

SUPER EIGHT

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MELBOURNE SUPER-8 FILM GROUP NO. 19 OCT '87

The Train Rolls On: Soviet cameramen.



FILM VIEWS magazine is presenting 2 weekends of films and discussion focusing on 3 important contemporary filmmakers; JEAN PIERRE GORIN (a recent guest at the Melb. FilmFest), JEAN ROUCH (champion of the Cinema Verite movement who has, for many years taught and made films in Africa) and CHRIS MARKER, possibly best remembered for *SUNLESS*, but a prolific film "theorist" in that he has shaped and influenced modern cinema as we know it yet never enjoyed a high profile like his contemporaries in thought, Godard, Rivette et al. This event should be of profound interest to all filmmakers/writers who have recently, thru the pages of this newsletter, staked out their claims on a cinematic ideal of economic, ideological and personal proportions.

The following piece is lifted from "Marker changes trains" by Terence Rafferty from *SIGHT & SOUND* 1983, and dedicated to Darron Davies and those whose trains are yet to leave the platform....

In 1962, when he shot *La Jetée*, Marker wasn't travelling. He was in his home city of Paris: in that year, he also shot (with Pierre Lhomme) and edited *Le Joli Mai*, a documentary portrait of the city. This is one of his most straightforward films, composed primarily of on-camera interviews and coverage of current events, but it's also a film whose commentary (sparing though it is) seems to be reaching towards fiction, a more fantastic framework, an alien perspective on familiar landscapes. *Le Joli Mai*'s first half assumes a detached, lofty vantage point—this section is called 'A Prayer from the Eiffel Tower'—and its second-half narration imagines a city haunted by 'the return of Fantômas', the mysterious criminal of Louis Feuillade's silent serials; here transformed into a metaphor for Parisians' fears and uncertainties near the end of the Algerian war. And at the end of *Le Joli Mai*, Marker shows us a prison in the heart of Paris, and his commentary asks us to imagine a prisoner who has had no part in the daily life that the film has chronicled, and asks us, finally, to assume the prisoner's perspective upon his release, as he looks into the faces of ordinary Parisians and sees only their tense unhappiness, the features of another kind of prisoner.

La Jetée—whose vision of Paris after the apocalypse begins with a shot of the Eiffel Tower and then descends to an underground prison—seems almost a pendant to *Le Joli Mai*, part of the same attempt to achieve a perspective on a moment of transition between a traumatic past and an unforeseeable future. Again, it's a prisoner's perspective, an eerie evocation of a solitude filled only by images from the past. In *La Jetée*, the imagination looks like an escape, a means of survival; but the experimenters can't seem to find the imagina-

tive roads to the future, and the past turns out to be a plan that has already been fulfilled. The images from the jetty (a setting which implies flight, though we never actually see a shot of a plane taking off) have a different meaning the second time the hero sees them: after his long return journey of the imagination, the scene he witnessed as a child and experienced only as a shock finally comes back to him with all the details filled in (the faces of the murderer and the victim). He has closed the circle, taken full possession of the obsessive image from his past—but it's just as if he'd committed a slow suicide in his cell.

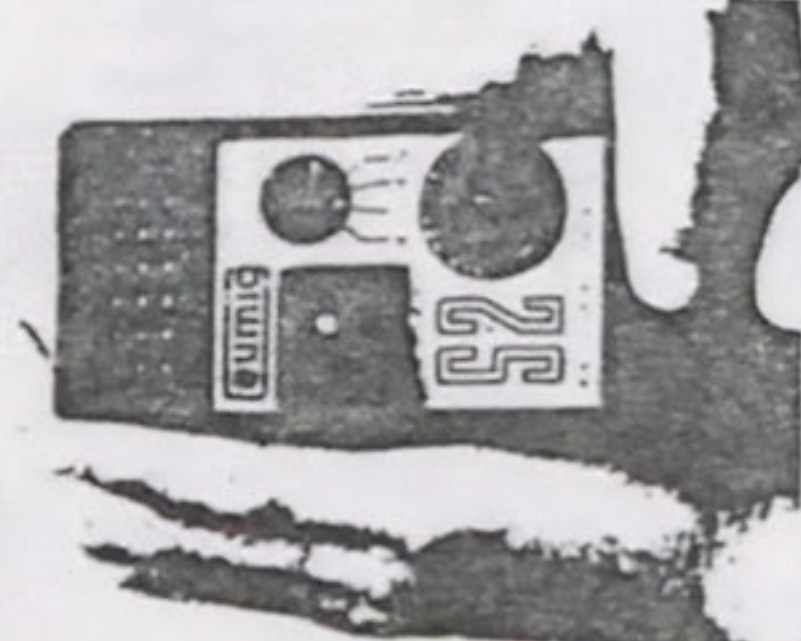
The movie's ambivalence about the value of imagination is, I think, a reflection of Marker's mixed feelings about creating imaginative fiction on film. Stuck in his home city at a moment in history too unsettled and contradictory to be seen clearly, and having decided that fiction (and science fiction, at that) was the right response, Marker seems to have discovered that fiction film-making can be a process of deepening isolation—the solitude of the scriptwriter repeated as the solitude of the editor. It's a departure from his documentaries, in which he skips the scripting stage and goes straight to the shooting, and also from his 'imaginary films' like *America Dreams*, for which he writes the script but leaves out the shooting and the editing.

If, as I've suggested, Marker's documentaries are a kind of interrogation, a correspondence between the man who films—spontaneously—and the man who edits—analytically, reflectively—then what correspondence can take place in a scripted film like *La Jetée*, whose shooting is following a plan? What he does, in his editing room, is reduce the filmed footage to stills, in the attempt to return the story to the moment of its conception



(but with all the details filled in), to return it to the writer who, in solitude, imagined it. He gives it back, not as a moving picture, but as a truly imaginary film: a storyboard. By eliminating movement, the illusion of immediacy, Marker makes a film in which the present seems not to exist. The power of *La Jetée* is that he makes us feel the full poignancy of its absence.

