, and very beautiful, something that could neither be described nor ex-

plained. It acted upon us with its multiplicity of images, associations, memories, eyes. The impact was both on our retina and a physical, kinesthetic impact, on our body—and it wasn't Cinema, where it is the vertigo that does it. Here the impact was produced by something that was more formal; it came from the organization of visual, kinesthetic materials—and that's where art comes in.

Piero Heliczer's evening, *The Last Rites*, was a ceremony, a ritual—really, the most successful (as ritual) of the six rituals presented at the festival. This was not because Heliczer had for his script the New Testament; not because he played a bishop; but because of a certain unfaked directness, immediacy that he produced. Although he was “acting,” there was something very real about it. Angus McLise's music helped much to sustain this mood. At the center of this ritual was cinema, the tiny 8 mm. image projected on a large screen, in front of which, on the stage, a ceremony of watching the image and blessing the image was performed. There was something ambiguous, inexplicable in this blessing of the image, in this playing of the bishop, in this watching of the image. Later in the evening, Weegee (of *Naked City* fame) brought some of his latest work, and it was projected, as part of the ritual, and beautifully destroyed and incorporated into the whole by Heliczer.

Much of the evening was just fooling (“acting”) and just nothing—as most of what Heliczer does is. But that is where, as far as I can see, the originality and beauty of his work, and its essential difference from all the others, is. His work has none of the ambitiousness and artistic struggle of the others; none of the wanting to be impressive, or shocking, or ugly, or violent, or grotesque—something that is so much part of the contemporary art. Heliczer's art I find more human—if not more beautiful.

Above all, however, I should stress here the ambiguity of his work, the mystery of his work. The art of Vanderbeek, Smith, and Vacarro was a direct, almost physical assault on retina, on senses, with nothing left unsaid: You get it all or none at all. Nothing is concealed. Heliczer's evening (and it's more proper to speak about it as an evening than “a work of art”) was mysterious, ambiguous, suggestive, indirect. And it is here that the kinesthetic experience begins to connect with the poetic experience—which,

for me, is a higher and more subtle art than just a pure kinesthetic experience, as far as my thinking and feeling goes.

December 2, 1965

MORE ON EXPANDED CINEMA: EMSHWILLER,
STERN, KEN JACOBS, KEN DEWEY

The unusual festival of film happenings at the Cinematheque is continuing. When they are bad, they are very bad; when they are good, they are almost great. Last week, Ken Dewey, Dick Higgins, Ed Emshwiller, Gerd Stern, Ken Jacobs, and, less intensely, Jackie Cassen, Aldo Tambellini, Elaine Summers, Ray Wisniewski continued the series of new visual discoveries.

Ed Emshwiller remains the craftsman and the scientist of the avant-garde cinema. His piece *Body Works* may be not only the best piece he has ever done, but also the first successful attempt at cinema ballet. Whereas most of the other film-makers who use multiple projections leave much to chance, Emshwiller presented a completely controlled and almost scientifically planned work dazzling in its visual effects. He played tricks with our eyes, with our vision, with the depth of field, with the long shots and close-ups: right there before our eyes he snapped his fingers and the dancer changed into a skeleton or became a huge hand or became two dancers.

Gerd Stern's evening was less dazzling but it was more beautiful for the eye. Here again was a planned presentation of multiple imagery (defraction boxes, strobes, carousel projectors, live action) but with enough holes for chance so that the effect wasn't as scientifically abstract as that of Emshwiller. Gerd Stern is more attracted by the soft and pictorial conglomerations of light, color, motion. He admits a great influence of Marshall McLuhan. Their complete trust in McLuhan permitted them (Gerd Stern and his collaborators, Michael Callahan, Brian Peterson, Jud Yalkut) to abandon themselves completely, not to bother about what art or cinema is, and to work on this sensuous sea of color, motion, and light that seems to surround us completely. We swim in it almost bodily and it is like going through the most fantastic dream.

I state here openly, I admit that I have experienced subtle aesthetic illuminations during Dick Higgins, Gerd Stern, Ken Dewey, Ed Emshwiller shows, and my aesthetic senses are not easy to please: I have spent thirty years of my life doing nothing but perfecting these senses. I realize perfectly that there are many questions to ask here concerning this festival, and I will be asking them later, at the end of this by now revolutionary festival—questions that will begin with *What Is Art?*, *What Should Art Do?*, etc., etc.—but, at this time I would like to remain a chronicler, albeit an emotional one.

Ken Jacobs—who, with his ten unfinished (money, money, money) films, is probably the least known, although one of the most productive (creative), beautiful, and influential of modern film-makers—gave us a strange piece, as part of the festival: a political romance performed as a shadow and light play (and some color prisms).

Ken Dewey's piece wasn't a shadow play, but it was shadowy from somewhere deep, or far, repeating, repeating, and overlapping itself, and there was light going on and off, and when it was on, you could see four or five women standing on the white stage, all white like milk, five women in milk and in wedding gowns, like in a store window on a misty morning, with streets still empty, in Williamsburg, Brooklyn; and it was a sad piece. The voice said, and repeated in a thousand different ways and shades the phrases: "I," "That's not you," "It's me." ("I have great respect for an artist who is as nervous as he is," said David Brooks, and he has studied more Freud and psychology than I.) And the movies were running along the ceiling, a most perfect use of the inside of the theatre I have ever seen—Dewey used the ceiling beams as screens, breaking the image into four or five depth levels. He also defracted light through the carefully placed and angled mirrors on the sides and the back of the theatre, and they caught, at certain moments, glimpses of light and image creating almost ecstatically beautiful pure crystal light experience that sounded like Mozart; I almost could write down the notes.

ON THE ART OF SHADOWS AND KEN JACOBS

But the thing I wanted to say at this point is really this: Ken Jacobs, by making his show into a shadow play, pointed out,

intentionally or not—and he has always been right—the direction most of the artists at this strange festival have been going to, from many different directions and through many different and complicated side routes: the art of the Shadow Play.

Permit my insane head a few heresies: Isn't it possible that cinema is really nothing new? Isn't it possible that the art which we thought was our art, the 20th century art, isn't our art at all? Isn't it possible that the shadow and light artists of Persia, of China, of India were the real masters, the real magicians of the art of light, motion, image? How little we know about it. Aren't we coming back to it, though, closer and closer to it, as the least naturalistic, as the most stylized, most controlled art of telling the stories and creating magic through light, motion, images?

When I watched the shows of Ken Jacobs, Gerd Stern, Don Snyder, Stan Vanderbeek, Jack Smith, Emshwiller, Tambellini, or Jackie Cassen, I suddenly saw them as the new shadow play magicians. I felt that there was practically nothing that couldn't be done by a shadow artist. Motion picture camera can be eliminated from most of these shows with new gains for the creative imagination. I am exaggerating now, no doubt, for making my point, but what I saw with my dazed head was the rebirth of this forgotten art of the past, the art of shadow play that will become, during these few coming years, the controversial challenger of cinema as we know it today, and a new source of inspiration. Not that it will push out the cinema as we know it today—but it will make it seem only one, and, perhaps not the largest, part of the motion, light, image art. The ground is shaking and the cinema we knew is collapsing, the screen, the projector, the camera, and all. Suddenly, and without any bang (I am the only bang) the entire so-called underground, avant-garde cinema has shifted in time and space and has become part of the classical cinema, for our own and children's enjoyment. The new avant-garde of cinema (light play) has moved ten years forward, into new explorations, and, if you'll permit me to contradict Marshall McLuhan (can I, really?)—the artists' dreams are so much farther advanced than the rest of the human activities that it will take at least another ten years, maybe, to catch up with the artist and to create proper tools to enable him to put those dreams into reality.

December 9, 1965

THE NEED FOR THE NARRATIVE AND NONNARRATIVE EXPRESSIONS IN ARTS

With an evening of La Monte Young's heavenly music, the first New Cinema Festival has come to its conclusion. For almost a month, I haven't seen any other movies but those at the Cinematheque. I intend to catch up, these coming days, with whatever I missed. For example, Fellini's *8½*. I am anxious to see Fellini's film because of all the conflicting reports. Yes, those conflicting reports!

There is always the "serious" critic who will condemn anything that isn't "deep," and by depth he always means a certain literary depth. Then, there is always the other critic, one who will condemn anything that isn't "pure," "visual" cinema. In the middle, there is the Dwight Macdonald kind, who is neither here nor there, who writes well, has a sharp pen, but whose knowledge is of a potpourri kind: something from the silent cinema, something from the sound cinema, something from Godard; basically, a literary critic (notice how Macdonald scribbles down all those lines from the movies which he dislikes in order to prove how silly they are, and they sound silly, taken out of context and stripped away from their very essence: cinema).

It is almost trite to say certain things about art, things which are so obvious that we don't even think about them when we talk about music, painting, or writing. But it would do us some good if we'd remember them when we discuss films. Here is one paragraph from the *Cinema Primer* which both audience and critics should keep well in mind: "All art, as far as one can trace back, is marked by a quality that reflects all of man. On one hand, art re-creates, interprets, creates the world by impersonation, by enacting man's experiences and myths, by telling stories; on the other hand, art reaches towards the symbolic, or the ideal, or the abstract."

In music we have pure sound, and we have the opera; in painting we have the decorative, the abstract, and we have representa-

tional and story painting; in literature, we have from lyric poetry to the letterists, we have Shakespeare and Tolstoi. There are always these two directions in art: a desire for telling the story, and a desire for the experience of pure words, sounds, colors, forms. That is how the fullness of human experience expresses itself through art.

This fullness is being denied only to the art of cinema; it is supposed in cinema that only storytelling is the cinema.

Such is the contemporary attitude of our press, film critics, film magazines, and film historians—not only in the United States but all over the world. The public, misled, follows them.

This attitude was also reflected at the Museum of Modern Art's recent symposium, entitled "Whither Underground?" where filmmakers, who are primarily concerned with images, and not versed in words, were mercilessly delivered to smart, literary critics who butchered them.

These smart and literate critics are ignorant of the fact that cinema, during the last five years (and through a series of earlier avant-gardes), has matured to the level of other arts. We all like stories—but when something is overdone, it's overdone.

During the last five years, cinema has become an art with a duality, capable of expressing the full scale of human experience—the tragic experience of the world on the one hand, and the most subtle, lyrical imagery, abstractions, pure motion, pure vision, pure film medium itself, on the other hand. That's what has happened during these five years. While newspapers and critics were engrossed in the sensational and secondary aspects of the movement—for a movement indeed it was, and is, a movement of man's spirit—an entire body of works of beauty was created.

THERE IS NO ABSTRACT CINEMA:

ALL CINEMA IS CONCRETE

There is a paradox here. The cinema, even at its most ideal and abstract, remains in its essence concrete; it remains the art of motion and light and color. Once we leave our prejudices and preconditionings outside, we open ourselves to the concreteness of the pure visual and kinesthetic experience, to the "realism" of

light and motion, to the pure experience of the eye, to the matter of cinema. As the painter had to become conscious of the matter of painting, the *paint*; or the sculptor conscious of *stone, wood, marble*; so the art of cinema, to grow into its own maturity, had to become conscious of the matter of cinema—*light, motion, celluloid, screen*.

This late art, which we thought was capable, at best, of re-creating the tragic experience of life through melodrama, is now reaching, through its poets, together with all other arts, towards more subtle and less rational aesthetic illuminations.

These are the things to remember.

Cinema has reached its maturity and can no longer be discussed or reviewed or treated—neither by the audiences nor the critics—as a medium for telling stories. Now cinema, like any other art, has two ends, and they are far apart.

The day our publishers realize this, the contemporary movie reviewers will be fired as narrow, incompetent, and damaging reporters. Meanwhile, they will continue butchering cinema and misleading people.

December 23, 1965

MORE ON EXPANDED CINEMA: RAUSCHENBERG,
OLDENBURG, WHITMAN

Last column I did not have time to report on the closing program of the New Cinema Festival I at the Cinematheque, but I should mention it now since it was one of the most successful programs of the festival. (It was repeated last week.) Each of the artists—Oldenburg, Rauschenberg, Whitman—came with beautifully conceived and executed pieces. Oldenburg's *Moviehouse* piece was performed in the seats of the theatre, while the audience stood in the aisles. A group of performers sat in the seats watching a movie (light without film, projected from low angle, the heads of the "audience" often came on the screen); they moved from place to place, restless, as people do, smoking a lot, carrying packages and bundles and shopping bags; a man tried to drag a bicycle across the seats—a colorful medley of people from various walks

of life. It was all pure Oldenburg, and a very beautiful Oldenburg; a moviehouse poem of sorts, like all Oldenburg happenings usually are—poetic essences of very concrete daily realities; a look at the familiar from a poet's distance.

Robert Rauschenberg presented a motion-dance-objects piece, *Map Room II*, with images, objects, compositions, and symbols reminding us of his work in painting, but also different—I thought it was more like seeing his very personal autobiography put here on stage, everything executed with perfect precision and clarity that contained a certain classical Da Vinci-like beauty.

Robert Whitman's show combined live action with the filmed image. He played his performers against the images, for humor and for surprise (the same performers appeared in the film and on stage). Like any good magician, he had a good bag of tricks ready; as an artist, he let the tricks fail, sort of, and used their imperfections as a formal quality. Still, Whitman's show very often came close to being just a display of virtuosity; it was more on the slick side than any other of his shows I have seen—I mean, it was less ambiguous, more one-dimensional. But it was beautiful, nevertheless, and something completely new in movie-theatre experience. Only Emshwiller matches him in the effective and planned use of cinema for surprises' sake. That is also the main weakness of both artists, perhaps, this surprise effect—for once it is gone, much is gone.

I couldn't say it about Rauschenberg's show, though—and particularly about one, and the most memorable single image (or moment) of this, or any other, festival: his "neon stick" walk across the stage which amazingly and ingeniously combined formal beauty, visual beauty, and richness of meaning. As an image it can never be erased from one's memory. A man, a mysterious figure, walks across the stage, slowly. Huge luminous blocks are attached to his feet. In his hand he is carrying a long, luminous, neon stick. In this walk, in this image, Rauschenberg has created one of the richest and most mysterious visual metaphors I have seen in all my movie- and theatre-going experience. That metaphor could mean many things, and a different thing to each of us—but none can remain unmoved by it.

1966

February 17, 1966

ON THE EXPANDED CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE EXPANDED EYE

A few months ago, when writing on the Psychedelic Theatre, I stated, or I thought, that what some of the drug users take for an expanded consciousness is only an expanded eye, an increased ability of seeing.

Since then, I have had other occasions to think on this subject. One day, a young avant-garde woman playwright, after looking at some of Stan Brakhage's movies, walked out muttering that "these films do not increase man's consciousness; they are only for the eyes." It was a typical reaction of someone used to thinking and seeing in literal, not visual, terms, of one who confuses cinema with literature.

"You mean," I asked her, "that your vision, your eyes, has nothing to do with your consciousness? Does your consciousness exist separately from your eye? And what about music? Is music only for the ears? Is your consciousness connected with your ears?" What is really consciousness, that big word? Every one of our many senses is a window to the world and to ourselves. The eye, liberated from the inhibitions of seeing, gives us a new understanding of the world. This liberation of the eye can be done by drugs, or by an education through the mind—this is really Gerald

Oster's subject. Much research is being done these days in this neglected area.

The other day William Vehr screened his new film, *Brothel*. Something bothered me about this film. It seemed to be so rich in textures, in colors, that at some point I had to walk out. Then I came back again and I looked at some more. I told this to Bill Vehr.

"For over a year now I have been studying the arts of India," he said. "I found there something in common, spiritually, with what I want to do. I conceive, or I make my films like tapestries. They could be watched like oriental tapestries. My film is an ornament in time, a film tapestry woven with bodies, close-ups of materials, drapes, costumes, and blotches of color, joined together by the continuous movement of the camera. I never stay too long on one detail or one face. This face, this figure, never becomes a character, a person—the camera keeps floating in and out, it goes up the shoe, up the leg, up the hand, across the eyes, and on the bracelet—this tapestry has really no end and no beginning, it could go so for ever and ever. Isn't it legitimate in art to do something like this?" "It is perfectly legitimate," admitted I. God hasn't written with fire on the sky that cinema (or any art) is only this or that. Only the history of cinema is finite, not the future.

ON BILL VEHR AND THE ORNAMENTAL CINEMA

How do we look at a piece of tapestry? I asked further. Do we look for more of the same, or do we rest our eyes turning from one kind of design or color to another? There is a rhythm, a spacing, that we make with our own eyes (plus, nature has provided us with blinking). Now, this film is in front of our eyes all the time. Brakhage told his audience while introducing *The Art of Vision* (which runs over four hours) that they are welcome to walk out at some intervals if they feel like doing so—he has done so himself—and then come back and watch more. It could even be projected (as he has done) in one's own home, in the evening, while you do some other things at the same time. Like looking at a piece of tapestry, then looking at somebody in the room, or at the window, then looking again at the tapestry. Can we appreciate cinema that way? It seems possible.

We are only beginning to find out these things. These are all

new aspects to cinema. It is perfectly legitimate, as an aesthetic experience (or, simply, as an experience) and as cinema, to have screenings in open rooms in which you wander in and out, where movies, Bill Vehr's, or Andy Warhol's, or almost anybody's, are being projected continuously. We cannot measure or judge, evaluate all cinematic creations according to the established theatrical motion picture viewing conditions and traditions.

ON ART AND CRAFT AND ANONYMITY IN ART

When USCO had their show, not very long ago, at the Cinematheque, they stressed their anonymity. "In a world of simultaneous operations, you do not have to be first to be on top," said the program note. This is another new idea that is floating around lately. It is no great surprise today to see a college literary magazine with no names of the authors printed next to the poems. Andy Warhol doesn't sign or title his movies. The idea that there is no art, that everything is craft, and that all art is bourgeois (says Fluxus), is becoming wider and wider with the spreading of psychedelic drugs and with the dissemination of Oriental philosophies. What we do existed before us; we have seen it in our dreams or in other lives; identities can be exchanged; nothing new is created or added to what already exists; everything is an illusion; there is no beginning and no end, no top and no bottom.

However, even if the word "art" is replaced with the word "craft," we end at the same place: The best craftsman is the most honored man, the most sought out man—whether he makes a painting or an everyday utensil, a vase, a Brillo box, or a chair. And then, every great craftsman at a certain point loses his awareness of how he does it: He just does it.

The good thing about this is that, once the name of the artist is dropped, once the works of art begin to float freely as pieces of craft not attached to any name, we'll be forced, gradually, to acquire a truer, a better knowledge of what a good craft (art) is: We'll have to make all the choices ourselves, there will be no name mystique or prestige attached to the artifact to help us. In other words: no more snobbery. The general level of taste, the appreciation of the beautiful, should, therefore, increase.

March 3, 1966

AN INTERVIEW WITH MAYSLES BROTHERS

David and Al Maysles, together with Ricky Leacock, are working in that style of film-making which has become known as the direct cinema (in France it's called *cinéma vérité*). Until now, whenever one wanted to explain what the direct cinema is all about, one had a hard time in doing so. But with Truman Capote's book, *In Cold Blood*, answers became somewhat easier. Direct cinema has now a parallel in Capote's nonfictional novel. That's what Maysles' *Showman* is: a nonfictional film novel. It isn't a perfect answer, but it makes the process involved easier to understand.

Hearing that Maysles Brothers had just completed another film, *With Love, from Truman*, I went to see them, and we had the following conversation:

JM: You have been working together on films. Is there any "labor" division between you two?

David Maysles: Al is responsible for the development of the equipment. He has been working, for instance, for over three years now, building a new camera which will facilitate the film work that we do. He is also responsible for all the shooting. I am responsible for all the sound, the production, and the supervising of the editing. That is more or less the general line of things.

Al Maysles: When you say "division of labor," in our kind of work, it is a little misleading. Our work overlaps. We don't direct in the conventional sense. We both select, for example, and we arrive at an idea between us. While we are shooting, we have words back and forth—what we should film and what we shouldn't film. So it's direction by selecting.

JM: how many films have you made till now? Which ones would you like the public to know about?

AM: There are four major works: *Showman*. . . .

JM: You don't think you've done anything of importance before *Showman*?

AM: There were contributions to the work of other people. I

am talking about the films which are completely our own. The list, then, is: *Showman*, *What's Happening: The Beatles in the USA*, *Meet Marlon Brando*, and now, *With Love, from Truman*.

JM: Looking back at those four works, it seems to me that it was natural for you to bump into Truman Capote: Your cold-blooded direct-cinema style is so close to what Capote is doing in his book, *In Cold Blood*. Do you see any connection between Truman Capote's nonfictional novel and your own work in the nonfictional cinema?

DM: Yes, we are interested in poetry that comes out of nonfiction. Truman Capote's book is the closest thing to our own work we have ever come across. What we are doing is in direct parallel in motion picture form to what Capote is doing in the literary form. The only difference is that in this particular book, he had to go back before the events were taking place. In other words, the murder took place, then he had to find out what happened, how did it happen. He had to go back and to reconstruct—which we didn't do. But it could very well happen that the next nonfiction novel he writes will not be of murder but something that starts the moment he gets into it, and everything will happen as he sees it. He has said himself that our work is the closest thing to him. There is a common bond, in our styles and approaches.

There was one bit of conversation that we had that was particularly fascinating and exciting for us. When he was talking about the subject matter, and when we were discussing which story he would like to take next, what story he would like to do next, how does one choose the subject—he said that the subject matter of crime has never been of particular interest to him. It wasn't even when he engaged in it. What was interesting to me was that you pick up a subject matter, and at first you may not see much reason in choosing it—but as you begin to follow it, and as soon as you find something of yourself in it—you are in. What Capote found in his subject was Perry. Perry was just like Capote, he was very sensitive. In other words, you find something in the story, in the subject matter, that, unconsciously, begins to fascinate you.

JM: Capote looked for his subject matter in the newspapers. How do you choose your subjects?

AM: In the case of the Capote film, NET was doing a series on novelists, and we chose Capote because he particularly appealed

to us. And it was a labor of love, because NET doesn't give any profit incentives, as you probably know.

JM: By now, you have completed four films. Do you see any development in your style? With which of your films are you most content?

DM: We are most happy with the *Showman*, really.

JM: For what reasons?

DM: I think for the reason, I say it now, because I am quite sure of this—that we went into that film like a writer goes into writing a short story. Its growth is more organic, multisided, and complex—many different feelings, moods, situations are reflected, the character of the man is presented in a more complex manner. The Capote portrait is much simpler, but we like it also. There is much feeling in it. We like all four, really. Each one is doing something else. But *Showman* still sticks out as the “accomplishment.”

Talking about Capote's and our own techniques, there are other parallels. He, for instance, is very conscious of intruding upon his subject, of making any kind of intrusion. That's why he doesn't take notes. The same way that we try to build our equipment. We try to gain a certain kind of rapport, some relationship with the subject, as Capote does. To establish this relationship, we have perfected a camera that doesn't make any noise. It helps us to get that type of spontaneity, of rapport, without someone being self-conscious because of the equipment. Also, we work to establish a balanced human relationship before we can start shooting—you have to get the complete trust of the person you are filming.

JM: Is anyone else, besides yourselves and Leacock, doing anything worthwhile in direct cinema, here or abroad?

AM: Capote has inspired us more than anyone else. Or *8½*; or *Hustler*.

JM: Why *Hustler*?

AM: Its simplicity, perhaps. The story, really. The structure of the story was so simple. Something that we could do in a real life situation.

We don't see much of TV or cinema. We are all by ourselves. Really, it takes time to make films. It took us three years to get out of *Showman*, financially. We did it the way we wanted it, but

we had to take the losses. It may be shown, eventually, but at the moment it doesn't fit the networks' appetite.

JM: What happens to your movies after they are shown on television?

AM: We own them all, but we have no official permission to show them in theatres. They are all in various states of restriction.

JM: You shot your Capote film around New York. But there was one cemetery shot in it, from Kansas. Was it stock footage?

AM: Oh, no! We went to Kansas just for that one shot. We felt we had to do it. As a matter of fact, while shooting it, to help ourselves, we had a small tape recorder on us, with Capote's voice on it, reading that part. For authenticity of feeling.

JM: Are you planning another film?

DM: We are still looking for a good story that would sustain itself for an hour and a half. We are going to make it as soon as we find it. It is funny—we are working the same way, Capote and us. We buy newspapers, magazines, we look through all the items. One thing is certain: This story will have something the other films we did till now didn't have—it will be because it is a good story, but not because it's about a "famous person." It will be a person and a story that nobody knows anything about.

March 24, 1966

AN INTERVIEW WITH TONY CONRAD: ON THE FLICKERING CINEMA OF PURE LIGHT

The Flicker, a thirty-minute movie by Tony Conrad, is one of the most violently discussed movies in town. I say violently, because some viewers do not even consider it a movie. If you ask them what it is, they say they do not know. It may be an optical experiment. Or it may be a medical test for the eyes. Introduction to the film warns that those with epileptic tendencies should stay out. During the shows at the Cinematheque a doctor was present at all screenings.

Then, there are the others, the minority—I myself belong to that minority—who think that *The Flicker* is one of the few original works of cinema and a most unusual aesthetic experience of

light. To clarify some of the matters, I had the following conversation with Tony Conrad, the maker of *The Flicker*:

JM: Why did you make *The Flicker*?

Tony Conrad: For a long time I have been interested in the type of things that you see with your eyes closed. Some people have tried painting this—but such paintings can be only very bad imitations of what we see. The seeing with your eyes closed is a very different type of sensory experience from the visual impressions that you get with your eyes open, when your eyes are focused on an object. The only way to have such impressions is to use a device that produces them—doesn't project them, but actually produces them in the eye.

JM: Is *The Flicker* a movie?

TC: I don't think of *The Flicker* as a movie as we know it today. It is a piece of film that is experienced by a group of people in various ways—depending on how they choose to approach it. There is a variety of effects that I am investigating, effects that act on your eyes so as to produce the actual imagery directly within the observer rather than in a normal way of having the eye interpret the light patterns on the screen.

JM: Is your work in cinema connected in any way with your work in music—I mean, specifically, your collaboration with La Monte Young?

TC: In *The Flicker*, I was working within a form of light that is broken down not into areas or into colors but into frequencies. So that there is a numerological way of thinking about it. But outside of that there is really very little connection, except for certain stylistic ideas that La Monte Young and I have in common and which have naturally affected the overall organization of the film.

JM: Your film is a complex orchestration of white and black frames?

TC: Yes, all frames are black or white. The film is actually divided into about fifty sections each of which consists of a repeating pattern made up of one rhythm of black and white frames. Nevertheless, most people see colors, and that is not unusual at all.

JM: Is there any one way of looking at it?

TC: I don't think so. Most people are still concerned with what it is. Is it a movie? How do you look at it? Is it the form? Is it the

content and nothing else? What's going on? Is this expanded cinema or no cinema at all? People come to see the movie, and they are used to seeing representational images. They want to see images desperately. So desperately, in fact, that a lot of them hypnotize themselves into seeing imagery. Like, for instance, a brother and a sister, both, seeing *The Flicker* at the same time, at approximately the same point in the film saw a bird for about the same length of time. Someone else saw a dragon. Another saw cubes, rotating geometrical shapes. These are specific images rather than, for instance, mandala patterns (which is a way of talking about a kind of random retinal activity that you usually feel with your eyes closed or under various other conditions).

JM: Your interest wasn't a hundred per cent scientific?

TC: I had certain ideas which I wanted to see done on film. I had seen stroboscopic effects and I had been stunned by the tremendous impact, the experiences that I had under stroboscopic light. I also knew that stroboscopic light had been used effectively in the productions of rock 'n' roll, like, for instance, what was done by Murray the K in Brooklyn, two years ago. But it seemed to me that nobody had ever taken this in any other way than as an effect in conjunction with something else, and I had always seen it as fantastically beautiful in itself. I wanted to develop it further. The patterns that I selected to use in *The Flicker* are an extension of the usual stroboscope techniques into a much more complex system. *The Flicker* employs harmonic relations, speeds, pulses, and patterns different from those used until now.

(At this point in our conversation, James Mullins, the manager of the Cinematheque, where *The Flicker* was screened, walked in.)

JM: What was the effect of the film on you? You saw it twice.

James Mullins: It gave me headaches.

JM: You never had headaches in your life before?

Mullins: No. I had them always.

JM: That means, anything can cause it. What are the usual causes?

Mullins: I have photogenic migraine.

JM: What is it?

Mullins: It is caused by certain light conditions or effects on the eyes.

JM: Did you know it before, I mean, what kind of migraine you had?

Mullins: No. I found it out after seeing *The Flicker*, by talking to the doctors.

JM: I see. *The Flicker* can be used as a detector of the photogenic migraine. That's something—art or not art. What other reactions took place at the screening?

Mullins: Someone threw up.

TC: Is that a favorable or unfavorable response?

JM: That was definitely a favorable response. The man probably had something bad in his stomach and the movie cleaned his stomach out. That's good, no?

Mullins: In general, people felt that it was a very important film. But, at the same time, some of them didn't find it pleasant. It's like looking at the sun.

TC: The intensity of the light as reflected from the screen is in no way comparable to the light of the sun. It cannot produce any damage in any eye. I think that a lot of uneasiness in some people is produced by the fact that they are exposed for the first time to a completely new sensation. I found it strange the first time myself. But the second time I relaxed and went along with it. In fact, there are certain kinds of neuroses, war neuroses, that have been treated with the use of stroboscopic light. On the other hand, the stroboscopes are used to detect certain kinds of epilepsy. At a certain point, as the frequency is being increased, a certain psychophysical reaction begins to be noticeable, which, if the stroboscope would continue, would result in an epileptic seizure. But photogenic epilepsy among adults is very rare—one person in about perhaps 15,000.

JM: Some people asked me in the lobby, after the screening: What's the content of this film? I said: It's the light, don't you see? God is light, so the content is God! Anyway, is *The Flicker* a work of art?

TC: I was speaking this afternoon with someone who said that for him the transformation that changes a scientific experiment into an amusement, or an amusemental experience—or, in other words, into a work of art—did not take place. It seemed quite different from all other aesthetic experiences. He reacted very strongly, he told me, to the fact that there was no representational

imagery in the film. So, instead of watching the film he turned around and he watched the audience in the light reflected from the screen. He found that the transformation did occur, that it did create an artistic effect in him.

I think that *The Flicker* acts as a very versatile art object. The observer can really use it to his own means over a wide range of possibilities. The beauty lies within the beholder himself. In most aesthetic presentations—drama, cinema, music—the common attitude is that the amusement or the beauty or the effect of the experience is wholly within the entertainer; that the entertainer is actually creating the impressions or the reactions himself. *The Flicker*, I think, presents a clean-cut case of the experience lying wholly within the observer. Most of the details, most of the impact, most of what people find in it, what they take away with them from having watched the film, wasn't there, was conjured up only when they watched this film: It didn't exist before, it doesn't exist on film, it wasn't on the screen. On the other hand, I don't feel it's my responsibility to be able to entertain everyone, because no one can guarantee an entertainment for everyone. Even the most classical ballet, for instance, would be loathed by most of the world, because most of the people just couldn't care less. *The Flicker* will provide entertainment for people who like different things to happen to them, who like to take a chance and have new phenomena occur, and to perceive a new phenomenon.

April 14, 1966

AN INTERVIEW WITH GREGORY MARKOPOULOS,
ON GALAXIE

For three weeks, Gregory Markopoulos has been busy making film portraits. By now he has over twenty such portraits. The "sitters" include a wide variety of New York artists, poets, and friends, such as Parker Tyler, Jasper Johns, Panna Grady, Alfonso Ossorio, Frances Stelloff, Allen Ginsberg, Storm De Hirsch, Amy Taubin, W. H. Auden. Film portrait is a new film form. Recently, it has been used by Andy Warhol and, in *Songs*, by Stan Brakhage. I asked Gregory Markopoulos to answer a few questions:

JM: What are these portraits you're doing?

Gregory Markopoulos: These color portraits are in the tradition of portrait sittings. To these I have added certain film superimpositions, as befit the individual I am film-painting. Each portrait is only three minutes long, and takes about two hours to complete, depending on the intricacies involved. You see, I also time single frames throughout the filming. This means I still retain what I have learned from the aftereffects of *Twice a Man* and, even, *The Illiac Passion*. At the same time, without doing away with editing, I have incorporated what for me is a very interesting departure from my usual procedures in making a film. I would say, too, that my editing may thus become even stronger than before for I am working in that tradition which one might also name as documentary—planned on the spot, inspired by the subject, the surroundings, yet at the same time (because I am also editing in the camera) permitting an absolute freedom.

JM: You mentioned *The Illiac Passion*. What's happening to it, when are we going to see it?

GM: The shooting of *The Illiac Passion* was completed more than a year ago. It was edited from January to August of 1965. And, then, it remained idle in the vaults of the laboratory while I proceeded to find the funds to pay for the very expensive laboratory fees of printing. Each three minutes, you see, is estimated by the laboratory to be about \$500. Happily, thanks to private patronage (this seems to be the only way that a film of this type can be completed) the printing, as I have stated, has begun. I might add that the printing is so expensive because of the complexities involved with the furthering of my own personal film form (my own single frame variations) as a vital clue not only toward a new and much needed narrative form for the film spectator, but, hopefully, even beyond, toward the conception that the film-maker may well be one day the physician of the future. . . . As for when we will see the film—I would hazard that, keeping in mind the understanding of my laboratory, the enthusiasm of private patronage, and my own efforts to rouse some foundation to supplement the funds towards *The Illiac Passion*, it might be seen in the late fall.

JM: Do you see many so-called commercial films?

GM: I seldom see commercial films unless they happen to be

Joseph Levine releases. However, sometimes through sheer accident, I do come upon a very important commercial work. I am thinking of Curtis Harrington's *Woman of Blood*, which I saw in Boston a week ago. It is excellent, and fascinating, that Curtis Harrington was able to put so much of his own work into the science motion picture. There must have been rapport between the producer and himself. And I do know from personal experience (*Serenity*) how difficult this is.

JM: Which of the new avant-garde films do you like?

GM: I would say that the films of Mike Kuchar interest me very much at the moment. Also, some footage by a young film-maker in Boston, Tom Chomont, his footage (unedited) for *Night Blossoms*. I was particularly impressed with Mr. Chomont's footage because it reminded me of the painting (form and color) of Odilon Redon. Too often, the young new American film-maker will leave too many things to chance, thus avoiding that most important principle that, I fear, is lacking today in not only the amateur fields, but also in the professional, and that is *arete*, or excellence.

April 21, 1966

TO MAYOR LINDSAY

So the city is clubbing the arts again! So they are burning the books again, so they are tearing apart the little strips of films and the white blood of celluloid is drying in the impersonal and cold-eyed offices of the city.

The whole censorship and licensing business has become so childish by now that it's difficult even to get outraged about it. We all know that any official censorship of art (or life) is doomed, because man has entered into a different, freer, higher stage of consciousness. It's no use wasting much energy on fighting censorship: Censors and licensors are the last craggy symptoms of the old New York. There is a new New York coming! It's almost here! Mayor Lindsay: Please put your ear to the windows, and to the walls, and to the ground, and listen to the new vibrations in the air—and it's not only because it's April! It's a different kind of

April that's in the air. Cleaners of the city: Don't put the poor 42nd Street souls and artists in jails: Hire them to paint the subways white and in colors and flowers, and put music in subways, and 8 mm. movie screens so that the uptown and downtown ride will be like really going home, or like really going to see a friend. Oh, there are so many things to do in spring! Dear Mayor Lindsay: Don't let yourself be dragged down by the ghosts of the past!

ON FILM JOURNALISM AND NEWSREELS

I have been thinking and thinking these last few weeks, and now I should tell you what's bothering me. It's this: There are so many things happening round us, from the ghettos of L.A. to the smoky outskirts of Chicago and all across the country and in Vietnam, and in our own small city—big things, and small things, ugly things, and things like the eyes eaten out by smog, falling out and rolling into the gutters; and how the GIs are dying smiling and happy and in glory like butterflies. Things like that. We see nothing in our movies! And I am not talking about our poets: Our film poets have made the most beautiful poems in the world. I am talking about newsreels and about documentaries and about real life commentaries. With all the new techniques and equipment available to us, with almost weightless and almost invisible cameras, 8 mm. and 16 mm., and with sound, we can go today into any place we want and put everything on film. Why do we neglect film journalism? Eight mm. movies should be secretly shipped from Vietnam; 8 mm. movies should be shipped from the South; 8 mm. movies taken by the ten-year-old Harlem kids armed not with guns but 8 mm. cameras—let's flash them on our theatre screens, our home screens; 8 mm. movies smuggled out of prisons, of insane asylums, everywhere, everywhere. There should be no place on earth not covered by 8 mm. movies, no place without the buzzing of our 8 mm. cameras! Let's show everything, everything. We can do it today. We have to go through this, so that we can go to other things. We have to see everything, to look at everything through our lenses, see everything like for the first time: From a man sleeping, from our own navels, to our more complex daily activities, tragedies, loves, and crimes. Somewhere,

we have lost touch with our own reality and the camera eye will help us to make contact again.

Why should we leave all reporting to the press and TV? They are nice people but they are interested in making a living, in money, in many nice things, but not in seeing things. We know that we can never see things as they are, but at least we can come closer to them so that we could feel the warmth of their being or the coldness of their death.

Let's swamp the Cinematheque with newsreels, home-movie newsreels, not the Pathe Bros. newsreels, not the Walter Cronkite reports!

If anyone would ask me what was the most important thing that happened in cinema last week, I would answer that it was Shirley Clarke (who made *The Cool World* and *The Connection*) buying an 8 mm. camera! She is not ashamed of the tiny little 8 mm. camera, she is carrying it everywhere with her, and she is shooting, shooting. I am certain that this marks another big crack in Papa's cinema: That big ship will surely sink. And don't misunderstand me: We like studios and we like 70 mm. and we are going to shoot one million and ten million movies. But we have to do the 8 mm. job too.

The Film-Makers' Cooperative has established the End of Century Newsreel series which will be shipped to colleges, universities, theatres, and whoever wants them. Home-movie-makers all over the world are being asked to film and send to the Co-op whatever happens around the town, this city, country; whatever is exciting, terrible, or beautiful for others to see and to know. We have to start doing this *right now*. Let's record the dying century and the birth of another man. The time is here to change the ways of journalism on this planet Earth. The schools of journalism will soon replace their writing classes with 8 mm. movie-making classes. Let's surround the earth with our cameras, hand in hand, lovingly; our camera is our third eye that will lead us out and in and through. The buzz of our cameras should be louder than the buzz of the fuzzi. Nothing should be left unshown or unseen, dirty or clean: *Let us see* and go further, out of the swamps and into the sun.

May 5, 1966

ON SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT AND THE AVANT GARDE

Last week, Louis Marcorelles, a leading French film critic and an editor of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, spent some time in the city, searching for films for the coming Cannes Film Festival. Before he left New York, he made a statement to *The New York Times* that there will be no young American film-makers at Cannes this year because the “young American directors are simply not turning out films of more than routine interest.”

While he was in town, Shirley Clarke, Lionel Rogosin, Louis Brigante, and myself had a long talk with Louis Marcorelles. I will give you a few excerpts from what came out so that you'll know what the best critical minds of Europe feel about what we are doing here.

Louis Marcorelles explained to us that one of the purposes for his coming to New York was to inform us that there is an attempt in Europe to create an international distribution center for the new cinema.

JM: What do you mean by “new cinema”?

Louis Marcorelles: The new cinema, in our minds, is basically the independent commercial cinema. It doesn't exist in America—but it exists in Canada, Brazil, and Hungary. These are films made by the new generation, people who are between twenty-five and thirty-five. After McCarthyism and Stalinism, they have gained a different outlook at their societies. They work through the medium of fiction film and documentary—but basically the fiction film. In the communist countries, it's state-sponsored; when they work in capitalistic countries, they work on a low budget, between \$10,000 and \$100,000. The main difference between the New American Cinema, or the so-called underground cinema, and this new cinema is that the underground cinema costs a little amount of money, and is purely personal, and is free economically, while the Brazilian or Canadian cinema, even when it costs only \$10,000, it still has to get that money back.

(At this point, we explained to Mr. Marcorelles about how the

Film-Makers' Co-op works, about the Film-Makers' Distribution Center, and the London branch of the Co-op which is opening next month.)

LM: But what you are doing is for the underground film only.

JM: No. For all and any films. We are letting all film-makers know that any film-maker who has an extra print of a film can send it either to the New York or London branches of the Co-op and the film will be distributed, no matter how much or how little it cost to make. We are not categorizing what kind of film.

LM: But this cinema that now is known as underground cinema doesn't exactly fit into the same category which we call the new cinema and which is commercial cinema.

JM: But these are unnecessary and confusing terms.

LM: What I mean is that these films cost \$10,000 to make, which is a good amount even if it's low budget.

Shirley Clarke: What do you think *Scorpio Rising* cost?

LM: *Scorpio Rising* is on the verge of what I call commercial cinema.

SC: We aren't making the cost categories any longer. The Co-op has my films, and Rogosin's, and Markopoulos'—we don't discuss categories. They may cost \$200,000 or \$200.

JM: Each film at the Center or the Co-op requires a special treatment, each film has its own audience—that's the only difference. It may seem to you a little bit confusing. You have a very clear idea of what you want to do. And it may seem to you that we don't have. It may seem to you that we are all mixed up. But that's part of what we are doing. This mixup, this confusion is part of the New American Cinema. We don't like separations. The cinema is one.

LM: It's not realistic. You may be able to do it with amateur films.

JM: It's unrealistic to separate. And then, who wants to be realistic?

Lionel Rogosin: I am surprised that you as a critic call our films amateurish. Do you call *Scorpio Rising* amateur? Or *The Brig*? Because they cost little money to make? I don't understand.

LM: But they were made with film-makers' own money.

JM: It's not true. You don't know what Kenneth Anger went through to raise money for his films, or I did for *The Brig*. Even if

it costs only \$100 you have to raise it. Anger had more difficulty raising money for his film than many a "commercial" film-maker for their million dollar movies.

LM: They cannot be professional.

SC: What do you call *Umberto D.*?

LM: Professional.

SC: Why? It was made with his own money!

LR: It is a matter of how good the film is—not whether it was made with a hammer or a chisel.

LM: Maybe you are right. Our center eventually will work in this direction also. I don't say that the work of Brakhage or Markopoulos or Anger is not important. But at this time Shirley's films and maybe Lionel's films would be the only ones that would fit into this category.

SC: I don't think we'll be able to participate in any international center that thinks in such terms. We refuse to make that kind of separation.

JM: You look from the how-much-it-cost angle; we look from the what-kind-of-film angle; what's its audience, and how to reach it.

LM: This new cinema of Brazil, Canada, Hungary is definitely very socially rooted, engaged. It may not be so individualistic as the underground cinema. The fight that these film-makers are leading may seem to be divorced from the underground.

JM: It is not the question that they are engaged and we not. It is a question of different realities, of different concerns in each country. The artist in Brazil feels that his people are hungry; he feels that that is an important reality of his country; so he makes a film about bread. We feel that there is a different reality that is important in America today.

LM: Your position here is completely different from Europe or Brazil and Hungary. You have Hollywood here which controls everything, even people's minds. And then you have the underground which is empty, completely empty. There is no real commitment on the part of the artist.

LR: I disagree. During the last few years there were at least ten films made with social commitment. And a lot of stuff that comes from Europe that is supposed to be so great has zero social commitment.

SC: There are thirty films screened at the Bleecker Street Cinema's New American Cinema retrospective this and next month. I want to see a similar program from any other country, as good, as interesting, with as much variety and as socially committed.

LM: I personally feel that cinema should be highly socially responsible, in the Brechtian line. Cinema has to be located in a given time, even if it's poetry—in a given time, a given purpose.

JM: But that's what we are doing. In Brazil they have hunger problems. But here we have hunger of the soul. So the form and content is immediately connected with these needs of place and time. If you'd think deeper about the underground cinema you'd find that it reflects the American man as deeply as the Brazilian cinema reflects the Brazilian man.

LM: I feel that the underground cinema is completely divorced from America.

JM: That is because you don't know what's the real reality of America that really asks to be brought out and developed. The underground cinema is touching something that has been very neglected. For the essence of the American man was beginning to die, he was becoming like a machine and like money. Now, something is beginning to happen. And that is the most important thing and it's here that the work must be done. You may think that something else may be more important. But it is not.

SC: You see, we are no longer bread-hungry. What we are, we are hungry out of our souls. We are losing our souls. We are losing our hearts.

