

REPORT: THE FIRST FESTIVAL OF WOMEN'S FILMS

By Joan Braderman

The free woman is just being born; when she has won possession of herself perhaps Rimbaud's prophecy will be fulfilled: "There shall be poets! When woman's unmeasured bondage shall be broken, when she shall live for and through herself, man—hitherto detestable—having let her go, she too, will be poet! Woman will find her unknown! Will her ideational worlds be different from ours? She will come upon strange unfathomable, repellent, delightful things; we shall take them, we shall comprehend them."

—Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1949

THE FIRST FESTIVAL OF Women's Films took place at the Fifth Avenue Cinema this past June in New York. Even film scholars were amazed to discover that there were, in fact, three weeks's worth of film directed by women in existence. And why not? That most modern of art forms, that most technological form, wedded more than any of her to the economics of its production might well be expected to have been especially restrictive to women in its centrally creative role. The degree to which the large amounts of capital, hence power, involved in filmmaking expand logically on Virginia Woolf's claim that women should have economic autonomy should be self-evident. This same set of social and political determinants which have been decried by a resurgent feminist movement as suppressing creativity in women has obviously and particularly held true for film.

Let us examine the work not of some women film directors but of some film directors who are women. They have more in common stylistically and otherwise with other artists working in these contexts than with some transhistorical notion of the female artist. Let us look critically, as well at the structure of our own Women's Film Festival as well as looking critically at the films screened.

The first rule to change should have been in the structure of the event itself. Kristin Nordstrom, an extremely enterprising young woman who had worked for Richard Roud on the New York Film Festivals, chose not to change it. But she should undoubtedly be saluted for having materialized her original idea which, according to publicity materials for the festival, was as follows: to discover and exhibit the work of new filmmakers; to permit a general audience to see films made by women that have not received wide distribution; to make the public aware of the great number of highly creative women working in film; to see the images that women are creating for themselves; to prevent a comprehensive exhibition of films made by women *in order to investigate the existence of a female film sensibility*.

Thus despite the festival's contribution to that rediscovery of creative female models, it might well have been presented without that misguided desire to assign a "female" sensibility to works which are absolutely disparate since they emerge from different economic and artistic contexts. It might also have been conducted according to what we've learned about male structures out of that political necessity—without that same damned (male) authority structure.

Exuberant though we may have been to see films day after day that were made by members of our sex, I assure you that it boggles the mind to see a film by Maya Deren and a film by Lotte Reiniger and a film by the women of San Francisco Newsreel, all in one sitting. Because many women, out of economic necessity, have made short films (they dominated the festival's screening list), the numbers of shorts were accommodated by showing them in groups, lumped under thematic pseudo categories, e.g., "The Feminine Mystique," "Comraderie," "The Life Cycle." The original nature of a filmic oeuvre like that of Canadian Joyce Wieland, for example, can hardly be seen to its best advantage when one of her films, *Rat Life and Diet in North America*, is shown as the companion piece to an Italian narrative feature starring Britt Eckland, *The Year of the Cannibals* by Liliana Cavani.

But since normal theatrical screening conditions involve the showing of a feature and a short, so did our women's festival. It failed to make any gestures to critical discrimination or even historical differentiation. In other words, instead of presenting with suitable background materials or explanation, major filmic oeuvres, one was forced to swallow in a single pill, this insane jumble of TV documentaries, commercials, cartoons, computer films, Hollywood and international features, and the avant-garde from 1922 to the

present. Then in discussions and panels one was asked to cull from it ideas toward this erroneous notion of a female film esthetic.

Although my desire is to be as positive about the event as possible, I think I should say that such problems may have been the result of haste and the festival's having suffered conception and realization by an individual rather than a group of qualified women. For collective decision-making is a practice inextricably tied to the premises of the present feminist movement, one which has animated its interaction these past few years. The festival's original screening committee, a group of 20 or so able women in film, if working together and utilizing the expertise of many, might have avoided some of these pitfalls. Their letter of resignation which Jonas Mekas published in his column in the *Village Voice*, June 1, 1972, several weeks before the festival, made some of these points in deference to the positive potentialities of the festival as such.