CONT... PAGE 2...



Perhaps the reason why Marker didn't repeat *La Jetée's* experiment in fiction was that it was too successful: creating a film entirely out of his imagination seems to have brought him close to the weary detachment of the story film's lonely artisan, Hitchcock, the master storyboarder who often claimed that his interest in a film was exhausted in the planning, before the shooting began. *Vertigo* is clearly an important film for Marker, but its significance, as *Sans Soleil* illustrates, is that of a powerful memory, not a model of the film-maker's activity. We can see something closer to Marker's true model—a favourite myth—in the *SLOAN* documentary *The Train Rolls On*, a film which isn't his solitary creation, but the product of a collective. It's not difficult, though, to imagine Marker's part in this short profile of the Soviet film-maker Alexander Medvedkin: the beginning, a montage of stock footage (the October revolution, cavalrymen, Lenin's funeral) and stills (Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov and his brother Mikhail Kaufman, the futurist art of El Lissitzky), is a reverent but graceful evocation of the period, and it has Marker's stamp on it. The early years of the revolution are imagined here as a kind of golden age for both society and the arts, and a time, besides, when film was the most important art because it served as the witness, the record of social change. 'First, the eye,' says the voice-over commentary. 'Then the cinema, which prints the look.'

After this lyrical prologue, Medvedkin, now an old man, tells his story about the cinema train he took through Russia in 1932. We see, as he tells it, stills of railroad cars equipped with editing machines, a lab and a projection room—everything needed to shoot films, develop them, edit them and project them, all on the run. Medvedkin and his crew filmed farmers at work, showed the footage to the people they'd filmed, and led discussions on the efficacy of their methods; they did the same in factories. 'The cinema,' says Medvedkin, 'could be a great and forceful weapon, reconstructing not just factories, but the world.' It's hard to imagine a more stirring image for revolutionary film-makers, a train that travels everywhere, filming and changing the world as it goes—a film-making process that's nearly immediate, the distance between shooting and editing reduced to almost nothing. In a final romantic burst, the narrator links Medvedkin's train to 'everything that's advancing and moving—history, the cinema ... The biggest mistake one could make would be to believe that it had come to a halt.'

Medvedkin's train, Marker's ideal, may have been rolling in the fervent, hopeful days of the late 60s and early 70s, but from the evidence of *Sans Soleil*, it seems to have stopped before it reached the 80s. Tokyo is a city crisscrossed by trains, Marker tells us, but the trains we see are vehicles of dreams: the passengers file in from underground shopping malls, and the train's smooth movement lulls them into a sleep filled with samurai and ghosts and beautiful women from TV ads. (The narrator imagines 'a single film made of the dreams of people on trains.'). When the ride is over, and the crowds spill up from underground into the January light, they seem to have acquired an otherworldly beauty—whether because they've been refreshed by their images or because they have, at last, been released from them is impossible to say.

But the images Marker sees when he dreams at his moviola are of those things that were 'advancing and moving' years earlier, like the revolution in Guinea-Bissau, but have since been arrested. The one that keeps returning is the face of an African woman whose eyes meet the gaze of his camera for exactly $\frac{1}{24}$ of a second, the duration of a single frame of film. Or he sees again the 'image of happiness' he began with, the blond Icelandic children on the road, who have 'grafted themselves into' a sequence from Tokyo showing a Shinto blessing on the debris left after a celebration, a blessing which is 'a ceremony for everything that's been left behind.' The last time he sees the blond children, he holds the shot for its full duration, including the bit he'd edited out earlier, when the image starts to tremble, the camera blown by

the wind. And this time, he follows that shot with a friend's footage of the volcanic eruption that wiped out the town in Iceland five years after: it is, he says, like watching the destruction of his memories.

Marker's return to Tokyo in *Sans Soleil*, like the time-traveller's return to the jetty, produces a more detailed image, one which includes everything that has passed in between. He finds, again, the huge advertisements, the mannequins, the statuary, the flood of TV imagery, but he also finds local festivals and a wide variety of commemorative celebrations: for lost cats; the war dead; broken dolls. He finds a letter from a princess of the Heian period who speaks of the 'contemplation of the tiniest things ... things that quicken the heart', and a man with a video synthesizer who plays with the traumatic images of history (the Second World War, Vietnam), distorting them into abstract, colourful shapes, 'drawing profiles of what's gone.' Japan, this time, seems one huge festival of commemoration, a precise reflection of the mood of the traveller who's left so many places, people, political movements and past selves behind, but kept bits of them on film, notes which have lost their immediacy, things which have stopped moving but inspire in him the desire to reanimate them at the editing table—the only way available to him to commemorate the things that have quickened his heart.

When the traveller sits, at the end of the film, before Hayao Yamaneko's video synthesizer (an EMS Spectre) and watches the images of *Sans Soleil* in vivid outline, lingering on a beautiful distortion of the African woman's fleeting look, as the woman on the soundtrack wonders 'Will there be a last letter?', he seems to have arrived at another alien perspective, as if the accelerating, circular movement of self-interrogation had finally spun him off into orbit—and from this distance (as if from the year 4001), his own images, rendered in the crude, liquid beauty of synthesized video, look like the cave paintings of animals in Lascaux, still pictures that are moving because we sense the movement of the mind and the hand that made them, in commemoration.