JM: And the work is being done there. This is the deepest engagement that one could have in America today. I even have a feeling that that is true of any other place in the world today.

LR: There are feature films that are engaged in the way Marcelles is talking about as well. Like *Babo 73*.

SC: We are doubly engaged.

JM: That's why it's very important that Shirley has bought an 8 mm. camera.

SC: I am ready. This is for me like I was doing a novel. Now I can do it.

LM: Without sound?

SC: What do you mean without sound? How do you know what sound I am going to have?

LM: I have my theories to articulate.

JM: Oh, there are many theories. Every film-maker has his own theory.

LM: I have a very important question to all of you, particularly Shirley and Jonas. How do you relate to people who see *The Singing Nun*?

JM: Then, the question really is: Where do you begin? Before you reach the one who is watching *The Singing Nun*, you have a line of, say, a hundred people, a lowering progression of sensitivity, of mental and spiritual development. If you have really given up the country, and the man, then you compromise yourself to the end and you make another *Singing Nun*, and make money. But if you don't compromise, and if you believe that the man can be changed, that he can grow and build some kind of basis, and if you have some kind of basis yourself, and if you are an artist, then you begin from the top, depending where you are yourself, depending on the brightness of your own vision of man, and wherever you feel it is possible for you to plant that vision of man without dirtying or breaking it. The one who is watching *The Singing Nun* may never be reached, he may be a goner, and he will die (to be reborn, no doubt) but that is not the question. Certain things are out of our reach. . . . We may not even reach him in this generation—but we'll reach him in the next one—if we are really that bright ourselves.

SC: You don't give up the country because its people are lined up to see *The Singing Nun*.

JM: It's an old moral and exasperating problem, to reach that one man on the bottom. He can be reached perhaps by grace alone. Or by a shock. Which may be the same. I don't know. In any case he has to be reborn, spiritually and bodily.

LM: But you could make something that could touch this man.

JM: You have to change this man before he can see anything on the next higher level.

LM: The greatest art for me is that which reaches everybody.

JM: That is true also. Everything has two (and more) ends. Because one could reason the other way too: Let's save first the one who is closest to the abyss—we can always come back to the ninety-nine others. . . . If it's right to think in terms of "saving" at all. . . . Some people have gone out of their minds thinking about these matters . . . so we better stop right here.

May 26, 1966

ON THE PLASTIC INEVITABLES AND THE STROBE LIGHT

Suddenly, the intermedia shows are all over the town. At the Dom (Jackie Cassen and USCO); at the Cheetah; at the Martinique Theatre (Robert Whitman); at the Riverside Museum (USCO); at the Cinematheque (Kosugi). Etc., etc. There were artists working with sound-light-multiple projections for a good ten years but they remained in experimental, semi-private stages until the Expanded Cinema survey at the Cinematheque last autumn. When the survey was first planned the idea was to pull out these artists, whose work I had followed privately for years, into the light of day, and see how they will hold. I felt that without such an exposure they were beginning to lose the perspective of what they were doing. Thus the Pandora's box was opened.

The Plastic Inevitables (Velvet Underground; Warhol and Company) performances at the Dom during the month of April provided the loudest and most dynamic exploration platform for this new art. The strength of Plastic Inevitables, and where they differ from all the other intermedia shows and groups, is that they are dominated by the ego. Warhol has attracted toward himself the most egocentric personalities and artists. The auditorium, every aspect of it—singers, light throwers, strobe operators, dancers—at all times are screaming with screeching, piercing personality pain. I say pain; it could also be called desperation. In any case, it is the last stand of the ego, before it either breaks down or goes to the other side. Plastic Inevitables give us the most dramatic expression of the contemporary generation—it's at the Dom that its needs and desperations are most dramatically split open.

At the other, almost opposite, end is the USCO show (at the Riverside Museum)—the show that sums up everything that USCO has done till now, and one of the shows that I ask you not to miss. The Riverside Museum show (as was the USCO show at the Cinematheque and is the current Long Island show) is a search for religious, mystical experience. Whereas in the case of

Plastic Inevitables the desire for the mystical experience is unconscious, the USCO is going after it in a more conscious way. They have arrived somewhere, and gained a certain peace, certain insights, and now they are beginning to meditate.

Nevertheless, often I get the impression that the mystical, meditative mood of many of my friends that I meet in psychedelic circles is really not the beginning of the new age or new cosmic consciousness, but the sunset peace of the Age of the Fish, of the Christian era—the sunset meditation. At the Plastic Inevitables, however, the dance floor and the stage are charged with the electricity of a dramatic break just before the dawn. If at the USCO show I feel surrounded by tradition, by the past, by the remnants of the oriental religions—at the Plastic Inevitables it is all Here and Now and the Future.

The Dom, after the Plastic Inevitables left for California, was taken over by women. Although USCO has a hand in it, it is practically run by Jackie Cassen and her team. The show falls somewhere between USCO and the Inevitables. There is the ego and a touch of perversion coming from the performers; and there is the mystical tendency on the dance floor and in the visuals—the kind of color abstraction and pattern play that by now has come to be known as psychedelic. Although much frantic movement and color and light play is going on, the show is peaceful, ornamental, and feminine, most of the time.

The Cheetah provides the most curious use of the intermedia. Whereas the Dom and USCO shows are restricted (or became restricted) to the In circle, Cheetah was designed for the masses. An attempt was made to go over the personal, over the ego, to reach the impersonal, abstract, universal. The smoky color patterns, the hugeness of the place, the shiny aluminum reflector sheets create an impersonal, metallic feeling—as opposed to the sexuality and emotionalism of the Inevitables or the mysticism of the USCO shows. One could say that the feeling at the Cheetah is one of being out—beyond both USCO and Warhol—in those regions where both the mystic preoccupations and the ego are abandoned, where you disappear and become a zero; no more empty body moving to and fro to the rhythms of the amazing Chambers Brothers in the gray twilight of the dance floor.

Very often while watching these shows, I ask myself: What are

all these lights doing? What is the real meaning of the strobes? Where is all this coming from or going to? Do any of the artists know the meaning and effect and power (both healing and damaging) of colors and lights? I have noticed, very often, how suddenly, during certain surges of colors and lights, I become electrified, my nerves become jumpy as if somewhere deep inside I were pierced with a knife; or, at other times, suddenly the peace surrounds and takes me over. The same with the new sounds.

Yes, but that's what this is all about—partially: We are over the first, experimental, private stage. Now we are thrown into the open, to find out what this is all about, what it's doing to us. Man will find out soon what the light is all about; what the color is all about; what the movement is all about. The Pandora's box of light and color and motion has been opened because the time was ready for it. There are moments, at the Dom, and at the Riverside Museum, when I feel I am witnessing the beginnings of new religions, that I find myself in religious, mystical environments where the ceremonials and music and body movements and the symbolism of lights and colors are being discovered and explored. The very people who come to these shows have all something of a religious bond among them. Something is happening and is happening fast—and it has something to do with light, it has everything to do with light—and everybody feels it and is in waiting—often, desperately.

June 16, 1966

MORE ON STROBE LIGHT AND INTERMEDIA

A few weeks ago, I raised a question: What is the strobe light all about? The strobe has been on my mind for some time now, as it has been on the minds of many other people I know. Last week, while talking with Steve Durkee, who is responsible for much of the USCO show, a few new thoughts came on the subject.

JM: We keep asking this question, "What's the strobe all about?" because, in a sense, the strobe dramatizes the intermedia, the light shows. One could even say that it dramatizes the light itself.

Steve Durkee: Strobe is the digital trip. In other words, what the strobe is basically doing, it's turning on and off, completely on and completely off. You can't do it with the incandescent light, you can do it only with gas. It goes on and off, on and off. It creates a discontinuance so that it looks like the flicks. It's real, no question about its reality; but so far as what's doing—we know little about it.

JM: Since there is nothing but the white light in it, it represents—as some people feel about it—the point of death, or nothingness.

SD: Death? Yeah. We live in the world of magicians, really. What humans have learned to do is to tap into the fifth element, or ether, into this fantastic energy source, and they draw from it for their own use—that's what we see manifested in electricity. I don't think about it either as negative or positive—just an energy that is all around us. We use strobes, and they turn a lot of people off. A lot of people think about it as about DMT: a very metallic, harshly synthetic type of thing. But then, again, it is perhaps only a question of acclimatization. Fifty years from now, everybody may be living with strobe lights. These things are hard to tell. But that death thing is certainly part of it. The on and off. Actually, almost all electric lights go on and off sixty times a second anyway, that's how they operate, the cycle alternation. But the incandescence itself—the filament in the bulb holds the light so that you don't get that harsh on and off. What do you think about strobes?

JM: I am still thinking about it.

SD: Do you like them?

JM: They don't bother me. I have met a number of people who have, they say, gained much from various aspects of the intermedia shows. But the strobe always bothers them. Some of them feel that there is something almost evil about it. But how could the light be evil? But then, when we talk about light we usually think about the sun, and there is warmth in the sun. The strobe is cold. But it's always there at whatever intermedia show you go to—it's always there, in one form or another. Sometimes for rhythmical reasons, sometimes to create the illusion of motion. Maybe it's something that joins cinema and whatever else it is.

SD: The best use I have seen of strobes was at the Trips Festival (at the Dom) where they had them hung up on wires, and

something that looked like shower curtains, and people would go inside and dance, under the strobes, and you could see the incredible scenes of these people, inside. And I began thinking about them as showers, electrical showers. You go inside this thing and you go through the whole thing and you come out.

JM: On the dance floor, under the strobes, very often you lose the sense of the musical rhythm, you pick up the strobe rhythm, instead—you can't even hear the sound, you lose the sense of sound. . . .

SD: Or who you are—because all you see are fragments of yourself. It's really like being in a movie.

JM: You become a particle, a grain of the movie. Maybe that's what it is. We are cut by strobe light into single frames, to eight frames per second or whatever the strobe frequency is, on and off. . . .

SD: Like movies becoming real. . . .

JM: Maybe only now some clarity is beginning to emerge about what cinema is all about. Or, perhaps, the matters are being confused completely. For eighty years now all we hear and see is cinema cinema cinema, but we know nothing about why it came into existence, from what deep human or cosmic necessity, and why it came at the end of the Piseean Age. What's the meaning of our becoming single frames?

SD: It is hard to understand the meaning but it certainly seems to be what's happening.

JM: Spirituality? Dissolving all the points of hard resistance, both of matter and mind? So that every reality that is here like a rock is being atomized? You know, we started with a simple screen and one-long-take images; then we started superimposing images; triple superimpositions; then two, three, eight screens; single frames; superimpositions were further atomized, spiritualized by silk screens and colored veils and sound tracks. Now we've left the screen, the film, and we come down to ourselves, with strobes we cut ourselves into single frames, like some symbolic or magic gesture or ritual. Is this a desire to reach other dimensions, to go beyond our skins? Or just the opposite?

SD: Still, some people are really turned off by strobes.

JM: But it's very possible that those are the fears of something incoming. We are going into a more spiritual age and there is a

fear of losing the old bag with all the junk that's in it—a fear of death of the old. So it's evil, they say—that's how big the fear is. But light shouldn't create fear if you're open to light. It creates fear only if one holds against it. To me evil is, in art or life, only what keeps us rotating in one place like a record that gets stuck in the same groove. But the intermedia shows and the strobe open us. In any case, I don't see how it could set any aspect of us back, even if it's just one day back. I see our understanding and knowledge of it only opening, like the very fact that we are talking about it, and thinking about it, and reacting to it—and not only you or me but everybody. That means we are going to find it out, that's all. It helps to see ourselves in a new way. Again, like Andy Warhol's movie *Eat*, where you see a man eating a mushroom for forty-five minutes. Now we are beginning to see ourselves in a different perspective, or in no perspective at all, perhaps, but in the simultaneity of distances—like looking at ourselves from outside and inside at the same time, out of our own body—learning again everything from the beginning. Or something like that. In any case, it's exciting. Like going to the first grade.

June 23, 1966

ON THE TACTILE INTERACTIONS IN CINEMA, OR CREATION WITH YOUR TOTAL BODY

Last Thursday I was watching the Beverly Schmidt *Moon-Dial* piece at the Bridge Theatre. The piece fell in that category which is known (by now) as intermedia—in this case, dance, plus slides, plus movies, plus sound, plus costumes. It was one of those few cases where everything seemed to work perfectly. The Schmidt-Tambellini piece had a classic perfection and beauty about it. From the period of an experimental chance creation the intermedia shows are entering the period of a controlled chance creation (the same was clearly noticeable in the dancing of Elizabeth Keen and Yvonne Rainer, on the same program). The flashes and glimpses of light and slides and the dancer all together produced an aesthetically unified performance.

It was often a breathtakingly beautiful performance. But that's not what I really wanted to write about, this time. It's something else. In the middle of the performance, during one of its culminating passages, I turned around for a moment and looked where the slides and the projectors were set behind the audience's backs. And I saw this amazing, almost fantastic thing happening: I saw both Tambellinis immersed in a deep dance trance of their own, moving, with hand-held projectors and slides, shaking, and trembling, no longer conscious of themselves. And when I looked at their faces, they were going through similarly fantastic changes and it seemed that the things on stage were directly, physically connected with their fingertips, their face movements, with their very flesh—and it went deeper, through their flesh to their souls: Every light change, every light trembling, every motion that took place on stage was produced directly, by their very bodies, by this fantastic action-reaction.

And I remembered how, just last weekend at the Philadelphia College of Art, Sol Mednick was saying that he felt that one of the things that cinema will probably never have is that tactile feeling, that energy that sparks when a painter or a sculptor presses his brush or knife against his materials—the tactile interaction which produces a very direct relationship and enables him to completely transmit his temperament and his feelings through that brush or that knife into that canvas or that wood.

And I remembered Stan Brakhage telling (and I think he writes about it in *Metaphors on Vision*) how in his earlier years, he used to spend hours, every day, moving in his rooms with an empty camera; and how those who come to the Cinematheque are often watching, quite amazed, John Cavanaugh in the lobby going through his strange performances with an empty camera. David Brooks used to do that, and Jerry Joffen, and Ron Rice. And I have seen Barbara Rubin going through entire evenings of shooting with an empty camera; or the amazing performances of Ray Wisniewski during his multiple projections.

Here is another aspect where the new cinema differs from the traditional cinema—in this direct relationship between the artist, his tools, and his materials. I have said before that the camera has become the extension of the artist's fingers, and the lens his third eye. I remember, after shooting *The Brig*, walking for weeks,

trying to get out of the trance into which I was pulled during the shooting—I absorbed with my body all that horror myself. Judith Malina thought—or was it Miss Hecht who said it—that I wasn't really shooting but performing one of the strangest dances they ever saw.

The essential point here is that this is not one-sided activity: It's an interaction. The camera movements are reflections of the body movements; the body movements are reflections of the emotional and thought movements—which, in their turn, are caused by what came in through the eye. A circle between the artist's eye and the camera eye is established.

None of this is entirely new in arts. All that I'm saying is that it's new in a different way. One can imagine D. W. Griffith standing beside his cameraman during the take of a scene, and, while the camera grinds, going himself with his face and his body and hands through all that's happening in front of the camera, becoming almost an electrical cable connected with the camera—although it doesn't touch it, it's there, objectified, removed, transposed. It's what one could perhaps call an epical removal, as compared with the direct contact of a more personal creation. Both are eternal.

No, this isn't new. But for the first time we are seeing it happen in cinema in such an intense manner. There was always this personal relationship—but the frequency, the intensity, was different. Through the intermedia projections it has come out. Really, what's happening is that some of the work of Harry Smith, of Jerry Joffen, or Robert Whitman, or Barbara Rubin, or Andy Warhol cannot be shipped and shown in a film can—their projections have become extensions of their creative work, the film in the can isn't really the thing by itself.

This spring, the Cannes Film Festival wrote to me asking to suggest what new American films they could show in the critic's section. Could I ship to them some films, they asked. No—I wrote to them—your thinking is all wrong: You are still thinking that all that's good and new and exciting in cinema can be wrapped up, canned, and shipped to you for "previewing": those days are come and gone. Some of us are making "film evenings," not "films," and you have to take to Cannes not only the "film" but the film-maker and the equipment and, perhaps, technicians. I suggested to them

a few programs to take which would shake up Cannes. My suggestions were, naturally, ignored, and Cannes had another of their "worst" years.

That's what's happening.

That's what I thought in that one second, just before I turned back from the Tambellinis to the stage, where Beverly Schmidt was moving surrounded by a web of light.

September 1, 1966

ON ROBERT WHITMAN

Of all the happening artists, Robert Whitman has been most consistent and most ingenious in his use of cinema. In the happening performed August 26 and 27 in East Hampton he did it again.

The happening took place in a small swamp, surrounded by woods. In the middle of the swamp lay a shallow muddy swamp lake a hundred feet long or so. When entering, you could pick up a mimeographed note which read: "Time for me is something material. . . . It can be used in the same way as paint or plaster, or any other material. It can describe other natural events. . . . The images make real the experience of the time. Please stay to right of candlebags." In place of the word "time" he could have also used the word "nature." Nature was transposed into man-made images.

Candlebags (candles in sand in paper bags) led the road across the wood patch into the swamp area. Around the entrance area, three huge reflector sheets caught you and the grass and the light, creating a mirage-like world of fact and illusion. At the same time, while you stood there, admiring the lyrical scene of grass and illusion, you were picked up by the video camera pointed at the area and projected upon a screen standing in the south end of the swamp for the audience to watch the people entering. At one moment, the video beam picked up the moon and we watched it on the screen. A "sun" beam was thrown upon a batch of cuddled tree heads swaying in the mild night wind—an *aquarelle* kind of image. As the evening progressed, a color movie appeared on the

second screen, west side of the swamp (the audience sat scattered upon the east side of the swamp in the grass). On the side of the forest, under the trees, there seemed to be a beautiful woman combing her hair, maybe a witch. Further to the north, in the middle of the swamp, by the forest, a clothes line appeared—a pair of pants, shirts became brightly visible as two or three men and women began taking them off the line and putting them on. You could see them, like white ghosts, as they were being sprayed with phosphorescent paint right there, as they slowly emerged out of the darkness. Once in a while, a cloud of phosphorescent smoke appeared around them and they moved across the swamp, romantically. Suddenly the whole side of the forest and the brushwood was pierced by two or three stroboscopic flashlights as they moved along the edge of the woods and through the woods, crackling in the air. On the north side of the swamp, a big white balloon-like creature started emerging and growing bigger and bigger. With the help of one of those ingenious movie projections which are among Whitman's specialties the thing began rotating sideways and changing its shape and color. Four strange creatures in transparent cellophane bags and cellophane shoes trod along the east side of the swamp, making strange and beautiful sounds in the grass as they went along through the night. In the woods behind us, where some hidden mikes were scattered, we could hear huge electronic crickets singing into the summer night, while in the center part of the swamp, in the light of flashlights and phosphorescent vapors, a romantic lonely soul paddled in a tiny boat, occasionally letting out some water sprouts behind the boat as the cool Long Island mist began to form and float around the swamp.

It was a romantic, idyllic summer-night happening. It was a huge movie sculpted with light in the midst of nature and night and it moved through space and time, image after image, and it was beautiful and peaceful to look at, like a dream spread out across the night.

A NOTE ON EUROPE

I have just come back from Europe where I spent five weeks and I have seen and I have learned something about the happenings there. It seems that the European undergrounds are breaking

open. The American happening artists are becoming classicists in a way, concerned more with creation than destruction. They have accomplished their demolition and freeing plan—so one feels, or hopes. It's Europe that has to go through its destruction and breaking out period now, and the happenings staged in Europe are so much wilder, messier, and so much less "art." I saw one staged by Jean Jacques Lebel in the small town of Cassis, where 6,000 people came to watch a huge 300-foot rubber Priapus come into the harbor from the sea, as the loudspeakers sold free love, and it was a wild scene that broke into a near riot, with three boats sunk and tourist cars lifted into the air and plastic bombs thrown at the Living Theatre, and which ended with Jean Jacques Lebel being run out of town by the mayor. But the town will never forget it. The European youth is waking up, the provos and capellonis and beats are taking over, and there will be some wild things happening. New York, however, is becoming a scene of quiet, classicist creation, lately. It is very possible that we have accomplished enough liberation through destruction—temporarily—and now we are trying to work out some problems of a "constructive" creation—perhaps. This autumn and this winter should show the truth. I hope we did not poop out. It's only that the summer got us down.

September 15, 1966

ON THE NEW YORK FILM FESTIVAL AND UNDERGROUND

Once again, the New York Film Festival; once again, arguments against and pro. I, myself, I have no big complaints to make. By now, the fourth year, I have learned to take it for what it is: a potpourri of current films from all over the world; some bad, some good—I see them all. I used to complain that the festival doesn't really reflect what's going on in cinema. Now I know, yes, it reflects, but its mirrors are pretty dusty. Its mirrors are the tastes and personalities of the people who run it. What else do you want? An underground festival at the Lincoln Center? The new millennium has only just begun.

There are some good people working for the festival. Their

intentions are good. But they are split between their own tastes and what the Lincoln Center stands for (its past, not its future). On one hand, Amos Vogel writes (in the festival press release) that "the cinema is changing . . . thematically, stylistically, philosophically, aesthetically. . . . It was always a bit silly to imagine that film (insofar as it is art) could remain exempt from what is happening in the other arts. . . ."—which shows he is aware of the changes in cinema. On the other hand, when he begins to call film-makers by name, he puts the official cap on, and he names Bellocchio, Forman, Teshigahara, Bertolucci, but is afraid to name Brakhage, Markopoulos, Anger, Warhol, Smith. Does Vogel really believe that Forman is a more important artist than Brakhage? Not really. Thus, in the name of all that Lincoln Center stands for, he is misleading the people about the very art he is devoting his life to.

When the big boss of the festival is caught, then all the others down the line are caught too. We are all human. I was told by John Brockman, Vogel's assistant, why two of this year's great American films aren't being shown at the festival. I was told that Gregory Markopoulos' *Galaxie* isn't being shown because Brockman doesn't like Markopoulos' character: It's difficult to deal with. Brakhage's *Songs* aren't shown because Brakhage insisted that the festival pay a rental fee for the film, and this, no doubt, was too much to ask. Festival programmers felt it's more important to show to Brakhage that he is wrong in his demand than to have the film at the festival. The more stubborn personality won out, the festival saved \$75 and lost probably its greatest film.

Being only human, Amos Vogel and John Brockman feel that because they are working for Lincoln Center, the Center is the most important thing that ever happened to film-makers. You can't be really in unless you pass through Lincoln Center. *Variety*, mirroring this human vanity of Lincoln Center, writes that the showing of the underground movies at Lincoln Center "will separate film poets from the poseurs, the gagsters from the real achievers." *Variety* didn't invent this: Those are the words of John Brockman. Since I have already mentioned the cases of *Galaxie* and *Songs* I don't have to elaborate on the falseness of such presumptions on the part of *Variety* and the film festival.

\ I am saying all this, and I am bringing all this down to the

personal level, because Lincoln Center isn't really run by computers: It's a product of people. These people run the whole undertaking down to the level of their personal tastes. Which is only human. This is the real truth about the New York Film Festival, this is my New York Film Festival "Confidential" column. For the last three years, the excuse given for not showing *The Art of Vision*, *Scorpio Rising*, or other films which we felt were superior to the usual festival fare was that there was no 16 mm. projection at the festival. And we thought that was true. This year, the festival *has* the 16 mm. projection. Still, neither *Galaxie* nor *Songs* are there—just to name two unique films, the most original and most beautiful films to come out of the art of cinema this past year. So now we know that it has nothing to do with the equipment: It has always to do with the people. It has always been so. When it comes to festivals—as with art galleries or publishers or theatres—their real importance is revealed not through what they show, but through what they don't show, through what they exclude.

And now, all this said, we can go and enjoy whatever is included, whatever is shown.

September 29, 1966

ON THE CHELSEA GIRLS

After seeing Andy Warhol's new film, *The Chelsea Girls*, I was walking along the street and talking to myself. There was no doubt in my mind that I had just seen a very important film. But if I am going to write anything about it, people will say I am crazy.

But here I was and I had to make my choice. Really, I had no choice. I made a special effort not to miss a single film at the festival: Some of the films I even saw twice. Now it was clear to me that *The Chelsea Girls* was not only a more advanced cinema than anything I had seen at the festival—but it was an important work by any standards. Thus, once more, I have to make a fool of myself and say what I think should be said.

What is *The Chelsea Girls*? It is Warhol's most ambitious work to date. It is also probably his most important work to date. It is

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ROOM 946—GEORGE'S ROOM

ROOM 202—AFTERNOON

ROOM 116—HANOI HANNA

ROOM 632—THE JOHN

ROOM 416—THE TRIP

ROOM 822—THE CLOSET

**Starring Mary Woronov, Gerard Malanga,
International Velvet, Marie Menken,
Dorothy Dean, Pope Ondine, Edie
Sedgewick, Eric Emerson, Donald Lyons,
Edwin Hood, Patrick, Arthur Loeb, Ingrid
Superstar, Randy Borscheidt, Angela
Davis, The Velvet Underground & Nico.**

IN COLOR AND BLACK & WHITE

an epic movie-novel. During the four hours that the movie lasts a huge gallery of people pass by, a gallery of complex lives, faces, fates. The film is conceived as a series of rooms at the Chelsea Hotel, two rooms projected side by side at the same time, with different people in different rooms or, sometimes, overlapping. Many strange lives open before our eyes, some of them enacted, some real—but always very real, even when they are fake—since this is the Chelsea Hotel of our fantasy, of our mind. Lovers, dope addicts, pretenders, homosexuals, lesbians, and heterosexuals, sad, fragile girls, and hard, tough girls—quiet conversations, doing nothing, telephone conversations, passing the time; social games, drug games, sex games. I know no other film, with the exception of *The Birth of a Nation*, in which such a wide gallery of people has been presented as in this film. We don't always understand what they are talking about, only short fragments of conversations really reach us clearly. As the time goes, this gallery of people and lives grows into a complex human hive. The film in its complex and overlapping structure, in its simultaneity of lives before our eyes, comes closest to Joyce. Forgive me this sacrilegious comparison—really, this is the first time that I dare mention Joyce in connection with cinema. This is the first time that I see in cinema an interesting solution of narrative techniques that enable cinema to present life in the complexity and richness achieved by modern literature.

The Chelsea Girls has a classical grandeur about it, something from Victor Hugo. Its grandeur is the grandeur of its subject, the human scope of its subject. And it is a tragic film. The lives that we see in this film are full of desperation, hardness, and terror. It's there for everybody to see and to think about. Every work of art helps us to understand ourselves by describing to us those aspects of our lives which we either know little of or fear. It's there in black on white before our eyes, this collection of desperate creatures, the desperate part of our being, the avant garde of our being. And one of the amazing things about this film is that the people in it are not really actors; or if they are acting, their acting becomes unimportant, it becomes part of their personalities, and there they are, totally real, with their transformed, intensified selves. The screen acting is expanded by an ambiguity between real and unreal. This is part of Warhol's filming tech-

nique, and very often it is a painful technique. There is the girl who walks from scene to scene crying, real tears, really hurt; a girl, under LSD probably, who isn't even aware, or only half aware that she is being filmed; the "priest" who goes into a fit of rage (a real rage) and slaps the girl right and left (a real slap, not the actor's slap) when she begins to talk about God—in probably the most dramatic religious sequence ever filmed. Toward the end, the film bursts into color—not the usual color-movie color but a dramatized, exalted, screaming red color of terror.

No doubt most of the critics and "normal" audiences will dismiss *The Chelsea Girls* as having nothing to do either with cinema or "real" life. It is becoming apparent that there is a complete misunderstanding about the role of the artist in a society. Some critics would like to relegate him to some sweet and innocent corner of our life. Most of the critics and viewers do not realize that the artist, no matter what he is showing, is mirroring or forecasting also our own lives. The terror and desperation of *The Chelsea Girls* is a holy terror (an expression which, I was told, Warhol himself uses in reference to his work): It's our godless civilization approaching the zero point. It's not homosexuality, it's not lesbianism, it's not heterosexuality: The terror and hardness that we see in *The Chelsea Girls* is the same terror and hardness that is burning Vietnam; and it's the essence and blood of our culture, of our ways of living: This is the Great Society.

Those who hate or dismiss Warhol's work because of this terror in it hate it for what they should really praise in it: For being able to portray some essential truths about ourselves. As I have said a number of times before: It's not the artist that is failing today. It's the critics that are failing by not being able to explain the real meaning of art to man. These works, once understood and embraced, would become rituals of holy terror, they would exorcise us from terror.

October 6, 1966

ON THE STATE OF WORLD CINEMA

Carlos Saura, the director of *The Hunt* (during his film festival visit to New York—after viewing *Thanatopsis*, *Vivian*, *Chum-*

lum, *Jerovi*, *The Dead*, and *Amphetamine*):

The conception of this type of cinema is extremely amateurish, elementary, and without the realization of what cinema is—like children playing with a camera. *Amphetamine* is a disgusting movie. *Chumlum* and *Vivian?* Painters should remain painters and avoid making films. *Jerovi* has metaphysical pretensions and is vulgar. New York shocks me with its brutal, bestial images of violence, yet you people play on the superficial and nonsensical. There is more responsibility to making films.

He walked out of Andy Warhol's *The Chelsea Girls*, commenting: "This underground cinema is disastrous and a disgrace."

Agnes Varda commented on the films (and shows) of Stan Vanderbeek, Robert Breer, and USCO: "They are useless." Pasolini commented on *Scorpio Rising*: "This is an easy way of making films."

I don't know why I am giving all these nonsense quotes. But I thought we should know the state of mind of the "world cinema."

October 13, 1966

ON THE SUPREME MASTERY OF PETER KUBELKA

Unsere Afrikareise (which you can see at the Cinematheque, together with Kubelka's earlier work, this Friday) is about the richest, most articulate, and most compressed film I have ever seen. I have seen it four times, and I am going to see it many, many times more, and the more I see it the more I see in it. Kubelka's film is one of cinema's few masterpieces and a work of such great perfection that it forces one to reevaluate everything that one knew about cinema. The incredible artistry of this man, his incredible patience (he worked on *Unsere Afrikareise* for five years; the film is twelve minutes long), his methods of working (he learned by heart eighteen hours of tapes and three hours of film, frame by frame), and the beauty of his accomplishment make the rest of us look like amateurs, or, perhaps, like children who can never gain any distance from their emotions. The entire cinema is so fucking emotional. Kubelka's cinema is like a piece of crystal, or some other object of nature: It doesn't look like it

was produced by man; one could easily conceive that it was picked up from among the organic treasures of nature.

Peter Kubelka: When you transcribe this interview, you should state that what I say has nothing to do with my films. I feel a very great need to communicate. I work hundreds and hundreds of hours for one particular minute in my film and I could never produce such a minute by talking. The real statement which I want to make in the world is my films. Everything else is irrelevant.

I work for this living generation. I want to help in aging mankind, to get it away from stone age, make it adult. I feel that the age that mankind has now is that of a very young child. For example, it just begins to be articulate. In *Afrikareise* I play with the emotions and try to tear the emotions loose, so that you would have a distance to your emotions, to your own feelings. This is one of my main tasks: To get distance to the whole existence. . . . In *Unsere Afrikareise* I trigger a lot of the emotional mechanisms at the same time and I create simultaneously comic feelings and sad feelings, and. . . .

JM: Like the death of the lion, when they are dragging him up on the truck. I think this is one of the saddest scenes I have ever seen. They drag this poor lion, already dead, and it's difficult to pull it up, it's a very tragic shot. But the sound is sort of comic. And the zebra is hit by a shot, and she falls on her side—and on the sound track is this funny little sound, like the zebra is falling on her side from laughing. . . . It's very sad.

PK: This is achieved through a perfect synchronization of music, did you notice that?

JM: Yes.

PK: They all move in rhythm. There are many things that are not noticeable on first viewing at all.

JM: Or the eye, when the dying lion lifts his eye and looks directly into the camera, sort of accusing and forgiving, and then dies! If there ever was a great moment of cinema, this is one.

PK: When you really want to communicate, you must be so economic with every part of the film, with every second. For me, film is the projection of still frames. My economy is one single frame, and every part of the screen. I feel that every frame that is projected too much makes the whole thing less articulate. So I

always work by frames. I have twenty-four communication possibilities per second and I don't want to waste one. This is the economy. And the same is with sound. You must have the same economy with sound as you have with image.

JM: How long is your total work, how many minutes?

PK: Thirty-nine minutes.

JM: That makes two minutes a year, no?

PK: For the last sixteen years I have been totally concentrating on cinema. I began in 1952. Yes, two minutes a year.

JM: How many frames—2,880 frames per year?

PK: This means, eight frames, approximately, a day.

JM: That's plenty.

PK: One is enough. When you really speak out, when you really articulate, it mustn't be so much. Eggeling spoke out, and he made only five minutes in his whole life.

I take my time. They say: If the film isn't finished in two years, it's too late, or something. But I feel that when you work all your life and when you really want to see and feel and communicate, and you produce something that speaks—there is no time limit, and one minute of film is enough. I thought that the African film would be finished in three months, when it began. And it was five years. Of course I didn't work every day and I couldn't work every day because I had no money—but what's really true is that these five years I lived always with these images, every day. There wasn't a day when I didn't—I always lived in this film, for five years.

October 27, 1966

ON THE THEATRE AND ENGINEERING SHOW

If one would judge by *The New York Times*, or even by *The Village Voice* (last week) one would think that the Theatre and Engineering show is (was) nothing but a big flop. In reality, however, and I am speaking, no doubt, from how it looked to me—the show is (was) both successful and beautiful.

Most of the criticism that I've heard about the show came from those who were not looking at the shows for what they were, but were measuring them by certain things that, according to their

guessings or some overheard information, “didn’t work” technically.

As far as I am concerned, everything worked. I took each show at the face of what worked. I had no idea of what else was supposed to happen or to work. It was of no importance to me at all how many speakers failed to work at the Cage performance: It was a great evening anyway; or the Steve Paxton things; or Tudor—I missed absolutely nothing. The failures of Steve Paxton’s things were more aesthetically (and in many other ways) enjoyable than some of the successes I’ve seen elsewhere. Or the Whitman piece. I was told, later, that two or three projectors didn’t work, that the video cameras didn’t work. Who cares! Do we ever ask the poet how much greater his true vision was than his final poem? The Whitman show was an unusual ear and eye experience anyway. If I say that experience could have been still stronger or deeper, it’s not because of the things that didn’t work: It was only because it lasted too short a time. Whitman’s pieces, it seems to me, have to take a certain time, they cannot be rushed, they have to work themselves into you and out; they are controlled, but they are atmospheric pieces.

From the pieces I’ve seen till now (the show is still going as I am writing) the Rauschenberg piece, *Open Score*, gave me the deepest aesthetic experience. *Open Score* consists of two parts: In the first part, two tennis players are playing with rackets wired for transmission of sound. The sound of hitting balls is thrown into the auditorium. As they play, lights go out, one by one. As the dark surrounds the stage space, a crowd of some four hundred people moves into the space. Dark masses of people, moving one direction, then another, are picked up by two infrared video cameras and thrown upon three screens, high above the “stage”—sometimes single, sometimes superimposed, sometimes positive and negative combined—and when that happens, the moving masses seem to become covered with brush strokes, so that the whole huge space in front of us, the three screens, and the dark masses of moving people that we discern with our eyes, and the sound, as each one introduces himself by saying his name . . . “I am Lucy” . . . “I am Harry so and so” . . . and the sound of the crowd—all this make up one living canvas in the Inferno cycle. Later, some people told me that they felt an anger coming from the crowd,

from the sound and from the movements. To me it looked and sounded more with a touch of sadness, though. Like the heart of New York City. Like the soot of the subway system. Like many other sad things.

What made the Rauschenberg show work for me, what made all the shows, even those that worked least, work for me, was this huge fantastic space. Whenever I pass Grand Central Station, I stand there and I listen to the sound of it, and it's a tremendous experience. You can hear and feel the whole city reflected there, its heart beating, as if this huge auditorium, this huge thing serves as some kind of radar, some kind of big ear that absorbs the beat of the city. It's the same with the Armory. Or Madison Square Garden. Peter Kubelka says Madison Square Garden is the most beautiful auditorium in the world. In a sense it is. It is the most beautiful ear in the world, and it is the most fantastic thing for the eye when you see these thousands of people getting up suddenly and shouting, or even if they are silent. That's why it was so great when during the John Cage performance all those hundreds of people got up and moved across the floor area to where the musicians were working—and for a moment it looked and sounded like I was in Grand Central. I thought it was a fantastic idea for an artist, and a fantastic chance to have this huge place, to recreate a thing like Grand Central, or a huge factory, an electrical plant, perhaps the soul of it, to have these means made available, be it by science or luck or I don't know what.

And we should remember—after all this is said—that the Armory show is not a beginning of something but . . . the end of explorations and thoughts that have been going on for some time. This huge show is only a leaf closing one chapter. And, as Bill Kluver said, as the workers pulled down the ropes and things and cables and wheels, and as the audience watched all this: "These people think this is something complex . . . I think in five years we'll be all laughing about it."

Yes, where are we going to be five years from now? I guess, just where we are now: In constant motion forward as the leaves of our games keep falling away. Or, as Godard says, "Being on time when the rest of the world is behind gives the impression of being ahead."

December 1, 1966

ON ROBERT DOWNEY AND CHAFED ELBOWS

I have to write about *Chafed Elbows*. Because it is a good movie. I think Bob Downey is the Lenny Bruce of the new cinema. When I saw the film at a preview, two months ago—and a good crowd of the press and film people were there—I thought, this will be one of those times when I'll have no need to write: Others will do the work. But the film, amazingly, seems to have completely missed them. The New York Film Festival rejected it. The Chicago Film Festival rejected it (after Lloyd and Preminger, two old pros, called it "insulting"). The New Yorker Theatre seems to be scared of it. And so down the line. It is completely beyond my understanding.

Chafed Elbows is a very good film. *Chafed Elbows* is the funniest film I have seen in years. I think *Chafed Elbows* is as good as anything done by *nouvelle vague* (let it rest in peace). I think *Chafed Elbows* introduces into American cinema one of the most original satirical artists since Preston Sturges. Really, there is so much good to say about this film that I could go on and on piling praises. But what's the use?

So, why do you think a film of the stature of *Chafed Elbows* goes through the doors and windows of the Establishment unnoticed? The reason, I think (and Downey agrees) is this: *Chafed Elbows* is a young film. It belongs to the young. And there are millions of the young. This is what I have to tell to the old croaks: Give up the fort, we're climbing up the walls, we are climbing up the gate—we'll scalp you by the dawn. You know, by now, that you can't beat us, so why don't you join us? But before you join us, leave your tastes outside, by the door. We want your unconditional surrender! This is an ultimatum from the underground.

P. S. *The Chelsea Girls*, which our daily movie critics didn't even care to review (with the exception of Archer Winsten), but which the audience has made into the first underground blockbuster, is moving to the Cinema Rendezvous (57th Street and Sixth Avenue), where it begins a two-week run tonight (Thursday).

1967

February 2, 1967

AN INTERVIEW WITH GREGORY MARKOPOULOS ON *HIMSELF AS HERSELF*

In Issue 21 of *Film Culture* (1960), Parker Tyler had an essay entitled "Two Down and One to Go?" Two down were Curtis Harrington and Gregory Markopoulos. The only hope given to Markopoulos, as an avant-garde artist, was the polite question mark.

Oh, what fools the critics are! Markopoulos has created some of his most important work since then. He is continually surprising us. After seeing his latest work, *Himself as Herself*, which may be his most perfect, most dramatic, most personal work to date, I wouldn't make any guesses or predictions about where Gregory may turn next. It's of interest to note, in this connection, that our three most talented film artists, Gregory Markopoulos, Stan Brakhage, and Andy Warhol, are also our most productive artists.

JM: How do you edit your films?

Gregory Markopoulos: I screen my film footage once, to know what there is. Then I hang it in strips on the wall. Roll by roll. I work in one-hundred-foot lengths. I don't work necessarily in sequences. I never start editing until the film is completed. I stop filming as soon as I get tired with filming, and I do the same with

the editing. Getting tired means it's time to do something else. I keep editing, editing—like, say, *The Illiac Passion*, I edited, edited, and then I said one day: This is ridiculous, how about stopping?

JM: So now you got those strips hanging on the wall. What's next?

GM: For *Himself as Herself*, I had Fred Eberstadt's projector that he loaned to me. So I take a strip, usually ten feet or so, and I just put it into the aperture gate, and run it, just to see it, and then I snip it. After I snip it, I put the X-marks on each end of the shot, and those are the only frames they can cut, for A & B rolling. All my splicing is done at the Western Cine lab. And I have to say that they have never made a mistake yet. Mike Phillips, at Western Cine, is a great lab artist.

JM: Did you have many takes?

GM: I usually don't have more than one take.

JM: Did you shoot from a script? or notes?

GM: What happened was that I have been collecting notes for my *Illiac* project and a friend saw them and he said, "You don't have one script—you have five movies going here." So I looked at the notes and I realized that he was right. So I went through and I selected my notes. Usually my notes are very simple, just one line, like "Park Sequence."

In Boston, where *Himself as Herself* was shot, I was very lucky. I had no money at all. I went there, and everybody started helping me. It was fantastic. Really, I made the film for nothing. The actual shooting cost only \$300 or \$400, and I still owe money to the lab. As for locations, for instance, I needed an elevator, and somebody told me that there was a house on the hill with an elevator. So I went, I looked at it, and I said, we are shooting in two hours. I built the scene around that elevator right on the spot. I saw what the architectural possibilities were. Or the scene in the courtyard, with these lions, and I said, Oh, wait a minute, there is another sequence! I saw what my thematic motive was.

JM: What is your "thematic motive"?

GM: Really, I am discovering only now what my film is all about. I don't know it, and I am not ashamed to say so. In a sense I do, but I am discovering it. Because, in a sense, it sort of started off with me going to Boston. I went there, and I had a feeling that

people would help me. Then I saw the Boston gardens and the tulips, and I came back, and I happened to be reading a book on Androgne, and there was a mention of Balzac's novel *Serafita*. The clue to the whole film is the tuxedo that the protagonist wears. You see, it's a certain strata of our society. That's my first social comment. . . .

JM: Besides the performance of Beverly Grant in *The Illiac Passion*, which didn't come out yet, I think that Gordon Baldwin gives the richest performance of all your films.

GM: This is because there was a tremendous tension between the protagonist and the film director. I was introduced to Baldwin by Andy Warhol. He was going to use him in a movie and I guess he changed his mind, so he said, I think you should make a movie with Gregory. And since I was in Boston, and he was in Boston, I said, why not. And as we were filming at such a tremendous pace—the shooting was completed in two weeks—Baldwin got very, very involved in his role, and he didn't know what his role was, of course, which was just being himself. It was like going to a psychoanalyst, except that this was a free psychoanalysis, and the film-maker was acting as an artist-physician, if I may say so.

JM: I have always admired your outdoor shots, those fantastic greens and blooming trees.

GM: Well, I don't do anything. I guess it's the way I see and the kind of lighting that happens. And then, what kind of lens is used. I always use Bolex with Switar lenses.

JM: I don't want to mean this as an insult, you being a film-maker—but my feeling is, and I should say it, that you are one of the most important contemporary novelists. There is an area of cinema, the narrative aspect of it, which in some way is related to the novel. Guy Davenport and P. Adams Sitney think that even *Dog Star Man* is an epic novel. The thing is that at different periods of history the mediums through which we tell stories keep changing, rotating: now it's drama, now it's music, now it's literature, now it's painting, now it's cinema—depending on the needs of man, depending on the vitality of the art. And cinema is the most vital art today, so that the stories are told through cinema.

GM: We are telling stories. I keep telling myself that all other arts are dead. But you see, even painting isn't really dead, we paint with the camera now. It went into cinema.

JM: I feel that *Himself as Herself* is a perfect one-character novel, and it's as perfect stylistically as, say, Flaubert or Stendhal was. *Twice a Man* was a more complex film, and may be more revolutionary, but *Himself* is a more perfect and a more moving film. Another curious thing is that *Himself as Herself* is a film to which, say, Bresson has been coming closer and closer. In a recent interview he said that ideally he would like to make a film in which everything would be told through faces, close-ups, hands, expressions, movements, and sets. *Himself as Herself* is such a film. It is in that sense that, to me, your film is the most advanced film novel in contemporary cinema. *Chelsea Girls*, *Dog Star Man*, and *Himself as Herself* are three important epic narratives of today, and each one is as different from each other as day from night.