This isn't, perhaps, what Marker had in mind in the early 70s: this movement isn't the steady, effective rolling of Medvedkin's train, but a high-speed, crisscrossing motion, trains and planes zipping frantically through the world and leaving, the first time, only traces of their motion, after-images on the retina when we close our eyes. In *Sans Soleil*—if we return to it a second time—the lines resolve themselves into an image, just visible across the distance of time and fiction, a ghostly face. ■

LAST MEETING

September 8, 1987



At 7:30 p.m. - HISTORICAL FILMS

Approximately Water (1972, Lynsey Martin)
 Rita and Dundi (1967, Albie Thoms/UBU Group)
 Fundeath (1969, Michael Lee)
 Album (1970, David E. Perry)
 Bouddi (1970, Arthur and Corinne Cantrill)
 Island Fuse (1971, Arthur and Corinne Cantrill)

At 9:00 p.m. - OPEN SCREENING

The Walking Track (Arthur and Corinne Cantrill)
 Untitled (John Hardy)
 Walled City trailer (John Calder)
 Around Tempe rushes (Barry Branchflower)
 Squatters (Richard Perdriau)
 Some Devil's Eye (Adrian Reeves)
 Delica (Ernest Healy)

Perhaps some would say its our naivete, our supreme tolerance that allows John Hardy's *HAY DAY MARCH* (NOT A FILM) to be screened and not commented upon in any way publicly, when this film doesn't speak of anything about film at all, but rather the impotency and bankruptcy of the traditional Left, its sad and futile gestures towards mobilisation and solidarity, its inability to pick up on philosophies and cultural activism employed by the Right and so on, ... this is what this film is crying out for, yet nobody is willing to discuss these issues on any level because somewhere along the line we've compartmentalized "political" film into something called "realism" or rather mythologized it into something irretrievable and elsewhere, like the canonization of Godard or Pasolini, in effect, cancelling out the real stuff of life which is ultimately more important than a super 8 film. J.R.



San Salvador

DIATRIBES

1. RESTRAINT

UNTITLED

The overlong experimental "thing" from the Cantrills was interesting at first. I had a feeling of déjà vu right from the beginning when I saw those all too few shots that were stable enough to recognize what it was that the camera was pointing at. I was able to identify some pathways and trees and bushes seen in bright sunlight, but they promptly disappeared and were followed by an interminable collection of shaky shots and single frames repeated ad nauseum. But even the self-indulgent repetition could not wipe away those first positive feelings of déjà vu. It took me awhile to realize where I'd seen those shaky effects before. It was in another self-indulgent film shown at an Open Screening earlier in the year: *Something to Hide* by Ron Olthof. However, in this film, the shaky sequences only comprised a small fraction of the total length. They occurred somewhere towards the end when the main character meets the killer (a ludicrously badly acted sequence itself) and is chased along tracks and through bushes. But, in total contrast to the boringly conventional and predictable nature of the rest of the film, the scene is comprised of a sequence of frantic and shaky shots similar to the style of the Cantrills' film. However, the important distinction between the two films is that in *Something to Hide* the shaky shots have a consciously planned reason for being. They symbolize the frantic nature of the chase, but more importantly, the very fact they are so different from the rest of the film provides them with a powerful impact. There is nothing resembling this impact in the Cantrills' film, which just piles the images on top of each other in a totally random manner. Just comparing this use of a similar type of image in these two very different films makes me realize how much more effective a visual idea is when it is not wasted.

A single visual idea has been used by the Cantrills to fill an entire 10 minute (?) film, yet by Olthof, it has only been used as a one-minute sequence in a thirty minute film. The former film, with its determination to explore every particle of interest in a very simple idea, has only succeeded in killing it. It has been done to death through the sheer self-indulgence and absence of thought that went into its use; overused to the extent that an audience would be irritated to see it used again.

THE EDITORS WISH TO THANK THE STAFF OF THE TOORAK TIMES FOR PERMISSION TO REPRINT THIS FINE AND TIMELY CONTRIBUTION TO OUR ONGOING CONTROVERSIAL DEBATE ON EXPERIMENTAL FILMS.

On the other hand, its use in *Something to Hide* is the epitome of restraint and self-control (even if the rest of the film is the opposite). The idea has been saved until its use was justified; until its inclusion would actually mean something as part of a larger film, rather than exist for its own sake.

Furthermore, its short length ensures that it never outlives its novelty value. Rather than present the simple but interesting visual effect in isolation, why couldn't the Cantrills have done something with it, as Olthof did.

Another film shown at the September Open Screening was *Squatters* which, according to an article in the last newsletter, was submitted for the Super-8 Film Festival in August, but rejected by the selection panel. Having seen both this film and those at the festival, I feel its inclusion in the festival was warranted even if only for the fact that it was so different from the numerous "Greasy Pigs" (as John Calder called them in the last newsletter; a description I see some truth in.)

I like experimental films as much as the next person, but surely the whole point of a festival is to show variety, to show the "range" of work that is done. While I don't think *Squatters* was a great film, it was as unique as most of the films in the festival. Furthermore, *Squatters* had not had a public screening before, whereas I had seen some of the films in the festival several times before. Why do we see some films over and over again (films like *Gold Green Black* and *Morena*)?

Is it because some of the same people are on selection panels for the various festivals, and always manage to get in a vote for their favourite films (or even friends'?)?

I admit that these films are interesting, but variety is more interesting, and I don't think that their quality justifies their over-exposure.

Yours,

JOHN LUKE GODDARDD

(There seems to be a lot of pseudonymous articles in the newsletter lately, so I thought I'd add myself to the list of the people too cowardly to stand behind their opinions.)



Sequence of "The Naked Kiss" offers a good example of her style. In the role of prostitute, Constance Towers at procurer (Monte Mansfield) and gets her wig ripped off. Fuller's special camera rig in action. Fuller turned his actors same, had them photograph each other during the making scene, later had to scrap their footage and re-shoot with screenman skilled at keeping subjects in the frame.

2. MILITANCY

"Towards a Political Greasy Pig" - John Hardy

PIGS

Well, I must say the pork has really hit the fan at last at the Melbourne Super 8 Group.

And, of course, the debate has been long overdue. People have started questioning what actually is the activity of making Super 8 film and what are its directions for the future.

We owe a lot to people like David Cox for giving people the shits badly enough to stimulate this debate. Dave's drag net was pretty wide and therefore had something in it to offend the sensibilities of virtually everyone.

What is Super 8, and more importantly, what is the essence of Super 8 if it's not its revolutionary potential? Super 8 IS political precisely because it puts the power of film into the hands of everyone. People can afford to make (and pay for) their own films and, in doing so, avoid the manipulation by big money capitalists and government (read 'enemy') funding bodies. By being able to spit in the eye of those who would control us, we are truly independent film makers.

Okay, so what is this opposition between independent and mainstream film? This got muddled right from the start by a debate about the opposition between narrative and non narrative film, something which I would have thought was pretty well worn ground. Narrative is not the only 'language' of film any more than English is the only language in the world. It is merely a convention like any other, not superior but nor is it inferior. Revolutionary cinema uses the narrative just as it can use any convention, using the right tool for the task at hand.

The opposition to the bourgeois mode of film production is different, however.

CAPITALISM

Q. What is Capitalist Cinema, what are its faults and riches?

A. Its fault is that it's the RICH's, ie. not ours.

Capitalist Cinema is one of the most capital intensive sectors in the world economy. With budget allocations on a scale comparable to capital investment in heavy industry, the decisions made concerning the production of films are primarily economic ones. Good films (and over an eighty year period there have been quite a few) happen only when creative and economic interests coincide.

The typical response to this argument is 'but there's always a market for good films', and this is certainly true, through specialist venues, a good film might pay for itself and even make a lot of money. But, because of the corporate nature of the film industry, a capitalist will generally only invest in areas which generate the greatest rate of profit and that generally means films like 'Rambo'. The really important films rarely get made.

Mainstream cinema can only survive as long as it remains profitable relative to every other sector in the economy, otherwise the capitalist may decide to pull out and go into, for example, heavy duty codom production instead (a growth industry at the moment).

Super 8 can cut across this bullshit. Freed from the profit motive or the need to please some careerist funding bureaucrat, the film maker can be left to produce with vitality and spontaneity, important films about the moment, about NOW.

John Calder was one of the first in recent times to demonstrate the political potential of Super 8 film in his film about the Springbok tour of New Zealand. The immediacy of eight mm lent itself in such a way that this film probably would not have been possible on any other medium.

The process of even discussing the political aspects of film and specifically Super 8 is not without its problems, however. Criticism of the mainstream provokes accusations of ignoring history and even language. The adjectives used to describe David Cox's article and film indicate the sentiments: Idealistic, Romantic, Seductive, Questionable, Dangerous, Utopian, Egotistic, Manipulative etc.

The charge of manipulation intrigues me. Revolutionary film by definition is about demystification, clarification and empowerment. Manipulation would be a more apt criticism of mainstream cinema which seeks to hand everything to the viewer on a silver platter.

Dave's attempts at getting people to speak up and talk during his film was somehow taken to be an indication of his contempt for the people in the audience. On the contrary it was an attempt to stimulate debate and shows rather his contempt for the whole concept of 'audience'. That is, the dictatorship of the film maker over the audience. This is also why the film uses some theatrical techniques in order to bring people into live interaction with the film.

MANIPULATIVE

The success or failure of such methods is not the case in point here. These attempts are obviously misread as Cox posturing, directing attention at himself instead of his film. Perhaps Dave's mistake is in believing that the audience is anything OTHER than dumb, passive or repressed and that they might be in the slightest bit interested in the topics discussed in the film they are viewing?

Political film praxis is about making films as well as watching them. In the process a politicizing film must seek to encourage others to make films as well. It doesn't demand passivity from its viewer, on the contrary, it demands action.

of the important issues of our era.

Super 8 film makers, as the largest single group of truly independent film makers, have the special responsibility not just to film the insides of their bedrooms (or their heads) but to go out and make the films that explode the myths and ideologies of society and really challenge this whole stinking, reactionary, stifling and NASTY system.

Film Makers Of The World Unite
You Only Have You Grants To Lose
(or maybe a cushy job at the AFI!)



ADORABLE COMMUNIST
Eduardo Molinaro's comedy "Adorable Idiot" has Brigitte Bardot as Penelope Lightfoot, who is a curvy, sexy, naive and innocent communist! Anthony Perkins plays a young Russian who strays between the party line and Brigitte. Is there a choice?



MAINSTREAM CRITIC OF THE MONTH: UMBERTO ECO

Once upon a time there were the mass media, and they were wicked, of course, and there was a guilty party. Then there were the virtuous voices that accused the criminals. And Art (ah, what luck!) offered alternatives, for those who were not prisoners of the mass media.

Well, it's all over. We have to start again from the beginning, asking one another what's going on.

(from "Travels in Hyperreality"
..Picador)