February 9, 1967

ON THE NEW UNDERGROUND—BARBARA RUBIN
AND JOHN CAVANAUGH

I have good news. Change is taking place in the underground. The youngest generation, a generation that grew up with the Co-op, with Bobby Dylan, with LSD, with Allen Ginsberg, with Brakhage—this generation is entering the field of action. During these coming few months we shall see a completely new crop of names coming in and a new, fresh, free, loving spirit. My own concern here is cinema. Cinema is being reevaluated, redefined. The coming few columns will be devoted exclusively to this changing scene.

The people involved in the first conversation are John Cavanaugh, who had his first one-man show at the Cinematheque last Saturday; Gordon Ball, whose first film, *Georgia*, was premiered at the national magazine photographers' gathering two weeks ago; Barbara Rubin, whose new film, *Love Supreme for the Free Spirits*, will be shown at the Cinematheque later in February; and Susannah Campbell, who also worked on *Love Supreme*. Other voices are those of friends.

John Cavanaugh: I'd rather make my movies in the country,

not in the city. There I'd have only trees, and beautiful girls. Then I wouldn't have to stop and to select anything. I could just move constantly, and all would be completely beautiful.

Question: Why should there be that difference between the city and the country? Why can't you just . . . ?

JC: Because you haven't got the freedom of movement, the space isn't the same. Here we are in a multi-dimensional space.

Barbara Rubin: Yes, but that's all we do, we shoot. In the city. Everywhere we go. He's just into the dimensions. . . .

Susannah Campbell: Seeing pretty girls and brooks . . . he could go stay with my grandmother. She's got all these brooks.

Candy: Grandmother could go naked.

JC: That would be a good idea. You wouldn't have to stop moving. 'Cause everywhere you move you have something beautiful.

Question: You mean, there are some things in the city that you wouldn't select, as you shoot, because they aren't beautiful?

BR: He means, when he shoots a flower he is shooting only a flower, while in the city there are all these multiple meanings. . . .

JC: Like, say, to make a movie in here, in this place. Whenever you move around, everything is so multi-dimensional. If I'm in the woods, like, I have plants up there, millions of spaces that I can move in and out. I have the whole cosmos. Because I have the sky, and the earth, and the water, and the trees, everything. Whereas here there's nothing. I'd have to frame. That's what I mean. I got to frame. . . .

Question: You have to compose? What about your current film?

JC: I'd say there was no conscious planning. I just try to be as . . . I don't know . . . as, like conscious . . . not in the conscious way . . . as conscious as possible, when I shoot . . . so that I have shot what then was there. . . .

JM: In the lobby of the Cinematheque, he used to practice, to "shoot" with an empty camera, moving around. People thought he was crazy.

JC: What's so crazy about that? . . . I wish someone would make films with round screens.

SC: Man . . . if you could have movie theatres like planetariums. . . .

JC: We could have movie theatres like rocket ships, we could really take people places. The screens could be like the port-holes.

Question: Could you go back to what you said about structuring and picking out what you want? About being completely free?

JC: No . . . I am much more interested in . . . I am not interested in that at all . . . less and less. I am interested now in using camera as an energy transforming machine, to bind kinetic energy sequences. That's to me the important thing, to do this, to bind the kinetic energy. . . . I think that's what I'm interested in. . . .

BR: This is the kind of film Gordon is filming around the room . . . looking at each other . . .

JM: That's what we mean by home movies. . . .

SC: That's wherever I go in the streets, I want to take a picture, like of that spade lady, who was turning around. I just say, "Hey, I'm making a home movie, would you please stand in the light . . . ?"

Question: You say that?

SC: Yes. Lots of people go and stay in the light. I'm serious.

A Voice: That's nice, and soft, and warm. . . .

JM: You see, we always said that we are closer to the sun than to the. . . .

Question (to Barbara): You don't dig his kinetic energy scene?

BR: Of course I do. I'm just thinking . . . I sit there and I marvel at what he's doing. But I, like, like I am at the point when I just . . . you know . . . I am emanating feeling . . .

JM: His movies for you are too intellectual. . . .

BR: Well, how do you like that? I think *Empire* is my favorite . . . the most beautiful movie I've ever seen, even though I know exactly what he was doing. . . . He was shooting still camera life . . . but it's really, really beautiful. I'm waiting till we project it in the sky.

JM: When you are shooting . . . you are all emotion. . . . Your mind is no longer there, it seems. And when Cavanaugh shoots, he seems to combine both. . . .

BR: If you'd ever believe that! It's not true at all. It's not true. Because to get to the point where you can be free is far more . . . I mean, to understand that concept of free . . . is not just, you know,

it's almost as if, you know, like it's somebody else, something else shooting, it's not me.

JM: Still, it's the emotion that predominates in your work. . . .

BR: But it's not even my . . . just my emotions . . . it's magic, it's just pure magic. It's the spirit other than myself. It's maybe the whole thing that I am rather than the emotion.

JM: All I'm saying is that, it seems, that the mind is more at work in John's case than in yours. But then, I could say, the difference between Barbara's movies and John's movies is the same as between them as . . . people.

Question: Is John more interested in formal stuff?

JM: You see, he went through a stage when he was interested.

BR: We are exactly the same, like the opposite sides of a coin. Exactly. Exactly the same.

JM: The only thing is that you'd never read books on craft and theory, and John reads, or has read, them.

BR: But that has nothing to do with it. One side head and one side tail, but they are still the same two sides of the same coin.

A Voice: You're tail, he's head. . . .

BR: Now, let's not get into that one. . . . It switches all the time. One day he won't even be a coin. He will be a star.

JM: Anyway, I don't know what other film-maker besides Brakhage has read so many books as John Cavanaugh.

JC: Yeah . . . but, of course, now, I'd say that that was . . . that was just a tremendous waste of time.

JM: Now your word has no value. You ain't pure any longer 'cause you went through it.

BR: Oh, this is one of those arty conversations of the film-makers. I want to do it in the sky. John will be there probably first.

A Voice: He's taller. . . .

BR: And believe me, I'm just beginning to appreciate the value of being so many feet above people. Maybe I wouldn't have so many faces. Imagine the different movie I'd make if I were taller. . . . What a different view of the world he has. (Cavanaugh is six foot five.)

February 16, 1967

ON THE NEW UNDERGROUND—BARBARA RUBIN
AND JOHN CAVANAUGH

This is the second part of the conversation on what's new in new cinema.

John Cavanaugh: It seems to me that what the cinematic process is, like where it has value, is in expressing directly certain things that are going on in the body, which I take to be an approximation of certain kinds of magnetic energies, magnetic currents. I want to delineate this subtle magnetic process, because I think that's like the essence of mind. In other words, like the mind isn't the symbol program [Cavanaugh here opposes Stan Vanderbeek—JM] but the mind is like an energy structure. So what I'm interested in doing in cinema is directly delineating mind, rather than delineating mind by way of any kind of symbols. I see mind as a very definitely shaped pattern of energy fields. You know, I'd like to directly express that with the camera.

Question: You think that Barbara Rubin's movie is a freer movie than yours?

JC: Yeah . . . but not. . . . You see, it's a matter of degrees. Like my movie is free too but the point is to be totally free.

Barbara Rubin: The only difference between you and me is that you use all those big words, and I'd need a dictionary. I didn't understand one word you said. Not one word you said.

Question: Would you say you are completely free when you are shooting?

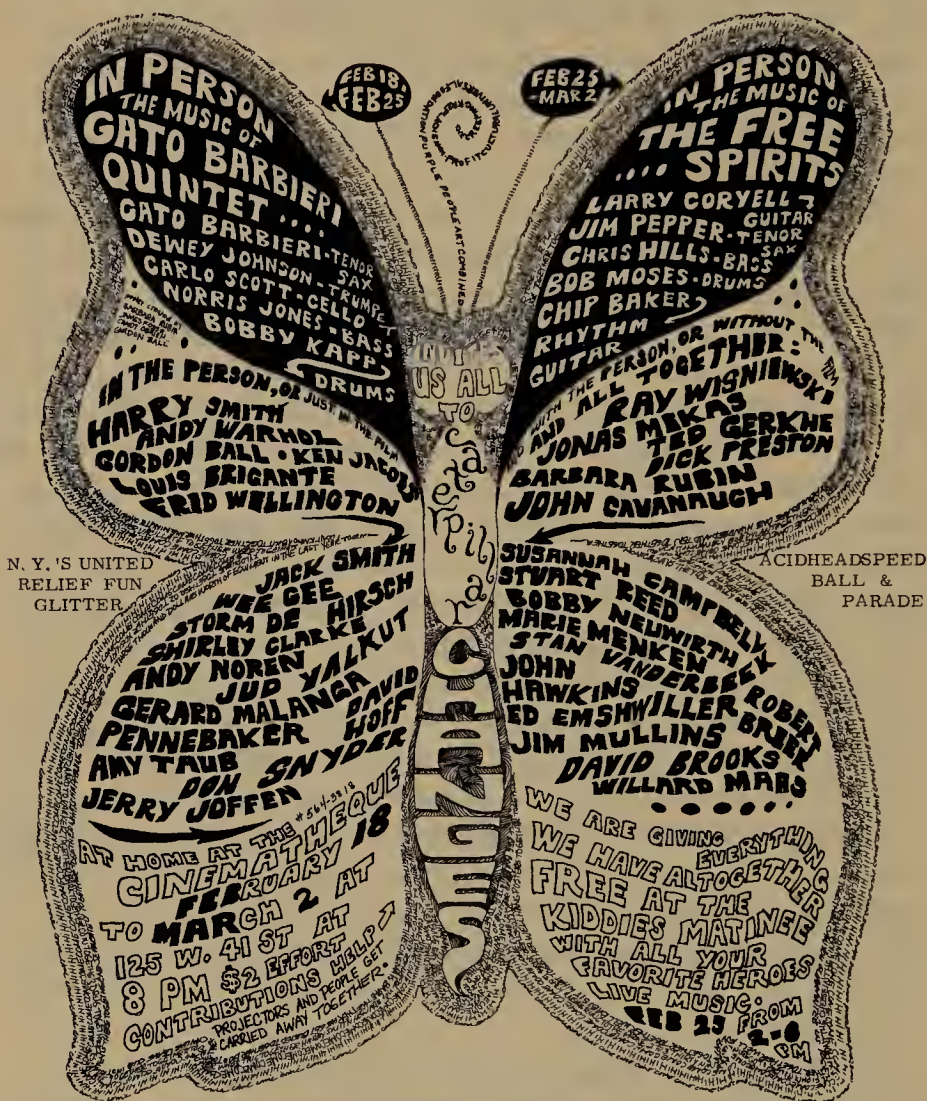
BR: You have moments.

Question: Do you care if you have those moments or not?

BR: But that's my joy, that's where I am. I didn't know what it was like, I started with the 16 mm. Wow, and I went through a trip with that one! The whole beautiful setup, sound, and motor, and I couldn't move, I couldn't move! And I said, NOOO, this couldn't be where it's at, it's too much. So when I discovered 8 mm. it was like. . . . I have to be careful, because, you know, if I'd had the opportunity to have enough film, it would be like a

hand with me, I'd just carry it around all the time, shooting all the time. If they'd make anything smaller . . . like eyes . . . eyes. . . .

JC: I'm like really interested in mind. . . .



& ANGUS MACLISE & THE VELVET UNDERGROUND in THE DENTAL DESTRUCTION OF THE CHAIRS a MASS MENTAL CONCENTRATION AGAINST FURNITURE BY MOVIES MOVIE MOVIES SLIDES & LOOPS & BURNING PROJECTORS MUSIC WOVEN FOR 12 DAYS ONLY IN THE MASS LOVE CONTEST "SMOTHER ME" FREE FORM WALKING BOO LOVE HISS 'n COME COSTUMED

BR: I think you should give classes to the Puerto Rican kids of the Lower East Side, on film-making. As an eighteen-year-old film-maker I think you should endow some of your intelligence. . . .

JC: I'm nineteen.

BR: Pardon me, nineteen.

Question (to Gordon Ball): And you haven't said a word. You just kind of sit taking it all in. . . .

Gordon Ball: I know very little else.

BR: He makes beautiful movies.

JM: There is no city in his work . . . peaceful. . . .

JC: I'm concerned with tuning the positive-negative symbol systems back to the body which is where I think the intelligence is. I don't think that intelligence resides in the symbolic mind. In other words, if somebody just has intellect, he isn't intelligent. Intelligence, literally, is in the body. So that my concern is to get away from the symbol mind which I feel is like stupidity, you know. Let's say, I have been taking LSD now, for the last few months, and, according to the Tibetan religions, what it does to you, it liberates the life flux, the basic life flux, the swirling energy patterns that make up the actuality of life . . . and that to me is like pure mind, intelligence. So my concern now is to deal directly with that, and trace out with my camera the life flux. And the reason I said [see last week's column—JM] I have to be out in the nature to do this, is that that's where the natural energy is which is based on the same types of energy structures as I'm dealing with, like directly, perceptually.

Question: What happens to the energy in the city? It gets perverted?

GB: Organized humanity always does.

Question: The drift of all modern civilization has been to imprint your mind, no?

JC: True, very true. But not any more! Me and William Burroughs will rub out all mind imprints.

Question: What happens when you start de-imprinting the mind, like de-imprinting the astronauts, you know?

BR: Then they set fire to the capsules, right?

Question: How far can you go with de-imprinting the mind?

GB: All the way.

Question: How far is "all the way"?

GB: Whatever you can think of.

Question: Why is film so important in this whole process?

BR: Because of the reflections. We are going through the reflection age. Living through the subjective reflections.

JC: To me, cinema is yoga of getting organized the patterns of direct energy. Burroughs has a conception of the image virus. I am beginning to understand what he means by that. I was stoned on acid, I found out just what it is. Like Burroughs says that a virus is a two-dimensional entity, that it needs a three-dimensional being to operate through. And he says, the virus enters the three-dimensional body through the cardinal points, which are, which is like any habit, like it can be as simple a thing as a certain style of body movement, anything that's part of a controlled situation is a cardinal point.

BR: That's the whole beauty, the whole prophecy of films. That's why we are making films now. That's why all our saints today are the artists. Because it's the whole creating of that, the backwards living we are going to do now. Now we are going to spend all our time watching what we are doing, we are not going to live it. We are going to reflect it, project it, then we are going to rehash it, reedit it, and then we are going to throw it back out, just like the flying saucers. We are going to go through it. Here in America today all those young kids who are turning on and everything, they are all doing the tribal scenes, taking Eastern cultures, you know, doing that whole thing, and there will be little communities in America, "independent states of mind," and they will make the United States. Until, one day, we realize we are not really in America, but we are flying saucers from outer space. Everybody's taking movies. Everyone. Even my uncle had an 8 mm. camera, before I had one.

Question: About this backward living. You aren't going to live it, you are just going to reflect it?

BR: It's much swifter. Imagine if we'd have to live through all that?

JM: What she means, I think, is that we have collected too much dead matter. In man's development, whenever he has to make a big step forward, he looks back and drops the dead matter, he becomes very conscious of his past and sees that's like nothing, not worth keeping—compared with what's coming.

BR: The biggest problem with films like this is that you need a trained eye. It's the whole backwards thing. We are getting to the point where we're just doing blinks, more in film than we do as human beings. How many people do you know who go out in the street and blink?

GB: Twelve frames per second blink. . . .

BR: Like Brakhage, he's still such a problem, the man has such a trained eye. It's like sitting and listening to music and being able to hear the gut outside of itself. That's the whole beauty of films now. And now we have Andy Warhol. I was thinking, while watching John's movie, listening to the Velvet music. They are like Buddhists, like Zen Buddhists. The kind of person who might, years ago, have gone out and dug that kind of state of mind, living in that, you know, kind of mystery and feeling, that whole generating quality. Now, you understand, he's making movies or playing this music. The Velvets—this tape . . . it's a meditation. They are sending me in that kind of feeling . . . which is just sitting and being very quiet.

March 9, 1967

MORE ON THE NEW SENSIBILITIES IN CINEMA

More than twenty different film-makers and two music groups, Gato Barbieri and the Free Spirits, contributed their imaginations to Barbara Rubin's *Caterpillar Changes* program during a two-week run at the Cinematheque. But it was Rubin who was the caterpillar, really, and the show was the product of her imagination. In my judgment, this show, to those few who saw it, and *really* saw it, provided an insight into the farthest out frontiersland of cinema and of vision. Really, the whole cinema as it is (or was) fell to pieces, and was hanging around the auditorium in shreds, like a leaf eaten out by worms. I said it was the product of Rubin's imagination, but that shouldn't be misunderstood: Her imagination is only part of *our* imagination. Rubin acted as an architect who was pulling out from our dreams the primordial shapes, shred by shred, recreating our own dreams in front of and around us. It was a visionary show and one that marks a very important direction in cinema, and I will attempt to indicate this direction with a few quotes. The quotes will be from Max Heindel, the mystic who died in 1919; Paul McCartney, the Beatle; and the Gospel of Thomas (uncovered in 1945 in a ruined tomb in Upper Egypt).

Max Heindel (in *The Web of Destiny*):

Aquarius is an airy sign having special rule over the ether. The Flood partly dried the air by depositing most of the moisture it held in the sea. But when the sun enters Aquarius by procession, the rest of the moisture will be eliminated and visual vibrations, which are most easily transmitted by a dry etheric atmosphere, will become more intense; thus conditions will be particularly conducive to production of the slight extension of our present sight necessary to open our eyes to the etheric region.

By aspiration and meditation those who are longingly looking for that day are taking time by the forelock and may quite easily outstrip their fellows who are unaware of what is in store. The latter, on the other hand, may delay the development of extended vision by the belief that they are suffering from hallucinations when they begin to get their first glimpses of the etheric entities, and the fear that if they tell others what they see, they will be adjudged insane.

Recent investigations have developed the further information that much of the eye trouble now prevalent among people is due to the fact that our eyes are changing; they are, in fact, becoming responsive to a higher octave of vision than before, because the ether surrounding the earth is becoming more dense and the air is growing more rare. This is particularly true in certain parts of the world, southern California among others.

. . . the Christ currents are becoming more and more forceful and their static electricity is being liberated. The etheric impulse which they give will inaugurate a new era, and the sense organs now possessed by mankind must accommodate themselves to this change. Instead of the etheric rays which emanate from an object bringing a reflected image to the retina of our eye, the so-called "blind spot" will be sensitized and we shall look out through the eye and see directly the thing itself instead of the image upon our retina. Then we shall not only see the surface of the thing we observe, but we shall be able to see through and through it as those who have cultivated the etheric vision do now.

Paul McCartney (in the *International Times*, No. 6—you can buy it at the 8th Street Bookshop):

With any kind of thing, my aim seems to be to distort it, distort it from what we know it as, even with music and visual things and to change it from what it is to what it could be. To see the potential in it all. To take a note and wreck it and see in that note what else there is in it, that a simple act like distorting it has caused. To take a film and to superimpose on top of it so you can't quite tell what it is

any more, it's all trying to create magic, it's all trying to make things happen so that you don't know why they've happened. I'd like a lot more things to happen like they did when you were kids, when you didn't know how the conjuror did it, and were happy to just sit there and say "Well it's magic." . . . The only trouble is, that you don't have the bit that you did when you were a kid of innocently accepting things. For instance, if a film comes on that's superimposed and doesn't seem to mean anything, immediately it's weird or it's strange or it's a bit funny, to most people, and they tend to laugh at it. The immediate reaction would be a laugh. And that's wrong. That's the first mistake, and that's the big mistake that everyone makes, to immediately discount anything that they don't understand, they're not sure of, and to say, "well, of course, we'll never know about that." There's all these fantastic theories people put forward about . . . "It doesn't matter anyway," and it does, it does matter, in fact that matters more than anything . . . that side of it.

The Gospel According to Thomas (Harper and Row edition, p. 17):

They said to Him: Shall we then, being children, enter the Kingdom? Jesus said to them: When you make the two one, and when you make the inner as the outer and the outer as the inner and the above as the below, and when you make the male and the female into a single one, so that the male will not be male and the female [not] be female, when you make eyes in the place of an eye, and a hand in the place of a hand, and a foot in the place of a foot, [and] an image in the place of an image then shall you enter [the Kingdom].

April 20, 1967

ON THE STATE OF FILM TEACHING AT OUR UNIVERSITIES

The teaching of cinema, the education of cinema, is on a primitive level when compared with literature or other arts or crafts. Last week I attended the national College Union convention. I was surprised (not too suprised, though) to hear, in a paper read to the convention, that the programming of films is still done by genres, say, a "war" film, a "melodrama" film, etc., instead of programming by the authors. Imagine what would happen to the

teaching of literature if we would start teaching poetry by genres, say, "harvest" poetry, "spring" poetry, etc.—I mean, on the calendar level? But that's where the programming of films in universities is today. I have been traveling much this spring, through universities and colleges, and I have discovered that they all have movie series running. But I was shocked to find that about half of the films shown are, in most cases, post-war British comedies and thrillers! In other words, the programming at our universities is done by the availability of catalogues, and not by any intelligent system, say, history of cinema. I discovered that the commercial distribution outfits and their salesmen are swamping the learning institutions with their 16 mm. catalogues of "art" films, so that these institutions are hypnotized by all this publicity and paper. I discovered, in my travels, university film departments which didn't even know that there was a Museum of Modern Art Film Library—from which they could rent at least some classics. It is a hopeless scene.

May 11, 1967

ON THE COMMERCIAL TEMPTATIONS

With the underground cinema gaining in strength, with all the publicity and all, the moneybags are beginning to see profitable possibilities in it. All the temptations and the commercial bustle is beginning to surround us. All kinds of clever commercial fishermen are beginning to tempt us with promises, contracts, sweet tongues. It's time to sound a warning. The film avant-garde is going through a very tempting and crucial period. We should stick together more than ever. And we shouldn't give in even an inch to the commercial temptations. Our direction should remain inward, and homeward. Personal cinema as against public cinema. Self-expression as against "public" expression. Director's cinema as against producer cinema. Cooperative distribution as against private distribution. Multiple distribution as against "exclusive" monopolistic distribution. Silence as against noise.

May 20, 1967

ON THE UNPRETENTIOUS BEAUTY OF CARMEN D'AVINO'S FILMS

Last Monday I had an occasion to see complete works of Carmen D'Avino. Carmen D'Avino's films have very simple, unambitious themes. He doodles constantly and endlessly. He is nuts about painting things. Really, it's all about painting things. He is crazy about colors. Summerlike, flowerlike, very light. Things, colors, everything moves. He can't stand things that do not move. If they don't move, he sets them in motion by painting them. But most of all he can't stand things that can't be seen. By painting them and by setting them in motion—be it a drab piece of wall, a shoe, a piano, a stone in the river, a road, a patch of trees—he makes them suddenly visible. He doesn't like things that stand there invisible. If a thing is there it must be seen, homage must be paid to it by the eye for its humble being there. But if it must be seen, then it must be so through motion. And if it has to move, it has to move through color. That's Carmen D'Avino. It's good for the eye. He is our medicine man. He gives us beautiful things to look at in this drab black and white city. He makes us healthier. These are films for their own sake, with no messages of any kind, beauty, color, motion for their own sake, which makes them—being so unambitious and selfless—kind of saintly films. They don't ask anything from anybody; they don't shoot people; neither do they take LSD; nor do they go to work. They don't pretend to do or give you anything, they are just there, singing, praying, like the birds and like the lilies.

After seeing Carmen D'Avino's films you want to smack your friend on the back—in a friendly way, of course; you want to jump up and down, to sing, to run out into the streets with a bucket of paint and brushes and paint all over the walls. Of course, they make you do silly things! But this is only because our smart civilization has exiled so many of our feelings into the Garden of Silliness.

June 22, 1967

REPORT FROM ITALY

I've been in Italy for the last six weeks with the Avant-Garde Film Traveling Library. The Library was established by the Film-Makers' Cinematheque to meet the endless and anxious requests from all over the world to see the American film avant garde. The Library includes the work of Bruce Conner, Carl Linder, Harry Smith, Stan Brakhage, Marie Menken, Robert Breer, George Landow, Bruce Baillie, and about twenty other film-makers.

The first observation from my travels: The world is changing faster than the Establishments want. Wherever I go, I meet little groups of beautiful people (there is no other name for them) and they constitute the cells of the new millennium. I thought that only in America the meeting between the old and the new generations was no longer possible. But the same is in Europe. This is the time of the Big Split. We split. You can stay where you are and die what you are. On July 1, we are going to tear off the remaining pages of the calendar. We are going to celebrate the New Year's Day of 1968 on July 1. The beginning of the year has been messed up by the Establishment. Let them continue it. As for us, we'll move to 1968. There is no time for fooling around. If things go as they are going, we may go into 1967 by August 1.

I have discovered that there is a New Italian Cinema here in Italy. It's being made by very young people in Rome and in Torino and in Napoli. This New Italian Cinema is very much like the New American Cinema: It's made by a new kind of man. It's clearer than ever, looking from this distance, from Rome, that a new cinema can come only from a new man.

As for the other resemblances: The techniques which we thought were American—all the techniques of the underground cinema which some of our movie critics in New York are still trying to dismiss as "gimmicks" or as "child's" work—these techniques are really the techniques of the new generations all over the world. These are the techniques and forms of the changing reality, of the changing eye, of the changing intelligence, of the changing angle to reality. You can see today films in France and Japan and

Italy that employ all the techniques that you can see at the Cinematheque. Brakhage is their D. W. Griffith. Where they all differ is in their content, in their personalities. Techniques are universal.

ON PRIVATE PROPERTY AND CINEMA

One of the reasons why the proper development of the European film undergrounds is not as speedy as it could be is the lagging of the European cinema technology. In France and Italy, to have a 16 mm. projector is a big luxury. To project a 16 mm. or 8 mm. film is a big problem. In the streets of Rome, only the American tourists are taking movies—no underground cameras are clicking in the streets of Rome yet. When I started clicking my camera in the railroad station of Pesaro, a cop told me to stop. "Only the press is allowed to take pictures," he said. When I started clicking in the one two-engine plane airport of Falconara, the military cops stopped me and wanted to destroy the film—as if any damn country would want to know anything about their lousy shabby airport—a cowpatch in the fields, a dog wouldn't piss on it. In Rome, I have been told often by people not to film them. Cops kept chasing me out of stores. They all insisted that I was invading their private property, their privacy.

That's it. That is the clue. The private property, the privacy. I think that one of the most important contributions of the underground cinema is just this: the destruction of the phony privacy walls behind which all kinds of poisonous weeds grow. The privacy in which you can breed more worms of competition, and loveless suspicions; all this secrecy. I am not talking about home privacy. I am talking about all the public privacy. The underground cameras should expose everything, every corner and nook of our society, every prison, every ghetto, every army brigade, every office, subway, insane asylum—there shouldn't be secrets anywhere, no man should hide anything from another. I have noticed that the beautiful people are not afraid of cameras, they take it as a gameful, loving thing. And that's why I say that the underground cinema is really a political movement. Every film frame is really a bullet—only it doesn't kill—it frees us for more life, it makes lead bullets look like ridiculous pushers.

I will continue my notes from Italy. Meanwhile, do not forget to prepare yourself for the New Year's party July 1.

June 29, 1967

ON MUSIC AND CINEMA

Even at Pesaro, only those of the New American Cinema films were "appreciated" which had pop music on sound tracks (like Harry Smith's *Early Abstractions*) or had some "funny" visual ideas (like *Oh Dem Watermelons*) or fast movement coupled with fast pop music (like the work of Bruce Conner). I have noticed the same in New York. Europe is no different in that respect. So that the above mentioned films were really "appreciated" for wrong reasons: They were, really, listening to the music. During the screening of Harry Smith's films a group of teenagers in the back of the auditorium kept singing the Beatles sound track all during the show and it was going well and everybody applauded. It was a discothèque sort of happening. Which is O.K. and a very beautiful thing. The bad thing about it is that this butterfly turns into a little monster when that kind of film-watching criterion later is applied to watching Brakhage or to Landow's *Bardo Follies*, and they say, "Uh, these movies do not swing!" and they start shuffling their feet or they yawn. You see, no Beatles music in *Bardo Follies*!

What this is, it's again the dear, dear ego, not being able to give yourself to anything on that screen unless it's *you* there on that silver screen, with all the Beatles songs you like so much and everything else you know so well. But to go into unknown territory . . . and through all that silence . . . uh, that can be dangerous. I saw a sign by the entrance into the auditorium of Istituto della Spettacolo movie theatre in Rome and the sign says: DANGER OF DEATH. The sign is there by accident but it's very meaningful: our egos have to die upon the entrance of the auditorium if we want to understand and grow through art. End of sermon.

NEW YORK POLICE SEIZE MY DIARIES

June 22: Just came back to New York. At the airport, the customs man looked at my passport and said: "Hm, you have some troubles in the courts, with the movies." He went into his office and came back in two minutes and gave me all the details of my life. They seem to have a good filing system there. In any case, as the welcome back into the country the customs seized all my New York film diaries and my European film diaries which I was carrying with me as working materials. What this means is the same as seizing the travel notebooks of a writer—my films are such travel notebooks. "Are they obscene, these films?" they asked me. "Yes," I said, "these movies show streets of New York and they are quite obscene." The customs man reminded me not to make jokes about serious matters. But the laws of the United States are very funny, funny like murder. And to change them, one has to fight. But fighting produces a bad effect on me. So, I am not going to fight back this time. Give me back my diaries, and we'll call it quits.

July 20, 1967

THE END OF THE DOM, OR HOW THE ESTABLISHMENT EXPLOITS THE "NEW"

Since everybody's talking about it, I too went to see the Electric Circus. It was a disastrous experience. On my way out I bumped into Prentiss Wilhite. He said, "We have to get Barbara Rubin into this show somehow, immediately, to disrupt the whole thing, to make it more real, a scratch here, a scratch there." He even thought that maybe a tree could be planted in the middle of the place—a real tree, that would help. Now the machines are masters. Really, that wouldn't be too bad if the machines were masters: No, they are used and badly used by humans. The electricity of the old Dom, fifteen months ago, Velvet Underground and Jackie Cassen and Barbara Rubin—all is gone. The evening I was there, there was neither electricity nor circus at the Electric

Circus. There wasn't even what one could call dancing. I saw only a bunch of, my guess was, suburbians (the ticket that evening was \$3.50). There wasn't a single spark all evening, either on the floor or on the walls or in the air. On the way out, however, in the foreroom, in the corner, there one could see the light painting by Earl Reiback, with its colors slowly, quietly, and silently moving, changing—and it's about the most beautiful thing these days at the Dom, as it stands there quietly, not minding all the noise and colors splashed behind the walls, not minding all that wasted ingenuity and gadgetry of man. There is something happening there, in front of that painting, in that darkish corner, with a few people standing silently, it's a small soul event.

But the Electric Circus, although there are humans behind the machines, looked totally lifeless. The spontaneity, the dynamics, the shocks and the sounds that made your mind blow and your soul spurt, these are gone. It's symbolic, perhaps, that they painted butterflies on the floor and people dance upon them.

No soul will be awakened for life in this place any more, no mind will be blown up to pieces—unless somebody comes in and disrupts the whole place completely. As it is now it is a place of sleep—not of sleep where one rests and wakes up full of new energy, but of a tiring numbness. Who was it—it was Lampedusa who said that the Establishment likes the new, but it uses only a certain measured amount of it, just enough to keep the old exactly where it is, where it was. That's why *Time* magazine writes about hippies and avant-garde; that's where the Electric Circus is. They suck on the new so that the old won't die yet. They use the new as a rejuvenation serum for the dying old. The Establishment, instead of dying honorably as any old body should, is now prolonging its life by vampirism. The youth of the world, the teenagers of the world, the avant-garde of the world (not just that of America, not any longer) should become conscious of this fact—otherwise even this beautiful man who is emerging, this waking, spurning soul, will be sucked out by the Establishment and thrown away. I say Establishment, but I should simply say our parents. And they *love* us. But they are our murderers, really. You see, they can't die honorably and in peace, the Establishment: Because inside they know that they haven't fulfilled their human obligations on earth, that they have perverted the human life on earth—

they feel it, somewhere deep, and they don't want to die yet, they think that if they will prolong, somehow, their life, even by vampirism, something may happen and save them. What they don't know, and it's our duty to tell this, is that nothing will happen unless you do it yourself and right now. Oh, nobody dies beautifully any longer—we die in dread.

MISCELLANY: James Stoller writes in the last issue of the *Voice*: "One should really review only what there is some point in reviewing." Yes, but if you see no point in something, you think there are no points in that thing? That's how we kill things. That's the Crowther way. I would paraphrase the Stoller dictum into at least something like this: "One should really review only what one likes to review, what provokes one to review it." Because really everything has a point, many points.

And here is an example of the final perversion of the eye. I will quote the July 14 *Time* magazine:

Based on instinct-shooting techniques developed by a Georgia snuff salesman and trick shot named Bobby Lamar ("Lucky") McDaniel, 41, the Quick Kill method was developed for the Army by McDaniel's former business associate, Promoter Mike Jennings, 50, a dabbler in horse races, prize fights and shooting matches. Behind the method is the same principle that a small boy instinctively adopts in a game of Cowboys and Indians. When he sights his foe, he flicks his index finger toward him and, without really aiming, hollers "Bang! You're dead!" His hand is an extension of his eye—and in instinct shooting, the key is to make the weapon an extension of the eye.

That's the difference between the old, the Establishment, our parents, and the new man, the new teenager. We also say that the hand is the extension of the eye. But we put a camera in that hand and we caress the world through it, frame by frame and lovingly. The dying man, the Establishment, puts a gun in that hand—that's how his mind works. Die, die, old man.

July 27, 1967

ON THE MISERY OF THE ANIMATED FILM

July 14: Richard Leacock, speaking about his shooting techniques: "I am so concerned with sound, I am so deep in it! If I

were shooting a mountain I think I'd shoot it with perfect sound, in perfect sync. I may throw out the sound, later—but I'd shoot it in sync nevertheless.”

July 18: I saw films made by children (age five to fifteen) from the Yellow Ball Workshop, Lexington, Massachusetts (conducted by Yvonne Andersen). (Films were screened at the Cinematheque July 17–18; I was also told that some were shown at the recent Museum of Modern Art survey of the animated film.) Without any exaggeration: These forty minutes (approximately twenty short films, each from 30 seconds to four minutes) are about the best animated films made anywhere today. The feeling that comes through, the amazing strength and directness with which children can catch a mood, a situation; their humor. There were images in these films that contained so much, and in such a condensed form, like nothing you can see today in the grownup animated cinema. The grownup animated cinema is a sweet sissy phony world of cuteness—a world of cute emotions, cute imagery, cute feelings, cute moods, cute ideas. Be it a Polish animator or a Czech or a French or a Canadian or a pure American animator—they are all phonies. Every grownup animator should see these children's films (they are available through the Film-Makers' Co-op) and learn something from them, learn how miserable their own work is, how it has degenerated into a complete insignificance, how it has nothing to do either with visible reality nor the reality of our imaginations. These children take a very simple scene, like a storm, like a family sitting and talking, a child with a ball, a country scene—very real little scenes—they don't take subjects like peace, love, international brotherhood, creation of the world, evolution of humanity (these themes constitute ninety-nine per cent of the current grownup animation); but these unpretentious and everyday scenes become love and peace and all other things. It's the realism, the poetic realism of these films that amazes me most. No fooling around in these films: They go right to the essence, with a few striking colors (which make the colors of the grownup animation look like nothing), a few strokes, a few details: Everything becomes alive and true. Grownups are desperately trying to find “interesting” subjects. But these children's films demonstrate that there are no uninteresting subjects: There are only bad, washed-out artists. There is nothing unusual in the

little film called *A Summer Scene*, for instance: It shows a field, a few flowers, a butterfly, a tree. But the way it's done makes it into the most beautiful lyrical film you can see—it took my heart, it took my breath away for a second, it was so beautiful. It never happens in the grownup animation—the most that that comes to is some kind of admiration of the animator's cleverness, that's all. There is such a power of expression in the work of these children that it makes one ask what went really wrong with the grownup animation? How come these six-year-olds' films have more beauty, more intelligence, more form, more expressiveness—more art if you want—than all the grownup animation you see today at film festivals? Any answers?

August 17, 1967

ON WILLARD MAAS

The Maas-Menken film evenings (at the Cinematheque) were not too crowded. There are so many things to see, places to go, much more exciting than some movies by Willard Maas and Marie Menken. The young people? The hippies? One story goes like this: There was an underground movie show in San Francisco. The film-makers went to the Love-In where thousands of hippies were grazing on love. "Come, come you all," said the film-makers, "we'll show you some movies." And the hippies answered: "Movies? Are you still playing the movie game? Who wants to see movies!"

So there was a small, faithful crowd at the Maas show. Maas was wondering why the daily press didn't review his films. They review every piece of Czech or French or Hollywood celluloid. But they didn't come to the Maas show. Press comes to the underground only when there is a headline in prospect. But Maas and Menken movies have more to do with inner headlines than the newspaper headlines. Art? No headlines in art!

For the art of cinema, this was an important event. In truth, this was the most important cinema event in New York this season. After twelve years of silence, one of the most important pioneers of the avant-garde film presented to us two new works.

Which doesn't happen every day. *Orgia* and *Excited Turkeys*, the two new works by Willard Maas, tower like two green trees above the contemporary ramblings. I never really went too much for Maas' earlier work, except *The Geography of the Body*, which is a classic. But I consider the two new works of Maas among the important works of cinema. I am not sure where their real power comes from. You are never sure with any work of art. You only know that it's there and that it works. There is a powerful personality behind them. Both works are examples of film realism. But a realism that like that of *Greed* is lifted to a level where it becomes poetry. This is done by means of stylization and a few well chosen details, like the presence of Maas himself in *Orgia*. The realism of feeling. The realism of detail. And above all, the great sadness that pervades both works. Maas was standing in the back of the theatre rambling in his usual way, complaining grumpily that nobody was laughing. And one never knew, was he serious or joking. In *Orgia*, Maas wears a laughing clown mask. At one moment he takes it off, and then we see the face, and if there ever was a sad face, it is the face that comes from under this laughing mask in *Orgia*.

I was told that Maas considers *Orgia* only a fragment of a much larger work. To me, however, it is a complete thing as it is. The only other film that comes to my mind that has the same feeling and power—two very different films—is Chaplin's *Limelight*. Both films are autobiographical. Both are masterpieces. Both have a deceiving simplicity. Both are comic and tragic at the same time. Both are beyond simple interpretations. And, like *Limelight*, *Orgia* may have to wait for its time of recognition.

Excited Turkeys was shown in two versions, one was silent, the other had as sound track a sound loop of gobbling turkeys. The sound version made all the difference. The sound gave the final formal touch needed to tie this piece of Americana together and to bring out its messages. But again, it's wrong to treat it only as Americana. The realism, as I said earlier, is lifted here to the poetic intensity where the meanings become deeper, universal, multi-level. Most of the people I spoke to seemed to take this film as a plain parody. Maas encouraged them to think so. But the film is much more than that. That's the thing about art, that when a thing reaches the stage of being art it remains exactly what it looks

like and at the same time is something else. It depends who looks at it and how one looks at it. Only that much is revealed to you as is in your own eye. And it pulls you into a deeper experience of the subject. We are enriched. But most of the films we see today are just material through which our eye rambles as through some ruins, sadly, with no place to stop. The eye bounces back a little bit robbed. Maas's works are like islands in that vastness, islands to stop on, to compose oneself, and from which to cast a sad eye upon the rest.

August 24, 1967

**AN INTERVIEW WITH SHIRLEY CLARKE ON
PORTRAIT OF JASON**

Shirley Clarke's new film, *Portrait of Jason*, has been chosen to play at the Lincoln Center's Film Festival this September.

I saw the film and I'll be writing about it when it opens. It is one of the important, very important, contemporary films. I had the following conversation with Shirley Clarke:

JM: How does your new film differ from your other work, say, *The Connection* or *The Cool World*?

Shirley Clarke: For me, the uniquely extraordinary part of making *Portrait of Jason* was the shooting experience itself. I've been making films for over ten years, but this was the first time the shooting was both exciting and relaxing. Instead of deciding in advance each exact movement of the camera and the actor, I planned a very simple camera procedure: I had only one set-up, I had only one action to follow. For the first time, I was able to give up my intense control and allow Jason and the camera to react to each other. Suddenly it was as if a great weight was lifted, and I could relax and, more important, respond to the emotions spinning around the room.

I finally became part of the situation myself, not the deus-ex-machina but one with Jason and the camera. At last I found the ability to swing along with what was happening spontaneously, with no preconceived judgments. I started to trust Jason and the camera and not insist on being the controller. The only horror was

working with an Auricon camera that had to be reloaded every ten minutes. But we kept the tape running the whole twelve hours, from 9 P.M. to 9 A.M. the following morning.

JM: This is your first film in three, four years. Why the lag in between?

SC: The forming of the Film-Makers' Distribution Center and my subsequent involvement more directly with the underground are responsible for the fact that I stopped sitting on my ass waiting for my agent to sell one of my scripts or inform me that Hollywood is calling me. Since *The Cool World* I hadn't been able to convince any major or minor company to produce any of my scripts and I was beginning to think I'd never make another film. When Jonas, that's you, of course, persuaded me to try 8 mm. and keep a film notebook, I got such a kick out of handling a camera again that I knew I'd have to find a way to make another film. The success of *The Brig*, *Scorpio Rising*, and *Chelsea Girls* convinced me I could produce my film myself if I kept cost way down, and I guess that's what I did.

JM: How did you come to filming Jason?

SC: For me, as for thousands of others today, film is the medium of the 20th century. Yet so little of the medium till recently has been explored. The underground has been exploring poetic cinema and the changing vision. Cinéma vérité has called to our attention that people are the most interesting subject. Yet we have rarely allowed anyone to really speak for himself for more than a few minutes at a time. Just imagine what might happen if someone was given his head and allowed to let go for many consecutive hours. I was curious, and wow! did I find out.

JM: Why did you use Jason instead of . . . yourself?

SC: I had that idea at first. I had the idea of using myself as the subject of this experiment. But soon I realized I was too hip-aware filmwise. I would have both over-censored or over-directed myself, and I knew that a valid film could only be made if you were free enough to reveal the truth. Now it was also important to "go" with someone I knew well enough to have some idea of what he could or would reveal, but at the same time not someone I was *too* close to, which I believe would make for dual self-consciousness.

I had known Jason on and off for several years and I knew he'd

dig the opportunity to do his “thing” for a public. I also suspected that for all his cleverness his lack of the know-how of film-making would prevent him from being able to control his own image of himself, unlike my experience filming Robert Frost—Frost was always playing a mirror image of himself.

JM: From what you say, it’s clear that you started with a certain amount of known, or “controlled” elements. Where does the unknown come in?

SC: One thing I never expected was the highly charged emotional evening that took place. I discovered the antagonisms I’d been suppressing about Jason. I was indeed emotionally involved. Since the readers of this “conversation” haven’t yet seen the film, I should say here that while Jason spoke to the camera, other people were in the room, during the shooting, besides myself, who reacted to what Jason said and did, got involved with him. We had a tiny crew, plus two old friends of Jason who knew all his bits and had suffered from his endless machinations as well as enjoyed his fun and games.

How the people behind the camera reacted that night is a very important part of what the film is about. Little did I expect how much of ourselves we would reveal as the night progressed. Originally I had planned that you would see and hear only Jason, but when I saw the rushes I knew the real story of what happened that night in my living room had to include all of us, and so our question-reaction probes, our irritations and angers, as well as our laughter remain part of the film, essential to the reality of one winter’s night in 1967 spent with one Jason Holliday, né Aaron Paine.

October 5, 1967

ROSSELLINI ON THE RISE OF LOUIS XIV

The Rise of Louis XIV is a master’s work, a perfection. It reminded me a little of Eisenstein’s *Ivan the Terrible*, Part Two. The same clarity, precision of character, the simplicity of means by which it’s achieved, the documentary quality. We saw Abel Gance’s *Napoleon*, and it was a masterpiece, but it was all Abel

Gance, all visual splendor, all genius, all invention, and you knew it was invention and you still liked it even if you laughed when there appeared on the screen notes saying that the line or the scene you're seeing was historically authentic. Because even those authentic scenes and lines looked and sounded invented, fabricated, created. But in Rossellini, without any notes of authenticity, in *The Rise of Louis XIV* everything looked and sounded authentic and true; I had no doubts that that's how it really was. That is the amazing art of Rossellini. The technique of underplaying, of understating. I have nothing other to say about this film but that it is a virtuoso piece, a textbook of cinema.

Rossellini held two press conferences during his stay in New York and I made a few notes:

Q: Why did you turn to making TV films?

A: TV gives occasion to reach tremendous audiences. Sixteen million were watching the premiere of *The Rise of Louis XIV* in France and fourteen million in Italy.

Q: Are you interested in working with multiple screens, mixed media?

A: No. I am against everything that costs more—it limits your freedom.

Q: But it would give you more possibilities to educate, to inform. . . .

A: I never look at the problem that way.

Q: How long did it take to make the film?

A: Twenty-three days of shooting and one week of preparation.

Q: How much did the film cost?

A: Eighty-three million old francs, which is \$160,000.

Q: Why did you choose Louis XIV as your subject?

A: The TV company gave me a few choices. I chose Louis XIV because I know his period very well. I was also helped by a very good book on Louis XIV by Arranger that came out a year ago.

Q: You are an expert on war tactics. . . .

A: I am no authority on war tactics. It's a mistake to confuse neorealism with war. Any subject can be treated in neorealist manner. Neorealism is an effort to discover the truth. And the older I get, the less I know, the crazier I get. I don't understand

things. So I am making inquiries into things, I am trying to learn. I want to understand history, how the mechanics of life work—with no effort to prove or demonstrate; it's an effort to understand. I was interested to find out how Louis XIV came into power, I was interested in the movements of a new class, with all the corruption, etc. I was interested in the mechanics of taking over the power. And I tried to select incidents which are not easy to explain but which open other insights, like the line after the meal, "I'll go with you to feed the dogs."

Q: Did you find any difference between working for TV and working for movies?

A: No difference between TV and movies. When I first started working for TV I studied it, but I think it's a false problem.

Q: You did not use hand-held camera?

A: Hand-held camera destroys the solemnity of cinema. But in this film I didn't need to do it. I was searching to establish the grammar of cinema. I was trying to use the camera as a pencil. I was trying to write my film as clearly as possible and stick to it.

Q: You have made statements against *cinéma vérité*. Why? They are also searching for truth.

A: You are referring to what I said at the UNESCO meeting. I am not against using *cinéma vérité* techniques to document, to record life scientifically. I asked Jean Rouch if that's what he wanted. No, he answered, I want to do creative work. That's what I am against and it's here that the discussion begins. *Cinéma vérité* techniques should not be used to falsify the truth. They should be used to educate.

A: In what way does *Louis XIV* show your social commitment?

A: *Louis XIV* is a new research into understanding of reality.

Q: For what do you want to educate people?

A: To the truth. I want to relate some of my enthusiasm for the search for truth.

A: Did you want to dramatize the period?

A: As I grow older I am more sure of myself, I dramatize less and less. I try to keep the acting down and bring out the lines. I tried to avoid any dramatization. Dramatization is an easy way out, an escape. I wanted to remain coldly with the facts. The psychology of the King had to come out through small things.

Q: Why did you use unknown actors?

A: I tried to reach the possible truth. With the face of a known actor the magic would have been lost immediately.

October 26, 1967

IN PRAISE OF ART

On many days what has kept me alive in this city is the patch of green grass I see on my way to the post office, on Eighth Avenue and 24th Street. I usually stand there for a while, trying to drink enough green with my eyes, just enough green energy of living grass to pull me through the day.

A work of art does the same. A painting. Certain films. Certain music. It wakes up in you all kinds of energies that are asleep or almost asleep. Some of our best energies, subtle corners of our living bodies, are stirred, revived by colors, sounds, by nuances planted by the artist in his work.

Ah what easy nonsense it is to talk about art as "useless." Art is not useless. Art is the most necessary thing there is for our being, next to food and sleep, next to air. Art is the most informing thing. Art is immediate knowledge. You can go through a pile of books, or you can go through life bumping into all kinds of people who drain your sensitivity, who make you dumber and dumber, emotionally, intellectually—then you stand before a Vermeer, a Jan van Eyck, a Joseph Cornell, and suddenly you come awake, something begins to stir in you and you almost shudder in horror just thinking that essential parts of you had been dying slowly, unnoticeably, day after day, day after day. . . .

I speak here now in praise of art, just a few words at least, because I hear too often, "Oh, everything is art," "Oh, everybody's an artist." There is a big misunderstanding here. The fact of this democratic possibility for everyone to have a chance at self-expression through art doesn't yet mean that each of us can make of his "art" anything beyond personal therapeutic action, something that would have meaning for others. And I am not speaking about the extreme cases, like most of our so-called critics, who sit there in front of, say, Dreyer's *Gertrud* or Rossellini's *Louis XIV*,

stubbornly covering their minds and hearts with seven layers of protection, saying, "O.K. now, Mr. Dreyer, O.K., now Mr. Rossellini, try and reach us! Let's see if you can really get to us! Challenge us! Astonish us!" That's not the way to get anything from art.

November 9, 1967

HOW TO REALLY HIT THE AUDIENCE

At the University of Delaware, I saw a production of Kenneth Brown's play, *The Brig*. It was a very good production, and it was an opening night, and there was a good audience. But there was something in the air that was really frightening. I watched the audience, I listened to the reactions, and the questions, and I came to the following conclusions: If this play was shockingly true five years ago, and it really hit the viewer—today the same thing has to be five times stronger to hit anybody. The Living Theatre production of *The Brig* of five years ago wouldn't have the same effect today. It would be just a mild shock of truth. During the last five years we have become so involved in senseless violence that something like *The Brig* seems just another play, no matter how you perform it. I had a feeling that today the only way to hit the audience with truth, if you want to instruct them or move them by "hitting" (one could start here a big discussion on whether art—and people—should ever "hit"), is actually and literally to hit them one by one with a long expandable stick, right from the stage, bang, bang, bang, and save oneself going through all the "playing." Or, perhaps, the actors could shoot, occasionally, a few real bullets into the audience, to give them some sense of "reality." And here I come to two questions: 1) Did Vietnam do this to us? or 2) Do we have Vietnam because we have become what we are?

ON THE CHANGING EYE

I used to take Tony Conrad's film, *The Flicker*, to universities and colleges two years ago. Or films by Brakhage. And usually

there were all kinds of complaints: "Oh, it's too fast!" "What's this single frame business?" "What's this light business?" Lately I have been watching again the reactions to the same films and in the same places—and what a change! Nobody even mentions single frames—it's all natural vision today. When I first screened *The Flicker* two years ago two-thirds of the people walked out. Today they ask for a repeat screening. It still provokes some heated discussions, but the objectors are being fought down by their own colleagues—there is nothing for me to do. It's clear that we tend to incredibly underestimate our real capacities—our capacities to see, to hear, to learn, to perceive, to accumulate; and to hate, to murder, to violate.

SHOULD THE ARTISTS CRUMBLE WHEN THE TIMES CHANGE?

There is a curious thing in the air, in the arts and life today. The astrologers tell us that America has just entered a twenty-three-year period which will be its most creative, its most imaginative period to date. The creative imagination of America will fly. And all kinds of movements, beginnings of movements are perceivable in the air. But at the same time, dramatic decisions are being made. Like there will be (and are) those who will have difficulty making the jump into the new period. This is the time when both the artists and the people have to make their decisions: I stay where I am and I defend my stand; or I go forward, into the future, almost blindly, with no clear aim, trusting that it's there anyway. The transitions are dramatic, violent. Politicians tell us: Please, reason; go slow; reeducate. But some of us say: No, we are pushed to the edge, our actions are the actions of automatic reflexes. We'll hit back, we'll shoot, don't push us, the country will burn with guerrilla warfare.

Some of our best artists, because of all kinds of inner and outer clashings, precipices, political, social, emotional, etc., go through these dramatic changes. The greater the artist the more dramatic the transition. Many of you saw the full-page ad by Kenneth Anger in the October 26 *Voice*. It said: "In memoriam, Kenneth

Anger, film-maker, 1947–1967.” In 1947 Anger’s first film, *Fireworks*, was made. The original image and sound of *Lucifer Rising*, Anger’s newest film, were stolen from the artist as a most senseless bit of the accumulated violence of our times. Kenneth Anger, deep in occult sciences, a tortured and prophetic figure, sees and interprets the signs of the times and is moved by them into his own actions. So he declared the old Kenneth Anger is dead. He did what he had to and could do. He is entering the Aquarian Age as another man, and this new Anger may not even be a film-maker, he says. Anyway, he is making a dramatic and herculean effort to continue his life, to make another step as practically another man—at a time when many of us give up and join. Stan Brakhage, high in his Colorado mountains, is going through similar dramatic motions, and the air shakes as these two great artists try to span their fates across two humanities, themselves like bridges between the two, with their own lives trying to keep humanity together, to give it some continuity, not to let it fall to pieces.

So much courage is needed today to believe in the future and that the good will win. Because everything seems so bleak, judging from the political and moral fields. But a few among us feel that nothing will stop the advent of the Aquarian Age, the spiritual age, the first glimpses of which can be seen in the flower generation; that the actions of governments and politicians, no matter how much suffering and violence they produce today, are only the last and desperate movements of old governments and old politicians—a Frankenstein monster no longer human moving across a bloodied landscape. And as Mel Lyman says, those among us who are able to transcend all this constitute the new government. Thus you can see what responsibility rests on those who have gained some new insight into things, be they artists or flower children. How do I define, in practical terms, this “new insight”? In the following two guidelines, both by St. Teresa (of Avila): 1) “My intention was good, but my conduct bad; for however great the good, one may never do anything wrong, however small, to bring it about.” 2) “I fear those who are afraid of the devil more than the devil himself.”

November 16, 1967

ON THE CREATURES OF JACK SMITH

A very important event took place last Thursday at the New Cinema Playhouse. Jack Smith presented two hours of his new work. The audience, their eyes glued to the screen, watched two hours of the rarest imagination. Peter Kubelka is right, there is no middle: Either you are an artist or you aren't. There are movies you watch and then you go home and you try to make up your mind: Is this cinema or is this not? Is this art or isn't it? But you look at Jack Smith's work and from the very first image you know where things are. You are face to face with one of the most original artists working in America today.

We saw three films, forty-five minutes each. They didn't have titles, but the first one starred a most beautiful marijuana plant, a gorgeous blooming white queen with her crown reaching toward the sky. In the second part we saw a gallery of creatures, and there is no other name for them but to call them Jack Smith's creatures. Although they are enacted by other talented and beautiful people, it's Jack's imagination that crowns them with those fantastic gowns and hats and plumes and colors. The third part is like a continuation of the second, but it's in black and white, or more truly, in gray and white. The most surprising thing about this black and white part is that it comes after all the lush and glorious color and you think what could surpass it, and you are sort of afraid, for a moment, when you see black and white. But not even three minutes pass, and you realize that this black and white is as glorious and maybe even more so than all the rest; that these grays and whites surpass all the other colors, and triumph, despite all the competition.

The films will be shown, I understand, for a few more times, same place, Tuesdays and Thursdays, midnights, so you'll be able to see them for yourself. I can only express my own reactions, and as you well know I am not an objective viewer—if I like something I exalt about it. The contemporary commercial and—sorry to say—avant-garde cinema is so bad today, that to see Jack

Smith's work, last Thursday, was like a national holiday. From under the ruins of the contemporary cinema, suddenly a flag was lifted up toward the sun, a flag of a great poet. It's therefore that I call here, with no "objective" reservations: Joy, joy, the film art still lives and lives gloriously, radiating life all around itself. How you are going to know it's there if I don't joyfully shout here? The voices of commerce will overshadow me anyway.

December 7, 1967

ON TACTILE SENSES AND TELEVISION

There is this so-called "single frame" technique widely used now in the underground cinema. Each frame a different image. Last time I was in Europe, I stopped at the Filmmuseum of Vienna, which has a beautiful print of Dziga Vertov's film *Man With the Movie Camera*, made in 1928. I looked through the print, frame by frame (on a moviola). And sure enough: Vertov used bursts of single frames in at least two sequences. It took us another forty years to catch up with the eye of Dziga Vertov, the mad Russian, but here we are, finally. . . .

When we talk about the changing eye, we cannot avoid talking about television. I remember John Cavanaugh, who is twenty, one of the most talented of the young film-makers, who went to the Pesaro film festival last June and created there quite a stir with his "tactile" movies, and who later went to Rome and got busted by the police and who is now in sort of a madhouse. He is so far out they thought he was out of his mind. But he's an artist and more normal than others. The last time I saw him, in Rome, he was walking the streets of Rome, alone, and complaining, almost physically suffering, because there was nowhere he could find a television set to watch. He had to sit in front of that set at least two hours every day, he said. And it had to be silent, just the image, no sound. So he tried to turn off the sound in the restaurants, and the hotel lobbies, where there were some TV sets—but then the other viewers used to protest violently and used to throw him out. So he walked through the streets of Rome, in his big giant strides, very sad and very sick. He needed that television energy, those light patterns, as a tree needs sun.

ON STRUCTURING AND SIMONE WHITMAN

Two weeks ago, at the School of Visual Arts, a series of performances was given involving many different arts. One piece, *Cloths*, by Simone Whitman, was a sort of underground opera. The “singers” sat behind some contraptions that looked like four-by-six-foot screens, and from behind these screens (I think there were three of them, in various places of the theatre), every minute or so they kept throwing upon the screen some patterned, colored sheets of cloth, like pages of a book. What it came closest to, you felt like you were watching an abstract movie, say, the latest movie by Harry Smith, the one in which he shows Indian fabric designs. Nothing but a simple fabrics show, sales show—one would say. But there was more to it. What made the Whitman piece really work (and also made the Harry Smith fabric movie work) was the rhythm in which the sheets were changed. Through this rhythm the piece gained a definite structure in time.

And it reminded me, how often I see the underground films—and now everybody’s making “pattern” films, single frames and all—and it always comes to the same: They remain nothing, nothing can save them, no matter how beautiful some of the shots or frames are, if the footage lacks rhythmic structuring in time, if the personality of the film-maker is flat like a pancake.

ON “EDITING” AS AN INTUITIVE PROCESS

Some people say: “Hey, you, avant-garde film-makers, you don’t edit your films any longer; go back to school, boys, and learn how to edit your films.” Stop, big boys, I have something to tell you on this subject, and there is nothing to argue about in what I’m saying: I’m telling this to you, like a teacher tells to children. What has happened during the last ten years is that cinema has matured. Editing became an intuitive process. Like, say, when somebody paints (there is “editing” in every art): The painter doesn’t think that now I should pull the brush up, now to the left, now up again, now down, etc. Nothing can be achieved that way. Or a poet, suppose he’d start thinking consciously what word to put next to the other. But in cinema, we say that that’s

exactly the thing to do, that that's a virtue! The avant-garde film-maker today does his "editing" the same way a poet or a painter does: intuitively, automatically, during the process of shooting (creating). And what about the preparation? Oh, yes, you have to develop your aesthetic senses: by watching other films and by being with other arts. That cannot be done in two weeks, just before the shooting, bang, like that. That has to be done all your life, and constantly: You are the real instrument of your art, not the camera (you learn your camera in two hours), all work must be done on yourself. You speak to a film-maker, you listen to his gross, vulgar, heavy thinking, feeling—and you know that's how his films will be, too. On earth as in heaven. . . .

So that now, when we have all the tools (they say there are eight million 16 mm. and 8 mm. cameras in the United States today) and when everybody can make films (like everybody can write or paint)—now we can talk about some other matters, more difficult (and more important): the art of cinema. Soon you'll start hating me. . . . Here is a different Jonas speaking . . . (there are several of me).

December 21, 1967

ON HOW THE UNDERGROUND FOOLED HOLLYWOOD

Bystander (who would like to remain anonymous) to Jonas: You have been interviewing other film-makers. Permit me to ask *you* a question. Let's face it, the secret is out: It has been all a joke, all this underground business?

Jonas: I guess I have to tell the truth now. There is nothing to lose by now. So, may as well let the world know the real truth about the underground cinema. It all started ten years ago, when a few of us who wanted to make films very badly but who couldn't get our hands either on the Hollywood studios or the equipment, one day, suddenly, came up with a brilliant idea which we immediately proceeded to put into practice. It was a very simple idea and it was based on our good knowledge of Hollywood psychology.

Bystander: What was the scheme?

Jonas: It was like this. We decided to work out, to concoct a

few very "unusual," kooky ideas and gimmicks—like hand-held cameras, out-of-focus shots, shaky camera techniques, improvised acting, single frames, jumpy cutting—things like that. Knowing the Hollywood psychology, which we studied carefully, we knew that it was only a question of some insistence on our part and some "casual" publicity—and Hollywood would pick up our bait. You see, Hollywood wants to be "with the people," "give them what they want," "be up to date." (*Newsweek*, for instance, knew about Be-Ins before the hippies found out about them.) And I don't have to tell you this—it worked! Our scheme worked perfectly! Today, in Hollywood, they are running in the studios with hand-held cameras, they are shaking them, while dollies and tripods are getting rusty. Next week a truckload of tripods is arriving from Hollywood to New York to be distributed to the underground film-makers—Hollywood has no longer any use for them. We are finally free to take any piece of equipment we want, any studio we want, almost for nothing! Now we can really start making our movies, while Hollywood will go underground. And since we are now in complete control of things, I feel there is no great reason to hold from the world the truth about our hoax.

Bystander: And what about the press?

Jonas: The joke was on the press, too. They swallowed the bait and the hook. All those articles on the underground movies! What's more—some of the film-makers themselves got hooked on the scheme! They really believe, some of them, what the press tells them! They think they are underground film-makers!

Bystander: You don't seem to have any great qualms about it?

Jonas: Oh no, not at all! Those of us who have been in on this joke, we consider any artist who doesn't see that this is a joke and who gets hooked seriously on it, on our underground hook—such an artist has no sense of humor and therefore is no good anyway. Therefore, no big loss. . . .

1968

January 18, 1968

ON NORMAN MAILER NEW FILM FICTION STYLES

Most of the daily and weekly film reviewers objected to the virtues of Norman Mailer's film, *Wild 90*. I don't want to discourage our reviewers, but the techniques of *Wild 90* are here to stay, for a while. *Wild 90* is only one of many films that you are going to see soon which use the so-called cinéma vérité techniques to "write a novel."

No doubt, it all started with Lumière. But it was Leacock and Pennebaker who brought these techniques to the attention of our contemporaries. The only thing is that it was always considered that it's O.K. to use the cinéma vérité techniques to shoot a documentary, a reportage, but not for anything else. And that's how it went, for a good ten years. Until, one day, came Andy Warhol. In the history of cinema Andy Warhol—besides many other credits—will have a credit for introducing, very freely and very casually, the cinéma vérité techniques into the fiction film. Not the "neo-realist" techniques or style where they did everything to imitate the life, to recreate the life; but to use the real life to make fiction of it.

In a sense, it's nothing new. Artists, that is, film-makers, always used real-life techniques in cinema. It's only a question of the emphasis, of the degree. And the emphasis, the degree, the angle

always comes from the immediate (contemporary) needs of man. The theatre of Stanislavsky is based on the use of "real-life" experiences, too. All good acting is based on "real" experiences. But there are so many levels and aspects to this "real truth" in which we live. The emphasis, the styles keep changing.

The first masterpiece of this fictionalized reality, no doubt, was *The Chelsea Girls*. *The Four Stars* is its Odyssey. *Vali* and *Portrait of Jason* followed. Sheldon Rochlin (*Vali*) is editing another film, *The London Scene*, which he shot in London during a period of several months, and if he won't destroy his footage in editing, his new film in which he follows several real people in real life situations will provide us with a *Go* (John Clellon Holmes) of London, 1967. *The Edge*, *Troublemakers*, and *In the Country* fall in the same category. There are, basically, two variants to the technique: 1) to take real people (usually, nonactors) and let them improvise upon given situations (*Chelsea Girls*, *Wild 90*, *The Edge*) and 2) to follow real people in real life situations and edit the footage into a "novel" (*Vali*, Rochlin's new film, *Portrait of Jason*). In the second variant, the film-maker can either stay very close to the character (*Vali*) with a documentary fidelity (much of Jean Rouch's work falls in this category), or he can use the gathered footage freely and fictionalize it.

Knowing what's in editing rooms, and knowing what's in the wind, I can tell you that there will be many more films in this direction during this coming year. Really, the only thing that's holding the film-maker is the technology of cinema which is so far behind the life, behind the ideas, and behind the practical needs of the artists. The sync equipment for sound shooting is still too complicated, too expensive, and too unreliable.

I know that there will be some among my readers who will say: "Oh, look what he is pushing now. I wonder what will be next. . . ." But, you see, I am not a critic. I don't criticize. I am a cold, objective, "piercing" eye that watches things and sees where they are and where they are going and I'm bringing all these facts to your attention. Now it's up to you to interpret the facts of life. The only thing is that you prefer history, you prefer to look at things and enjoy them from the past, as history. All your interpretations are interpretations of history. But when the things happen, right now, you don't find much instruction in them, you prefer to "criti-

cize," that is, to dismiss them, very skeptically—as if your skepticism would eliminate in us the need for these new developments, new researches, new insights. And that's how it always was, with critics, and with people, and that's how we remain, most of us. Except that times are changing. The children of Now are here. There will be much more consciousness of the present during the coming years. Not everything will be left to history, to "historical perspective," as the war in Vietnam already demonstrates. We don't want the truth of history about Vietnam: We want the truth of now.

January 25, 1968

ON RADICAL NEWSREEL

December 22 will go into the history books of cinema. Some thirty film-makers—cameramen, editors, soundmen, directors—gathered at the Film-Makers' Cinematheque and created a radical film newsreel service. The same day a very significant coincidence occurred: On our way home, in the evening papers, we read the headline—Universal Newsreel Service Closes.

The new Newsreel service is still in organizational stages, it needs money very badly, but the first newsreels should be out sometime this week. Not even the name of the service is fixed as yet, proposals going from the Guerrilla Newsreel to the Radical Newsreel to just simply the Newsreel. But whatever the name, the time is ready and ripe for it.

What will the new Newsreel do? I will quote here some of the half-official announcements:

The Newsreel is a radical news service whose purpose is to provide an alternative to the limited and biased coverage of television news. The news that we feel is significant—any event that suggests the changes and redefinitions taking place in America today, or that underlines the necessity for such changes—has been consistently undermined and suppressed by the media: Therefore we have formed an organization to serve the needs of people who want to get hold of news that is relevant to their own activity and thought.

The Newsreel is the cooperative effort of many young film-makers who have been documenting independently whatever they considered

"news." Most of their footage has had no outlet, and some has not been seen. The Newsreel will be such an outlet and will make several types of news film: short newsreels which will appear every week or two; longer, more analytic documentaries; informational and tactical films.

The Newsreel films will reflect the viewpoints of its members, but will be aimed at those we consider our primary audiences: all people working for change, students, organizations in ghettos and other depressed areas, and anyone who is not and cannot be satisfied by the news film available through establishment channels. We intend to cover demonstrations; to interview figures like LeRoi Jones and Garrison; we want to show what is at stake in a housing eviction or in consumer abuses in Harlem; we should provide information on how to deal with the police or on the geography of Chicago.

Films made by the Newsreel are not to be seen once and forgotten. Once a print goes out, it becomes a tool to be used by others in their own work, to serve as a basis for their own definition and analysis of the society. Part of our function, therefore, is to provide information on how to project films in nontheatrical settings—on the sides of buildings, etc. We hope that whoever receives our films will show them to other local groups as well, thus creating an expanding distribution network. We shall also encourage the formation of similar newsreel groups in other parts of the country, so that there can be a continual interchange of news films, whereby people in Oakland can see what happens in New York and vice versa.

Films may be obtained from the Newsreel in the following ways: 1. Free of charge to community organizing groups that cannot afford to pay for prints; 2. On a regular subscription basis to film clubs, national organizations, theatres, etc., who will pay for the cost of prints plus handling charges; 3. By renting back prints of the Newsreel in a package; 4. By renting whatever foreign or other documentary films we have compiled.

February 1, 1968

ON CHURCHES AND THE SHADOW METAPHORS OF KEN JACOBS

The churches of New York are sooty, heavy, cold buildings. No good vibrations in these churches. Maybe in some corners, yes. When I walked into the St. Peter's church, in Rome, it felt like a factory. But some corners, some half-hidden areas felt like a

church. In my travels, I have come upon only one little church, lately, in Austria, near Vienna, on a hill, a very tiny, tiny church, which felt like a church. And if someone were to walk into this little church, in Austria, and start doing what Ken Jacobs did at the Washington Square Methodist Church last weekend, I'd throw him out with my own hands. But in the case of this particular Methodist church, Ken Jacobs' *Apparition Theatre of New York: Evoking the Mystery: Chapter 4 of the Big Blackout of '65* piece uplifted the spirituality of the church. For the first time the sad, cold building was touched, explored, looked at with loving attention. Still resistant and frozen, it started coming to life, for thirty-five minutes. Jacobs manipulated carefully placed lights which, when switched on or moved around, revealed now a cornice, now part of the ceiling, now part of the altar, now a chair, now the organ pipes—while the sound system blew into the church the sounds of the street, noises, cars, bits of voices, and, later, the organ music (played by Michael Snow).

This was the fourth installment of Jacobs' *Big Blackout* epic, and I can only repeat what I have said on other occasions, that Ken Jacobs is the subtlest manipulator of light and shadow in the entire multi-media area, and as a lyricist (with a touch of melancholy) he is hardly surpassable. (Other lyricists are Nam June Paik, Claes Oldenburg, and Ken Dewey.) Jacobs is not content just to show what you can do with light, as an effect—light itself—which is the way of most of the psychedelicists. What Ken does, and often with a real genius, is to make shadow-light metaphors. It's a pity that Ken's pieces aren't recreated more often—and when they are, the audience is usually so small. But Ken Jacobs' shadow metaphors are among the most beautiful in the whole new cinema-shadow play art, and they are impossible to describe (they are already shadows to begin with); the child metaphor, the moon metaphor, or in the case of the latest installment, the opening door metaphor; or the illuminated ceiling image when the pale light strikes fragily the church ceiling, as the rest of the church remains in darkness—it's a breathtaking moment of meditative beauty; the church becomes a live thing and you identify with it, as if you were this church, alone at night, listening to the city noises with the car lights caressing your ceiling.

It's no great news that man is going through a spiritual regeneration. With the old religions (churches) crumbling in their own

staleness, even the houses of God must be rejuvenated, recovered, touched again with love, one by one, piece by piece. As I sat in the Washington Square Methodist Church that night last weekend I had a feeling that the church building itself was excitedly aware of its own coming back to life—of a possibility of becoming alive. The blasting sound of trumpets and organ sounded and shook the entire church as the light hit the ceiling and the walls, again and again, almost painfully, like streams of sunlight—long rays of light and shadow pierced into the (symbolic) darkness of the church—again and again, trying to bring walls and space to life, walls abandoned by man to death. And the church stood there, in expectation, for a moment, waiting for God to breathe life into it. But the altar remained still in darkness.

Yes, artists are priests today. Reverend Kenneth Jacobs. The spirituality of the poet against the practicality of a Yogi, Maharishi Mahesh?

April 18, 1968

ALL ART IS REAL AND CONCRETE

“Experimental Film is synonymous with a mental delirium and the escape from reality,” writes French movie critic Marcel Martin in one of the three leading French movie journals, *Cinema 68* (N. 124), as he reviews the Fourth International Experimental Film Competition at Knokke-Le Zoute. This kind of attitude is still very typically European.

In the United States this mentality is represented by Amos Vogel (see his *Evergreen* article). What amazes me is this: How, with all the schools of philosophy behind them, the French intellectuals (??) can still be so primitive about reality. Escape from reality! A regular Hollywood (or French) movie scene is reality; but Tony Conrad’s film, *The Flicker*, is not reality . . . it deals with light. Or *Wavelength*. Light is not reality. But reality is endless, there are so many levels and angles to reality. Hollywood film is one reality, the work of Markopoulos, or Snow, or Brakhage deals with another reality. The work of the avant-garde filmmaker is not an escape from reality—it’s just the opposite: It goes deeper into reality, beyond what has been seen by the eye of the contemporary narrative cinema.

To sum up:

All is real and concrete.

All senses are real and concrete.

Aesthetic senses are real and concrete.

Art is real and concrete.

Art's workings are real and concrete.

The soul is real and concrete.

The workings of art upon the soul and the workings of the soul through art are real and concrete.

And now I'll tell you a story. My story could be called "A Story About a Man Who Went to the Frick Gallery to Look at Vermeer."

A STORY ABOUT A MAN WHO WENT TO THE FRICK GALLERY TO LOOK AT VERMEER

Once there was a man. He lived, he worked, he ate, and he slept like everybody else. One day, I do not know how nor why, he went to the Frick Gallery and stood in front of a painting by Vermeer. As he stood there, watching the subtle play of light and color, he began to feel pleasant currents go through his whole being. Later, at home, and at work, he could still feel Vermeer's presence. He felt a kind of electricity in the subtle and tiny ends of his senses, a current which went further, into his thoughts and through his heart. He knew that something that had been atrophying and dying in him was suddenly given new life by Vermeer. And he felt richer for it. He wasn't a shrinking man: He was expanding. All his life he was told that art and beauty were ephemeral and unreal. Now he knew that in actuality both art and its workings were concrete and real. Vermeer had locked into his painting the energy, the subtle vibrations of light and line which can wake up and come into action as soon as there is a sign of an approaching frequency of vibration in the onlooker—and it lifts that lower vibration of the onlooker into its own field.

Knowing this, the man now frequently visited the gallery to spend time with Vermeer. It was like going to school and learning and growing—only the facts learned were not the facts of profession and craft but rather the facts of aesthetic senses. If in school, he felt, his thinking powers were strengthened and the know-how facts were instilled into his memory—so here an entire area of his

being that he didn't even know existed was strengthened and developed and now seemed to give meaning to the rest. He also understood now that the expression which he had heard so often in school and among his friends, that art is a reflection of life—now this expression had little meaning for him. Art was not a reflection of life: Art *was* life. Art was energy. Art was more life than he was, very often. . . . More soul was locked into this painting than into some of his friends. The separation was not between life or a reflection of life but between the different phenomena. A man is one thing, a tree is another thing, a stone still another, and a painting by Vermeer still another. And each of the four was a field of energy and they acted upon each other and all four were life.

As the years went by, while his visits to the Frick Gallery continued, he used to stop occasionally in the street in front of some artist selling his paintings. And he was always disappointed not to receive from them any of the feelings he got from Vermeer. A confusion of muddled tones seemed to come out of these amateur paintings—a vibration of a much heavier quality and frequency which almost by force was pulling down his own frequency, dulling his senses, jarring with them, making him almost physically sick, and he had to rush away. He knew by now that the artifacts of man can act both ways—they can lift one up or they can drag one down, all depending on where the onlooker was in his own development and where the creator of the artifact—“the artist”—was when he was creating the artifact, where he was in his own development, how pure, how clear an instrument he was himself, what kind of note could sound through him.

May 16, 1968

OBSERVATIONS ON FILM FESTIVALS

I spent this past weekend at Yale University as one of four judges at the first Yale Film Festival, organized by Yale University. (Other judges were Annette Michelson, Willard Van Dyke, and Bernard Hanson.) The first prize was given to Scott Bartlett's film *Off-On*; the second prize to James Broughton's film *The Bed*;

the third prize to Will Hindle's film *Chinese Firedrill*. John Craig got the prize for the best film under three minutes for his film *Twitchy*; Jerome Hill's *Anticorrida* received the honorary prize for a film under three minutes. Larry Jordan's film *Gymnopedies* was given jury's special prize. Each judge chose one of his favorites for a special mention. Annette Michelson chose Palazzola's *O*; Willard Van Dyke chose Loren Sears' *Tribal Home Movie No. 2*; Hanson chose Will Hindle's *FFFCTM*; I chose George Landow's *Bardo Follies*.

No point telling you that each of the four "judges" had his own individual preferences which differed greatly from the list of the "winners." The winners constitute a compromise among the four. For instance, none of Annette Michelson's selections got on the list of winners. Which brings us to a very important lesson. Festival juries consist of individuals with very different interests in cinema. They come from all kinds of professions and from all kinds of walks of life. When we look through the names of the film festival juries, we find writers, actors, poets, art critics, film festival directors, and film-makers themselves. It is absurd to ask them all to agree upon the same film. The only thing that can be done is to announce the individual selections of each juror. The reasons of each juror could be given for his selections. The compromise selections of prize one, prize two, prize three, etc., do justice neither to the films nor to the jurors. I for myself do not intend in the future to participate in any other kind of jury but ones which will be based on individual selections.

The second observation from which it's time to draw practical lessons concerns the films themselves. Usually, hundreds of films are being sent to film festivals (230 were sent to the Yale Film Festival). Festival organizers appoint a local preselection jury to reduce the number of films to a size good enough to squeeze into the festival screening time (in the case of Yale, three screening sessions, each session 2½ hours long). So that the jury of the festival sees only one-tenth of the films submitted to the festival (this goes for all festivals, from Cannes to Yale). Since the virtues of some of the most advanced works, the youngest works, can be noticed only by the most advanced and open critics, it happens very often that such films are eliminated before they reach the final jury. Looking through the list of rejects at Yale we discov-

ered that the rejected films were as good as the ones which were accepted. So we started digging into at least some of the rejects. Annette Michelson's top choice, for instance, Palazzola's *O*, came from the rejects. At this year's Oberhausen Film Festival (Germany), Scott Bartlett's *Off-On* was rejected by the preselection jury. Only upon the insistence of some members of the jury (Willard Van Dyke was one), who by sheer accident happened to know that Bartlett's film was submitted, the film was put back into competition and it ended up by winning the grand prize. Among the rejects of the Third International Experimental Film Competition, Belgium (1964), was Stan Brakhage's masterwork, *Dog Star Man*. The conclusion is this: The final jury, the one that gives awards, has to see all of the films submitted. No doubt this creates all kinds of problems, including longer sessions of work for the jurors—but either the jury takes its work seriously or it doesn't. The jury is responsible not only for those films which are selected for screenings to the public, but for every film submitted to the festival.

Number three observation concerns the technical aspects. No festival of cinema can be considered serious if it cannot cope with 8 mm. projections, loop projections, double (or triple) screen projections, or other similar technical aspects which by now have become part of the normal film-making vocabulary and techniques. (Yale Film Festival, for instance, did not consider 8 mm. films at all, and it failed to project Storm De Hirsch's two-screen film, *Third Eye Butterfly*, even after it was accepted. At Cannes Film Festival, last year, they could not project *The Chelsea Girls*, because it requires two screens.) Film festivals have to bring themselves up to date and change their working procedures if they want to show what's going on in cinema instead of what's going on in the history of cinema.

May 23, 1968

ON THE NOVELISTS IN CINEMA

Cinema keeps attracting novelists. I have never really understood why. Writing, good prose and good poetry, is a gift of angels and a great craft. It takes years to master it. But the same novelist

who knows perfectly well what goes into good writing (nobody can say that Pasolini, Robbe-Grillet, or Mailer do not know what prose is)—they go now into film-making as if it was the easiest thing to do. Do they really believe that to tell stories with a camera is easier than with words?

Robbe-Grillet's *Trans-Europe-Express* is sloppily, poorly written (with the camera, that is). I picked up his book *Dans le labyrinthe*. I read: "Je suis seul ici, maintenant, bien à l'abri. Dehors il pleut, dehors on marche sous la pluie en courbant la tête," etc. I am searching in my memory for a single scene in Robbe-Grillet's film of such ease and flow and magic. The film is clumsy and undernourished. Despite the constant intercuttings, the plots within plots, and the method of "estrangement," the film remains too plain, too simple, too one-level. There is in it none of the magic and playful simultaneity of his prose, and none of the down-to-the-matter quality. Same goes for Robbe-Grillet's first film, *L'Immortelle*, with the exception of the fascinating and almost hypnotic use of the panning shot (even if he has learned it from Resnais). Obviously, it would be foolish to say that Robbe-Grillet shouldn't make films, or that they are completely without value. As long as he doesn't take the rhetorical "now everybody can make movies" for plain truth, it's O.K.

Norman Mailer is more clever. Robbe-Grillet and Pasolini (with the exception, perhaps, of *Accattone*) fail mainly because they are working within the conventional (and commercial) narrative cinema, never daring to go beyond the *nouvelle vague* usages. Thus they are exposed to all the comparisons. You can't watch Robbe-Grillet without measuring him against Resnais, Godard, or Hitchcock; but you can watch Mailer's *Wild 90* without ever comparing him with anyone else. Mailer, clever and intuitive, chose a more contemporary style—specifically, the style of *cinéma vérité*—which permits him to remain the center of the film, as he is the center of his writings. He performs another clever trick in the transition: While in his writing he is all reason, all mind, all intellectual, in his films he goes to the opposite, whatever that opposite is—he becomes a spitting slob. Thus he avoids any comparisons of his films to his writing—which is not the case with Robbe-Grillet or Pasolini. The films of Pasolini and Robbe-Grillet look like shadows of their own earlier books; the films of Norman

Mailer have nothing to do with his books: If you want, you can consider them completely new books, written on film. The reels of *Wild 90* and *Beyond the Law* can sit on the shelves next to his other books, with equal rights. Mailer pulls through, maybe because of his temperament, his vitality—that is, because of his qualities. You can watch Garbo even in a badly directed film: Garbo is the film. And so is Mailer.

August 1, 1968

ON ERNIE GEHR AND THE "PLOTLESS" CINEMA

I saw Ernie Gehr's two films, *Eyes** and *Moments*, twice. The first time they seemed like light events. Two light events. On second viewing Gehr's films began to appear to be two light narratives. They also look like movies which could be projected in Michael Snow's room in *Wavelength*.

Which is not taking away anything from Gehr's personality or originality; it's just that he has absorbed all the light lessons taught by *Wavelength*, and has gone his own way. For *Eyes* could surely be looked at (although there are many ways of looking at it) as a narrative. (We shouldn't forget that *Wavelength* is also a "murder story.") At least I found it that way. Two people sitting in a room. Silent. Nothing seemingly happens. They slightly change positions from time to time. Window. Room. Furnitures. Action between the frames. And the light, between them, around them, over them. The story is not told by way of usual situations, happenings, actions, emotion clashes, because the story is not the usual one. It's happening on some mental level. The light, no doubt, is the key to it, it punctuates the events, it tells the story, it sets the tone.

Wherever I go, wherever there is a discussion of modern cinema, I keep hearing the question of plot, of story, of narrative. "But where is the plot?" they ask (or, rather, cry). And the filmmaker defends himself, as I have so many times: "Yes, but this film isn't supposed to tell a story, this film belongs in the domain of poetry; if you want plot you go to prose." Etc., etc.

* Later retitled *Wait*.

The truth is more simple and more complex, and makes the usual poetry-prose, narrative-nonnarrative explanations practically silly.

The point is that poetry has plot. The point is that Ernie Gehr's films have plot. All of Brakhage films have plots. His little *Songs*, the most lyrical works created in cinema yet, have plots and have stories.

What do I mean? It's like this:

Man, as an individual, goes through stages of growth. Today, the stress may be on the physical adventures, emotions, life outside, naturalistic events; tomorrow, the same man makes another step, and turns inward and begins to follow the events of his unconscious and he follows them through their intricate, but quite logically plotted, causal development (story) lines—as in poetry.

The larger sections of people, of population, go through similar ups and downs, ins and outs. There are centuries which are so much out, preoccupied with the matter only, that even their poetry is all nature, all gross (sentimental) emotions, moralizing, all is "reflection." At the turn of this century, or before that, the humanity began swinging in (Joyce, Proust) to inner adventures, developments, and events. Only cinema remained in the 19th or 18th century.

If Ernie Gehr's *Eyes* were a 19th-century "narrative," these two people who are now sitting in Gehr's room, no doubt, would be talking, exchanging some lines, performing, going through some psychological bits. No matter how disjointed, surrealistic, or cubist, still they would be going through lines and actions and expressions aimed at revealing their psychology, emotions, ideas. In a later 20th-century or early 21st-century film, which is where Gehr's film is, the event is transposed to another level and we don't give a damn about these people's emotions or their characters. We are following completely something else, something that cannot be told in words but can be revealed only through certain rhythms of light—emphases, and events of light—something that is happening on a mental level which communicates directly to your thought waves (nerves) and you won't get anything out of it if you try to react emotionally, if you look for psychological keys, or any of that bag. Yes, maybe we should use Richard Foreman's term: Ontological cinema has arrived.

So we should stop crying that there is no plot in the new cinema. There is plot in the new cinema and there is story in the new cinema: Only that plot and that story is on another level of being, so no doubt it has different characteristics and laws and different logic (illogic?). Still, these events are as tightly knit and proceed with as much inevitability and time-place-character unity as on the other, outer level (circle) of being (of art).

August 15, 1968

THE SUPREME OBSCENITY OF THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS

August 5: Preview of Peter Bogdanovich's first film, *Targets*. Boris Karloff plays himself. I'd like to see the film again. I can't talk about any film from one viewing. It's a very good first film. It has a number of submerged interesting levels of content. The style is direct, clear, in the best Hollywood tradition of storytelling (Hawks, Ford, Hitchcock).

August 6: Last autumn, a print of Jack Smith's film *Flaming Creatures* was seized at the University of Michigan. The case is still open. Meanwhile, the enemies of Justice Fortas, manipulators of justice, got a print of Jack's film from Detroit police, and are circulating it in Washington, D.C., among the senators, to undermine Fortas. Supposedly, Fortas was one of the judges who approved the film, when my own case went to the Supreme Court last year (and was rejected). Says *Time* magazine: ". . . the anti-Fortas faction said it planned to send copies [of *Flaming Creatures*] to women's groups and civic clubs in hopes of triggering further outrage." And all this without asking Jack Smith's permission! What an outrageous mocking of author's rights, all in the name of justice, and on the very floor of our Senate. So who wants to talk about justice in this country any more? Corruption everywhere. I know Jack Smith is so fed up by now with misuse of his rights that he may not do anything about it. But what about the people of the law? How can they tolerate things like this? Why can't they put the United States senators in jail for stealing and peddling prints of Jack's film?

August 29, 1968

TEN REASONS WHY THE NEW YORK FILM FESTIVAL SHOULD BE CLOSED

Should the citizens of New York close the New York Film Festival? Why? Or why not? Is there any art in Lincoln Center? Should we close (some say: burn down) Lincoln Center? Do we have right to entertain ourselves at the Lincoln Center (art or no art) while we conduct wars in other countries?

If you are interested in discussing the above (and similar) questions and getting some answers (or providing them yourself), you should attend one of the meetings taking place all over the city these days. The idea emanated from the Newsreel group, but numerous student, youth, grownup, political, and apolitical groups are already involved in the Down With Lincoln Center movement. One meeting will be on September 3, 8 P.M. Blue Van Films, 28 West 31st Street. If you want, you can organize your own discussion groups.

There are several texts and manifestoes floating around, prepared by various groups. Here are some excerpts from the texts:

Although much more sophisticated than popular culture and addressed to a narrow constituency—the educated middle- and upper-middle class which is not fully deceived or adequately satisfied by the mass media—Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts also functions to maintain the false consciousness which bourgeois culture must induce to prevent a critical spirit, understanding, disaffiliation, and consequent revolt. Like the other cultural institutions of the society, like the mass media, its function is coping with rebellion.

The structure of Lincoln Center adequately defines its reactionary role, and its occasional exhibition of radical cinema or theatre is a part of that structure itself, not a deviation, since Lincoln Center's presentation of radical art, by plucking it out of the social context which could give it life and meaning, effectively nullifies whatever explosive content it might have had. Like any other bourgeois institution, Lincoln Center—in its own sophisticated manner—continually functions to maintain the anti-human capitalist social system.

Lincoln cinema is a phony radical's cinema. It has nothing to do with cinema.

Gathering from all over the world what its directors consider to be great cinema, petrifying the film into an art object, concentrating a whole year of film-making into ten dizzy days of alienated film-viewing, the Film Festival is a powerful confirmation of coterie art. The entire concept of a film festival, of a cultural event, militates against the establishment of ongoing relationships between film-makers and audiences, especially new audiences, which alone makes vital and progressive art possible.

We understand that Lincoln Center—Pentagon of cultural oppression—must now be confronted, but not on the basis of demands that Lincoln Center improve its programs, i.e., give us better elitist festivals, better bourgeois culture, more refined social control. Up against the wall, bourgeois institutions, bourgeois culture, bourgeois life.

We want a new society where art is no longer a commodity or a mystification, but where it is ecstasy, illumination, and celebration.

The audience of the festival is a coterie of cineasts (and fellow travellers who acquire the status of coterie by attending the festival) who have swallowed the elitist definition of culture whole and who seek to impose those definitions on the "art of the film."