The Line Between Documentary and Fiction

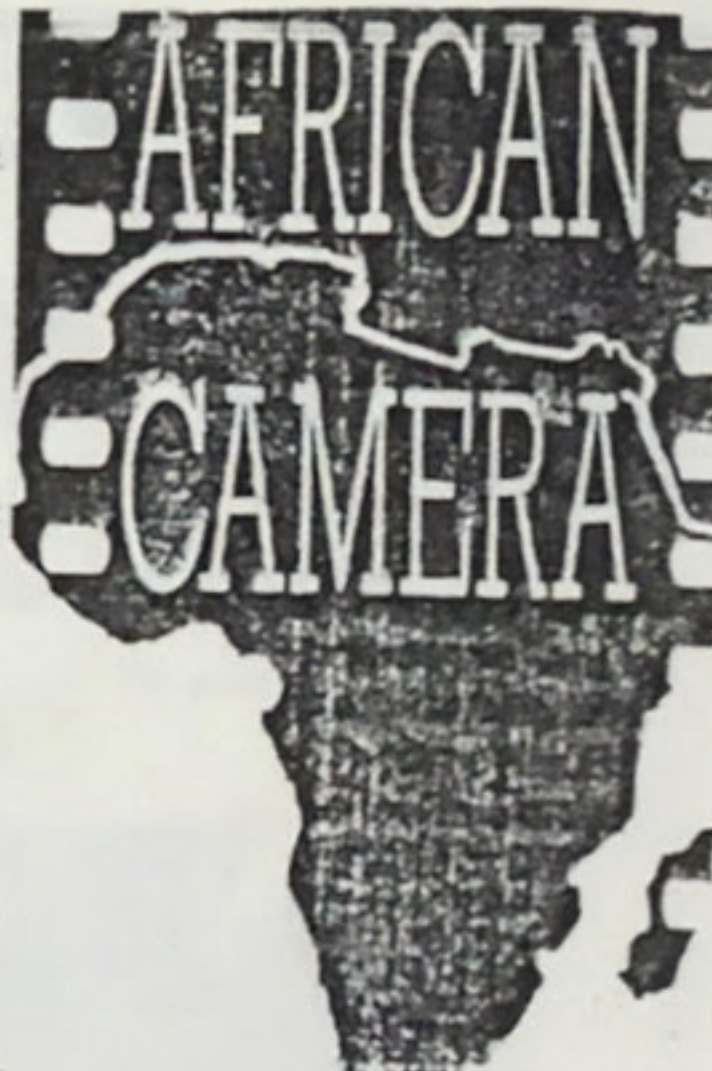
JEAN-PIERRE GORIN / CHRIS MARKER / JEAN ROUCH

A FORUM PRESENTED BY FILM VIEWS MAGAZINE IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE AUSTRALIAN FILM RADIO AND TELEVISION SCHOOL. SPEAKERS: ADRIAN MARTIN, ROSS GIBSON, BILL ROUTT. FILMS TO BE SCREENED*: ROUTINE PLEASURES, POTO AND CABENGO: JEAN-PIERRE GORIN / JAGUAR, MOI UN NOIR (ME A BLACKMAN): JEAN ROUCH / SUNLESS, LA JETE: CHRIS MARKER.

THE FORUM WILL TAKE PLACE OVER TWO WEEKENDS. THE FIRST WEEKEND WILL COMPRISE THE FILM SCREENINGS WITH THE PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND DISCUSSION ON THE FOLLOWING WEEKEND. VENUE: AFTRS 369 KING STREET MELBOURNE TELEPHONE (03) 328 2517 DATES: SATURDAY 24 AND SUNDAY 25 OCTOBER (SCREENINGS) AND SUNDAY 1 NOVEMBER (SPEAKERS AND DISCUSSION) HOURS: 9.30 AM - 5.30 PM COST: STUDENTS/UNEMPLOYED \$25 OTHERS \$40 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT THE MELBOURNE OFFICE AFTRS (03) 328 2517

*FILMS SUBJECT TO CONFIRMATION

State Film Theatre
October 8-27



An exclusive season of thirty films from and/or about Africa, most imported for this season. A once only opportunity to see these films in an Australian cinema. Films and videos from Senegal, Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Tanzania, Angola, Zaire, South Africa, Tunisia, Eritrea and Namibia. Features, docs and shorts of a staggering variety.

HANDY HINT - Close-up lenses, for animation etc., have become expensive and hard to get in the past few years. But you can buy them as "plus...diopter spectacle lenses" from SOLA OPTICAL, 43 Oxford st., Collingwood. Ph: 419 3922. They cost less than \$3.00 each. A set of 3 = "plus 1", "plus 2" and "plus 3" diopter is \$8.63.

FOR SALE - ELMO 350SL sound camera with I film. Manual exposure option, f/1.2 lens, \$80. ph: John 429 5473



Arrest for failure to carry an ID card, San Salvador.

Next Meeting

TUESDAY 13TH OCTOBER

ONCE AGAIN THE NEXT OPEN SCREENING WILL NOT BE IN THE GLASSHOUSE MEETING ROOM, BUT IN THE BISTRO UPSTAIRS. FOLLOW THE SIGNS!

7:30

STORYBOARDING WORKSHOP
- with John Calder
- based on a workshop he attended at the super 8 centre in Brussels.

8:30

OPEN SCREENING
- BYO Films!!!



BORDER CROSSINGS

MIMA presents a programme of films and videos that counterpoints the differences between cultures whether that culture be Italy, The Netherlands, New Guinea, Japan, Venezuela or U.S.A.

Impressions about a culture can come in various forms.:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Dramatised account | -SPAVENTAPASSERI by Luigi Aquisto |
| Personal Diary | -HOMECOMINGS by Dirk De Bruyn |
| Visual and Anecdotal Impressions | -GOD BLESS AMERICA by Mark Titmarsh |
| | -WERE WE LED ASTRAY by Marcus Bergner |
| Exploring Cultural Form | -ESTHETICS OF DISAPPEARANCE
& BON VOYAGE by Peter Callas |
| | -UP IN THE MOUNTAINS by Mark Worth |
| Creating a ficticious culture | -VENEZUELA by Geoff Weary |



(...A CULTURAL TOURIST.)

Furthermore, the character of a city or culture can just seep through the work (CITY SUPPLEMENTS by John Dunkley-Smith & SYDNEY GA by Mark Titmarsh). These last two films give us a tongue in cheek look at the differences between Melbourne and Sydney (Are there any????).

Screenings held at the State Film Theatre, 1 MacArthur Place, East Melbourne on:
 Friday 23rd October at 9.30 pm,
 Saturday 24th October at 5.30 pm,
 Sunday 25th October at 7.30 pm.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE RING: Judy Schreiber at MIMA 6631953

An INVITATION to the Cast and Crew and Super-8 Film Group members and friends...