Lincoln Center should be totally utterly demolished, smashed, popped off, scum-cleansed by violent intrusions, cutting off dresses and titties.

These are the voices of the people. They may be wrong, they may be right, but one thing is certain: Those in power have brought this action (or reaction) upon themselves. Should one call it "punishment"? That would be moralizing, no?

CONSTRUCTION VS. DESTRUCTION, OR LEAVE THE DEAD ALONE

Where do I stand myself? I can only tell you where I stood myself till now. I am not very certain where I am now. This was my past stand: Those who have watched the growth of the New American Cinema, the underground film, should know by now that our attitude (my attitude) or spirit was to build, to create,

not to destroy. The things that we considered outdated, even harmful, we left to their own inevitable and solitary death by not cooperating with them, by keeping ourselves out. We didn't waste energy on destroying the Hollywood film industry. We directed our energies toward creating a new kind of cinema, a more personal cinema, toward the liberation of the camera; we didn't waste energy on destroying or fighting the competitive, commercial film distribution systems—we created our own cooperative distribution center, Film-Makers' Cooperative, based on noncompetitive human relations. We didn't waste energy on fighting censorship laws: We created a cinema that is changing the censorship laws. We didn't even waste energy in fighting the corrupt public information media—we created our own underground information film, the Newsreel. The same thing was with the film festivals: We stayed out of them. That is, till now. Because things are different now. The air is full of foulness and desperation. Who is creating this desperation? Do I have to answer it? I am afraid things are out of control. But that's how they always were, I gather, when one looks from the worm's angle. . . .

September 5, 1968

ON TV AND THE DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION

I never watch television—I have no time for it—but I watched the Convention. One good thing I can say about television: It helps to dethrone such public pigs as the Mayor of Chicago. Thursday morning, after the “nomination,” I listened to some people who I knew had no great previous passion for breaking the “law and order,” and they all told me, in shaky voices, that after seeing the behavior of Mayor Daley on the convention floor, and what was happening in the streets of Chicago—they were ready to go into the streets and smash windows. There he was, Mayor Daley, mockingly grinning at all decency and justice, the big boss, the biggest Democrat of them all—and he could not hide anything from the all-seeing eyes of the TV cameras. His snickerings, his huddlings with the Mafia, his secret (he thought) signs to the buddies in the balcony, his childish and almost innocent pride, and

his uncontrolled anger when he lost even a tiny bit of control over the Convention—nothing could be hidden.

The NBC footage of the woman trying to take three youths out of the demonstration area, her driving into the solid wall of the National Guard, their anger, their violence, their monstrous demonstration of senseless brutality—a whole team of heavily armed National Guardsmen and one helpless woman with three kids in the car—as if she were carrying three kegs of powder (and maybe that's how they look today at the American youth, each one is a keg of powder); and how they pushed their guns into the face of the woman and shouted—and amazingly, the woman remained surprisingly calm and controlled when the entire National Guard team looked like an insane asylum in a fit of hysteria; yes, this footage, these two or three minutes of film—I do not know, really, how long it lasted, the time froze in horror, these two or three minutes of TV film are the most shattering anti-army, anti-police, anti-American, anti-Daley, anti-Humphrey document, produced by Mayor Daley himself.

Orwell predicted that in the year 1984 all citizens will be monitored by the police. I think that we should aim for the opposite. We can do it. I think that a law should be passed to enable us to watch on special TV sets any time we want all our public “servants”—presidents, mayors, police chiefs, even the individual policemen, generals. One channel for Mayor Daley, one for the chief of police, one for the President, one for the Department of Buildings, etc. We could see how they run the city, the country, we would find out what kind of people they are. They would think twice, whatever they say or do. They would know they can hide nothing. Why should a good man hide anything? We are entitled to know everything about the government and its operations. Under the all-seeing eyes of the TV cameras no pig would be able to stay in any office for very long. Paradise on earth would come closer. Now I can't see it, it's behind the clouds of tear gas. It is a symbolic action, I guess: Cover your faces, close your eyes, don't look around, run blindly. That's *their* conception of a citizen. Which is a hell of a nerve.

September 19, 1968

**ON PROFESSIONALISM, PRESS PREVIEWS, AND
NORMAN MAILER**

An old note, from May 6: "Went to a preview of Mailer's new film, *Beyond the Law*, at 1600 Broadway. Norman was there, neater and slicker than usual, his hair combed close to his skull, still wet, very proper, like a farmer boy going to town. 'Oh,' I said, 'you look so proper.' 'I am the producer now,' he blurped, in Norman's usual way. As an actor, he was right. Something in that word 'producer' makes one want to look more proper, and solid, and clean. It gives security and strength."

As soon as you leave the underground, you enter the strange world of pretended security. Be it at the 1600 Preview Theatre, or at the Lincoln Center Film Festival—you don't want to look sloppy, you have to keep a sense of properness. You don't shuffle your feet unnecessarily, you don't move around much, you sit straighter than usual. If you have any such small vices or imperfections you tend to hide them, push them down.

That has to do with the personal behavior at Lincoln Center or 1600 Broadway. But the same applies to the film-making. When you make a movie and you know that it will be previewed at 1600 Broadway, you make your movie so that it will exude the same sense of safety and "strength." Your movie should behave properly, it shouldn't shuffle its feet, and no coughing. A "proper," "real," uptown movie. The camera must be steady, its movements orderly; the people in the movie must speak in certain proper voices. If not, then your movie will be designated as "personal," as "independent," and it will end up in the Special Events, a freak show. But what you want is to be with all grownup art, at the Philharmonic.

We put on ourselves this artificial pose when we enter 1600 Broadway, or when we enter the Philharmonic, when we enter the world of commercial art. I have watched hundreds of commercial critics' previews at 1600 Broadway until one day I couldn't take it. I watched them, these people, the film-makers, the producers,

the reviewers, this second-water Hollywood, and they all had those expressions of forced, phony seriousness, of faked security, strength, fake power. Many times I tried to look beyond those masks, but they had been walking in those Establishment poses for so long that the masks got stuck to them, like a second nature. They have become the games they played.

It's interesting to watch these audiences looking at a Mailer film. Or read their scribblings. They find Mailer's second film "more professional." Vogel put it into the festival. It's their little dirty corner. A little dirty corner in the festival, to balance things. Mailer is a good choice, because he is backed by enough official reputation, and he writes for *Harper's* and *Esquire*. So it's O.K. if he spits in Philharmonic Hall and his camera is shaky. But not too shaky, please! Pennebaker ensures that. It won't shake outside the limits of the properness, I can assure you that. Pennebaker makes films for TV.

And there is the real Mailer who has too much energy to become the game he plays. He has been around the "proper" people long enough that much heavy plaster has got stuck on him, the plaster of Establishment, and it makes his movements heavy and unnecessarily vulgar, and gross at times—and the plaster becomes too itchy, and Mailer begins to stir, to shoot into wild outbursts. Yes, insult them, make a fool of yourself, show what a slob you can really be—what a slob everybody can be—make a fool of yourself, show the 42nd Street of your soul, spit it out—spit the gangster out, spit the cop out, spit the murder out, yes, yes—do it, do it, Norman—entertain the clean, proper folks, you are the Man Who Laughs, they have thwarted your very soul, they have made you what you are, in their Procrustean beds, their society, their way of life—they made of you an exaggerated, laughing replica of themselves so that they could use you to entertain themselves—be a goddamn slob, and a goddamn idiot and fool and talk dirty and be Norman Mailer. At least you can vomit it out—through your movies. Others are less lucky; they carry it inside until it becomes what?—cancer—murder—death—puke.

September 26, 1968

ON TV MONITORS AND PUBLIC OFFICES

Three weeks ago, I wrote in the *Voice* that we should monitor our public servants, policemen, mayors, etc.—to reverse Orwell's prophesy that it's we who are going to be monitored in the near future. I wrote my proposal in a fit of anger, provoked by the Democratic Convention and Mayor Daley. People like Daley can bring the worst out in you. There was no great reason to lose my cool because of Daley or the Convention. My proposal to watch, to monitor our civil servants, was, really, immoral. Immoral because it's based on mistrust. It's one of those many, many protective regulations, legalities, restrictions with which man has surrounded himself already, trying to fix things from the wrong end. We want to create an ideal society but we are doing it from the wrong end. Nothing can be done when you begin with force and mistrust. The right end to start at is the opposite: no force, but trust to the end. The only action, besides love, that one can take—as far as I can figure it out—is the education of man. That is, to increase his knowledge of himself so that he wouldn't do anything that is against himself—because to do harm to others is to do harm to yourself. This is the preacher speaking—but since everybody's speaking revolution, why not me? I think that humanity is badly educated. Ignorance is cruel, heartless.

November 7, 1968

WHY WE SHOULD THROW BRICKS AT FILM CRITICS

I have no idea who was the first one to write that Mailer's *Beyond the Law* is "a much better film than *Wild 90*." I keep seeing that statement in every review, even by the people who never saw *Wild 90*. I'd like to punch their noses. They almost managed to create the impression that yes, this one is O.K., but the other one, oh, that one was really lousy. Which is not true. *Beyond the Law* may be better, but *Wild 90* was good too. What

an ugly habit: As soon as we find something good or beautiful we try to use it as a club to hit the other thing, that is a tiny bit less good and less beautiful. We have to enjoy ourselves through blood.

Anyway, for the sake of those who haven't seen *Wild 90*, I want to state here that the movie reviewers are misleading you. Both Mailer films are interesting. They are as interesting, and often more, as the best of Hollywood or European movies around. The reviewers hated *Wild 90* because it was Mailer's first film. Reviewers always hate first films. They are full of mistrust, and they are blind like bats. Only when they see that a film-maker is persisting in what he is doing, do they decide to give him a break: They figure, O.K., the second one must be better than the first one, it stands to reason, we can't make a big mistake. Dear reader: Whenever you see a film critic, pick up a brick and throw it at him. No great damage can be done to his head.

December 12, 1968

WILL GODARD BECOME AN UNDERGROUND FILM-MAKER?

December 2: *Weekend* reconfirms my belief that Godard with his every movie is coming closer and closer to the techniques and aesthetics of the New American Cinema. It's interesting, when you see *Weekend*, how the greatness of an artist like Ron Rice stands out, who, in his very first film, *The Flower Thief*, in one big stroke managed to liberate himself from most of the restricting conventions of the cinema and the society, while it took Godard six years and ten movies to do the same, and he still hasn't made the final plunge into freedom. Yes, he slapped his own producer in the face, publicly, in London—but privately he still plays games with the capitalist cinema, with the Daddy's Cinema, with bad cinema.

ON DAVID BROOKS

December 3: Museum of Modern Art, as part of their monthly Tuesday Series, presented David Brooks' new film, *The Wind Is Driving Him Toward the Open Sea*. The film is as poetic as its

title. I find it one of the most interesting narrative films that have come out this year. What's interesting about it, at least to me, is that David Brooks manages to fuse in it a number of different techniques which till now have been used only in nonnarrative, poetic films—techniques such as single frame, free, impressionistic camera movement, almost total plotlessness, etc. The other thing that I like about *The Wind* is a fascinating melancholy that surrounds it. It's a narrative of moods, of reflection, of things lost, gone, like autumn leaves—no tragedy, really, only a mood of melancholy, of sadness—of friends, of ways of life, of cultures gone, of ages coming and going—these are just some of the notes that the film strikes. Romanticism? Perhaps.

ON CAMP AND BEING CAMPY

December 4: *Barbarella*—rich man's science fiction movie. Mike Kuchar's *Sins of the Fleshapoids* was done only with a tiny fraction of the money wasted by Vadim, but Kuchar's movie had much more craft, much more imagination, and was better cinema. Just compare the "love-making" (touching the hands) scene which Vadim, knowingly or not knowingly, borrowed from Kuchar (*Fleshapoids* played in Paris). The difference, I think, is that although both Vadim and Kuchar worked within the Camp style, Kuchar never lost his distance, his detachment, Kuchar never lost his cool; Vadim, however, loses his detachment and becomes campy himself—which is his proper and natural level, and it's simply bad.

ON VOICE AND IMAGE

December 5: For two minutes I watched a documentary on Michelangelo on TV. Had to turn it off, because of the stupid commentary. Not that the commentary was totally stupid—no, very often, truths were uttered, serious statements. But that voice! That hollow, stupid, that banal voice! I think that the main reason why all our documentaries fail is that the voices, the speakers are so stupid. I have come to the final conclusion that unless the reader or speaker of the lines of the commentary is as sensitive and as intelligent as the truths he is pronouncing, the commentary will sound hollow, stupid, pompous, banal, and will destroy the

images. That's what's so good about books—God bless the books!—there they are, all the great poets, and all the bad poets, and all the wisdom, black on white, pure and plain on that white page for you to read—no hollow stupid rolling voice comes out from their pages—oh blessed be the silence, in which the angels speak. . . .

December 26, 1968

SUMMING UP THE YEAR 1968

To sum up the avant-garde film scene, 1968, we have to begin with the last half of December, 1967, the premieres of Andy Warhol's **** and Norman Mailer's first film, *Wild 90*. From there on we go into 1968:

January: Premiere of probably the most important film of the year, Michael Snow's *Wavelength*. Other first screenings of importance: Robert Nelson's *Grateful Dead*, Charles H. Ford's *Poem Posters*. Ken Jacobs presents *Chapter Four of the Big Blackout of '65*.

February: First screenings of newsreels produced by the Newsreel group (organized late in December, 1967)—the most important new development in the American cinema. The Newsreel group, during the rest of the year, makes more than fifty films, and establishes branches in Chicago, L.A., San Francisco, Boston, becoming the most active new film movement in the country. Other premieres of February: Will Hindle's *Merci Merci*, Adolfas Mekas' *Windflowers*, first New York show of Robert Breer's *66*.

March: Hermann Nitsch show at the Cinematheque, first public screening of Andrew Meyer's *Flower Child*, premiere of Robert Kramer's *The Edge*, David Wise's *Triple Spice*.

April: Premiere of Stan Brakhage's *Scenes from Under Childhood*, Gregory Markopoulos' *Illiatic Passion*, Lloyd Williams' *Line of Apogee*, New York premiere of Godard's *Les Carabiniers*, Jack Smith begins to show his new film(s) under constantly changing title(s).

May: First public shows of Warren Sonbert's *Holiday* and *The Bad and the Beautiful*, Stan Vanderbeek's computer films, Scott Bartlett's *Off-On*, Will Hindle's *Chinese Firedrill*, James Broughton's *The Bed*. With the critique of the Yale Film Festival (*see*

"Observations on film festivals," p. 310) begins the summer-long reevaluation and confrontation of film festivals. Premieres of Storm De Hirsch's *Third Eye Butterfly* and *The Color of Ritual the Color of Thought*, George Landow's *The Film Which Rises to the Surface of Clarified Butter*, first New York show of Gerard Malanga's *In Search of the Miraculous*.

June: Joyce Wieland's *Catfood, Sailboat, and 1933*. First public screenings of Ernie Gehr's *Wait and Moments*. First "private" screenings of Carolee Schneemann's *Fuses*, certainly the most beautiful film of the year.

July: First screenings of Andrew Noren's *Kodak Ghost Poems* (another contestant for the most important—or beautiful—film of the year). New York police and the Building Department close the Film-Makers' Cinematheque and inaugurate a long slump in the New York avant-garde film viewing. For the rest of the year, it becomes impossible to see independently made films on any regular basis.

August: Premiere of Peter Bogdanovich's *Targets*, my opinion being that Bogdanovich is one of the more talented newcomers to the "narrative" film; first screenings of David Brooks' *The Wind Is Driving Him Toward the Open Sea*.

September: Norman Mailer's *Beyond the Law*, John Cassavetes' *Faces*. October: Larry Kardish premieres *The Slow Run*, Godard's *Weekend* opens in New York.

November: George Kuchar premieres *Unstrap Me*; final version of Bruce Baillie's *Quixote* screened in New York; Ken Jacobs' *Airshaft* and Hollis Frampton's *Surface Tension* premiere at Hunter College.

December: Paul Sharits' N:O:T:H:I:N:G, premieres at the Jewish Museum.

Please notice that I am sticking to the New York opening dates. I am not going into international waters, and much has been happening in the international film avant garde these last few months.

ON H. G. WEINBERG, THE TRUE LOVER OF CINEMA

Looking back through 1968, one can't miss the amazing number of books on cinema that have come out and keep coming out. My special tribute of the year goes to Herman G. Weinberg, for

his two books, *Josef von Sternberg* and *The Lubitsch Touch* (Dutton paperbacks). I have known Herman G. Weinberg for many years, and many of us who have been bitten by the cinema bug have known him for years. And all these years we have been waiting for his books to come out. Some of us lost hope. But Weinberg didn't rush, he took his own time. And now that I am reading his books I am almost wishing that they hadn't come out. You see, Herman Weinberg is writing with such love and with such firsthand knowledge about all those fantastic movies that I am reading his books and am dying to see all those movies. There are books on cinema, many, many, they keep coming out, like mushrooms—and they are nice, scholarly, pedantic, researcher's, professor's books. They are nice to have—but they are innocuous. They do nothing to you. They don't excite you, they don't send you immediately to the phone to call the Museum of Modern Art: When are we going to see Lubitsch's *Kiss Me Again*, or *Sumurun*? Weinberg's books are different. They can make a Museum-of-Modern-Art pest out of you. Weinberg's books should be banned; he writes with so much love for the movies that you read and you go crazy thinking about where are you going to see those movies, and when. I am in the middle of *The Lubitsch Touch*, right now, and I can't bear it. Either I see *Sumurun* tomorrow or I get rid of the book. I am even considering suing the publisher: It's not fair to make you all excited about a film and not to provide, as a supplement to the book, the film itself. Anyway—do you see the difference between a book and a book?

1969

January 2, 1969

ON CENSORSHIP

I do not want to end the year on a morbid note, but I figure it's better to end the old year on a bad note than to begin morbidly the new one—so here I am, with bad news.

It seems to me, at least during my morbid days, that the higher we fly (say, as high as the moon) the more we seem to ignore the small, private, individual citizen. We don't seem to mind, we do not even notice how an individual person is being stepped upon, spat upon, with all his liberties violated: It's only the big things, like riots, like demonstrations, marches, that we notice. So that when the United States Senate completely ignored Jack Smith's rights to his film, *Flaming Creatures*, and made dozens of prints of his film, not a single man of law raised a question about it: They all spoke about Fortas, and they all ignored the rights of the filmmaker.

Everybody's talking about how the censorship laws have been relaxed in this country. We seem to be very happy about the "public" relaxation, and about all the vulgar movies that we can see now. We make a big fuss when some stupid Swedish concoction is stopped by the customs officer: Everything that is on a big scale seems very important to us; but we are not interested in how every day the rights of film-makers are being violated, laughed at,

by film labs, by custom houses, by the police, in endless, small, unseen cases. (When the customs house, on my way back from Italy, seized my footage, and when I refused to permit them to screen the originals, they forced me to pay \$160 for the prints, completely useless to me.) The small film-maker has no money to buy justice.

I have pretty bleak thoughts about the justice of our courts, of City Hall (wait until I publish my diaries . . .). I have had my experiences, and I have lost—I have lost both my cases and my faith in justice. The Cinematheque is still closed. The New York police still hold two screens, two projectors, one totally innocent film by Andy Warhol, and one totally innocent film by Jack Smith (not *Flaming Creatures*) that they seized almost four years ago and, mind, *there was never a charge* against the two films. But to get it all back from the police, the Cinematheque would have to sue the police and we have figured out that it would cost us more to sue the police than to buy two new projectors, two new screens, and to make two brand new films. That's justice for you. Fuck New York justice.

So that I have come to the conclusion, and have been advising every film-maker, to simply stay away from the police and the courts—do not trust justice, do not trust the police, work more deviously, be more clever, work from the underground, and don't brag about it. When I am carrying a film to Canada or from Canada, across the border, no matter how innocent the film is, I hide it carefully on the train. I know the police. And whenever I hear about a film-maker getting into trouble, I simply think he is a goddamn fool. Any film-maker who trusts the police or the City or the law is a naive, no-good fool.

Now, all this, what I have said, is like a summing up of my position today, and also an introduction into the troubles and adventures of Bill Vehr, whose case is typical of how the rights of film-makers are being violated today and how little anybody can do about it—because all we are thinking of is those men there in the moon orbit. I would like you to read the two following letters, and see—dear readers, citizens, lawyers, friends of justice, and you, the revolutionaries—see if you can do something about it, see if you can begin the New Year by doing something about it. What—I have no idea.

But the case is crying to the heavens—or to Hell, I don't know which. (As for the obscenity aspect of the films themselves, that is, the work of Bill Vehr—they are as innocent as a baby's poo-poo, we don't have to talk about that, or do we?)

Here is the first letter:

Dear Jonas:

I was hoping I would be able to handle my problems without involving and/or bothering too many people—but events are out of control now, and I don't know where to turn. Perhaps you could offer suggestions or help. On October 1, I was returning by bus from Montreal where there was a showing of my films *Brothel*, *Avocado*, and scenes from a work in progress. At the border I was stopped by U.S. Customs officials. My baggage was searched and my films were seized. They projected the films and decided they were in violation of U.S. Code 1305 Title 19 (in other words: OBSCENE!). Unfortunately I had the original of *Brothel* plus the only print of *Brothel*—also, the footage of the work in progress is original footage. After two months of telephone calls, letters, etc., I finally received word that the films were judged obscene and in violation of Code 1305 Title 19 by Mr. Fishman of the Customs Office here in New York. I was then told that I could sign a release forfeiting the films to the U.S. customs to do with them as they wished or else the films would be referred to the U.S. Attorney for action. The films are now in Albany (where the trial will be) and I have to defend my right to own these films. Of course, there is more to it than just what I've written—a friend and I were treated brutally at the border as if we were criminals—plus the films were lost in the mail for four weeks, no one knew where they were or cared—two men from the Customs House came to my apartment once when I wasn't home and left a note—etc., etc.

I've spoken to a lawyer who I was led to believe was interested in the case and wanted to take it at a minimum cost. However, it turns out that his "minimum" is a \$750 retainer fee—plus probably \$2500 by the end of the trial or trials. Three thousand dollars seems like quite a lot of money to pay someone to get back something that already belongs to me—besides, if I ever did get my hands on that much money, I would either a) move out of the *rat's nest* in which I live, b) travel around the world, c) make another film infinitely superior to the films in their possession. Any one of those suggestions (a, b, or c) seems better than taking their idiotic, meaningless, time-consuming, energy-sapping trip. On the other hand—how can I let those

BASTARDS get away with this? So please, Jonas, if you have any suggestions, propositions, advice, home-remedies, anything! please call or write—

Bill Vehr
517 East 12th Street

The second letter (a week later, December 21):

I never mailed the other letter—still wishing not to bother you—but now I am desperate—I have to appear in Albany, January 6, to defend my films. I have no money for a lawyer or even for a bus fare or room and board while there. I have to stay two days, the libel suit says.

How can they get away with this? How can they wipe me out? What can I do?

Merry Christmas.

—Bill Vehr

January 9, 1969

THE UNCOMPROMISING SERIOUSNESS OF ANDY WARHOL

Finally, I managed to see Paul Morrissey's film *Flesh*. It's not a good film, but it's an interesting one. I am a little bit amazed how anyone could mistake it for an Andy Warhol film. *Flesh* is an equivalent of an average *Olympia* sex novel. Nothing very much stands out, it has no special aesthetic or stylistic values, but it keeps going without boring you. To the student or admirer of Andy Warhol's work, Morrissey's film will be of special interest. Although *Flesh* was made by one of Andy's closest co-workers, and uses some of Andy's actors and techniques, it has nothing to do with Andy Warhol cinema. The film is a good illustration of what Andy Warhol isn't about. Probably the most important difference is that *Flesh* is constructed, plotted, and executed with a definite calculation to keep one interested in it. The hero goes through a series of "sex-novel" adventures, designed to "cover the ground," to "give an insight"—like a *Confidential* story. And it works. I think the film achieves what it set out for itself to achieve. But a Warhol film never gives you an impression that it wants to make itself interesting. Take *The Nude Restaurant*. It

doesn't give a damn about the viewer's interests. It goes slowly about its natural, casual business, trusting its inspirational, occasional sparks. And as it goes so, through its seeming insignificancies, it achieves—before you know it—a frightening seriousness of life. Whereas *Flesh* remains on the level of a caricature. In a Warhol film, even when an “actor” acts, it looks like he's living it; in a Morrissey film, even when an actor lives it, it looks like he's acting. Which is all fine. Only that the two authors are after two different things.

January 23, 1969

ON UNIVERSITY FILM FESTIVALS

As we are entering another year, we are entering another film festival season. From the first three festival announcements—Cannes, Venice, and Ann Arbor—it doesn't look as though festival organizers have learned anything from last summer's lessons. In their announcements, both Cannes and Venice throw snide remarks at the film-makers who criticized them, and both intend to proceed the old way. I do not have to worry about Cannes—the French film-makers and students will take care of it. I am more concerned about Ann Arbor.

Ann Arbor is the oldest of the university film festivals. By now almost every second university has a film-makers' festival going. I like the inflation aspect. The only way to destroy the festivals is to have a thousand festivals. But neither I nor the film-makers like anything else about them. From my discussions with other independent film-makers the following few points have come out and I would suggest that the university film festival organizers take these points seriously, if they don't want to be boycotted:

1. Film-makers should not be charged any entry fees.
2. All films accepted for screenings should be paid rental fees designated by the film-makers. This applies to both competitive and noncompetitive festivals.
3. If a festival is competitive, the jurors should see every film sent to the festival (that is, preselection should be abandoned).
4. If any monies are to be given out as awards it should be left

to the jurors to decide how to divide the monies. There is a movement against "unanimous" juries (where all jurors have to agree upon "the best" film) and toward the personal selections of each juror.

5. Films should be shipped back to the film-maker immediately after the festival is over, at the festival's expense.

That's what more or less is in the wind. And since it looks like Ann Arbor doesn't comply with any of the five points, it should be busted. Anyone who wants to be a fink, here is the address: Ann Arbor Film Festival, P.O. Box 283, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107.

February 6, 1969

ON GEORGE KUCHAR

I am not a reviewer. I write, I comment only on those aspects which interest me. I never review the films. And it's a pity, for instance, that I didn't review George Kuchar's film *Unstrap Me*. It had a brief run at the Bleecker, and disappeared. Nobody liked it, reviewers dismissed it. But I thought it was one of the really beautiful films around. What George did with Walter Gutman was so pathetically beautiful. The character that he created I thought was one of the most original, freshest characters I have seen in cinema in a long time. Parts of *Unstrap Me* are far from the strength of some of the earlier Kuchar. But the figure of the main protagonist, this sad, tragic, aging man who is so full of life and exuberance—this figure is such a rare thing in cinema that it gives the film a special merit. If I had to look for comparisons, I would have to go to Michel Simon in Renoir's *Boudu* or Vigo's *L'Atalante*. The special gift of George Kuchar is that he is a humorist with a great sense of tragedy. His people are so much larger, so much more real, than most of the people you see in cinema today. Recently I saw again George Kuchar's short film, *Mosholu Holiday*, and I was amazed at how much he managed to put in that short film—there was the Bronx, split open, its very heart, sad, crying, and laughing. In short: It's a pity that a film like *Unstrap Me* is dismissed by our reviewers. But I guess that's life. Someday a plague will come and will wipe out all film reviewers, including

all those belonging to the National Society of Film Critics. And it will serve them well, egoistic punks.

February 13, 1969

ON JOHN CHAMBERLAIN AND ROBERT FRANK

At least for the historical record, if nothing else, I should note here that on February 6, John Chamberlain held the first screening of his first two movies (at the Hunter College auditorium). One was called *Wide Point* and was projected on seven screens placed side by side, with seven projectors. Images: random foolings and sittings around. Taylor Mead appears in most of the footage. But the star of the "projection" was a teenage girl, dressed in blue, playing a violin—a very sweet, camera-innocent, curly girl, from a colored postcard, rosy, romantic, and pop. Nothing else struck my eye. Oh, yes: When the "film" was over, the projectors were still running, and the screens were still lit up, in different projector lamp tones. It was very beautiful. But, I guess, to use the word "beautiful," when one goes to a pop or camp event, is out of place.

The second movie was called *The Secret Life of Hernando Cortez*. Taylor Mead and Ultraviolet were the stars. With the exception of one or two instances, Taylor Mead walks through the movie with no inspiration. The two instances are a dancing sequence and a hysterics sequence. But I am no judge of camp, there may be other scenes. I hope there are people who need this type of cinema. I really hope so. I myself, I am no measure of *all* cinema. During certain kinds of cinema I simply go blank.

Also, for the record: Robert Frank's new film, *Me and My Brother*, opened last week (at the New Yorker). I sat through it. I didn't go blank: I hated it. But later I decided that I should see it again some day. I thought it was so unbelievably phony. But I know Robert Frank, and he is the opposite of phony. I cannot believe that he would make a phony film. So I must have missed something completely. I seemed to like all of the footage. But I seemed to hate what was done with the footage. I kept cursing the editor. The whole thing seemed so unnecessarily contrived. This is

what I propose: Since it seems that I had a bad week, and went blank—why don't you, dear readers, enlighten me about these two films, that is, Robert Frank's and Chamberlain's? Please write me if you found anything good about them. I hate to walk in darkness.

I have one nice thing to say in this column. I really liked Mike Jacobson's little film called *Esprit de Corps* which was shown last weekend at the Gotham Art Theatre. There was a positive, life-inspiring energy locked in this little unpretentious film. Probably, it was the only life-generating film playing in New York that evening—or that week. Ah, the reader will jump: You mean, there is good art and bad art? Oh, yes, sirree, take it from an old farmer: There are good horses and bad horses, good chairs and bad chairs, and there are things called weeds.

But please do not misunderstand me, from what I said about camp. I think that campiness is needed today. It will take many more camp movies to bring some fresh life into the acting styles, into the stiffness of Hollywood and independent narrative movies (or Broadway theatre). (Talking about theatre: My trustworthy spies reported to me that last weekend I missed probably the best theatre evening New York has seen in a long time, that is, Byrd Hoffman's *The King of Spain*.)

February 20, 1969

MORE ON ROBERT FRANK AND JOHN CHAMBERLAIN

This is a continuation of last week's column, more rambling on Robert Frank's movie *Me and My Brother* and John Chamberlain's movie *The Secret Life of Hernando Cortez*.

The tragedies and dramas of the regular movies are ridiculous, outdated, pre-yippie, pre-hippie, pre-beat, even pre-Freud and pre-Marx. That's what's good about Chamberlain's movie: It doesn't take seriously any of the emotions, ideas, beliefs, or even facts of the existing society.

The Secret Life of Hernando Cortez will be enjoyed by people who have freed themselves (or are attempting to free themselves) from the concerns and passions of the middle-class capitalistic culture.

H. G. Weinberg, in his book on Lubitsch, points out how Lubitsch humanized the heroes of the history books. Chamberlain's movie, like a number of other camp movies before it, goes one step further: He makes the heroes of the history books ridiculous.

Robert Frank's *Me and My Brother* is about the most beautifully photographed movie you can see around.

P. Adams Sitney: "Robert Frank's film reminded me of something I had completely forgotten: that cinematography in a movie can be enjoyed as an independent thing."

Why all the tricky editing in Frank's movie? Why this "film within a film within a film" business? I guess my question is not very fair. The film-maker does what he does because he's following his nose.

I was really impressed with Chaikin's imitation of Julius—particularly his body movements.

I should never see films in progress, the "rushes." I saw parts of *Me and My Brother* in an unedited form, or at the beginning of editing, and I found the footage so strong—it had such an impact—I thought I was watching a great movie. But when I saw the completed film, the footage was cut to pieces, all kinds of outside ideas imposed or superimposed upon it, it didn't have any of that impact any longer—at least not on me.

I found *Me and My Brother* too clever, like trying to tell something, and play five different records at the same time, and maybe stand on your head, and wiggle your toes, and do a few other tricky things—instead of doing it plainly and to the point.

Recently, I saw a few old Kino-Pravda newsreels (1919–22) by Dziga Vertov, and his *Man With a Movie Camera*—and it amazed me again, its directness, its simplicity.

A movie doesn't have to be very good to be liked.

I think I like Robert Frank's movie more in retrospect than when I was watching it. The idea of interchanging, superimposing characters is not a new one, but always challenging. Robert Frank did a few interesting things in that area.

A movie in which nothing much happens, like Chamberlain's movie, is a pleasant change from all the movies in which film-makers are desperately trying to keep things happening, as if that were of such great importance.

I disliked Frank's movie because he kept trying (he or the

editor) to make it more meaningful, more important, more significant, deeper than the reality itself which was caught by Frank in the footage. By editing, the editor deflated the content of the shots and created a different content, different levels of content which were too vague and even, I felt, corny, at times.

When Julius says, toward the end of Frank's film, that the camera was "disapproving"—did he mean the camera as an instrument, or the cameraman behind it?

Where does Robert Frank's morbidness come from? From this world, you fool. . . .

With his camera Frank captures so much immediate truth about whatever he is shooting, that later, whatever plot is imposed upon the footage by the editor looks silly, pretentious, incongruous, unnecessary.

I am wondering what George Kuchar would have done with exactly the same people, same situations, as Robert Frank? Probably we would have come up with a life-celebrating movie. Now it's so bleak, so hopeless, so down!

No film-maker really shows us life as it is: All film-makers show their own inner states.

I thought Chamberlain's four-part poster for the film (I think you can buy it at Castelli) was superior, artistically, to the film itself.

I have to admit that I have seen *The Secret Life of Hernando Cortez* already twice, and I wouldn't mind seeing it again. I think it's beginning to grow on me.

Taylor Mead is the greatest actor in America today.

March 20, 1969

WHY I'M WRITING THIS COLUMN

The settling down of the Film-Makers' Cinematheque at the Gallery of Modern Art—our new place of exile—forced me to skip a few columns. Now I do not know where to begin. The untimely death of David Brooks brought us down to the ground, for a moment, some of us. We stopped running, we thought about our own fates, about our own work. First Maya Deren, then Ron

Rice, and now David Brooks; all young, all senseless deaths, all part of history now, as we continue.

I started writing this piece, and it didn't make much sense. I wanted to skip another column. But then I thought: Look, thousands of columns in thousands of papers are being used to promote the stupidity, the vulgarity of all the bad cinema. As long as I have a chance, in this little corner here, to bring to people's attention some creations of man which are working toward light, I must use it. So here I am again, typing away, with a dramatic edge, thinking: How almost evil, it's almost evil that our movie critics, under their present policy, review only the commercial cinema. They call themselves film critics, but all they are is servants of money. How evil of the publishers of our daily press and our weekly magazines to bring to people's attention, to give space (because that's what reviewing essentially is) to only those films which have long, "continuous" runs, no matter how bad or stupid the movie is, and who ignore, who keep away from people's awareness all the beautiful works which can afford only one evening or afternoon at the Cinematheque, at the Museum of Modern Art, or some other place. A greater number of small budget beautiful movies open in New York every week than those of the big budget, and nobody knows about them. Is it so much to ask our press to inform people about *all* of the films that open in New York? There are no secrets about their openings, the press knows about them. Did the press, did our movie critics review the Dutch film series at the Museum of Modern Art? Or the Canadian film series? They reviewed all the stupid movies that opened commercially that week, but they managed to be silent about all the interesting movies. And they dare call themselves movie critics, the National Association of Film Critics, or names like that. I accuse all our movie critics, and I accuse here *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Variety*, and *The New York Times* and the *Post*, and absolutely all our newspapers and magazines (including most of the underground press) of committing an unforgivable cultural crime by reviewing only commercial films, only long-run films, for ignoring one-time film events. And I am not doing this because I am interested to know what their scribblers will have to say about Brakhage, or Baillie, or the Chicago Underground: I am fighting for space, for equal rights for the aesthetic creations of man. These movies should be written about,

should be brought to people's attention, people should know that they exist. People have a right to know that there is a choice for them. The present reviewing system is evil. Everything is evil that deprives man from choices, from knowing that there is a greater variety of cinema experience. Our movie critics are shrinkers of humanity's sensibilities.

I think it's a loss, a cultural, aesthetic, human loss, and also a crime on the part of our press, that nobody knows that during the last three weeks Ken Jacobs' *Tom, Tom* was shown, Brakhage's *Horseman* and *Loving* were shown, Bruce Baillie's *Quixote* was shown, Nelson's *The Great Blondino* was shown. Our press had neither excuse nor right to ignore, to hide from the people's knowledge these sublime, magnificent works, when they gave all the space to all the filmic vulgarities that opened during the last three weeks. Three, four works of cinema of great beauty went unnoticed—and they call themselves the press, the news! Either the publishers assign reviewers (they have to hire men equipped to do so) to cover *all* movie openings in New York—be they long run openings or one-time screenings—or they should close and go home. Or, perhaps, it's time for our own cultural revolution. The pickets, the strikers, the students, the people should take over the Time-Life Building, the New York Times building, and demand a complete revamping of their cultural coverage, policies, and staffs. Because what I've just said about cinema, really, applies to all arts, to music, dance, theatre. My blood still boils with anger when I just think about the abominable pieces that Barnes did recently in the *Times* on the *Dance 69* series, what he did to it. What does this man know about modern dance? How do these papers permit people with moss falling from their asses to write about modern arts?

I am angry because I see artists like Maya Deren, like Ron Rice, and now David Brooks creating, working, and consuming their lives and dying young to create more beauty in this world, to make people's lives more bearable—while all our communication and information media are conspired to hide it, to keep it away from the eye and the soul of humanity—really, really, our press is bloody evil, and stupid.

April 10, 1969

SEX AS A "PROBLEM"

Teorema will be considered an important and liberating film, as is *I Am Curious (Yellow)* called such names, by some. But the trouble with these films is that they aren't free. These films, these film-makers still treat sex as a problem: Warhol makes films in which sex is the film's content as experience, as joy (or in the case of Jack Smith, as pain). Warhol doesn't make problem films. That's the basic difference between sex in Warhol (and underground in general) and the commercial "art" films.

April 17, 1969

ON WALTER GUTMAN, OR THE CINEMA OF ADORATION

April 4: Premiere screening of Walter Gutman's film *Muscles and Flowers* (Cinematheque). Gutman has been known till now as a producer (*Pull My Daisy*, *The Sin of Jesus*, *Unstrap Me*). Now he makes his own films. Now we can see what Walter Gutman is made of. *Muscles and Flowers* is a gentle, loving, romantic film. It is very sincere, very open. We see two film portraits, two women, two circus performers, Suzanne Perry and Hannah Weaver. I could watch Suzanne Perry forever. Gutman could watch both women forever. But not because he is a voyeur, as someone on the sound track smugly suggests; it's only because Gutman is such a loving person and he likes beautiful and strong women. His camera doesn't peek: His camera caresses, his camera pays compliments, his camera converses with the two women. It converses not in empty words or temperamental explosions, but in movements of wisdom, of respect, of, yes, of adoration. One of Gutman's earlier short films is called, very revealingly, *The Adoration of Suzy*. And he does it in no hurry. The pace is that of respect and love. The movie is made up of fifty minutes of images and another fifty minutes of sounds—some literary (?) people discuss art, vogues, and the movie itself as it's being projected. It

all fits together, with no great pretensions to anything important, even the silliness of the litterateurs is absorbed and made harmless by the images of Walter Gutman. After all the movies of speed, of action, of violence and sex, here is a movie of love.

No doubt not everybody who saw Gutman's film got from it or saw in it what I saw. Many looked at it as a movie by an amateur. They felt goodness and warmth coming out of that screen, but they closed themselves to it, they couldn't believe that that's what the movie is all about: They were expecting, were waiting for something else, for something to grip them, to jolt them, to surprise them. If they would see in Gutman's movie some special technique, at least they would take it as a sign of "art." But now, here is a very simple, plain movie—so how could it be art? We keep looking for obvious or striking or new artistic structures, intellectual signs which we identify with art. We don't know that, once the artist goes into a more subtle content, all that framework dissolves, becomes imperceptible, and we say: It's not art, it's all too simple.

A quote from St. John of the Cross:

The purer, the simpler, and more perfect the knowledge is, the darker it seems to be and the less the intellect perceives. On the other hand, the less pure and simple the knowledge is in itself, although it enlightens the intellect, the cleaner and more important it appears to the individual, since it is clothed, wrapped, or commingled with some intelligible forms apprehensible to the intellect or the senses.

April 24, 1969

ON THE CHANGING NATURE OF AVANT-GARDE FILM SCREENINGS

Robert Breer received the Max Ernst Prize for his film 69 at the Oberhausen Film Festival. The prize, the sculpture "Femme" of Max Ernst, donated by the artist and valued today (so we are told) at approximately \$7,500, is given to a film that "best corresponds to the avant-garde spirit." The prize is given not just for one film but for the body of work of a film-maker.

I am happy that Robert Breer got some recognition. I saw his

new film, 69, and it's so absolutely beautiful, so perfect, so like nothing else. Forms, geometry, lines, movements, light, very basic, very pure, very surprising, very subtle. Breer's films do not get much public acclaim. His shows are not among the heavily attended. His films attract no noise. But they are among the best films made today anywhere. A new film by Robert Breer is an important event. Imagine Mondrian or Dubuffet or De Kooning opening a one-man show in New York, and imagine—all critics missing it? The premiere of Breer's 69 was exactly an occasion of such proportion. And all movie critics missed it. History of cinema will remember my words.

Not only critics missed 69. Most of the people missed it. The screenings of avant-garde film around New York, at the Cinematheque or some other place, if not specially pushed, seldom attract more than twenty or thirty people these days. All the sensation-seekers have their sex movies. The screenings of the avant-garde films at the Cinematheque are announced in the *Voice* only by the names of the artists and the titles. No more phony pushing. Have you seen the art gallery page lately? Or any time? Openings of shows are announced by the names of the artists—no blurbs, no quotes, nothing about “the best,” “the greatest,” “excellent,” “worth seeing,” etc., crap which still goes with our commercial movie advertisements. The avant-garde film-maker, at least in New York, got rid of all that. So his audience dropped. But why should an avant-garde film-maker want to fill his auditorium with people? Should Frick or Castelli close because they are not filled with people? The question of avant-garde film screenings in New York is not the question of filling the auditoriums but of keeping the continuity of the screenings, keeping the continuity of the avant-garde film. To do that these days is very costly, and a certain amount of madness is needed to continue—but a certain madness is needed to run certain galleries too. This is my answer to the people who keep asking me why I am doing it. But don't ask me *how* I'm doing it because only God knows that.

The success of the underground film, the success measured in crowds and by crowds, is somewhere else at the moment. It's in the suburbs and in the country. Every university has a film festival going. There have been at least ten film festivals in the New York area this spring alone. The film culture is rolling across the country.

May 7, 1969

UNDERGROUND PRESS AND UNDERGROUND CINEMA

S.O.S. All underground newspapers. S.O.S. Why do you waste so much space on commercial movies? Why don't you review underground movies? Newsreel movies? When the underground papers began appearing, I said to myself: Finally! Finally I'll be able to relax, I'll be able to catch up even with some Hollywood movies! But as time went by, I discovered that I was only dreaming. Underground papers are not interested in underground films. They never review them. The Los Angeles Free Press is the only exception. EVO, the (late) New York Free Press, Rat, etc., etc., are interested only in commercial movies. Last week EVO introduced a listing of underground movie screenings, which is at least something. But for chrissake, don't expect me alone and by myself to do justice to all the underground movies that open in New York.

May 8, 1969

"Not to make films is as important as to make films." Buddha.

May 22, 1969

ON FILM STRUCTURALISTS

During the last two years (approximately) an entire group of film-makers has come into existence who seem to have a number of things in common. What are the qualities that bind together, at least for me, the works of Michael Snow, Paul Sharits, Ken Jacobs, Ernie Gehr, Hollis Frampton, Joyce Wieland, George Landow, and the recent work of Robert Breer? Each in his particular way is preoccupied with a conscious manipulation of movement and light. Movement and light is the very essence of their work. Sitney has called them structuralists. He finds that structure in their work is the most essential thing. They tie together with the

minimal art movement, in one way or another. In fact, they may be the only true minimalists.

Anyway, I find them the most dynamic and most productive group of artists working in cinema today, and one that is making the most interesting and most original contributions to it.

Last Wednesday the Whitney Museum premiered two new works by Michael Snow, *One Second in Montreal* and \longleftrightarrow (it's a graphic title; has no phonetic title). It is difficult to say, from one viewing, whether \longleftrightarrow is a more accomplished work than *Wavelength*. One thing is certain, it is a major work. The movie is very "simple." A part of a room, including a wall with two windows, and a corner with a blackboard (it's a classroom) is shot from one angle, with locked tripod. Camera mechanically moves from left to right, back and forth, never going out of its prescribed boundaries, covering always the same visual field. The movie is forty-five minutes long and is a structure of the back and forth movements. Certain actions occur in the room during the back and forth movement—sometimes there are people passing by, there is even some kind of party going, at one time, a class of students, etc. But they come and go and the back and forth (in the last quarter up and down) movement continues. It continues in increasing speed until it becomes almost a blur. Walls, angles, perspectives merge and become flat, two-dimensional, and relativistic surfaces. Nothing but energy, light, and movement is left.

I have neither space nor real way of talking about this film. But I feel that it's full of all kinds of ideas and implications concerning the subject matter, the content and form of cinema. One particular aspect keeps running in my head. Both East and West coasts seem to be preoccupied with movement and light. But while the West Coast (Sears, Bartlett, Conner, De Witt, etc.) is primarily concerned with the electric image, the video, which, the way I see it, tends to dematerialize all reality (for good or bad), in the East, in the works of the artists mentioned in the beginning of this piece, the reality seems to be transformed into another kind of reality, into a field of energy, aesthetic energy. It's not decorative, not just a message experience. To watch Ernie Gehr's *Waiting* or Snow's \longleftrightarrow is a much more intense kinesthetic, physical, and mental experience (or activity) than to watch any of the Scott Bartlett or Lauren Sears films. I cannot put my

finger yet on the exact difference and reasons—and this entire column may be just a useless heresy—but, essentially, it may be because of the difference between the two “media.” While Sears, etc., are working with TV technology, Snow, etc., are working with and in cinema. Cinema is a secondary reality and video is a primary reality (necessity for survival). Cinema is a muse; TV is a god. Cinema is an art and it can transform reality into an aesthetic reality (aesthetic energy); video is a servant of its god, electricity.

May 29, 1969

MORE ON FORM, STRUCTURE, AND PROPORTION

Last week I wrote about the films of Michael Snow, Ken Jacobs, Paul Sharits, Ernie Gehr, etc., stressing their preoccupation with light and movement. I don't think I really succeeded in putting my finger on the belly button of their work. These works escape precise discussion. Plus, I am not a precise thinker. Maybe I am more a tinker than a thinker. Anyway, to speak about light as essence is to speak about content. But it's the form that makes a work into what it is. It's through the form that we perceive the content, style. The manner in which it's done (the rhythm, the pace) reveals, tells something about the temperament, emotions, heart and lungs of the artist (your pace can be that of desperation, or that of peaceful contemplation, or . . .). And that's something to think about: structure. God, there are so many things to think about in the world. I wonder if I'll ever think them all out. Anyway, I'm trying. Where was I? Structuring. Our aesthetic senses respond to structure. There is no art without structure. There is no art without rhythm. Through the rhythm we express what we can't express directly, through the details. But then, there is nothing without structure. We can speak about lower and higher structures, perhaps. Some structures drag us down. The women's prison is a very bad structure. The present government of New York City is a very bad structure.

Oh boy, I'm getting into the fields. Anyway, when you come to the minimalists, the structure dominates. You can tell very little

about the artists themselves, their psychology, etc., from watching their art. They are like scientists. The other day, at the Rockefeller University, after the screening of Kubelka's film *Arnulf Rainer*, someone asked: "Do you think the film would look any different if I'd change a few frames one way or another way?" What I said was that we can't fool around with the scores of Beethoven or Kubelka's frames because there is an iron logic and order there. We know we can memorize music. Kubelka says, one can memorize films and architecture. Whatever, you can memorize only that which has a certain (no matter how hidden) order, logic, rhythm, pace, structure. Art is science, that's what I said. The intuition of an artist is as precise as the structure of the atom. Art is as precise as science. As the science of the atom. Poets can mutate atoms.

I keep referring to the atom because of what Richard Foreman said the other day. Oh, he said, I am dreaming of art, theatre, cinema which would have the same intensity as the nuclear physicists' description of the structure of the atom—or something to that effect. I thought that Michael Snow's \longleftrightarrow had some of that special intensity. There is this mechanical aspect to it which takes it beyond reason, beyond just aesthetic experience. I keep rambling, forgive me, dear reader: You certainly don't expect me to speak very clearly about matters which I do not exactly understand? I'm only trying to understand them. The exact processes, how a work of art works, will always escape us. Yes, we react to the form of the film. We react kinesthetically, too, to the movements, to the light. But through the form we reach deeper, into the indescribable, into the invisible: We reach into the area of relationships, proportions. You can't put your finger on it. Like Richard's atom. The scientists are speaking about the atom, working with the atom, splitting it—and all on paper, all through the formulas, mathematics—through relationships. All architecture, I am told, is a question of relationships. That's why it's possible to memorize architecture. When two things are put together in right relationships (right proportions or right disproportions) they sing. Of the films I see underground and above ground, ninety-nine per cent do not sing at all. They do not even hum. They puff, they squeek, they honk, like pigs—but they don't sing (I'm not putting pigs down—pigs are nice).

Oh, what's the use. I intend to go to the library, right now, and do some reading on these matters before I say another word. I think I need more education.

June 12, 1969

ON CINÉMA VÉRITÉ AND THE BOREDOM OF THE NEW NATURALISM

I have been delaying writing anything about Maysles' *Salesman*. I consider I shouldn't waste any of my space on films which are widely enough discussed in the "regular" press—even if I like the film. *Salesman* happened to be an important film, for many reasons. But then, there are equally (and more) important films which nobody writes about. *Salesman* opened in a large commercial theatre and is doing an average business, it doesn't need my help. If it needs it—then it's too bad. Somehow, during the last few years, I don't seem to feel much pity for films or film-makers who fail commercially with their films. If they want to play the commercial exhibition game, they should be prepared to take bravely all the consequences of that game. The house is not doing too well? Well, why did you want that big house in the first place? You want to reach more people? Oh, how pompous! You'll say, you can't get your money back unless you play it in a big house? So, you do something and then you want something back from it for yourself? How petty. Can you imagine a composer who spends three years on a symphony and then he doesn't let it out into the world because they aren't paying him for all those three years, in cash? God, how corrupt we are.

Oh, what's the use. The summer is here, it's too hot, and too smoggy, and they won't let Mailer clean out the air, people are so stupid, they prefer to sit in their own muck until they die. So I am pretty depressed. And I don't want to write about *Salesman* because the movie is so grim, and I just spoke with David (or was it Al) Maysles and he said he hasn't seen my review yet. *Salesman* is a very well made film, but God it's so grim, so boring. And that's why I am not writing about it: I can't figure out why this good movie is so boring. I am not bored with any of Leacock's work.

There is always a touch of ecstasy in a Leacock film, no matter how down to earth it is. But *Salesman*, shot after shot, every shot is good: But when they are spliced together, next to each other, the whole thing looks like a big pancake, without any sense of structure. Secondly, following the good old naturalistic tradition, Maysles concentrated only on certain grim, gloomy, sick aspects of their protagonists and their activities. After seeing the film, one is ready to condemn their profession, and them as people, and even the Bible itself. Which is silly. Because we know that these people in reality are neither that grim nor that corrupt. In any case, they are less to blame than the system which makes them do what they do. And here is one of my problems. There are films and novels which are complete, total works. Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* is such a work. It presents both the facts and the interpretations of the facts, the commentary. And then there are films and books which are only half-works. They present their cases perfectly, and in concentrated manner—*Salesman* is such a work—but they abstain from (or are not capable of) any interpretations, commentaries. In such cases, it's up to the critics, to the columnists, and to any intelligent member of the society to provide interpretations. As it is now, the meanings are there, but they are dormant. Which is O.K. But God, why it has to be so boring! That I can't answer. Why must truth be so boring? And myself, being a farmer, whenever I am facing anything that is so grim and boring—no matter how "serious" and "good" it is, I become very suspicious. There must be something wrong, or paranoiac, or sickly contorted about a boring truth, it cannot be a healthy truth, it has no sense of humor. . . . That's where I am stuck now, and I am still trying to figure this thing out, about *Salesman*.

June 19, 1969

ON TOM, TOM AND FILM TRANSLATIONS

On several occasions I have referred to Ken Jacobs' film *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son*. I should tell you something more about it. Forgive me that I have to write about a film which you can't see. The present film dissemination system doesn't permit you to see it. But you should know what you are missing.

Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son was a ten-minute (approximately) movie made by American Mutoscope & Biograph Company in November, 1904. It was photographed by G.W. Bitzer. The movie was preserved on rolls of paper at the Library of Congress (copyright department). Recently, a print has been made from the paper rolls and it's being distributed through Brandon Films. Ken Jacobs took this old movie and translated it into the modern film sensibilities. He rephotographed it, dissected it image by image, frame by frame, detail by detail, and came up with a movie of his own, seventy-five minutes long. He achieved two things: He created a film of a much greater visual and formal impact than the original; and he set up a precedent of "film translation." As far as the qualities of this film go, I have already stated, on other occasions, that I consider it a tour de force. The "film translation" aspect opens unlimited possibilities. There will be translations of *The Birth of a Nation*, of *Dr. Caligari*, of *Cleopatra*. I suspect the entire Hollywood production of the last eighty years may become just a material for future film artists—at least for some of them. (Ken Jacobs' film is available from Film-Makers Cooperative.)

July 17, 1969

MORE ON KEN JACOBS

Three new films by Ken Jacobs were screened last Tuesday at the Jewish Museum. I say "new," but they may be two or three years old. Ken Jacobs is one of those film-makers who is in no hurry to let his works out into the world. He keeps them, he seasons them. As far as I know he has a dozen other films in his treasury. Anyway, three short films, *Window*, *Airshaft*, and *Soft Rain* were permitted to go out, to see what's new in the world.

All three are exercises in form. It's almost a trilogy. Three songs to the world. Three songs to downtown. Who else will sing of thee, oh downtown? A gas station across the street, the rain drizzling. A window, shapes of the window and shapes of the sky. A flower pot on the window sill, so beautifully green, like Veronese, so beautifully brown.

What is Ken Jacobs all about? We don't know. One part of him

is all form. Which is the same as to say he is all content. Because in art nothing else matters besides form. It's the form that does whatever a work of art does, on the level that really matters. What is form? Who knows? Berenson said: "Form is that radiance from within, to which a shape attains when in a given situation it realizes itself completely." And in another place: "Form is the life-enhancing aspect of visible things." Does it make it any clearer?

In Ken Jacobs' three films, the movement and the camera and the form are inseparable. The quality of the movement, the structure of the movement, the shape of the movement . . . it's all very real. And very clear. All confusing matters eliminated. Only the music of things is left. That's why it gets very directly to us, and makes us more radiant. All things that are clear make us more radiant. These films do not want our soul; these films do not want our money; these films do not want our votes.

So now I can answer what Ken Jacobs' art is all about: It's about happiness. He made a film called *Little Stabs at Happiness*, years ago. His shapes and forms transmit to us, evoke in us or rather produce in us the states and forms of radiance. You can feel happiness moving through you. Not an ignorant, fool's happiness, but a happiness of one who is totally awake. Happiness in full consciousness. That's the difference between art and LSD.

ON ART AND POLITICS, OR "THE AUTEUR THEORY, 1969"

A festival of short films takes place every spring at Oberhausen, in Germany. A large and representative program of the American avant-garde film was shown at the festival this year. There were angry shouts during the projections. Posters appeared denouncing the American avant-garde film. Marcel Martin, a French film critic, summed it all up in *Cinema 69*, a Paris film monthly: "The American film avant-garde is totally apolitical." He was very indignant about it.

That's it: The Old Establishment, the capitalists, and the New Left all miss the true meaning of art, and they all hate it. The capitalist hates the film avant-garde because, if he be exposed to it, his very heart would be transformed, the beast would be killed. Those of the New Left who hate it are latent capitalists.

My God, apolitical! The three films of Ken Jacobs discussed

above belong to the strongest political statements made by anybody working in cinema today. How strange, and how corrupt it is to think of politics only in terms of films (or actions) of destruction. The avant-garde film-maker, the home movie-maker is here with something more than that: he is presenting to you, he is surrounding you with insights, sensibilities, and forms which will transform you into a better human being. Our home movies are manifestoes of the politics of truth and beauty, beauty and truth. Our films will help to sustain man, spiritually, like bread does, like rain does, like rivers, like mountains, like sun. Come come, you people, and look at us; we mean no harm. So spake little home movies.

This is the "auteur theory," 1969.

August 14, 1969

ON BEAVER MOVIES, SEX, AND THE SENSE OF HUMOR

The only redeeming value of sex movies (pornographic and beaver movies) is their social value. It's very seldom that they have any humanistic (aesthetic) values.

I saw Gerard Malanga's all-male *Male World* program, at the Fortune Theatre. I have to admit that I couldn't see in this program either social or aesthetic redeeming values. The program lacked social redeeming qualities because it was so stupid, self-indulgent, narcissistic, and above all so humorless. It was an all masturbation program. Masturbation in offices, in parks, in homes, etc. Whatever value masturbation itself may have—I have read very opposing statements on it, the modern ones being pro and the ancient ones being against—I found it pretty ridiculous and very depressing to watch movies about masturbation. I have to admit, no doubt, that there must be people who enjoy watching movies about masturbation. And why should one deprive anybody from having any kind of satisfaction? But I was looking at the audience, and there were forty or fifty men in the audience, of all ages and all races (there was not a single woman), and they all sat there very grim, and there wasn't a single laugh during the entire show, and when I looked at them it almost broke my heart to see

all that loneliness and sadness in their faces, at three in the afternoon. The whole thing was so over-serious and sad that even my jaw sank down by an inch, at three in the afternoon. And as little as I know about life, I know this much, that this show didn't make their lives a tiny bit brighter—it just dragged them deeper into their loneliness. And why should a poet—I mean Gerard Malanga—be engaged in life-draining work when the poet's work is really life's sustenance?

It should be obvious that my argument against Malanga's beaver movies' lack of redeeming values shouldn't send cops running into the theatre to seize the movies. I don't find any social redeeming values in ninety-five per cent of the commercial cinema to which the head of the police takes his wife and children on weekends. The thing I am saying is this: Malanga's program of *Male World* is as stupid, as humorless, and as damaging (life draining) as ninety-five per cent of the commercial cinema (and TV). They are made to perpetuate inhuman and anti-human political, psychological, economic, moral, etc., habits.

Now, I can't say the same thing about Warhol's *Blue Movie*, which was actually seized by the police last week, at the Garrick. How come it is always the wrong man, the wrong movie that has to suffer for all the bad men and all the bad movies? I guess, for the same reason Jesus Christ suffered. . . . Anyway, *Blue Movie* has both aesthetic (humanistic) and social redeeming qualities and values. It is many things. Art is always many things. I know it's not popular to speak about art these days. But I have to remind you that there is such a thing. There is poetry in *Blue Movie*. There is also ethnography in *Blue Movie*, a study of sex mores and sex games folklore, for generations to come. The second part, where Viva and Louis fry eggs and the sun is setting, is the most touching, poetic "home" scene I have seen in movies in a long time.

But what's the use talking of sex. Because there are really no movies about sex. At least I haven't seen any, and I see many. All the sex, porno, exploitation, beaver movies, and now, sex newspapers, are really children's dirty movies and papers; they aren't real. The only movie which I thought dealt with sex in a real, grownup way—in observations, feeling, and myth—was a movie by Walter Gutman, a movie called *The Grape Dealer's Daughter*.

I have found more maturity, originality of observation, and insight in this movie concerning man and sex than in any other film I have seen. Above all, it has humor—and to me this is the sign of the truest maturity and wisdom. I don't see how a grownup man can talk about sex and have no sense of humor. Malanga's *Male World* took itself so seriously that it almost stuck to the shoes. Warhol movies never take sex too seriously, that's why they retain social redeeming qualities. In *Lonesome Cowboys* much humor is gone, and the movie went down too. The actor types have no sense of humor, that's what's so bad about actor types (and theatre in general). Except Taylor Mead, who even in *Lonesome Cowboys* retained his sense of humor, and was redeeming. And, of course, Viva, whose sense of humor is indestructible, she is like a rock of life.

August 21, 1969

ON THE ART OF KENNETH ANGER

Two years ago, October 26, 1967, a full page obituary appeared in *The Village Voice*. It said: "In Memoriam, Kenneth Anger, film-maker (1947-1967)." The "obituary" was placed by Kenneth Anger himself. That's how he felt at that time. Partly, that feeling was a result of a tragic loss of a half-completed film, in San Francisco. There may have been other reasons of which we know nothing. Anger is one of the most complex personalities working in cinema today, and whatever he does, be it in cinema or life, he does it fully, to the bottom.

So here is the big news: A new film by Kenneth Anger, his first since *Scorpio Rising*, has just arrived at the Film-Makers' Cooperative in New York. The film is entitled *Invocation of My Demon Brother* and is ten minutes long. Where the film was really shot is a mystery to me. Parts, or even most of it, may have been shot in San Francisco. But Anger has been many places during the last two years, in Asia and Africa. Pardon me—I just dug out program notes written for the National Film Theatre (London) show of the film, and the notes, written by Anger himself, say: "Directed, photographed in colour and edited by Kenneth Anger.

In Memoriam

KENNETH ANGER

FILM MAKER

(1947-1967)

Filmed in San Francisco. Track composed by Mick Jagger on the Moog Synthesizer. Cast: Speed Hacker (Wand-bearer); Lenore Kandel and William (Deaconess and Deacon); Kenneth Anger (The Magus); Van Leuven (Acolyte); Harvey Bialy and Timotha (Brother and Sister of the Rainbow); Anton Szandor La Vey (His Satanic Majesty); Bobby Beausoleil (Lucifer). Synopsis: Invocation of my Demon Brother (Arrangement in Black and Gold). The shadowing forth of Our Lord Lucifer, as the Power of Darkness gather at a midnight mass. The dance of the Magus widdershins around the Swirling Spiral Force, the solar swastika, until the Bringer of Light—Lucifer—breaks through." The notes end with a quote from Aleister Crowley: "The true Magick of Horus requires the passionate union of opposites."

I am not versed in magic. Only yesterday, after seeing Anger's film, I bought Aleister Crowley's *Magick*. When I told this to some of my friends, they lifted their eyebrows: "Crowley? He is evil." So now I have to read Crowley, because I don't believe he is evil. Some people have called *Scorpio Rising* an evil film. And there will be many who will call *Invocation* an evil film. But I happen to know that Kenneth is one of the beautiful, good people living on this earth, and I know that even if he would try to make an evil film it would come out a life-enhancing film. But I know so many "good" people, who, even when they make "good" films, end up with life-draining, evil films.

Invocation is complexly involved with magic, myths, and rituals, the exact meaning of which escapes me. But even without knowing the meanings, I can feel the tremendous energies of the film, energies that are being released by the images, by the movements, by the symbols, by the situations. I know that some readers would like to know what kind of meanings and symbols are locked in this film. But I have this inborn lack of interest in literal, historical, symbolic meanings of images. When I read the explanation of what Markopoulos' *Twice a Man* was all about (as explained by Markopoulos himself, and by P. Adams Sitney), I was greatly amazed: "Really? Really? Is that what it's all about? I would have never guessed." I never gave a damn what *Twice a Man* was all about. What I liked and what I still like about it is beyond the symbolic and literal meanings. I reread an essay by Baudelaire, where he talks about Delacroix. He says (I'll quote freely),

whatever I got from Delacroix' painting was what I got when I just walked into the room and saw it from the distance, without seeing details—I saw only colors, shapes, movements. When I came closer, and “read” the literal meanings and story of the painting, the first impression remained correct. That's what Baudelaire, approximately, was saying. Same with me, with cinema. Some of my intelligent friends have often accused me of lack of interest in details, plots, meanings. But I have never figured out, neither have I ever really tried, what *The Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* is all about, or what *Scorpio Rising* is all about, or even what such a seemingly simple film as *Eaux d'Artifice* (my favorite Anger film) is “all about.” When I see a film by Kenneth Anger—and I consider Anger one of the three or four or five most important film artists working today—when I see a film by Anger, or Brakhage, or Markopoulos, the “all about” that I get from their work is in their form, movement, color, shape, pacing—and what it does to me, how it goes through me, how it touches me, and what part of me, how deep it all goes—and none of it is describable, explainable, you can't put your finger on it. To me, if a film works only on literal levels, or on meaning (idea) levels alone, and doesn't work on any of the others that I mentioned above—then a film doesn't interest me, then the film is only a litter. Which is not to condemn the meanings or ideas! It's only to say that although these films are rich in idea meanings and symbol meanings—which escape me—they are still richer in aesthetic meanings, where it really matters in art.

So there we are, a new film by Kenneth Anger, *Invocation of My Demon Brother*, a film that no number of viewings will ever exhaust, a film that will always remain a source of mysterious energy as only great works of art do—Kenneth Anger, the true (and adventurous) Cosmic Explorer.

October 2, 1969

ON BRESSON AND *UNE FEMME DOUCE*

Here is what I thought, walking home from *Une Femme Douce*. *Une Femme Douce* is a film about diagonals. Diagonal angles,

diagonal glances. About eyes that never really meet. A film without a single frontal shot. A film about three-quarter spaces. About the sound of closing doors. About the sound of footsteps. About the sound of things. About the sound of water. About shy glances. About unfinished glances. About the sound of glass. About death in our midst. About light falling on faces. About lights in the dark, falling on faces. About blood on forehead. About unfinished playing records. About a white crepe blouse. About blue. About flowers picked and never taken home. About the roaring of cars. About the roaring of animals. About the roaring of motorcycles. About green. About how life and death intercut with each other. About hands giving and taking. About hands. About bourgeois pride. About pride. About lights on the door. About lights behind the door. About doors opening and closing. About bourgeois jealousy. About jealousy. About lamps turned out. About brown and yellow. About yellow. About indirect glances. About glances. About one peaceful glance (in the gallery, Schaeffer?). About unfinished records. About doors opening and closing. About doors opening very gently. About a half-opened door. About people standing behind glass doors and looking in. About fool's hopes. About hopes. About a window which doesn't lead into life. About a red car seat. About a red shop window. About standing behind the door, looking in. About a green bed and green curtains. About one happy smile in the mirror, at oneself. About eyes which do not look even when asked. About the sound of metal. About sleep. About two diagonal lives.

October 9, 1969

A WARNING NOTE TO THE PROJECTIONIST AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

This is an open warning note to the projectionist of the Museum of Modern Art (and to all union projectionists): Last Thursday I sat through a beautiful, old, silent Russian movie, and while I watched it, silently—and two hundred other people watched it, silently, you couldn't hear a needle drop—you, there, a rotten, no-good, stinking, cowardly, snickering, stupid, squirming, yellow

bastard, you were talking there in your projection booth at the top of your stupid, creaking, ugly voice, providing to the film the most horrible sound track the devil could ever invent; you, who are supposed to love films, whose bread and life is films, whose profession is projection of films—how come you hate them so much, how come you have so little respect for the films you project and for the people whom you serve, who pay for your bread? I am still so disgusted with you that I don't even want to hear your answer. I have only this to tell you: WATCH OUT! If you plan to do the same again, that is, if I catch you again destroying films with your horrible yapping, remember this: Watch out, on your way home. I'll be there, in the dark street, waiting for you, with a heavy hot splicer in my hand, and you should begin to count your seconds by the time you leave the projection booth. I am not going to reveal what I'm going to do to you, it will all depend on how angry you make me again, you horrible creature, destroyer of old beauties of cinema, watch out, this is my first warning!

November 20, 1969

ON LES LEVINE, OR THE MARGINS OF CINEMA

Have I seen any good movies lately? Maybe yes, maybe no. I am not too sure. I think I saw something good, but I am not too sure what they were, what name to call them. For instance, Les Levine's *Wedding Album* (Jewish Museum, November 6). What was it? An organized unit of slides. They were projected. It all happened on the screen. Light was involved. There was a projector. Slides were taken with cameras. It was beautiful. A slide movie, that's what it was. But nobody moved, so to say. Nobody moved within the frame. But there was a movement between the shots. Les Levine gave still cameras (polaroids?) to a wedding party, everybody was shooting each other. Later, Levine collected the pictures into an album, slide album. A typical wedding party, the young middle class of 1969. The mood. The feeling. The faces. Jokes, pranks, happiness, nothing extraordinary, but a good album. An ethnographical study? A work of art? It stays in my mind. I think there were about two hundred slides. The projection lasted about twenty-five minutes.

I stopped at the Underground Gallery, on 10th Street. Don Snyder had a slide show of the Living Theatre, *Paradise Now*. A programmed slide machine was throwing slides on a wall, at a regular, and meditative pace. Each slide faded in, remained for five seconds or so, clear and strong, then slowly faded out again. The slides had a certain Rubens quality, the browns, the naked bodies, the compositions. It was sort of nice to see that quality at the end of the 20th century, the sensuousness, the reality of flesh, out of its realistic context, romanticized. It was a good movie, I thought.

I ended my Saturday stroll at Global Village, 454 Broome Street, where John Reilly, Ira Schneider, and Rudi Stern were presenting an environment, Program I, *Woodstock '60* (the show will be repeated every Friday and Saturday at 9 and 11 P.M.). A sizable loft. Black cushions (oh, how I hate cushions!) on the floor (it's difficult for my farmer's bones to take those Oriental positions, ruins half of my cool-geographical-zone animal pleasure)—and fifteen or so video sets around the room (the temperature in New York has to drop another three or four degrees before we can begin to build geodesic domes here), and a large screen at one end of the room. A preprogrammed set of video tapes was fed into the sets, some edited during the feeding, right there, behind a black curtain, at the other end of the loft—footage from the Woodstock gathering, the music, the songs. One hour and twenty minutes, I was told, but it went like fifty minutes. Not much content, mostly only "footage," mostly the same (in different images) repeated and repeated. It is McLuhanesque massage environment, and if one is beyond massage, one has to go somewhere else—and there is no place yet to go for those who are beyond massage stage (because nobody wants to sponsor the Ontological-Hysteric Theatre of Richard Foreman). So there were people all over the floor trying to orientalize their seating habits, which cannot be done without the melting of the earth's ice caps, massaging themselves, in a sort of unconscious megalomaniac way—some needing it, some not needing it any longer but only reconfirming for the nth time themselves as they are—but the program was well put together (craftwise) and it worked, that is, I could see that everybody enjoyed it. What was it? Was it like going to movies? It was and it was not.

December 11, 1969

ON ROLLING STONES

Four or five weeks ago at the Jewish Museum, Peter Ungerleider showed the 8 mm. movies he took in London during the concert the Rolling Stones gave in Hyde Park in memory of Brian Jones. With great sensitivity, with almost religiousness, he stuck to the Stones. The movie had no sound. In total silence one could watch, undisturbed, the techniques, the style, the performing art of Mick Jagger. Watching Ungerleider's film was a very revealing and engaging experience.

Later, I saw the Stones at Madison Square Garden. I said I saw, not heard, because to me the Rolling Stones are, in the first place, a modern theatre, or call it opera. All the steps, movements, *mise-en-scènes* of the London performance were repeated here to the minutest detail, and to perfection.

I am amazed by the pretentious blabber of the *New York Times* writer, Goldman, I think is his name, and a good number of other similar heads, who have called the Stones (and rock music in general) by fascist names. Don't they really see any difference between the hypnotism of demagogues and the joyous communion of art? A fascist act is when forty million people vote for Nixon and Agnew, that's what I call a public hypnosis and fascism. As soon as the Rolling Stones walked on stage, the very first thing they did was break down the barrier between themselves and the public. They opened themselves, that's what they did. They didn't throw a power blanket over their eyes; just the opposite: They discarded all blankets. So the people opened to them, too. There was this immediate contact. There was this feeling of exhilaration, of openness, of joyous communication.

I am really getting fed up with this identification of the drug and rock movements with the early Nazi movements. These people cannot accept a crowd of ten thousand waving, dancing, and jumping up in joy. These people will blame the horrors of the century on those few who are the only antidotes to the forces creating the horror. How many times have we heard: Hitler liked

Beethoven. But tell me, do you know how much worse Hitler would have been without Wagner and without Beethoven?

Anyway, there I was, at Madison Square Garden, and there was this great theatre, this great modern opera. Grotowski, my foot! Grotowski is the Broadway crowd's avant garde. How ridiculous: America has the most advanced theatre in the West (the theatre of Richard Foreman, of Ludlam, of Higgins, of Oldenburg, of Rainer, of La Monte Young, of George Maciunas, of Byrd Hoffman, Jim Dine, Jack Smith, Ken Dewey, Ken Jacobs, Angus Mc-Lise, Ken Kelman, George Landow, John Cage, Fluxus, Carollee Schneemann, Ken King, Meredith Monk, Whitman, Red Grooms, Jackson McLow, G. Stein, Al Hansen, L. Zukofsky, Piero Heliczer, Michael Snow, etc.)—and we speak about Grotowski! Long live the theatre of Mick Jagger and down with Grotowski! Give me one million and I will get all these people together into the most fantastic Theater Lab the world has ever had. Anybody with a million for the greatest theatre in the world? Call me at Chelsea Hotel; I'll be sitting and waiting. I am very serious about it, because I am very angry.

Oh, that's what it did to me, to see the Rolling Stones. It's always like that, in art: One good thing calls for another good thing. You can't tolerate anything below a certain line, you feel like drowning if you cross that line. So now I am waiting for one million. And, oh, yes, I sincerely preferred Meredith Monk's recent pieces to Grotowski. They had a much finer vibration, much finer.

December 18, 1969

UNDERGROUND FILM ACCORDING TO PARKER TYLER

At the end of the decade, we should settle for good the question of underground film.

What kind of film is it? What does it do? How would you define it?

Underground films are "peepholes," "peepshows," "infantile gimmicks," "fetish footage"; they are products of "degenerate growth of the underground"; they "lack importance as films"; they are products of "uncritical permissiveness," "childish self-indulgence," "wish-fulfillment psychology masquerading as a system of

aesthetic values"; they are "uncritical," "tantrums of children," "infantile compulsion," "obsession with racing rhythms," "toddlers," "shaggy," "encourage beatnik expressions"; they are guided by "practical rule of universal tolerance," "ultrapermissiveness," "exhibitionism"; they are "messy"; "technique and form do not matter"; "peepholism," "infantilism," "gimmickry," "opportunism," "idiot grim camp versions of commercial pop films"; "juvenile sort of buffoonery," "excretion," "poverty of means," "paranoid compulsion," "unfettered euphoria," "infantile-adult complex," "pad film," "blurring of filmic as well as avant-garde values," "shaggy," "frustrated art"; "aesthetic lunatics," "juvenile low jinks," "calculatedly sleazy"; "voyeuristic thrill is organically inseparable from the underground aesthetic"; "pathological infantilism," "bang mutually sought by makers and takers of underground films," "the paranoiac-critical kick," "disorder and amateurishness," "boredom"; "repetitious," "passive narcissism," "outbursts of naive frenzy," "giving up all poetry," "vague daydreams," "underground corn," "propaganda," "infantile self-indulgence," "fashionable camp hauteur," "infantilism," "crude curiosity," "self-indulgent egotism," "set exhibitionism," "playroom-pad's let's pretend," "unarticulated and tantalizing," ("at times they show real photographic ability"), "drug attitude," "mechanical enough and not necessarily expressive," "sterile," "only a psychedelic power," "narcissistic personalism of the self-sufficient poet-film-maker's pad," "sinning home-movie forays," "hit or miss," "hard core personalism," "lack of effectual talent," "exciting and complex in the superficial terms of pure retinal agitation," "filmic modernism smartened up with current visual vogues," "garbage pails," "indifferent, semiblind naivete toward matters filmic (and matters adult)," "plastically cute," "misguided but alert young film-makers of the underground have beat the bushes of inspiration by exaggerating, tightening, and indefinitely prolonging technical procedures that have long been familiar," "psychedelically dressed novelties," "morbid accent on youth," "titillating one's bored suspense," "boredom unlimited," "no true visual climax, no revelation," "fashion-mad," "exploit the medium at the expense of the message," "a definite decline of quality of imagination and daring," "lopsided," "ultrapermissiveness (part of the underground creed)," "underground is made largely of commotion," "promotion," "tinkering around with the

sheer technical possibilities of the medium," "reactionary rather than a progressive attitude," "error of cultism," "snobbery," "the art of the film becomes confused with the social protest of film," "disintegrative," "a fluke dictated by practical convenience," "formlessness, triviality, messiness, and amateurishness," "aesthetics without any conscious standards," "its relation to the art of the film is nil," "alas for all adult film-art values," "the tacit underground creed is lack of form and true filmic esprit," "smug assumption," "it doesn't matter what 'happens' in a film," "superstarmania," "fashion-mad clichè in cold storage," "insists on the absolute primacy of the 'personal statement' apart from all aesthetic credentials," "the terrifyingly childlike quality of underground films," "lunatic imagination," "lack of imaginative discipline," "lack of artistic conscience," "primitive photography," "personality promotor," "ante-diluvian occupation," "drunk on a technical innovation," "compulsive rather than inspired," "inventive rather than imaginative," "utterly futile and pretentious as a film to be sat through," "quirk," "oblivious to the theoretical virtue of criticism," "anything that comes to his mind is good," "merely pretentious," "indefatigable 'pad' workers," "with technical bravura they stretch audience patience to the breaking point and beyond," "fanaticism of the underground is holding onto the screen with optic/aural gymnastics," "a form of self-advertisement," "an automatic variety of cosmetics," "a historical movement to end all history," "without any values that can be measured," "declines to take seriously its own historical integrity," "a trailing filament of the visual void," "just plain chicken!" "kinky," "hobbledehoy of fads."

If I stop here, do not misunderstand me: I did not run out of words. In truth, I could go on and on. Because I have a tremendous source at my disposal: a brand new book (Grove Original, it says), *Underground Film, a Critical History* by Parker Tyler. The author of the book is a writer and has an unlimited vocabulary. I admire writers. More power to them.

A quote from a new Buckminster Fuller book, *Utopia or Oblivion*: "Somehow or other out of this enormous amount of chaos, in which the scientist finds that random elements are always increasing, ergo becoming ever more chaotic, until the random elements suddenly jell in an inexplicably orderly way and we have all the extraordinary things like daisies, diamonds, and moons."

1970

January 1, 1970

SUMMING UP THE YEAR 1969

I'll try to sum up the year 1969 in cinema, as seen from New York:

JANUARY: Larry Jordan's *Old House, Passing* premieres at the Jewish Museum; Paul Morrissey's *Flesh* opens at Garrick.

FEBRUARY: Jack Smith's *No President* is screened at Elgin; Stan Brakhage's *Scenes from Under Childhood, Part One*, and *The Horseman, the Woman, and the Moth* premiere at Elgin; Robert Frank's *Me and My Brother*, at the New Yorker.

MARCH: David Brooks dies in an auto accident; Ken Jacobs screens *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son*, at the Jewish Museum; Joyce Wieland premieres *Rat Life and Diet in North America*, at the Jewish Museum; Alfredo Leonardi screens *Book of Saints of Eternal Rome*.

APRIL: Robert Breer's *69* at the Cinematheque: *Reverberation*, by Ernie Gehr; *Image, Flesh, and Voices*, by Ed Emshwiller; *Dripping Water*, by Michael Snow. Truffaut's *Stolen Kisses*.

MAY: James Broughton's *Nuptiae*, Larry Jordan's *Our Lady of the Sphere*, Herbert de Grasse's *Venus*, Andy Warhol's *Lonesome Cowboys*. Michael Snow premieres \longleftrightarrow and *One Second in Montreal* at Whitney Museum; *Birgit's Dream*, by Jim Tiroff, at Nucleus Theatre.

JUNE: Andy Warhol's *Blue Movie* premieres at Cinematheque;

Mike Jacobson's first one-man show, at Cinematheque; Paul Sharits' *Touching*; Maysles Brothers, *Salesman*; *My Mountain Song 27* and *Rivers*, by Stan Brakhage; Glen Denny's *Nyala*; Robert Kramer previews *Ice* at New Yorker; Jim McBride previews *My Girl-Friend's Wedding*, at New Yorker; Ken Jacobs' *Soft Rain*, *Airshaft*, and *Window*; Hollis Frampton's *Palindrome*.

JULY: Robert Downey's *Putney Swope*. Walter Gutman screens *Grape Dealer's Daughter*. Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch*.

AUGUST: Part Two of *Scenes from Under Childhood*, by Brakhage; Jerome Hill's *Canaries*; Michael Stewart has his first one-man show at Cinematheque.

SEPTEMBER: Kenneth Anger's *Invocation of My Demon Brother*, at Cinematheque; *Carrots and Peas*, by Hollis Frampton; *Institutional Quality*, by George Landow. Eric Rohmer's *My Night with Maud*; Bresson's *Une Femme Douce*; Bergman's *The Ritual*; Godard's *Le Gai Savoir*; Jordan Belson's *Momentum* at the New York Film Festival.

NOVEMBER: *Men and Women and Bells*, by Dick Higgins, at Jewish Museum; *In the Year of the Pig*, by Emile de Antonio, at New Yorker; *Coming Apart*.

DECEMBER: Storm De Hirsch's *The Tattooed Man*; Joyce Wieland's *La Raison Avant La Passion*; *Tantra*, by Nik Douglas; *Imitation of Christ*, by Warhol; *Self*, by Lucas Samaras; *Topaz*, by Hitchcock; *The Damned*, by Visconti; Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West*, re-introduced by Sarris; *La Femme Infidèle*, by Chabrol; *Artificial Light*, by Hollis Frampton.

January 8, 1970

ON ROMANTICISM AND GERARD MALANGA

There are moments in my life when I think that Andrew Sarris was born under a much luckier star than I was. He chose (or was given) as his field of interest and enjoyment the narrative film. He goes to see Hitchcock's *Topaz* and he writes a column about it. He tells the plot of the film (it takes about one third of his column), he talks about the actors (it takes another big chunk of his column), then he discusses the social, the political ideas or refer-

ences or implications of the film, etc., etc.—and there goes his column. There is plenty to write about. But I have seen the films of Bob Branaman ten times by now and I still don't know what or how to write about him. As an aesthetic accomplishment, in the domain of film lyricism, Bob Branaman's work is superior to the latest by Hitchcock. But how to talk about Bob Branaman? Or the films of Piero Heliczer, also perfect lyrical expressions? How to discuss them intelligently and fruitfully? Have you noticed that I have practically never reviewed a film by Brakhage, the greatest film-maker making films today?

But there must be a way of talking about them. I intend, in my future columns—this is my resolution for the year 1970—to try to deal with this problem. Last week, for the fourth or fifth time, I saw the films of Gerard Malanga. I used to dismiss his films. Oh, I used to say, here is another poet who wants to make films. Why don't they stick to their literature! But after the most recent viewing—and I am talking specifically about *In Search of the Miraculous* and *The Preraphaelite Dream*—I have managed to escape my own prejudices and now I have no doubt that Malanga's work has its place in film repertory.

Immediately after seeing Malanga's work, I summed it up for myself: Gerard is a romantic lyricist. Why did I say so? How did I come to such a conclusion? My method must be similar to that of an art critic. There is a tendency, in movie criticism, to avoid any comparisons of methods that are either borrowed from other arts or resemble those of the other arts. I think such fears are unnecessary. The fact is that when you watch a film, you are absorbing various visual impressions. I watched the films of Malanga, and the various details, the moods of the details, the people, the faces, and the pace of the camera, the textures, the choices of landscapes—all these impressions set me in a romantic mood. The pace was that of a memory, languorous. The people, the glimpses of people as they were walking in the gardens, and parks, and streets; the "ruins" of the civilizations, the cities; the young people (the romantics die young) standing, gazing; Malanga himself carrying a huge bouquet of red roses, standing on a bridge, looking into the river (in Rome); everything contributes toward a certain melancholy lyricism which pervades the film.

ON BOB BRANAMAN

In Bob Branaman there is nothing of that sort. No pace, no detail, no structure that would set me in a romantic disposition. The images run in a fast pace, a lyrical staccato of frames, of images, disconnected from each other, but connected by a certain quality of feeling that has a minimum of emotion. It's more a feeling of form and materials than that of a specific emotion. Images: Nature, people, cities—only brief fragments—definitely a notebook, a lyrical sketch book, lyrical memories; but with no great attachment, with no dwelling for too long on any one detail or place (which we have in the case of Malanga—all romantics seem to be attracted again and again to the same moods, places, and “ruins”; but not so a pure lyricist). There is a certain carelessness of attitude, or let me say lightness of attitude, present in Branaman. A pure lyricist has a light foot and sets you in a light mood. The pace, the structuring is bent toward that purpose—while Malanga's structures are heavier, and always with emotional undertones. There is an undertone in Branaman (or, say, in Brakhage's *Songs*), too. But the undertone is not so much an emotion but some kind of mental quality. Form always has to do with mental qualities, with structures of thought and matter. It's nonsense that lyric is about “nothing.” That's how art pulls us into the essence of things, through the form—and the form is thought. And that's where the true beauty of a pure lyricist like Branaman or Brakhage of the *Songs* lies. And there's where the curse of the romantics is: Their sentimental attachments never really leave them, never really permit them to reach the core of things, that is, a pure form. But this is not to put the work of Malanga down: There are enough beauties and enough gold in the surface areas of our experience to keep us busy for a long time.

Because of the difficulties of discussing the nonnarrative cinema, this cinema enjoys only a very small circle of followers. And practically nobody writes about it. I have seen film-makers cornering the newspaper movie reviewers: Why don't you write about our films? What could they write? A reviewer of a new book of poetry, be it in *The New York Review of Books* or *The New York Times* Sunday book supplement, or *Caterpillar*—he can at least

quote a line or two. But what can a movie reviewer do? He can't quote movies. And since there is no plot to tell, no characters to talk about, and no timely political ideas to refer to—he says nothing. I wish I had a television program to discuss and “review” the avant-garde film. As for magazines and newspapers, it will be up to the new generation of film critics to work out the proper language, terminology, and method of discussing the nonnarrative film.

January 15, 1970

ON ANDREW NOREN, THE MASTER OF TEXTURE

Andrew Noren's film, *Kodak Ghost Poems*, has been shown several times during the last three years, in slightly changed versions. I have seen it at least ten times by now, so I can begin to talk about it.

During these coming years, there will be more and more comparisons between the meanings and characteristics of the literary forms and their parallels in cinema. Noren's film falls in the category of the diary or notebook. In literature, diaries are prose statements. Be it Andre Gide, Kafka, or Whitman (of *Specimen Days*), it's a work of prose. The author is the unseen protagonist of all the diaries. The best of the diary and notebook films—the work of Warren Sonbert, Bob Branaman, Andrew Noren, Gerard Malanga, or my own—are, as a rule, closer to poetic feeling and form than are any of the literary diaries. The notable exceptions are the diary films of Stanton Kaye or Jim McBride, which are works of prose.

Kodak Ghost Poems is a diary that consists of a series of short (from one to two-and-a-half minute) segments. Some of the segments are miniature pieces of daily realism, others are extended haikus, still others are small romantic poems. I was speaking last week about Malanga as a romantic film poet. I should state here that Noren is probably *the* sublime romantic of cinema today. His very posture and his looks; the things he likes (all the lushy Rubenses and the landscapes and cows of Corot and Courbet); his actual film work: Everything is permeated with the spirit of

romanticism. I have seen him (myself unnoticed) strolling. I saw him a month ago or so, walking along Seventh Avenue, with his slow, evenly paced, giant step; with his head high up, his hair like a fantastic trec; walking there, head and shoulders above the other people around him, with his dreamy eyes lost somewhere in some space before him—he strolled past me, without seeing me or anybody—like a walking island, exactly in the kind of stroll Cocteau was seeing himself in the *Testament of Orpheus*, in slow motion. It was a sight to see: A poet walking along Seventh Avenue. I understood, that moment, why New York, contrary to all predictions, hasn't gone down into the sea yet: As long as one single poet walks the streets of New York, the city will be spared its ultimate destruction.