SAT NIGHT 10th OCT

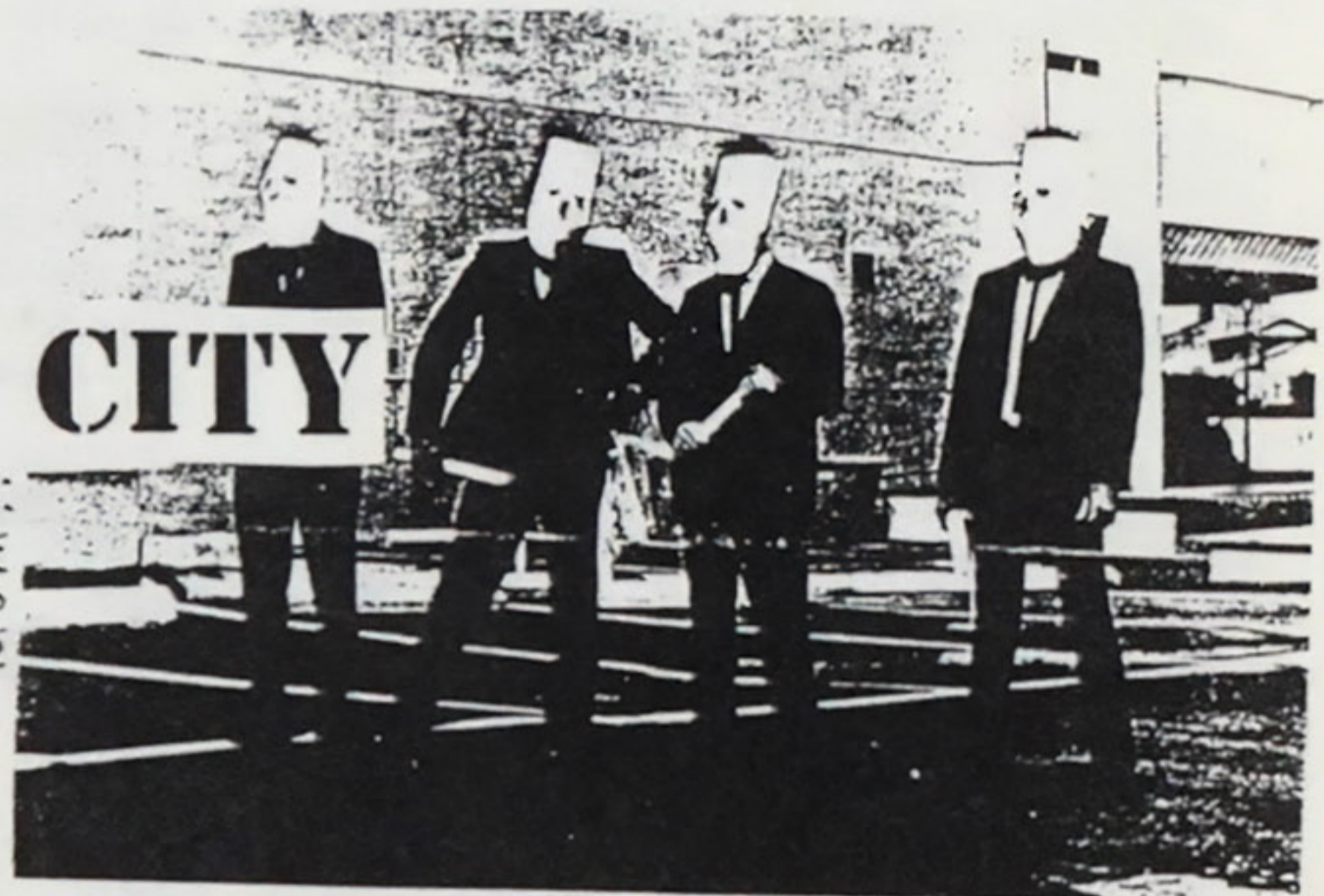
films start 8:30

WALLED CITY

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PERSONAL INDICTMENTS

ANNE-MARIE CRAWFORD REPLIES ...