Anyway, I was looking at *Kodak Ghost Poems* again, and for the first time I was able to put my finger on some essential things, at least for myself. The romantic feeling in itself wouldn't really make the *Kodak Ghost Poems* so lasting. What does it is Noren's almost fantastic preoccupation with textures and materials. I know no other film-maker who has such a feeling for textures and materials. We speak about Sternberg's ornamental obsessions, or Murnau's genius for the moods of men and nature, or the qualities of Max Ophuls and Fritz Lang—but none of them has achieved the degree of materiality Noren has in the *Ghost Poems*. The fabrics, those fantastic blues, those reds, those pinks—you can almost touch them. He keeps coming back to them, again and again. I have no doubt now that this feeling for the texture-surface-material is also the main reason for all the nudity in his films. The nudity of Noren's work, all the bathtub footage which has caused him all kinds of problems with the censors—this nudity is there for the same and sole reason. No, Andrew Noren is not a sex maniac. It's only that he's got to put on film all those textures of skin, all those bodies. A body, just a dry body is okay. But a wet body, a wet texture is richer than just a body surface. Flesh, all kinds of flesh we see in Noren's films. Only Rubens, or maybe Renoir can match the variety of flesh color in Noren's films. So that Noren's people don't just sit displaying their skin, which would be boring. No. They keep washing themselves, they keep rubbing and scrubbing their skins until they are almost transparent, beautifully transparent. And not only their legs, their backs,

their feet, but also their breasts, and their most private parts, which has always embarrassed me (don't forget, I'm a farmer's boy). But once you understand why the artist is doing whatever he is doing, everything gains a new dimension, a new interest, a new beauty.

So we have this luxurious and sensuous world of bodies and details and light before our eyes. Light, light, and again light. Only through the light are these materials revealed to us. So he keeps filming light on these textures, on materials. Light falling from the windows, light falling on the floor, on the materials. And then, the people. I haven't seen anybody, for instance, filming (or painting) woman's hair, long hair, as beautifully and expressively as Noren has done. Detail after detail, for a full hour, *Kodak Ghost Poems* sings the phenomenal world in the language and voice of all great romantic poets of the past. And I, a poor scribbler, all I can do is to pay tribute to one of the great artists of America who is walking the streets of New York with his head in the sky, with his fingers on his Bolex.

February 12, 1970

IN DEFENSE OF ZABRISKIE POINT (1)

Zabriskie Point. This won't be a review, only some notes. I liked it. It's so beautifully made, so beautifully constructed, and it has such a powerful ending. I want to see it again. But something bothers me. You see, Antonioni's women are always more intelligent than his men. This movie is no exception. In this movie he may even be right. I think that in general the women in (of) America are more intelligent than men. But the man of *Zabriskie Point* is too naive and too unintelligent. He is too trigger-happy. He is more right than the cop, obviously, but he is no brighter than the cop. He is a sleepwalker. The most avant-garde position for man today is to take a stand for the mind and for the intelligence. Unintelligent actions can do no great service to man's progress, revolution or no revolution. The unintelligence and the unconsciousness of the protagonist keeps the movie itself—most of the time—on a very narrow, decorative level. The decorative

level of the movie is very well searched out, that's the special strength of Antonioni.

Please do not misunderstand me: I like *Zabriskie Point*. But the better the movie the more one asks from it. From most of the movies I see I ask nothing: They do not even approach the asking point. But I think I am overdoing it here. Why don't we take a different turn: Why don't we say that the woman, Daria, is really the protagonist of the film? Mark is a secondary character, despite the length of his part. After all, the woman who disappeared in *L'Avventura* was the protagonist of that film. Once we accept Daria as the protagonist of *Zabriskie Point*, we shift the focus of the film and the film becomes both revolutionary and intelligent. The waking consciousness of Daria makes all the difference. Under this new, shifted focus, Mark becomes a critique of the unintelligent revolution.

February 19, 1970

IN DEFENSE OF ZABRISKIE POINT (2)

I hated it. I slept through it. It was boring. It was dreadful. It was stupid. Give me my money back, \$2.50, which I spent on the ticket. Or buy me a meal. After all, it's your fault, you told me to see it.

That's what some of my friends told me after seeing *Zabriskie Point*. But I refuse to take the blame. I don't think I am the most unintelligent man around. My average reading these days consists of, say, Buckminster Fuller, Vogelweide, Plato, Boehme, Olson, collected writings of Artaud. My favorite movies (recent releases): Bresson's *Mouchette* and Brakhage's *Songs 27-31*. And then I go to see *Zabriskie Point* and I sit through it from beginning to end (in fact, I *stood* through it from beginning to end, all seats were taken)—and I am with it from beginning to end, totally involved. Sure, as I watched it, all kinds of knobs and screws were turning in my head—but no matter what the knobs did, the reality of the images on the screen was stronger than any resistance or criticism I had. Please do not think, dear reader, that you can hypnotize me with anything that moves on the screen. My friends

know quite well that I *walk out* of films often, while *they* sit through any movie to the bitter end.

So that now I have this problem. I can't figure out why I like Antonioni's movie more than my intelligent friends do. Am I really a moron? I was very good in school, particularly in mathematics. All the reviewers stressed that, unlike any other Antonioni, *Zabriskie* has no hidden or compounded meanings: The movie was plain as day to them. Really, really! Why then is the middle of the film at *Zabriskie Point*? Why do they make love on that spot? Why do the two lovers become many? And what's the meaning of *three* in *Zabriskie Point*? And what was he really (or she) exploding at the end of the film? America or the American Dream? There are all kinds of questions, and all kinds of meanings. The film is as oblique and as compounded as any other Antonioni film.

One final note. Do you remember *Eclipse*? How gradually all communication between man and man disappeared? At the end, even contact with surroundings was gone. The streets, the walls, the landscape stared back at the protagonists, and the protagonists stared back at the surroundings, with no contact left, like a stare of two divorcees at the clerk's table. So they went into the Red Desert. From the desert they came back. They went to London, so to speak. The fashion crowd. More of the same. But now we find them at *Zabriskie Point*, making love. Totally fused with earth. At the very Zero Point. No more emotional preoccupations. No more intellectual preoccupations. Just earth, and body energy. They are two, but they are also three, and they are also many. They are wrestling at the Zero Point. That's the only place where you can find the beginning again. You see, none of the Antonioni movies till now had any beginning: They only had endings. They all ended in dead end streets. *Zabriskie Point* ends with a beginning. And that's why I like it, perhaps. But really, as I said before, I do not know at all why I like it. It may even be just a passing passion. Which is fine. I am an unmarried man.

February 26, 1970

ON BRESSON AND THE STANDARDS OF CINEMA

Before I say anything else: go and see *Au Hasard, Balthazar*, at the New Yorker Theatre. Bresson's film is the most articulate voice of cinema that you can see and hear in New York this week. All the blabbering of all the movie writers fades away, and all the movies that are playing in New York fade away and evaporate before *Au Hasard, Balthazar*. We go to movies, we discuss movies, and everything is fine, on the usual daily level. And then, suddenly, a movie like this one comes, and the whole perspective of cinema—the standard and the quality of cinema, as language, as art, and as articulation (as Kubelka would say)—shifts, and all the daily cinema that made us so happy on a day by day basis disappears into nothing. The seriousness, the substance, the bone and the blood of life and art is reestablished again, for a brief moment, for one week, at the New Yorker.

ON KEN JACOBS AND 3-D

Ken Jacobs came back to town for a day. The city greeted him by stealing part of his valuable 3-D equipment from his car. Valuable to him, that is. Because no one else is interested in 3-D and stereo. But Ken is. Last Thursday he had a small stereo and 3-D presentation at the Jewish Museum. When Ken gets excited about something, he goes into it so totally, with such love and enthusiasm, that when he talks about it—as he did last Thursday—he is like a singer, like a balladeer who sings under the window of his beloved. Anyway, he is in love with stereo and 3-D movies, and he showed some of what he had done, and he also prophesied—as he sang—about the things to come, all the spaces and volumes and movements and compositions and visions of 3-D. He showed some footage taken in Colorado, the fields, flowers, two naked ladies, sheep, trees, all in 3-D. Can you imagine 3-D superimpositions? Ken did it! Exciting, very exciting. Blurs in 3-D. Scratches in 3-D. And clear, sharp daisies in 3-D. It's an illusion-

ary experience so totally different from that of cinema or still photography or painting, and so little explored. And nobody knows why not. I think Ken, in one of his remarks—as he sang—made a very true point—probably *the* point—about why 3-D was touched and abandoned again. Man simply wasn't ready yet to cope with such a vast amount of new sensory experience. He hasn't exactly got used yet to two-dimensional movies; and here he was facing all the possibilities of 3-D. So he had a peek at it, ten, fifteen years ago—and he shrank back again: It was too much to cope with, sense-wise. Today, a generation later, with the changed environment, with his senses brought up to date, man seems to be coming back to 3-D and is beginning to cope with it. Ken predicted a boom of 3-D art in the near future.

ON BARRY GERSON

A day earlier, again at the Jewish Museum (which it seems has become the new center of avant-garde activities in cinema) Barry Gerson had his one-man movie show. I first met Barry Gerson in 1961. He came from Philadelphia to screen his rushes for *Neon Rose*. I liked the rushes. Later, he came back again, to screen the completed film. I didn't like the film. Years went by and Barry was shooting and working. I lumped him together with many other young men whose first films showed a promise, but who never got any further than that. They keep bothering me. They keep insisting that I see every film they make. And most of the time I do. But after four, five, six bad films and no progress I usually begin to avoid them if I can. Somewhere I have to draw a line. I was able to follow the bad films of, say, fifty film-makers, but it's beyond human endurance to follow and keep abreast of the bad films of five hundred film-makers (there are 385 at the Film-Makers' Co-operative alone). Plus I have to see all the good films of all the good film-makers (there are some twenty of them) and see them many, many times. So that you can see my problem.

Anyway, since I never give up too easily, I went to see Barry Gerson's one-man show and I have to report that I liked it. He managed to pull through a dead period of five years. In the last two years he has begun to reach fresh air. The Jewish Museum show comprised his last two years' work. One could clearly see the

progression. I have seen parts of the work before, but a part always remained a fragmentary experience. It was not clear what he was after. The seventy minutes of film shown at the Jewish Museum pulled one into his world, which in one sentence could be summed up as a very rigid preoccupation with minimal and free forms of nature. Small details and small motions. Nothing extraordinary, nothing very surprising, nothing too sensuous, nothing too formalistic, nothing too "visually" beautiful. It's sort of a monk's world, with all the pleasures eliminated.

Later, we were driving through the city and talking. I was thinking, saying, how similar are the procedures of creation in all the arts. A good musician practices ten years, and the eleventh year he feels he has enough mastery over his tools and over himself to go out and to perform Bach or to improvise. Same with the filmmaker. It took Barry eight, nine years to begin to really get after what he was really getting. His work isn't yet a perfect achievement. But it's already at a stage where it is beginning (as Kubelka would say) to "articulate." So that I don't count him any longer among the lost ones. I begin to hear his own distinct voice on the screen. First babbling sounds.

March 5, 1970

ON SCENES FROM UNDER CHILDHOOD

I just looked at Stan Brakhage's *Scenes from Under Childhood*, Part Four. Fifty minutes long. In color. Silent (available for renting from the Film-Makers' Cooperative). Brakhage has been feeling very low lately. He is in a "giving-up" mood. He thinks he has fought his artist's battle for the noncommercial film and he has lost it. Commerce is taking over, he feels. I don't feel that way at all, and I have been at the cannons too. I know that the civil war of the nonnarrative and noncommercial film versus the commercial and narrative film has been clearly won. The existence of nonnarrative film forms in addition to narrative film has been established. Particularly one feels this when one leaves New York and visits the universities and small colleges. There is no doubt that the big cities are still reeking of commerce, and many small places reek too. But most serious learning institutions, museums,

and art centers across the country have accepted the cinema in all its varieties. Stan has this low feeling sometimes, because he lives there alone on the mountain and likes to fight lonely battles. He forgets that he isn't alone, that there is the whole network of filmmakers' cooperatives doing the work, and there is a new breed of film educators across the country in all learning institutions, and they are doing their job. Slowly but surely.

Where was I? *Scenes from Under Childhood*, Part Four, may be the strongest of the four parts. The entire cycle, as it's growing now (total length of the four parts is slightly over two hours), is a slowly unfolding biography of the Brakhage family. It is a complex and progressing mosaic, or call it a symphony, of realistic details from daily life, filtered through Brakhage's eye. Details of very simple things around the house, the utensils, the furniture; details of emotions, like tears, or outbursts of anger or joy; details of daily activities, like washing dishes, making bread; details from the very first days of life, and deep into the childhood; details that are real, and details that take the shape of memories and dreams, that dissolve and fade in and out. This constant fade-in and fade-out of details and memories is one of the constants of the film. Although the film is made of thousands of little pieces, one practically never sees any cuts—they are all submerged into the sea of living and from that sea they keep coming up and sinking again. Another constant is the use of color positive-negative technique through all the parts. I like Part Four particularly. The first three parts dealt with early childhood, and everything was more rosy and more pastoral. Emotions were seldom permitted to play any part. Everything remained just images. Part Four uses emotional details too. But what I really like about it are the details themselves, how they are presented and treated and selected and the rhythm within which they move. No matter how different my own life was from the one presented in Brakhage's film, detail after detail they reflect in my own memory eye. There is a universality in these images that transcends the personal. As Buddha says, the more personal you are the more universal you are. What Brakhage has done, in these four parts, is made a sort of tapestry of our first memories. *Scenes from Under Childhood* is the only deeply serious movie I can recommend to you this week. Where can you see it? It's your problem, dear reader!

I have been told that Part Five of *Scenes* has been completed

but Stan has no money to make a print of it. I appeal to those few who are seriously concerned with film as art to come to Brakhage's assistance. I hope Stan will forgive me this note. Or he may laugh at it, the way he feels about it, these days: The world doesn't give a damn about its artists, the world wants more games, more sex, and more noise. (I read in this morning's *New York Times* that they are selling Van Gogh for a million and one quarter. As if Van Gogh would give a damn! Sell it for a penny, as far as he's concerned.)

March 19, 1970

ON THE MISERY OF THE COMMERCIAL ART FILM

A few notes on the Grove Press Film Festival:

The Most Beautiful Age (Czechoslovakia; Papousek): sentimental, provincial, petty, juvenile. Some formal attempts are visible in the restraint and control of images and actors. The director made an attempt to work with limited means. But what he does with it never leaves the level of the banal. The film doesn't insult one: It bores one. The program note says that Papousek was a student of sculpture before he turned to cinema. He is another living proof to my unchallenged theory: The most boring and imbecile personalities you can find today are among those who study arts.

Mr. Freedom (France; William Klein): a crude, loveless poster. Well meant. A poster from the days of the Old Testament. The man obviously never heard of the New Testament, at least not the spirit of it. So he fights anger with anger, stupidity with stupidity, ugliness with ugliness, an eye for an eye, lovelessness with lovelessness. Poor old angry generation! Klein and his film is part of the generation that has to die out.

Oh, terrible! What came over me! Why did I decide to attend press screenings? Why am I punishing myself? The other day, I looked at the pages of *The New York Times* and I said to myself: Wow, look at all those movies, I must be missing something! But now I see I am missing absolutely nothing. I am missing only some of the most horrible movies ever made. Like I kept hearing

about *End of the Road*. So I paid my three bucks and I saw a real piece of crock. I thought Czech cinema was banal! The new, young commercial American cinema is even more banal, and more vulgar. The worst kind of bourgeois crock. (EVO liked it! Bourgeois, capitalist sensibilities!) Joel Oppenheimer screwing a chicken, that's why they liked it. He dared to show it on film! A big deal! It's totally uninteresting. Humanity wasn't born this morning. Oh, how I am sick of commercial movies.

But there they were, all our movie critics, old and new, with beards and with milk on their lips—they were all there at the Grove (Grave) Press Film Festival Previews, to see graveyard art. And where were they during the New Cinema Festival at the Elgin Theatre? Oh, who cares where they were!

Next day:

Antonio das Mortes (Brasil; Glauber Rocha): I wonder by what blindness this good movie got into the Grove Festival! *Antonio das Mortes*. Oh, what a difference between all the stupid new commercial movies, and *Antonio das Mortes*. Here is a film with flesh and blood. Here is a film that deals with something very very real. You may not exactly grasp what that reality really is, but you can feel it pulsating. *Antonio das Mortes* is a very beautiful and very real film. It is a deeply political film. How pale suddenly all the documentary, newsreel films look when you compare them with Rocha's film. The newsreels, taken from real life, criticizing and attacking real life seem to look paler and more lifeless than this film which uses fictional style. The closest anything—politically and temperamentally—to Rocha's film I have seen was the short TV film LeRoi Jones did for PBL in Newark, a year ago.

ON JANCOSO

Winter Wind (Hungary; Jancso): Till now, I went by a theory which never failed me: The cinema (after the Second World War) ends in the West in San Francisco, in the East in Vienna. I may now have to push my cinema line to Budapest. The two films of Jancso I have seen till now are beginning to attack my Vienna line. The films are *Roundup* and *Winter Wind*. I liked both. Both are very formal. Both are very economic. There is a touch of—

please do not jump yet!—of Bresson, somewhere, in this man. In any case, here is the first film from beyond the San Francisco-Vienna line that has a form! A film-maker who is concerned with form. I found the film tremendously interesting. What's the film about? I don't really know. I'll have to see the film three, four more times to begin to discuss what the film is all about. No one seriously interested in cinema should miss this film (and Rocha's film).

So, after all, even at the Grave Film Festival there are some living things.

April 2, 1970

ON AN OLD DREYER MOVIE

The most interesting film I saw this week was *Man of the House*, by Carl Th. Dreyer, made in 1924. You can rent it from Contemporary Films, on 16 mm. That's what I did. I suddenly wanted to see a good movie, for a change. I wanted to see a Dreyer.

There are several good things about *Man of the House*. First, it's a film by Dreyer, which is a good thing in itself. Secondly, the film is full of most precise and most beautiful details from the daily life at the beginning of the century. All the little things that people do at home, in their living rooms, in their kitchens, you can almost smell and touch every smallest activity, detail. In a sense one could look at it as an ethnographic film, if one wants—there is so much in it on the level of reality. Thirdly, the film is a Woman's Liberation film made fifty years ahead of its time. It's about a man who treats his wife as a slave, because he thinks he's the worker and the boss in the family. It's about two women who conspire to teach him a lesson, and how they go about it, how they change his thinking and his behavior. It is all in 1924 style, but it's also amazingly up to date. I think it would be great to see a Dreyer at Liberation, etc., meetings, just great—if not for education (although all art is education) then at least for good fun.

April 16, 1970

ON HOLLIS FRAMPTON

On April 3, I saw *Zorns Lemma*, a new film by Hollis Frampton (sixty-one minutes, color). It's his most important work to date, and the most original new work of cinema I have seen since Brakhage's *Scenes from Under Childhood*, Part Four. Frampton's film is an exercise in mathematical logic in cinema. Or is it a mechanical logic? Three viewings do not help me to explain to you what the film is all about. It's about alphabet. It's about the unities of similarities. It's about sameness in a confusion. It's about logic in chance. It's about structure and logic. It's about rhythm. Ah, what a difference between *Zorns Lemma* and all the "serious" commercial movies that I occasionally praise! I am ashamed. Every time I step into a commercial movie theatre I lower my standards, I lower my demands, I lower my intelligence, I muddle my sensitivities, I descend down to the level of the people! Down with the people! Up the Angels!

A NOTE ON BRUCE BAILLIE'S ART

April 6: Bruce Baillie at the Museum of Modern Art. *Quixote*, *Valentin*, *All My Life*, excerpts from *Quick Billy*, a work in progress. This was approximately my twentieth viewing of *Quixote*. It has firmly established itself as one of the few important epic works of the decade. A visionary cross country trip. There are unforgettable images of wide spaces of the country which becomes an apocalyptic blackness as we approach New York. *All My Life* is just one simple image, a fence covered with red wild roses, and a song. A haiku. My favorite of all Baillie's films. Bruce says it's his favorite too. Less than two minutes long, but a much more perfect, a much more achieved work of cinema than all the commercial features playing in town.

April 23, 1970

ON THE MASTERY OF OZU

April 13: *I Was Born, But . . .*, Ozu's silent movie from 1932, at the Museum of Modern Art (Japanese Retrospective). One of the rare, joyful movie experiences. Ozu re-creates his childhood. The childhood of two boys whose parents move into a new neighborhood. Ozu works with very carefully selected details, and with perfect execution. The feelings, thoughts, games, relationships of the two boys and their friends, are outlined with realism, humor, and growing social consciousness. There are lines in this movie on the subject of schools, education, rich, poor, which sound exactly like reading *Rat* (my favorite underground paper since women took over its editorship). Which goes to prove, for the millionth time, that a genuine and inspired artist transcends the temporary, his work becomes eternally relevant. *I Was Born, But . . .* is as true and as moving and timely today as it was in 1932. As Buddha used to say (in case you are wondering, I'm quoting from Buddha's unpublished works, soon to come out): One should never underestimate the power of art.

April 30, 1970

HOW BIG A MOVIE SHOULD BE. HOW SMALL

Foot, by Hannah Weiner. Three minutes. Eight mm. Shown by Gain Ground Group, Thursday, April 23, at 80 Wooster Street. Autumn colors. Woods. A glimpse of one foot, then another. A foot coming into the frame and out, again into the frame and again out—as someone walks through the woods. Only the front half of the shoe, a sandal of some sort, light blue and white, in the overexposed color. A perfect haiku. A film haiku, a short, one idea, or one image film. This silly, unpretentious little 8 mm. movie by Hannah Weiner is a much more important and more successful and more beautiful and more memorable work of film art than, say, *The Man Who Lies*, *Mississippi Mermaid*, or *The*

Early Works. People will say: How can you compare them? One is an 8 mm. nothing, and the others are big movies. Grillet, Truffaut failed within *their* genre, within their form; Weiner succeeded, didn't fail, within her genre, within her form. Through Hannah Weiner's little movie one gains an aesthetic experience; through the others one gains nothing. In art, it doesn't make a bit of difference how big the undertaking: A failure is a failure. Hannah Weiner's *Foot* is the best movie I've seen since Ozu's *I Was Born, But . . .*

May 28, 1970

THE REGENERATIVE ART OF NIBLOCK

Environments II, which was presented at the Judson Memorial Church on May 19 and 20, was a rare, peaceful, regenerating evening. The program consisted of movies by Phill Niblock and dances by Ann Danoff, Barbara Lloyd, and Vernita Nemeč. On a large screen, side by side, three images were projected (movies and slides): trees, flowers, mountains, valleys, rivers, animals, rocks, clouds, brooks. Images of nature. At three spots images were interrupted and the dancers performed simple, one-theme pieces, very organic movement pieces that merged perfectly with the serenity of the images. Yes, peace, joy, and serenity were coming from these movements, from these images, from the faces of animals, from the trees, from the rocks. There are films which, like *Brand X*, take as their task to criticize the existing way of life, the distortions of life, and they do it by working with the same materials as the people they are criticizing—by turning it all upside down, by exaggerating it in order to make a point. *Environments II* criticizes indirectly, by avoiding all corrupt reality, by going to the sources of uncorrupt life energy. *Environments II* presented movements and images which contained life energy with a minimum of corruption. One left the performance revived, strengthened. At least I was. One can begin then to affect curatively the reality around oneself, with that newly regained energy and serenity. In *Brand X* a series of questions are raised, thrown at us; in *Environments II*, in the images of Niblock and the dance

of Barbara Lloyd, a series of presences are created, we face a series of presences of purifying, uplifting energy. A touch of art. That's the difference between art and propaganda. You can have your pick.

I should make here a special note on the art of slide. I am praising and honoring the slide. When all the other imagery, in painting and cinema and even still photography, is so muddled and hectic and "modern," the slide, it seems to me, is the only pure, unpretentious folk art that we have today, and one that celebrates vanishing nature and the human body. There is a certain innocence, unpretentiousness, and peace about slides that make me feel they were made by human beings in love. All other images are made by human beings in pursuit of art, fame, or money. Praised be the slide.

June 4, 1970

ON KEN JACOBS, OR IMAGES AND SOUND IN SPACE

Ken Jacobs came to New York on Sunday, May 24, to give a special stereo projection show at 80 Wooster Street. Three truckloads of his Harpur University students came with him. Since the audience couldn't be larger than fifty people for a good viewing, the show was not advertised. I was among the lucky fifty.

You are so used to hearing high praises from me that now I don't know with what words I should speak about Ken Jacobs' show, how to indicate to you the aesthetic and technological implications of this event. As Annette Michelson remarked, the excitement that one felt at Ken Jacobs' show was probably similar to the excitement the people felt when they were watching the first movies of Méliès.

What Ken Jacobs did was to present a series of very carefully planned 3-D sketches: stereo slides, objects and actions reflected on the screen, shadows of objects (stereo shadows) and actions beyond the screen, on the screen, and in front of the screen. The evening was a lesson in seeing and in hearing, a total exploration of images and space, including sound in space. The beautiful thing about it all was that at no point was there an attempt to impress

you or to astound you. It was all very subdued, quiet. The art of Ken Jacobs has always been the art of subtleties, of nuances. After all, Ken deals with light and shadows, those ephemeral substances that now you see and now you don't.

I do not know much about the technology involved. The devoted team of Harpur College students manipulated the show from behind the screen, ran all kinds of projectors and lamps, and moved the objects and strings and rode bikes and walked with flowers and fancy hats, and Jerry Sims danced in his 30's hat—and it all came out in 3-D and was very delicately beautiful, and like nothing you have ever seen or felt. It was very pleasing for the eyes, and relaxing, to go beyond the two-dimensional space feeling, to follow the movements beyond the screen and in front of the screen. In a two-dimensional screen or painting experience there is always a certain feeling of finality, of a closed door, a closed frame. Here there was a feeling of endlessness, of an open door, of open space—you could go further and further into it and beyond it. Like standing in the open field, seeing as far as your eyes can carry you, feeling a breeze in your hair.

Next day Ken Jacobs and all his students packed up, and back they went to Harpur; Harpur, which must be the most exciting place for any serious film student to be these days: At Harpur Ken Jacobs is setting up the most exciting (and the most advanced) visual arts workshop in the world today.

PRAVDA—GODARD'S ABSTRACT NEWSREEL

Now a few heresies. *Pravda* is Godard's best film to date. With *Pravda* Godard finally abandons commercial cinema and joins the underground. As I have stated on a number of occasions before, we have much higher and stricter standards in the underground. A commercial film can never be discussed in terms of the perfection we have in the underground film. But *Pravda* is cinema. It's beyond the commercial cinema. *Pravda* is Godard's clearest film. But it also is his most mysterious film. In one place the commentator speaks about how the truth comes through the chance relationships of image and sound. Part of the mystery of the film is that even on second viewing I haven't managed to understand more than one tenth of what's being said on the sound track. Only

chance words and meanings reached me. How much of this is chance, how much calculation? Is Godard really making a newsreel for the people? I think Godard is a romantic, and *Pravda* may be his most romantic film. He deals with contemporary romanticism. To be a romantic today you don't have to go into the woods and ruins of old mills. *Pravda* is a film of nostalgia for revolution, for truth. The film doesn't show truth at all (did Dziga Vertov really show the truth?). It rather creates a pattern of sounds and images and voices which sets you into the mood of revolutionary search for truth and class struggle. The class struggle of the mid-century. And it's there that the film's art and success is. It's unquestionably the first (and maybe last) abstract and universal newsreel film, to end all newsreels. *Pravda* is Godard's *Breathless* of the newsreel film. It's not the beginning but the end of the old. I wonder what Godard's *new* newsreel will be.

June 25, 1970

ON EMSHWILLER AND THE POWER OF THE LENS

Of the movies I managed to see during the last three weeks, I liked two new movies by Ed Emshwiller. The titles: *Carol in a Film by Ed Emshwiller* and *Film with Three Dancers*. *Carol* is a subdued, lyrical portrait of Carol. Trees, meadows, lights, and Carol's face, superimposed. At the end, a brief explosion of gay colors. *Film with Three Dancers* is a more complex film in the line of *Relativity*. As in *Relativity*, the camera is in the center: The camera in confrontation with reality. To a question from the audience, at the Jewish Museum screening, Emshwiller commented that his main work, as a film-maker, consists of "wrestling with the environment." Which leads to the essence of Emshwiller's work. If one searches for ideas in his work, one will be disappointed. When Emshwiller gets seduced by ideas, his cinema suffers. The dynamic center of his cinema is exactly this "wrestling with the environment": the eye confronted with the reality; the movie camera confronted with reality; direct optical events discovered through this confrontation; the cinema as a series of optical events. He sees a woman's hair, and he has to exhaust himself

in its optics. He doesn't show us the daily, down-to-earth reality of the woman's body (as Brakhage would do), no: Emshwiller abstracts it, he looks at it as if he were a lens, with no visible feeling or memory. He sees it as a flowing mass of thin soft silky substances in motion, in light, in space, swaying, the head of the woman swaying, mechanically. The bodies of the dancers are no longer human bodies, no longer flesh, but abstract shapes, sculptures, elongations, volumes. The camera runs along them, as if through landscapes; it turns and twists around and between the bodies, in close-up, all around; the bodies become mysterious canyons, with no left, no right, no up, and no down.

To another question from the audience, he answered that ideally he'd like to eliminate all interference of the camera, he'd like simply to "dream it," to "look it." He doesn't want the camera to become more human, no: What Emshwiller really wants is to become a camera himself! That's the degree of madness of this man. Strange images, strange thoughts must be going through the head (body) of this man: He wants to become a camera, he wants to turn into his own tool. He knows that the camera is blind. All cameras are blind. It's Emshwiller who makes the camera see the world that way, it's he who needs to see the world that way, it's he who twists and turns it and leads it into all the strange and unseen ways, it's Emshwiller's body that is vomiting out its existential memories and suspicions. And he does it with untiring persistence, shot after shot, film after film, year after year.

There are people who would like to see more in Emshwiller's cinema than this close-up, wide-angle, symmetricized, optical, mechanical look at reality, this wrestling with reality through the lens. And without doubt there are other sides to his art. But it's also true that at some point the phenomena of nature and life merge with art. Anything that a man does with a total involvement, a total passion (or obsession) becomes imbued with a power of presence that only the strongest phenomena of nature possess. It's at that point that the questions whether this is art or not become totally useless. Emshwiller's work is seldom discussed in terms of art. It's usually considered as a technical tour de force. It may also be exactly this reason—the fact that the aestheticians avoid discussing his work in terms of art and ideas—that makes

him often wander into the fields of literary ideas, to betray his own true love and true obsession. As soon as he leaves his true love, he loses his powers, he becomes just like anybody else. He thus opens several naked heels to the arrows of the aestheticians. Fortunately, he never stays away too long, he always returns to his camera and begins wrestling again. Only a madman could think he's a camera, only a madman. Emshwiller is mad, truly mad. Only mediocre craftsmen are like everybody else. The truly great craftsmen are creatures with demons at their service. And thus the borders of art and craft disappear in the mystery of created and found reality.

July 23, 1970

JACK SMITH, OR THE END OF CIVILIZATION

It all started when Ken and Flo came to pick me up, around 11 o'clock. While they were waiting for me in the lobby, someone completely blocked their car. Someone parked a huge car in front of Flo's car, right to the bumper. Flo said she'd pushed her car back enough so that if another car came, it would have enough space to get in and to get out. But what this other car did, the man had no consideration of any kind for the one who was behind him, for Flo, and pushed back as far as he could, with a totally useless overdose of space in front of him. He bottled Flo in.

As Flo was struggling to get out, inch by inch, we noticed that the car behind us showed some life. There were two men there, they got in, and obviously they were going out, and obviously, we thought, they see and they understand Flo's problem, so they will pull back to permit her to gain some space and get out. We watched them. They pulled back a little bit, and as Flo was almost ready to go, the two men in the back started going forward, to get out. They got out. It became suddenly clear to us that they never had any intention of assisting Flo: They just cared about themselves. Probably they didn't even notice Flo's problem. They were simply oblivious to other people's problems.

So we were driving, and talking, and trying not to be ironical. Ken told about walking with Stan, during his visit five years ago, somewhere downtown, and showing this and that, and how Stan

walked with his eyes down, on the street, and when Ken pointed out something, Stan just lifted his eyes for a split second, and down his eyes went again—as though, if he were to look longer at the lights, buildings, signs, all the civilization of New York, it would get stuck on his eyes, and through his eyes in his memory, his very being, like some disease—so he was guarding his eyes from really seeing it. And Charles was telling me yesterday how Bruce Baillie, on his last visit, two months ago, and he were driving to the Museum of Modern Art, and Bruce was holding a scarf over his face, to keep some of the fumes, and dust, and smog out, and when they were only one block from the Museum, where he had to pick up his films from the screening the day before—he told Charles, turn back, turn back, let's go back, let them mail the films, and he turned back, to Brooklyn, and he left New York.

We stopped at some Italian place, had some antipasto and some wine, regained some strength, looked at some of Ken's stereo slides, and went to Grand Street. It was about half past midnight, the time when, we guessed, Jack maybe was ready to start his show. Because that was really the reason we met. This was our theatre evening, our evening out, we said, and Jack had this theatre thing going every Saturday midnight at his loft. But Richard had warned us not to come too early, because Jack is never on time, and if we come too early, we may end up by being in the play, he has actor problems. So we arrived around 12:30 and we walked up the four floors and into Jack's studio, and the studio was about the same as I saw it last time, with Jack's living "quarters" in the front (entrance) part of the loft, and in the center area a couch and four or five assorted chairs, and the whole north end taken up by a huge, fantastic garbage dumping grounds, human wreckage set, Jack's stage. Seven other people were there. So we made ten all together. Jack was there, on the set, lit with spotlights, picking up things, and placing them down again. In his hand he held the pages of the script. A phonograph was playing a Latin tune. It seemed that we walked in just when he was about to make his decisions about the evening. He stood there, in front, on the left side of the set, for a moment, and he said something to the effect, "Should we just listen to the records? It's a kind of night that I think is just for listening to the records. Shall we play some records, shall we?" He

spoke slowly, and casually, in the usual Jack Smith slowness, and the tone of the voice that came from somewhere very deep. "Does anybody want to be in the play? Maybe we'll just play the records." After this little announcement he resumed his busying around the set. He changed records, he fixed a thing here, a thing there. He climbed to the second floor and changed the spotlights—the whole ceiling to the second floor was missing, but he had left part of it, for the lights and other mysteries which we didn't see. So he disappeared, for a moment, upstairs. Then he descended the rusty old brown steel ladder again. A few script pages fell from his hand and settled on the set.

Meanwhile a fluster was going on in the "front row." There were three very young men, and a boy of twelve or thirteen. They kept joking that they wanted to play, they kept poking fingers at each other and giggling. Nobody else seemed to be interested in becoming an actor. Jack stretched his hand and pointed at one of the older boys, and at the young boy. "You, and you, you come here." "No, I don't want to act," said the younger boy. The older one went to Jack. At the other end of the set was a contraption made of boards and lumber which looked like a huge coffin standing on its end (and which, as I later found out, it actually, or symbolically, was). A second young man stepped on the set. The "actors" disappeared behind the coffin, where they could hide, that was their "dressing" room or space. Jack disappeared too. Then he appeared again, to change the record. Now the record was Richard Strauss' *Salome*, I think, and he played it at slow speed, so that it dragged unevenly. He disappeared into the "dressing" room again and one could see him holding the pages of the script, and could hear him talking. The slow dragged-out music enveloped us all into a post-midnight unreality that seemed to become more and more real.

The set was a huge arrangement of, I have no other word for it, human wreckage: cans, bottles, containers, signs, bits and parts of things, a toilet with a doll sticking out, dirty underwear on the line, a huge red sign which said ALL DAY \$2 (later Jack placed a burning candle under that sign, and the candle he used as a cigarette lighter throughout the night, and the audience did the same). Another sign, half covered by junk and litter, said FREE GIFTS, and still another said EXOTIC FRUITS, it was part of

some fruit box; still another sign, half buried in the garbage, said BETTER LIVING. There were feathers, two or three old, dried-out Christmas trees, an assortment of paper boxes, containers, and cans, and bottles, all meticulously arranged, and ropes and things hanging from the ceiling and the walls, and pieces of plaster on the floor, and a large plastic fish next to it. Can you imagine a huge house, a living room maybe, of a large family with all kinds of things, and this house suddenly caves in, and you find it here, in Jack's loft, all of it, a huge pile, with all the middle-class home utensils, and things, and lumps of plaster—the entire caving-in of a middle-class capitalist culture, TV culture, A&P culture, Macy's culture. So it was all here. Or the essence of it, and it was sad and miserable.

As the small activity around the "dressing" room continued, and Jack kept changing records and touching this and that, slowly, very slowly, one began to see, to realize, that there was nothing, absolutely nothing, almost not even a piece of dust that was there by accident, by chance. It was all very carefully distilled and arranged. One had a feeling that it was a result of many years, of ten, of fifteen years of distilling. With the music filling the space in between, often in slow speed, and garbled and scratchy—the music seemed also to become part of the set, it just fell in, into the whole, the music became part of the set, or grew out of it. One slowly began—having nothing else to do—to study the set, segment by segment, area by area, and discover how every part of it was a small masterpiece of perfection, a small masterpiece of human wreckage, and how all the small masterpieces of the set made one huge set, one huge masterpiece. More than that: As Ken later remarked, there was absolutely nothing that hadn't to do with the essence of the human wreckage. One slowly began to perceive that this was not just a set for some kind of theatre piece that was coming up, a background, a crutch for it: No, this set, this arrangement was already the content and the essence of the whole thing, the content of the evening, of the play, it was there and it spoke already at us, and acted upon us, and it was all structured so; and slowly, around 1:30 or thereabout, it seemed to us, to me and Ken, that it didn't really matter, it was no longer essential what would come or should come, that the content of Jack's huge work was already beginning to gain power and sink

into us, this set, and Jack walking there, like a night watcher (or was he a grave keeper?), picking up this and that, and whatever he did or didn't do, and whatever his "actors" did, by almost doing nothing, or by doing something—everything seemed to fall into the set, to enrich it more and more.

It was around 1:30 or so that one of the "actors" came from behind the coffin contraption. He had red make-up strokes on his face, and one leg of his trousers was sort of pulled up, and an old brassiere was on top of his "puerto-ricano" jacket (I heard the "actor" in the dressing room keep repeating, "Should I be the village fool, village idiot?")—so he came out, and there was some kind of water pool, small as it was, behind the wreckage, or in the midst of the wreckage, and the idiot began washing his feet in it, but unbelievably still wearing his desert boots, which he then took off, emptied of water, put back on. Later he picked up an empty can from Jack's set (later, Jack put it back exactly where it was before) and started picking up water and pouring it out, picking up and pouring out. Jack brought him a chair, so he could sit down, and he kept working, splashing around the water and in water, and he wasn't sure what he should "really" do, he kept asking Jack, whenever Jack passed by, and he kept whispering to his boyfriend who was still in the "dressing room," and it was all so right and absolutely idiotic and proper and beautiful to do, that it went perfectly with the set and the play. Jack stood by the phonograph table (on the set) and he was working it, and he told the idiot to start reading lines, "shout, as loud as you can, each separate word," as soon as the "telephone stops ringing." And the telephone on the record or tape started ringing and the village idiot came up front with the pages of the script in his hand, and he started reading the lines, and Jack came to him, and told him to go back, because "the telephone didn't stop ringing yet." And there was the twelve-year-old boy, who kept walking all over the set, and talking to his two "actor" friends, and going back to his seat, and back into the set again, throughout the "performance"; and he became totally incorporated into the "play," like everything else was. So the idiot waited until the telephone stopped ringing, then he walked up front again and started reading the lines, and he read them fast, the lines that went something like "Good evening. Welcome to the

plaster foundation . . . a juggernaut . . . Christian civilization . . . [or was it a Christian juggernaut?] . . . Atlantis”—and Jack came to him and stood behind him, and told him, angry by now, to read it reeeally sloow, and look carefully at what he was reading. Jack told him to hold his pages in the light. “You can’t do things on stage you can’t do in real life,” he told the boy. “Can you read without light, can you?” The boy kept reading judgment instead of juggernaut, and Jack had to stop him three times, and told him to read it loudly, “to fill the room.” The boy became angry and shot back at Jack, telling him he had a sore throat and couldn’t shout, he would read “regular voice,” so Jack went back to operate the phonograph, and the boy read the lines. When he came to the word Christianity, Jack told him that now he should look “at the plaster on the floor,” and since the “actor” didn’t seem to understand what Jack meant, Jack pointed with his hand at the plaster, lumps of plaster scattered in the foreground of the set, on which a large plastic fish was sitting, and Jack said, “Now he looked at the plaster.”

Jack described to the boy his next action: While he played the next piece of music, the boy should go to the pile of the arrangement and pick up a copy of *Time* or *Newsweek*, whatever it was—there was a reference in the script to the effect of “my favorite magazine”—and there was also a line to the effect of orchids, dusty and old, dust falling on orchids hanging on the vines, and the boy read the lines and went and picked up the magazine, and Jack told him to point with his finger at the individual letters in the magazine, to the rhythm of the music, which the boy did beautifully.

Now it was past 2 A.M., and as I watched, as we watched this fantastic show, I had a feeling, I suddenly was very conscious that it was 2 A.M. in New York, and very late, and most of the city was sleeping, even on Saturday night, and that all the theatres had been closed and over, long ago, all that’s called theatre, all the ugly, banal, stupid theatres of the world, and that only here, in this downtown loft, somewhere at the very end of all the empty and dead and gray downtown streets, was this huge junk set and these end-of-civilization activities, these happenings, this theatre. I began getting a feeling, it resembled more and more the final burial ceremonies, the final burial rites of the capitalist civiliza-

tion, competitive civilization, these were the magic burial grounds and the burial rites of all the corruption, comfort and money and good living, and free gifts of the world that was now asleep, at 2 A.M., only Jack Smith was still alive, a madman, the high priest of the ironical burial grounds, administering last services here alone and by himself, because really the seven or eight people who were now his audience (the other three were on the set) were really no audience at all, Jack didn't need any audience, he would do it anyway, and I had a feeling that he did it anyway, many nights like this, many Saturdays, by himself, audience or no audience, actors or no actors, he reenacted this ceremony, the last man who was still around and above it all and not part of it but at the same time conscious of it all, very painfully conscious of it all, the sadness himself, the essence of sadness itself.