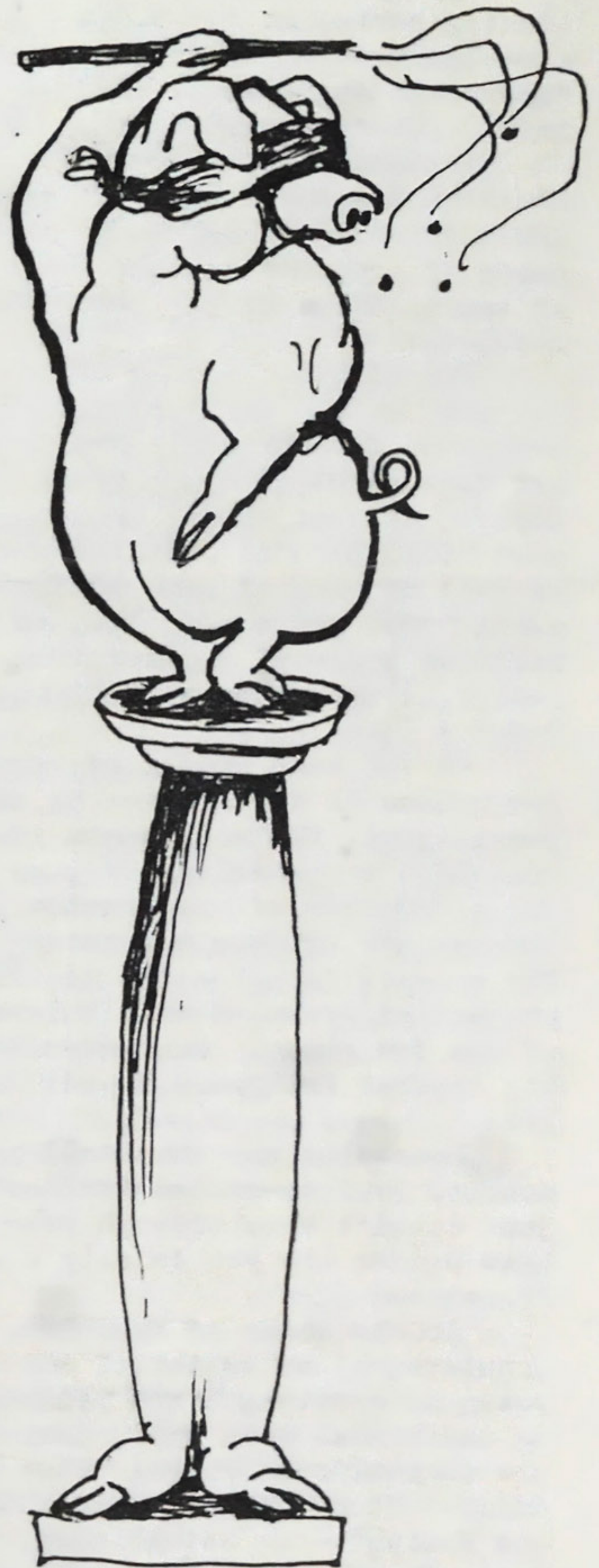
John Calder's "Greasy Pig" article in the last newsletter cannot be allowed to pass without reply, partly because of the silliness of his pronouncements, but perhaps more because of the wider problems it points to. At the outset, his sweeping classification of a diverse collection of films (diary, abstract, political, lyrical) as "experimental" is less than satisfying. I wonder how many of the filmmakers concerned even consider themselves 'experimentalists' in the wider sense of the word. I certainly don't feel very comfortable with such a description of my work.

As a "yardstick" for his criticism, John uses Fiona Trigg's Robin's Mouth, (perhaps the least likely 'experimental' film of the group). Overlooking all but the most superficial elements, he admires the way the film "explains itself to the audience with a lucid narration". This is fairly typical of his approach to all the work. With such a desire for the (laboriously) obvious, he was bound to be dismissive of these types of films, (especially the more abstract ones.)

Also a pivotal point of the article was a proclamation of the work ethic. What sort of argument is this? Of course people work at their films, but there are also such things as spontaneity and lightness of touch, qualities which seem lost on John's sensibilities. Subtlety and an appreciation of the abstract also need work in developing. In answer to his suggestion of 'working' at our films, I'd suggest he develop his subtler sensibilities and work at watching the films.

More reasonable (and interesting) however, is his questioning of how these types of films and filmmakers can develop given a limited access to the history of such cinema, comparatively few opportunities to view films of similar genres, and the minimal and inadequate critical response the work receives. It is for precisely these reasons that I feel the super 8 group needs to continue showing historical avant garde work on a regular basis and invite filmmakers currently working in this area to show and talk about their films. It seems particularly important at this point to start considering the relationship between the so-called 'experimental' super 8 films and filmmakers emerging now in Melbourne and the avant garde/experimental/art film traditions in general. Many super 8 films of the variety that John describes obviously do bear some relation to these traditions for their (often unconscious) appropriation of bits and pieces of their styles and techniques. But rarely apparent are any of those grandiose notions of 'originality' or even (except in the case of David Cox) political opposition to the 'mainstream'. In some cases it seems that the view of 'avant garde' film is that it represents a different tradition of film language with its own seminal 'texts' and modes of operation. Quite often the focus is alternatively on 'personal experimentation'; on a mode of expressing the autobiographical, the subjective, the small: expanded home movies. These are obviously just starting points, but I do feel it is important to begin trying to understand our work in a wider context.

All this is on a parallel with Darron Davies' call, also in the last newsletter, for more serious questioning of narrative film and the way super 8 exists in relation to it. This too seems an important and neglected area of discussion given the many narrative-related films we have seen around the Group. It seems however that most of the writer/filmmakers who would champion this form are too busy slagging off at the rest of us to attempt anything worthwhile...



THE INDUSTRIOUS

PIG AWARD



LJUBICA TOMIC REPLIES ...

Thankyou John for your very amusing review of the Super 8 Festival. I am honoured to have received the "greasiest pig" award, as I am also an animal liberationist.

However your reference to the Emperors New Clothes is rather cliched and only showed that you do not have an ounce of abstract thought in your mind or appreciation in the least for subtlety.

You talk so loosely of "meaning"! You must be the most knowledgeable person in the world!!! Nay, you should not have so immediately drawn upon the Emperor as your chosen archetype. Maybe next time you will pull out your Christ to tell us more of your sufferings in making that great epic "Walled City". Mc.Luhan spoke of a generation that really thought they were living in Bonanza land.

In the same system of perceptual projection as foreshortening and perspective, the mind comes up with wonderful compensating factors such as the phenomenon of the phantom limb (the canvas: the artists amputation stump.) The super 8 "epic" - the penile projection/dream of many male clubbers of the 8mm gauge. Surrender Dorothy. Big brother Hollywood I want to fuck you.

Mousoulis you have told us of so many of your so-called "dreams" that just doesn't show through your work. Like Calder are you falsely claiming the Promethean fire?

In the words of Koestler, the greatness of an artist, I too believe, rests in creating a new personal idiom - an individual code which deviates from the conventional rules. Once the new idiom - "a new way of bisociating motif and medium" - is established, a whole host of pupils and imitators can operate it with varying degrees of strategic skill.

As media artists we are well aware of the vicarious emotions present on both sides of the screen. The horror movie may cause the viewer to secrete more adrenalin on behalf of the person who may be in danger on the screen. These types of associations can have a primordial base and govern our reactions to certain films. It's why young kids relate to Rambo, Masters of the Universe: they're the modern day Superman/Icarus/Babel.

Mr. Calder, if you want to "review" films, you must clearly state why you did not like the ones you mentioned. Otherwise you're just a slanderous "mud slinger". Why did most people like the Paddy Field's film? Because we could all relate to it to some degree. Humour can be the best way of presenting some very basic human frustrations. Martin Scorse's After Hours is an excellent illustration. You did not like Gumsmere because you could not "relate" to it obviously, and you were so one-eyed John, as to not see any value in it. It documents an important aspect of Melbourne's underground music, that certain bands like Willsmere, Gum, No and Slub are experimenting with.

You are also under the delusion that anything with a bit of grain is attempting to be 'experimental'. For my first film I had some B&W handy and as I had no video editing equipment, I decided to "edit-in" to a film camera. The grain is thanks to the Cine Service's lousy bath. The fish eye lens was used purely for fun along with other images that are personal puns. The whole thing is a poke at stylistic elements of the video clip! You Jerk.

I regard people like Godard, Griffith and Eisenstein as the true experimentalists. Stop romanticizing - act.

I think at the heart of the matter you are irritated by 'attitude'. You think we think we are being avant garde. Anne-Marie and Jo I'm sure would not be so pretentious as to think that. (At least at this stage).

Vernon Lee regarded aesthetic experience as primarily derived from "the attribution of our own moods of dynamic experience, motor ideas, to shapes." So, whether it be De Bruyn, with his exploration of colour and pattern or Mousoulis with themes of home life, or Anne-Marie and Jo with what is important to them - everyone is essentially presenting something of the autobiographical. To do what you did John is just slanderous mud slinging. You make films about photocopiers - that is important to you as a public servant. But don't undermine the importance of us all going on in some way - perhaps someday contributing to a wider visual language.

TOMIC, LJUBICA

3. CULTURE(al cringé)

THE POVERTY OF SUPER 8 DISCOURSE
- Damien Grant.

The following are some purely subjective remarks about what I feel is the state of super 8 in Melbourne at the moment.

One of the most outstanding features that seems to typify the current state of affairs is the abundance of myth. The myth that Super 8 is unique, that over the last three years it has been exploring the limits of filmic boundaries. That the versatility and relative cheapness of the medium has resulted in a group of people who seek out and successfully make 'innovative' and 'highly original' films. That personal vision guides most of these filmmakers and that this is the only justification for the resultant works.

Mathew Rees or Sarah Johnson said at the recent open screening, that they have seen many filmmakers present films described by the filmmaker as 'experimental' and, although they are experimental for the filmmaker, they are not experimental films. This represents perfectly my view of the Super 8 film group and its recent history. Although it purports to and actively reinforces the above myths of originality, personal viewpoints, innovative techniques etc, they are in effect myths and only myths. The real state of affairs is quite the opposite.

If the Super 8 film group is trying to present itself as an oppositional force to other film discourses, then it is doing a particularly bad job. One has only to look at early editions of Cantrell's Filmnotes or the films shown recently by Dirk De Bragn, to realise that 16mm film had established by the early 1970's a vibrant experimental film culture which had conducted many of the experiments that the current lot of Super 8 'gurus' claim to have discovered.

Film experiment began many years ago. If you care to name any of the major Art movements of this century you can usually find an associated film technique. The Dadaists, the Formalists, the Expressionists, Futurism and the Surrealists and not to forget Abstract Art, all have an equivalent film technique. Remember Dali and Buñuel? Dominant film language was again challenged in the 1950's by the rise of European or more particularly French New Wave Cinema. The notions of narrative, montage, reflexivity and auteur theory have continually been explored by filmmakers the world over. Dominant film practice (ie. Hollywood Filmmaking, a rather shallow term) has previously been challenged and attacked by 35 mm features films and 16mm film, and this attack is still continuing today. Remember Goddard is alive and well and still making films not to mention - God forbid - videos.

To claim then that Super 8 is exploring uncharted territory is to dismiss most of film history and actively reinforce a myth. Instead of Super 8 being a highly original medium and oppositional force, it is in effect, quite a reactionary one. How many homages to Jacques Rivette do we have sit through before we realise that to make a film that utilizes or copies so called French Avant-Garde techniques, is no more innovative or original than copying a (gasp) Hollywood technique or style.(ie. no out of focus bits, a complex editing procedure.)

The recent Super 8 films from Europe shown at the last open screening has merely reinforced my opinion that the current Super 8 practice here in Melbourne is quite a poor one. The Europeans seem to have a far more mature and developed sense of what they sense of what they are doing. Whilst most of us are running about proclaiming how Avant-Garde we are, because we make films with no thought, we just shoot what ever happens to catch our attention at any given time and we call this personal filmmaking, The Europeans and the Japanese have developed a film language that excels in cinematography, use of narrative (narrative is not just stories about love or bank robbers) editing techniques and the vision to create films which are witty, intelligent, explorative and highly attractive.

Much of recent social theory has concluded that the method of a discourse determines the content of that discourse. It is easy to understand then why these European films are so successful. Their method of construction (ie. inter-relationship of cinematography, narrative, soundtrack) is quite complex, which leads to films with a content of almost equal complexity. However, here in Melbourne it is becoming far more obvious that

SYDNEY S8 FESTIVAL

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 -contact John Calder 429 5473

CONTACT NUMBERS

Anne-Marie Crawford	527 8442
Sarah Johnson	534 4344
Ian Kerr	859 1683
Noel Lloyd	481 5832
Bill Mousoulis	419 6562
Matthew Rees	<
John Thomson	417 5193



En haut Myriem Roussel dans *Prenom*
 Carmen. En bas Maruschka Detmers

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Michael Hutter (02) 264 6939

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Catherine (02) 699 2909
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Chris Windmill
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 Balaklava, 3183

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