The other actor came from the "dressing" room, he was coming out for some time now, coming out and going back again, dressed up as a woman, but the only thing one could really see was a fantastic plumed head grab she (he) had on, and she (he) stood there next to the town idiot, whom Jack by now had sent back to the water pool, to work with a huge spoon, pouring water—and then—here my memory lapsed for a moment, I may have skipped some important action, I was carried away by some other study or preoccupation or thought for a few minutes, or maybe I closed my eyes—Jack gave the idiot a big sign, in red letters, or black letters on red background, picked up from the street, and the sign read UNITED STATES GYPSUM, and they danced for a moment with the sign. Then Jack told the "actors" to carry the sign up front and show it to the people, and the "actors" couldn't keep the sign straight, so Jack kept fixing it, and then he disappeared into the back of the room, behind the "audience," looking for something—and the actors by now were really fed up with it all, they kept asking the audience, "What time is it, What time is it?" and Ken and I kept telling them, "O.K., there is plenty of time, it's early, and it's Saturday night, relax, it's early." Every time Jack disappeared for something, the actors dropped their actions, whatever they were doing, and they cuddled together and giggled and whispered something. But whatever they did, script or no script, private or instructed, it all fell into the set, into the play, against their own will, hilarious at the moment it all became part of the huge sadness of the burial grounds, the end of civilization sadness, part of

the plan, part of the human wreckage, all prearranged by Jack, the Madman of Grand Street, who seemed to know it all, to know the corruptions and weaknesses of men, and the problems he'll face with his art, so he preprogrammed it all, so that now whatever anybody does to destroy his art falls into his art, becomes part of the huge collage, no matter what they do. He prearranged the music and the whole set so that it absorbs everything—exactly like the end of the civilization itself which it seemed to portray—yes, this set became like this culture that seems to absorb everything and everybody—a huge dumping grounds, an open mouth of graveyards—

So Jack told the two “actors” to put down the UNITED STATES GYPSUM sign and he put a large teddy bear on it, and they picked it up, like a casket. Jack himself led the procession, walking slowly around the whole set, and the two actors carried the “casket” with the teddy bear. Under his arm, and very close to his heart, Jack was clutching a large red valentine heart. Did he betray with it his last love, hope for man? Was it his silent message for humanity, for the dregs of humanity? As Jack was walking, he kept interrupting the procession to fix up a detail here, a detail there, a can, a box, a sign, a feather in the set which his two actors kept slightly disrupting. I don't know what Jack needed, but he interrupted the burial procession and climbed up the black steel ladder, up to the second floor. It was at this point that the actors decided to make a dash, and after a small fluster they dumped the teddy bear into the Christmas tree and disappeared into the “dressing room,” from which they appeared a few seconds later, without the make-up and without the plumes. Jack descended the ladder as the actors were leaving the set. Jack engaged them in a small argument, trying to persuade them to stay. He said only one more scene was left: They had to put the teddy bear into the coffin. But the actors insisted they had done that already. “We dumped him into the pile,” they kept saying. “No, no, into the coffin,” Jack kept saying. The younger boy came from the audience and joined the argument, so Jack got hold of the boy and told him to wait, as the other two left the set, and Jack disappeared again for something into the “dressing” room. As soon as Jack had gone, the boy took his chance and dashed from the set. Before anybody could see, all three of them—the two actors and the boy—the entire cast, that is—were gone from the loft. Jack came

out from behind the contraption and looked at the set. He stood there for a long, long while, very sad. Music was playing, an old record from the 20's, and a collage of street and car noises. Finally, he moved his hand and pointed at a man sitting behind me, and he motioned him to come out on the set, which the man did without any resistance. So Jack told him to take one end of the GYPSUM sign, and he took the other, and he put the teddy bear on it again, and he began a slow march toward the back part of the set where the huge coffinlike contraption stood. Jack laid his end down, helplessly, and stood, pointing at the phonograph. He had to change the record, the music was wrong, he said. It was clear that Jack needed help, and that the play had to be completed, no matter what—so I got up and walked into the set and picked up the other end of the “casket” and Jack put on the right music and came to us. As soon as the music starts, we should begin to walk, he told us, “at ridiculously slow speed,” and so we did, and we walked at ridiculously slow speed, the three or four feet to the coffin, it took us five minutes or so to walk the distance, and Jack told us to put the casket into the coffin, there, and walk off the set, and we did walk off the set, through the left side, as Jack stood there, very tall now, against the structure of the coffin, leaning against it, in the very center of the set, smoking, and very quiet, and very much himself, and very sad, but also serene, somehow, as he looked at us, and at the set, or somewhere we didn't know where or into what—and there was a huge cross against the coffin structure, and Jack was next to it, and below, some kind of Arabic castle—

And then Jack said, feigning slight embarrassment, something like “that's it,” and he walked across the set, and to the ladder, and he slowly climbed up the ladder, probably to cut out the spotlights, and we stood there for a moment, five or six of us, and hesitated, to wait for Jack or not, but we decided to go, it was close to three o'clock, and we all went down to the street. I turned around as we left. Jack was still upstairs. The place, the set now was there by itself, completely empty and alone, the whole place was empty, and I thought for a moment I should shout to Jack GOOD NIGHT, JACK, but I didn't, I thought it wouldn't fit in all somehow, and we left—

We walked, five of us, down the long dark Grand Street, with-

out any words, several blocks, we walked silently and without words, and we knew, we knew that we had seen one of the greatest and purest theatre evenings of our lives, and we knew Jack was there alone and by himself in his loft, the keeper of the graveyard of the end of civilization, and one of the last and uncompromising great artists our generation had produced, and somehow everything stood clear inside us, a standard for our lives and our art was reestablished, for a moment, this night, in Jack's loft, here, downtown, this late hour, as the city slept. Somehow there was a new hope and life in the black street again, as we walked, silently.

August 20, 1970

WHAT A PITY THIS ISN'T CHINA

I was told that Mao forbade making narrative (story) movies in China, at least for a few years. Only documentary films are being made. What a pity this is not China. The only way to stop the flow of stupid commercial movies is to forbid them all. If anybody wants to make one, let him make it in secret, let it be a real necessity, knowing that the movie may cost his head. All good cinema has been created from such necessity. The rest is commerce, business, boredom, stupidity, waste of everybody's eyes and time. People should pick up dancing in the streets instead of sitting in movies, that would be much, much better.

On my way to the Met film show, I passed the Saint Jean Baptiste Church, on Lexington and 76th Street. I saw a good number of people walking in, like people going to movies . . . so I walked in. It was 8 P.M., but the church was completely full. I was sort of amazed. I haven't been to church in a long time. So I was really amazed. I just came from the 6 P.M. screening at the Met where the auditorium was only one-third full. Jokingly, I said to Stavis, who runs the Met shows for Langlois, and who was contemplating the small attendance, "It's Saturday night and people must have all kinds of things to do." "Like going to the Radio City," snapped Stavis. So now I was dumbfounded: They went to church! In any case, the church was full. It was a mixed crowd, mostly middle-aged, but many—

I was again surprised—very young. They were there, very quiet, and very much in themselves, and when I walked in, they were singing. The whole church sang. I stood there, in the back of the church, traveler and stranger in the world that I am, there wasn't even a place left, really, to sit, the only place for me was in the back, by the column, so I stood there, surprised, amazed, absorbed, and the whole church sang, their voices filled the church completely, and it sounded so simply and amazingly beautiful, real, unique, that all the vapid unreality, smallness, pettiness, pretentiousness of all the movies I've been seeing lately faded away, was washed away by this sound of a thousand human voices singing in this church, this August Saturday evening—and I stood there and I let it all sink into me, deep into my very flesh, and then I walked back into the street—the church still singing—the evening was falling lower and lower, and there was the street, still hot and muggy, and I walked in my even, long stride through the evening city.

September 3, 1970

CINEMA HISTORY, CINEMA FUTURE

For some time now, for three, four years, I have been going through a period of reseeing, reevaluating every movie I saw before, years ago, and thought was either great or terrible. I am discovering that I've been badly influenced by all the film history books. I am discovering that most of the film history books (and most of the current monographs and collections of film criticism) have been written after one or, at most, two viewings of a film. While we, the new critics (Kelman, Sitney, Foreman, myself, and, partly, Sarris), do not write anything decisive unless we see a movie five, ten, twenty, thirty times. So that all the film history books written till now will have to be junked, they are of no value, their only value is as part of social history. They have nothing to do with the history of film art.

Perhaps the only voices one can trust are those of the filmmakers themselves. Not when they are analyzing the meanings of their films (there, the truth of Matisse—the tongues of artists

should be cut out—remains true), but when they speak about how the film was made, the processes, the procedures, the impulses, the attitudes, some of the reasonings, and a few other such matters which begin to help us understand the creative process of film-making and which begin to lay the first seeds of formal criticism.

There we were, at the Flaherty Film Seminar, trying to learn something about cinema, talking until 1 A.M. It was after 1 when we were walking to the dormitories. It was pitch dark. One could see stars, but all around us was an impenetrable blackness. As we were walking so, and looking at the sky and the barely visible silhouette of the lake, suddenly there was a dark figure sitting by the roadside, in almost complete darkness, I almost stepped on it.

I leaned over, and I recognized the figure of a girl, from Harpur College, one of Ken Jacobs' students. She was sitting on the ground in the dark, and she had a Bolex in her hands, and she was sitting there motionless and silent and an inseparable part of night and occasionally she clicked her camera: She was filming. I looked into the distance—there was some kind of light there. There was nothing else. I had no real idea what she was filming, nor how. But there she was, completely involved in her work, at 1 A.M., and it was clear, as I leaned and looked into her, that she knew completely what she was after, although to us it was a total mystery—so we stood for a moment, and continued walking. Soon her dark silhouette disappeared in the darkness, she merged with the night: a film-maker at work, in the deep darkness of the Connecticut night. That's where the cinema is born, talk or no talk, books or no books: The creative process is continuing in its own night of privacy.

October 1, 1970

ON CULTURAL CONTINUITY

I found a copy of *Le Monde* on the plane. I read (September 11 issue) an essay on "Nouvelle Avant-Garde":

Victory of imagination over reason; experience over knowledge; turning over of perception; submerging into another reality which has to be explored, presented—abolishing of old laws and criteria. How to

separate good from bad, permanent from impermanent, how to classify the works in scale of importance if the works themselves do no longer exist but manifest as electrical discharges?

I read this and I thought: Who started the idea that the new, revolutionary, radical, underground culture is diametrically opposed to the old? I think the idea was invented by the enemies of processes of change. For the question is not of "upturning" values and culture but of deepening and cleansing them, recovering them. By saying that revolutionaries and radicals oppose values and culture they make revolutionaries look like fools and they excuse their own clinging to the "old," "other" values and culture, while in truth those "other" and "old" values are not values, but distorted values and their culture is a bastard culture. Revolutionaries who deny culture and art perpetuate the misunderstanding and distortion of art and culture and thus help the enemy. What they should say, instead, is the truth, and the truth is: Revolutionaries and underground are really restorers of culture, they are attacking the vulgarizations and misuses of culture, art, etc. They are objecting to the use of art as commodity.

"Victory of imagination over reason." *Not* victory of imagination over reason: The new art reveals that imagination is also reason. Not "experience over knowledge": Experience is also knowledge. Not "upturning of perception": It's deepening, widening of perception. Etc. Etc. The old banalized culture keeps looking at the new in oppositions, in negations, while in truth the process is that of deepening, cleansing, expanding, widening, adding. The question is how much can one widen or add without upsetting people's balance so much that they see it as "opposed" to what they know already. This amount is proportional to the intelligence, enlightenment of the person. The lower the mind and body, the smaller the change in knowledge and experience required to throw it out of balance, to set it shouting: They are against culture and values!

October 22, 1970

CINEMA AS PASSION

I want to sum up my thoughts on the European underground. One thing is clear: The American underground film is no longer alone. From now on, there will be a dialogue between the American and the European film undergrounds. I hope that this will bring some new excitement. The European underground scene is at the level of excitement and productivity of, say, New York or San Francisco of 1964–65. As we all know, the underground film scene in New York today is at its low ebb. The London gathering, the bustle, the excitement brought back memories of the early New York days. There is one difference, however, between the early New York film underground scene and what's going on in Europe. The main drive in New York and in San Francisco, the main excitement came from one central fact: We had rediscovered the film medium and the camera. This fact generated so much energy and passion that it produced a whole body of new cinema that was like a new beginning of cinema, another big step in film form and language. The only other case of similar magnitude I could cite would be the Russian revolution, which produced the cinema of Dziga Vertov and Eisenstein. In Russia, the excitement was generated by the revolution; in America, the excitement was generated by the medium (and the tools of the medium). It seems that the movements, steps, transitions in cinema or in any other art, the real steps, the real marks are made, happen only when such total passion for something comes into existence and takes over an entire generation, unconditionally, totally. I do not yet see such passion in Europe. I see some excitement but no totally involving passion which would eliminate any other thought, calculation, any other cinema, as happened in the American film underground between 1960 and 1968. What I see in Europe is a good application of some of the achievements, principles, directions of American underground and, of course, some original artists and original works, singular cases. Some of these works will take a place in the larger repertory of the new cinema. But the

passion is individual, not a mass passion, as it was in America. This is caused partly by the changing political realities. There was a noticeable political (I mean short-run politics, not long-run politics) preoccupation in most of the film-makers I met in London, both first- and third-rate. But the political interest hasn't become yet a passion strong enough to produce a cinema of passion.

October 29, 1970

THE CINEMA OF MARCEL HANOUN

I have seen four films by Marcel Hanoun to date: *Une Simple Histoire*, which was shown at the New York Film Festival in September; *Le Printemps*, shown last Wednesday at the Museum of Modern Art, at a special presentation; *L'Hiver* and *L'Été*, both shown to film critics and friends in a special midnight presentation at the New Yorker Theatre during the New York Film Festival. It's clear now, I have not a drop of doubt, that Marcel Hanoun is the most important and the most interesting French film-maker since Bresson. No matter how hard I try to understand it, it's completely beyond my comprehension how a film artist of such magnitude and quality has so totally escaped the eyes of the French film critics. If you'd look through the pages of the "critical" film monthlies, you wouldn't know Marcel Hanoun existed at all. I don't know how they are watching movies there: One thing is certain, they ain't watching them with their eyes; neither are they watching them with their minds, because the cinema of Marcel Hanoun is a pleasure and wine both for the eyes and the mind.

If one would judge Hanoun only from his first film, *Une Simple Histoire*, one would speak about him very much in terms of Bresson. But when one sees his further development, one discovers that to the qualities which we associate with Bresson—such as the total control of image, the economy of action and image, the precision, exactness, and almost puritan seriousness—Hanoun has added sensuousness, lyricism of image, structural concern, and the eye and hand of the cameraman (Hanoun shoots his films himself). There are moments in his films, sudden explo-

sions of images which belong to the most ecstatic moments of film art. I have been told that Richard Roud rejected Hanoun's *L'Hiver* for the New York Film Festival. There was nothing shown at the festival this year that would approach even half of the beauty of *L'Hiver*. Strange are the ways of festivals, of film magazines, of film critics. The melodrama, for all of them, remains the norm of film art. So an artist like Hanoun works year after year, year after year, completes seven feature-length films—and then he has to come to New York, to be seen for the first time for what he really is. My explanation of this is the following. The commercial cinema has so veiled, by its sheer volume and insistence, the eyes and minds of the spectators and critics that they don't know what they are seeing. In New York, during the last ten years, the underground (avant-garde) film-maker has removed some of that veil, has given some distance to the commercial cinema, has lifted the melodrama veil, so the beauty of Hanoun's work speaks to us very directly and clearly now. We are becoming more sensitive to film form, to structure, to the image itself. The new spectator can be deceived neither by a "timely" and flashy theme, nor by the "newness" of the images, nor by production "values."

Hanoun is not topical, not polemical, not sensational. His subjects deal with subtle feelings, thoughts, emotions, structures, forms that seem to transcend all temporary bustle. And above all, he deals with cinema. Hanoun's films are about cinema. They deal with the new frontiers of cinema, the possibilities of cinema, and the glories of cinema. A good moment of cinema—and there are many such moments in Hanoun's work—is better than any social tract, political session, better than . . . I don't know what. The meaning of cinema is cinema. The glory of cinema is cinema. The politics of cinema is cinema. The history of cinema is cinema. The liberation of cinema is through cinema. The meaning of Marcel Hanoun is cinema. If you don't like Hanoun—you are against cinema. That is as clear as day. To me, that is.

November 19, 1970

THE CANTO OF WARREN SONBERT

Footage from 1967–1970 is the latest title Warren Sonbert has given his ever-growing, ever-changing film. At earlier screenings it has been known as *The Bad and the Beautiful* and *Tonight and Every Night*. I saw it a month ago in London. It was shown in New York, at the Jewish Museum, two Wednesdays ago. By now the short film of twenty minutes has grown to eighty minutes. What it is, it's a canto on people and places. It is the first canto film I know. Sonbert keeps splicing together, one bit after another (each bit about the same length, not very long and not too short), bits of footage from his journeys in Europe, Africa, India, and the United States. He cuts these pieces in such a way that places and time are completely jumbled together. A shot taken in Tangiers is followed by a shot from India, and then by a shot from New York (maybe from a year ago) and another shot from India, etc.—and it's amazing how it all works together. It doesn't really work, if you see only fifteen or twenty minutes of it. But the longer you watch it, the more this jumble begins to work. He sings of people and places. It is a little bit tourist footage, only more splendid, with a kind of special Sonbert touch. In between these impersonal or touristic shots the very real faces and bits of actions of some of his New York friends appear. It was a pleasant and new experience to sit through this film—a collage of the world, a world which seems to be the same everywhere. I don't know if there are any lessons to learn from this film, and I have overheard some people complaining that there is nothing new in Sonbert's footage, no new information is given. Nevertheless, as I sat through these eighty minutes, I felt there was a completely different information being passed to me, something that wasn't in the shots; something that came from the fact that the totality of the film, the sum total of the shots, became more than the content or value or information of the individual shots. Something begins to happen, after ten or twenty minutes; the information is changed by time, by the ever-repeating rhythm of places and people, and a new kind of infor-

mation and form is born. One of the lessons, for me, in this film, came from the fact that I was beginning to get bored during the first twenty minutes. But I persisted, and it paid off. It's this time element that did it. It's in time that the structure of Sonbert's "looking at things" begins to appear. It's through time that the structure begins to work on our body, mind, blood, heart, lungs. So I thought I should write about this to you. A fool like me can afford to waste time, even when I get nothing in return. But sometimes I end up by gaining if I persist long enough (I am a Capricorn). After all, time is not money, time is one thing I can afford, a good eighty minutes of it. And then I walk the streets happy, smog or no smog. A good movie, good art clears out the smog of our minds. All the talk today against art is nothing but a social smog, I don't want any part of it. You can liberate your pot, if you wish; I get high on music (as I was on Messiaen, last week at Hunter); or on the clear, unpretentious movies of Warren Sonbert; or by looking at a brown leaf falling from a tree.

November 26, 1970

LONG LIVE CLIQUES IN ART

I find myself without a film to write about. Don't I go to movies or what? No, I go. Long or short, I saw at least twenty movies last week. But I haven't seen anything I could get excited about. Some of my friends ask me why I don't go to "commercial" movies: I seldom write about them. I go to commercial movies, but I don't like them. I write only about the movies I like. I have tried to write about the movies I don't like, but I always fail at it. I totally fail at my dislikes. What's the use of talking about something you don't like. Forget it, let it disappear. Take your stand for what you like. That's the only way to really get into something: to like it. That's the meaning of "cliques" in art. They say: Oh, you are a clique, the underground—you like only your friends' movies. Yes, glory to the cliques in art. Cliques, movements in art are concentrated wedges into the consciousness of man. The underground of the 60's was such a wedge. The French avant-garde of the 20's was such a wedge.

MORE ON JACK SMITH

So I sit through a commercial movie, and it does nothing to me. It is so far away from the main concerns and passions of the art of cinema today, that it does nothing to me. Then I go to Max's Kansas City, and I see Jack Smith's show, his present version of *No President*, and the screen suddenly comes to life. Not only comes to life: It moves with such intense and unique imagination that I sit through a hundred minutes without once being able to detach myself from it. I think Jack managed to put into this movie fifty, sixty, I don't know how many years of screen's mythology, symbology, everything. He distilled it all to the basic images of the unconscious, and in the most subtle way possible. Jack's film is one of cinema's glories. How can you go, then, to a commercial movie and write about it, react to it in terms of cinema, after being reminded by Jack Smith of what cinema could be, what cinema is? So, don't ask me why I don't write about Hollywood movies: It's not my ignorance of them—it's my wide perspective that doesn't allow me to get excited about them.

Oh, my dear friends: I feel kind of melancholic today. I went to a party, some kind of gallery opening. It was very depressing. I bumped into a number of people I have been seeing for years now. They were still searching for something. They were floating and searching, for friendship, for self-satisfaction, for self-fulfillment. They asked me about movies, and I said, no, I haven't seen any. What's the use telling them about Jack's movie, I thought: They are looking for bigger things. You see, I search for nothing, absolutely nothing. Search means nothing to me, it's meaningless. All I want is to celebrate a few things, a few very beautiful, unique, simple things, be they part of nature or the creations of man's spirit. Man's spirit, yes, man's spirit. It has to do with energy that sustains life and makes it more luminous, much more luminous. So I can give myself fully to these few luminous creations of men—like Jack's images—and speak about them to you, even if melancholically, at times.

December 31, 1970

THE INVISIBLE CATHEDRALS OF JOSEPH CORNELL

How to write about the movies of Joseph Cornell? Where can I find such lightness and grace and unpretentiousness and directness? My typewriter is here, in front of me, very real. The paper, the keys. I'm searching for words, letter by letter. To pay a tribute to a unique artist.

One amazing part of Joseph Cornell's film work—and he is the first one to stress this and remind us of it—is that a number of other people have been involved in the making of his films, either in photographing them or editing them. But when you see them (nine were shown at the Anthology Film Archives weekend before last), the same unmistakable Cornellian qualities mark them all. I spoke with Stan Brakhage, who did camera work on a few Cornell movies, and he said, yes, I held the camera, but I was only a medium who followed every indication, every movement, every suggestion that Cornell made: Cornell didn't touch the camera, but he made my every movement, he took every shot. Rudy Burckhardt, who photographed a good number of other Cornells, relates the same experience.

Yes, this invisible spirit of a great artist hovers over everything he does; a certain movement, a certain quality that he imposes upon everything he touches. When in contact with people, this quality rises again from the work, like a sweet mist, and it touches us, through our eyes, through our mind. Cornell's mist (art is the opiate of the people . . .), Cornell's fragrance is at once unique and at the same time very simple and unimposing. It's so unimposing that it's no wonder his movies have escaped, have slipped by unnoticed—through the grosser sensibilities of the viewer, the sensibilities of men who need strong and loud bombardment of their senses to perceive anything. What Cornell's movies are is an essence of the home movie. They deal with things very close to us, every day and everywhere. Small things, not the big things. Not wars, not stormy emotions, dramatic clashes or situations. His images are much simpler. Old people in the parks. A tree full of

birds. A girl in a blue dress, looking around, in the street, with plenty of time on her hands. Water dripping into the fountain ring. An angel in the cemeteries, sweetest face, under a tree. A cloud passes over the wing of the angel. What an image. "A cloud passes, touching lightly the wing of an angel." The final image of *Angel* is to me one of the most beautiful metaphors cinema has produced.

Cornell's images are all very real. Even when they are taken from other movies, as in *Rose Hobart*, they seem to gain the quality of reality. The Hollywood unreality is transported into Cornelian unreality, which is very, very real. Here is an evidence of the power of the artist to transform reality by choosing, by picking out only those details which correspond to some subtle inner movement or vision, or dream. No matter what he takes, be it a totally "artificial" reality, or bits of "actual" reality, he transforms them, bit by bit, into new unities, new things, boxes, collages, movies, with no other thing on earth resembling them. I have seen some of these movies in process of assembling themselves in Cornell's studio during the years, as they were put together, or maybe as they were putting themselves together from earth's dream matter, from things that people usually either throw away or don't pay attention to or pass by without looking, taking them for granted—be it a flock of birds, or an angel's wing, or a melancholy looking doll in a store window—people are always interested in important matters. . . .

Ah, but do not get misled, either by my writing, the way I'm writing about Cornell's little movies, nor by the seeming simplicity of the movies themselves: Don't assume for a moment that they are a work of a "home" artist, a dabbler in cinema. No, Cornell's movies, like his boxes and his collages, are products of many years of work, of collecting, of polishing, of caring. They grow, like some things of nature grow, little by little, until the time arrives to let them out. It's like all things that Cornell does. Like his studio, like his basement. I stood in his basement and I looked in amazement at all kinds of little things in incredible number, frames, boxes, reels, little piles of mysterious objects and parts of objects, on walls, on tables, on boxes, and on the floor, in paper bags, and benches and chairs—wherever I looked I saw mysterious things growing, little by little. Some of them were just at the

stage of birth, a detail or two, a fragment of a photograph, a toy's arm; other things in further stages of growth, and still others almost completed, almost breathing (on the table there was a pile of objects a little girl who was visiting the studio months ago spilled out, and he didn't touch them, he thought the creation was perfect)—the entire place looked like some magic hothouse of buds and flowers of art. And there was Joseph Cornell himself, walking kindly among them, touching one, touching another, adding some detail, or just looking at them, or dusting them off—the Gardener—so they grow into their fragile, sensitive, sublime, and all-encompassing perfections.

Once I was foolish enough to ask Cornell about the exact dates of the completion of his movies. When was *Cotillion* made? When was *Centuries of June* made? No, said Cornell, don't ask for the dates. Dates tie things down to certain points. Yes, when was it made? . . . Somewhere there . . . many years . . . So there I was, a fool, asking a foolish question. The dates! Cornell's art is timeless, both in its processes of coming (or becoming) and in what it is. His works have the quality—be they boxes, collages, or movies—of being located in some suspended area of time, like maybe they are extensions of our "realness" into some other dimension where our reality can be fixed. Our dimensions come and go, Cornell's dimensions remain and can always be touched again by sensibilities of those who come and look at his work. Yes, spaces, dimensions. No great surprise to find in Cornell's work so much geometry and astronomy. It has something to do with retracing our feelings, our thoughts, our dreams, our states of being on some other, very fine dimension from where they can reflect back to us in the language of the music of the spheres.

Or like the girls, the timeless girls of Cornell's art, they are either angels or children—in any case they are at the age when the time is suspended, doesn't exist. Nymphs are ageless and so are the angels. A girl of ten, in a blue dress, in a park, with nothing to do, with plenty of time on her hands, looking around, in a timeless dream.

So where was I? I was talking about the movies of Joseph Cornell. Or at least I thought I was talking about them. I will be talking about them for a long time. There aren't many such sublime things left around us to talk about. Yes, we are talking

about cathedrals, civilization. What's his name? Professor Clark? The cathedrals of today, wherever they are, are very unimposing, very unnoticeable. The boxes, the collages, the home movies of Joseph Cornell are the invisible cathedrals of our age. That is, they are almost invisible, as are all the best things that man can still find today: They are almost invisible, unless you look for them.

1971

January 7, 1971

FILMS OF YOKO ONO AND JOHN LENNON

Seven movies by John Lennon and Yoko Ono were projected at the Elgin Theatre Christmas week. Two of them, *The Fly* and *Legs*, were made in New York, the same week, in a crash movie-making program; others were older. *Give Peace a Chance* is a feature-length documentary on the Toronto Bed-In. It is enlightening and entertaining, particularly the part with Al Capp. *The Ballad of John and Yoko* and *The Cold Turkey* were song-music films, both very short.

Mostly I'd like to talk about *Apotheosis*, *Rape*, *The Fly*, and *Legs*. I don't know what to call these films. They are neither fiction, nor documentaries, nor poems. They are film objects, film things. Their enjoyment will depend on a number of unpredictable reasons and circumstances.

Rape is an eighty-minute film where the cameramen follow a German girl on her visit to London. She doesn't speak English. They don't let her go, they don't answer any of her questions, they don't talk to her, they follow her close to her heels through the streets, and into her room. The girl was chosen by chance, in the street, she was never told what was going on, they swindled the key to her apartment from her sister—and so it goes, a perfect camera rape, a psychological assault, and it goes and nothing

much happens in the film, only that the girl gradually becomes more and more frantic about the unclear situation. Two things become interesting to watch, as the film progresses: One is the girl herself and the other is the audience. At the Elgin, the audience gradually became more and more outraged that nothing was happening to the girl: They were waiting for a rape, they wanted a rape, a carnal rape, not the camera rape. Hollywood is raping them every day, businessmen are raping them every day, politicians are raping them every day—that's all very fine. We want rape! We want rape!

Legs is a series of 331 pairs of legs filmed in New York. These are mostly legs of New York artists and "intellectuals." The thing that shocked me when I saw the film was how ugly, abnormal, distorted, crooked, uneven, sickly most of the legs were. Now the world can see on what legs the whole New York art, intellect, and culture rest. What a document for future historians! Honestly, no two legs were alike, though they were always presented in pairs. If the right leg was straight, then the left one was crooked; if both were straight, then the right one had a big pimple; if there was no pimple, both legs were like two sickly sticks. Etc. Etc. It's a very bad state of legs in New York. I wish someone made a 331-leg film in Mexico, in Moscow, in Sidney. Three hundred and thirty-one farmer legs. Three hundred and thirty-one musician legs. Three hundred and thirty-one factory worker legs. Three hundred and thirty-one chimney sweeper legs.

The Fly is a forty-five-minute film showing a fly crawling or sitting on a nude female body. As the film went, with Yoko Ono's singing and John's guitar, it gradually became a film opera, a film opera with a fly in it. Toward the end of the film more flies join in the crawling trip and the film begins to take a grim and foreboding aspect. But then the film ends.

Apotheosis, I was told, is John's film, although clearly it's in Yoko's spirit of concept art. The film begins with a close-up of John and Yoko, but then it immediately opens on an air view of a snow village, a small medieval-looking old village. The camera (in a balloon) slowly floats up, we hear the sounds of the village, dogs barking, voices (actually recorded from the balloon), they gradually disappear as we go higher, as the balloon softly floats along—and then it goes into a cloud. For five minutes we see nothing but

the white screen, as the cloud encloses the balloon. This part of the film sent the theatre into loud cries and exclamations and whistles: The peace and love generation couldn't face the peace of the white screen, they couldn't face themselves. They thought that John and Yoko were playing a joke on them. Mistrust is the first sign of a bad conscience. So they went into a rage. At that point, however, the balloon left the cloud, and suddenly the cloud landscape opened up like a huge poem, you could see the tops of the clouds, all beautifully enveloped by sun, stretching into infinity, as the balloon kept moving up above the soft woolly cloudscape. The film gained an ecstatic tone and scope—like very few films I've ever seen. It's a perfectly beautiful film, simple and beautiful.

January 14, 1971

ON MARIE MENKEN AND WILLARD MAAS, NOW DEAD

A telephone message told me, Marie Menken died. She died on December 29. Two days later, an early morning, we stood in a small Brooklyn Heights church, a few friends, and we looked at a coffin, and Marie Menken lay in that coffin. There stood Willard Maas, and he was bent and beaten by grief, and few words were said. We knew how closely these two human beings have been together, both in the struggle of life and in their art. A few days later, another telephone message said: Willard Maas died on January 2. Gerard Malanga passed the message, late at night at Max's, and we didn't want to believe it yet, though we both admitted that when we stood there, that morning, in the church, we both had a feeling Marie and Willard were going out together.

So there we are. Two beautiful human beings and two of the most important and most colorful figures of the American avant-garde film gone. Only their work will remain with us. The day Marie was buried, her show took place at the Anthology. We watched the films from a different perspective. Before, there were her films, and there was Marie Menken herself, the artist, exuberant, joyful, stormy, and unpredictable, and very, very kind; and there was Willard, as unpredictable as Marie, and spouting, and puffing, and always concerned, always fighting, always in

trouble, and always very, very kind, at the end. So now we looked at the films, and the films now were all there was, and they were beautiful, and pure, and a world in itself, the essence of Marie Menken which now will be always with us, these films will be our Marie, and the films of Willard will be our Willard.

Next day I went to some commercial movies, and the next Sunday I went to some semi-commercial movies. I sat, later, drinking coffee, and I thought about these big commercial movies and their content, and I thought about the little movies of Marie, and those of Willard, and about their content. I thought of this human paradox, how largeness and mass and budget are preferred to the more subtle qualities. I kept thinking about Marie and Willard whose work was devoted to these subtle human qualities. Oh, sweet Marie. We used to sing some old Lithuanian songs together, some of which she still remembered, from her mother, and they were very lyrical, and Willard used to laugh at us, in his own innocent ironies: There was a very lyrical soul behind that huge and very often sad bulk of a woman, and she put all that soul into her work. The bits of the songs that we used to sing together were about the flower garden, about a young girl tending her flower garden. Marie's films were her flower garden. Whenever she was in her garden, she opened her soul, with all her secret wishes and dreams. They are all very colorful and sweet and perfect, and not too bulky, all made and tended with love, her little movies—and oh, how insignificant this work is when compared with the big movies that are playing around the town and which deal with all the big questions of the day, and the rock stars, and the big dramas, and people come to them and spend their evenings and they feel they have seen them, and *Wall Street Journal* and *Variety* report their grosses week by week. . . .

But here are the movies of Marie Menken and Willard, and they are like a flower garden, completely useless, nothing to report in *Variety* or *Business Week*. Eh, but you can sit in it, you can sit among the flowers of Marie Menken, and they'll fill you with sweetness and heavenly smells, and a certain rare happiness, a joy of life—yes, and maybe sadness, too, but it's all like sitting among flowers and seeing your own life very, very close to you, feeling your own life, and all other lives, and having some insight into what it may be all about, and you are

touched by the smell of these flowers, and you feel refreshed and very, very fine, and looking forward—

Eh, but who needs gardens and flowers and smells and perfumes and lyricism and poetry of cinema? Yes, it's true, what Kelman wrote about Richard Foreman's play *Total Recall*: a certain level of spiritual development is needed to appreciate certain forms and stages of art. Marie's work and that of Willard will be for those few who will feel a need for an occasional meditation, or dreaming, in a flower garden. They will come, quietly, and by themselves, maybe almost secretly, and they will sit among the flowers of Marie. The years will go, the world will keep changing, there will be more disasters, and more wars, and more anger, and more grief. The floor and the seats and the screens of all the theatres of New York will rot away, including those of Anthology. But the work of Marie will remain, for a long long time, to remind us of something else, of one part of ourselves which is, or could be, so much much finer, as we thought it would be at some silent secret moments of our lives—we thought maybe we could all be like gods. Both Marie and Willard brought down from the heavens a touch of godliness and left it in their work for us. And then they went back to the gods, as did Maya Deren, as did David Brooks, as did Ron Rice.

April 1, 1971

BRUCE BAILLIE, THE ETERNAL TRAVELER

In my film-makers' Pantheon, Bruce Baillie takes a shining place. His work I can see again and gain, it grows on me. *Quick Billy*, which is running now at the Whitney Museum, is his latest work. It crowns ten years of Baillie's lyrical and pastoral film sensibility.

Some have referred to Baillie as the most American of all the avant-garde film-makers. There is in Bruce Baillie something that reminds us of the wide country, of the spaces of America. If I remember Brakhage films for certain formal qualities of images, if I remember Markopoulos' films because of the uncompromising purity of his filmic language, so I remember Baillie for certain

images, certain almost pretty images that keep reappearing in my mind. Curiously enough, those images have always to do with travel, with cross-country rides, with wide spaces, with the huge



American continent being crossed, the hugeness, which Baillie so perfectly symbolized with the image of the turtle slowly moving across the desert, somewhere in Arizona or some other place, in

Quixote. I also remember the image of the grass violently shaking on the side of the railroad, from the power of the passing train, in *To Parsifal*. There are always trains moving across the country in Bruce Baillie's films, in *Quixote*, in *To Parsifal*, in *Castro Street*. There is the mystical motorcyclist riding in the *Mass*. And Mr. Hayashi dies on the highway, run over by a car in *Mr. Hayashi*. In *Quick Billy*, at the end of the film, we see Bruce Baillie himself riding off into the unknown—the eternal rider, superimposed upon the map of the United States.

So he rides through the wide spaces of the country, through the wide spaces of his memories, dreams, childhood, friendships, and we who correspond sometimes with him, we do not even always know where he is. He seems to be always on the road. But in the images of his films, he seems to be very stable and very sure and always going after some definite and, probably, always the same image. With each film one feels he maybe found it. But no, the image, the dream is not yet caught, still somewhere else—so he makes another film, trying to come closer to it, from some other angle. In *Quick Billy* he may have caught it through the form of the film. The form of the film itself may have something to do with the eternal search for Baillie, the feeling of all the lost travelers of the world, of attaching oneself and going again, attaching oneself and letting go again (it is no accident that Baillie says *Quick Billy* has been structured upon the Bardo Thodol, The Book of the Dead—the greatest book of the greatest travel ever). When it's all over, he sort of opens the very end of the film and permits it very slightly, very casually to spill out into the open again, he never closes the form completely. Paradoxically, this way he may have achieved the most complete and most satisfactory film, which, through this mysterious openness, permits us to project into it so many incomplete parts of ourselves.

There are fewer "pretty" images in this film, fewer individual memorable images, you see most of the time only brief and casual glimpses, all done in the most fluid lyrical-pastoral film language that I know. It's with mastery and grace that Baillie transcended the Brakhagean aesthetics and asserted clearly and gloriously his own creative individuality, presenting us with his own unique vision of the world. I do not expect that suddenly wide masses of people will rush to the Whitney to see *Quick Billy*. I am realistic

enough to know that the majority of the film-going public are still milling in the hallways of Eternal Hollywood. The art of Bruce Baillie is for the lucky, or for the ready, few.

June 13, 1971

GOD HELPS HARRY SMITH, BECAUSE HE HELPS HIMSELF

For more than a year now, Harry Smith has been shooting what he himself calls his most important film to date, *Mahagonny*, based on Brecht and Weill. I keep seeing him dragging tripods, cameras, and rolls of film. Whenever I don't see Harry with a tripod, it means only one thing: Harry is out of production money. Harry Smith has faithfully remained with the tradition of the underground, working day by day, week by week, as the money comes. Where does it come from? Nobody knows. He simply trusts that it will come. The other day, he said, somebody sneaked \$300 into his mail box, to continue the film work. But now, he said, he needs much more, maybe \$2,000, because he's ready to begin editing, needs a work print. So he said, pass the message to the people. Which I am doing here, because I consider Harry Smith one of the four or five greatest living film-makers. Plus, Harry is a genius.

A couple of months ago, Harry stopped in to visit me. He called me, he said he had to talk to me. Here are bits from our taped conversation.

Harry Smith: (about his new film) In addition to having like a political import, it will also be very complicated. It has 1,300 cuts in it, at least in the script that I've worked out. Because some of the scenes are like quarter-seconds, and some are ten minutes long. Right now, I need \$200—to continue. . . .

JM: How far will the \$200 push you?

HS: It will get me another 1,000 feet of film. Plus the developing.

JM: And then, what?

HS: Then I'll come back and I'll ask for another \$200. So if there is any way of raising money quickly, like on a loan basis. . . .

JM: I think I know someone. I may need two or three days to hustle it. I know I couldn't get it for myself, but I think I may get it for you. I can't do it right now, I am too harassed. . . . But I figure something could be done.

HS: As I say, \$200 would pay for 1,000 feet, and \$400 would pay for 2,000 feet, and so forth. I think I'll have to shoot two-to-one. But there are important scenes that are missing. Because the reason for this process of like dividing a song maybe one picture for one word, or one line of the poem to one picture, or one song for one picture, is that I want to make the film intelligible for the Eskimos or the Australian aborigines, and so forth. I derived great pleasure from Eskimo poetry, you know, that's my line. It's like anthropology. In a sense I want to give them something back. So I took Brecht's poem "Mahagonny" and I tried to translate it to ideographs that are universally known. The film isn't going to be shown very much commercially, because I'm making a special screen for it, of tornoff newspapers so that the whole thing looks like a collage, a two-and-a-quarter-hour collage. So that any time that you can . . . I wouldn't bother you about this, except that I think the world is in peril and I'm trying to do something now other than the mere artistic thing. I'm trying to make something that combines a political message with the highest artistry that I'm capable of. This is by far the most complicated and expensive and everything-else film that I ever made. I assume it's going to be the most complicated and artistic underground film ever made . . . see . . . and the process has got to be speeded up because both Barry Miles and Allen Ginsberg seem to think the serious political situation is going to be beginning next summer and I want to have the film completed by then. So that I don't have nearly as much time as I thought I did. Now, I have living money, and I suppose, I have little money coming in from the Co-op. I am \$1,400 behind in the rent, you know, at the hotel. That sort of thing. But any money given for the film is used only on the film. It can be a loan. I'll pay it back, you see. One thing that can be done, an interesting idea maybe, is for you to buy prints of the film at different stages of development, in other words, when the rushes are completed, buy a set of the rushes. Then, when the first cut is made, buy a set of that. . . .

JM: Great idea. The only thing is where to get money for it?

HS: There is no money. I mean, the depression is in. . . .

JM: Two hundred dollars, that I can get somewhere for you. I have a friend, he just came from Cincinnati, a newcomer, we can borrow \$200 from him. We'll have to work on him, both of us.

HS: I don't need it right today. You understand, it has been costing about \$150 a day to shoot. I think this film is going to cost around \$30,000. These people, Film Planning Associates, they were way off on all the figures.

JM: Who are they?

HS: Somebody that I gave \$300 to figure out how much the whole was going to cost, because this is the first time I have used all these things like A and B prints and careful cutting to the sound track—and I must say it was a great advantage to use your cutting room upstairs. So, in other words, production can go on and, as I say, if you can get \$400—do that; or if you can get \$600—do that.

JM: That's too much. Two hundred, that's what I hope for.

HS: Yeh, that would carry things for another 1,000 feet. . . . Well, as I told you before, I think I'm the third best film producer in the country. I think Andy Warhol is the best. Kenneth Anger is the second best. And now I've decided I'm the third best. There was a question in my mind whether Brakhage or myself was third best. But I now think I am. . . . I don't want to stop, as long as I can still get pictures of trees with leaves on them. Otherwise, I have to, you know, rent a car and go to South Carolina, and I don't want to waste money doing that. . . . It's a shame to ask you for money this way. . . .

JM: I don't talk about money, you know. Because I don't have any. But I'm willing to hustle for people I believe in.

HS: Well . . . in other words . . . well, you know . . . it's like playing marbles. . . .

P.S.. That's where our conversation ended in February. To bring you up to date: We managed to swindle \$200 from Steve, after buying him five drinks at the Chelsea Hotel bar. Harry managed to shoot his leaves. I have no idea how he did it, because in February, when I looked at the trees, all I could see were some brown shrivels hanging on the branches. But Harry is a magician, I know he made them look like leaves. The other day I bumped into Harry and he had ten rolls of film in his lap: ten rolls of

cherry blossoms, he said. Day by day, with the help of all good people, Harry Smith, one of the very, very few underground film-makers left on this planet, an underground film-maker as an Old Master, keeps pushing ahead, roll by roll. I remember someone once asked Harry how come he likes his own films, he always comes to see them. He answered: "I like my films because I didn't make them: God made them."

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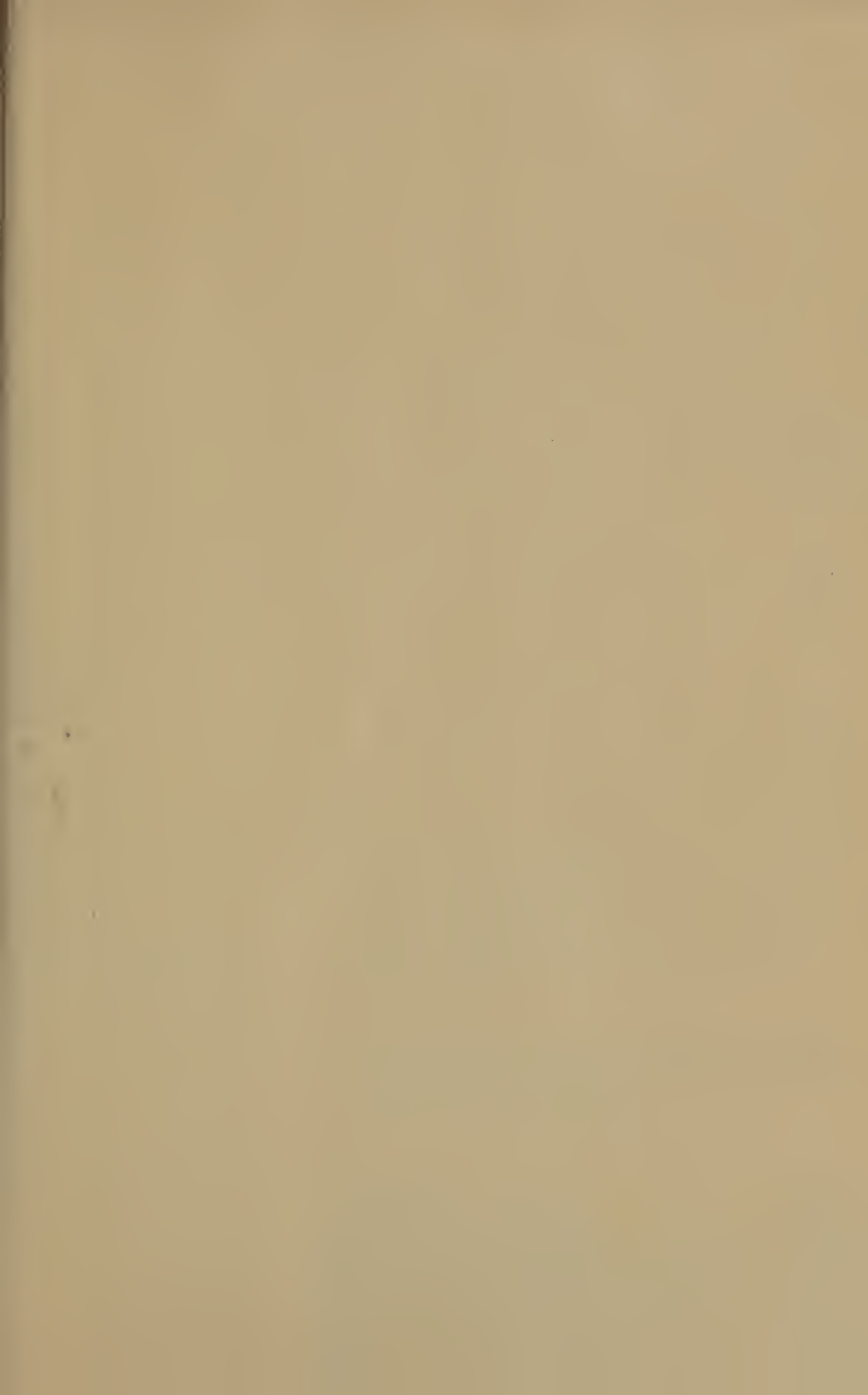
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