Even the mode of discussion involved an authority hierarchy. Panels of "stars" of various kinds—female actresses, editors, directors, producer, etc.—sat up on a raised podium and spoke (necessarily) down to their audiences. Workshops? Small group discussions? Well, we have many festivals of women's films before us. This was, after all, the first. Without lingering too long in this critique, I must also note that although my own press pass allowed me to view all the screenings, I rather doubt that masses of women could attend regularly at \$2.00 or \$2.50 each show. Had more woman power been engaged in the actual staging of the festival, perhaps wider public and foundation funding could have been obtained. And with broader organization and coherent presentation, less costly admission, and more extensive publicity, we might have had an enlightened everywoman's celebration of female creativity.

Women's entry into film can be accounted for historically with some sweeping but seemingly accurate generalizations. Scanning the careers of some of the better known female directors reveals that several, not surprisingly, have pre-film histories of feminism: Germaine Dulac, Lois Weber, Leontine Sagan, Wanda Jacubowska. Interestingly, Lois Weber, whose work was not represented in the festival due to its almost complete and ignominious loss in studio basements, made at least five films on birth control before 1915. Other extremely early films that are difficult to see now include the work of no less than 20 other American women credited with films before the advent of sound.

Several women have done work in film not requiring the large amounts of capital generally called for in the production of 35mm features, notably Esther Shub and somewhat later Nicole Vedres, creators, of compilation or archive films, who re-edited to their own compositional ends newsreel footage; or Reiniger and a now long list of other female animators; or Shirley Clarke (also visibly missing from this festival) who now works exclusively in video, as do other groups of women currently forming video collectives because of the portability of the equipment.

Maya Deren, of course, deserves special recognition not only for her consistently interesting filmic oeuvre and mastery of the premises and praxis of editing, but also because in the early '30s she virtually opened the professional use of 16mm equipment to a now ascendant American filmic avant-garde. The discovery of less expensive ways of making films is consistent not only with the closure to innovative filmmaking from members of both sexes by the American film industry but also within her role as a woman. Marie Mencken, Storm de Hirsch, Joyce Wieland, and a still longer list of women join independent filmmaking today.

Social revolutions have fostered surges of creative activity by women. In the Soviet Union, Shub, Yezaveta Svilova, Yulia Solntseva, Olga Preobrazhaskaya, and Vera Stroyeva are notable and in eastern European countries, Vera Chytilova, Wanda Jacubowska, Judit Elek. Others entered direction via film acting, such as Ida Lupino, Lillian Gish, Leni Reifenstahl, Alla Nazimova, and Olga Preobrazhanskava. Notwithstanding this, there is an implicit monumentality about work done by women in a field whose roles, as well as economics, have been structured to exclude them. And the festival under discussion begins to recreate that achievement.

At the beginning of the festival's unwieldy inventory of films lies *La Souriantc Madame Beudet* (1922) by Germaine Dulac. Though it was virtually lost in the festival's morass of "shorts," this is a film of singular significance in film history.

Though originally a feminist writing criticism for two feminist journals in Paris around 1914, Dulac emerges primarily as a filmmaker, film theoretician, and film activist. Being in Paris in the '20s, she was surrounded by one of the richest creative atmospheres in recent history and worked contemporaneously with Gance, Epstein, Feuillade, Clair, and Vigo, to name a few. Her theoretical writings, and their realization in her films, contribute to a large body of work which represents the first avant-garde of French experimentalism. A reading of her texts, scattered through experimental periodicals of the era, reveals her to be a staunch exponent of the "purely visual" film with a sensitivity to the difficulty of realizing them economically.

One is tantalized by *La Souriante Madame Beudet*, and the one or two other of her films still available for viewing, when one discovers that her entire oeuvre includes nearly 30 films. The descriptions of several of her later works—after the problematic collaboration with Antonin Artaud which produced the strained *La Coquille et Le Clergyman* (1928)—give "purely abstract" filmic interpretations of some compositions by Chopin and Debussy. Her infamous *Germination d'un Haricot* (1929) must have been a hyperbolically analytical film in which the growth of a bean plant is photographically penetrated with slow motion photography so that Epstein's invocation of a sound film in which one might "hear the grasses grow" is partially realized.

La Souriante Madame Beudet is both visually interesting and uniquely suited to a women's film festival. Its simple narrative (Dulac called the story "nothing, a surface only") involves the domestic strife of a petit bourgeois French provincial couple and its ensuing psychological ramifications for a smiling Madame Beudet who, in fact, never smiles. The husband, through a series of strong visual motifs and visual synecdoches, is portrayed as a capitalist male supremacist in the best spirit of today's movement. And the absolute isolation, alienation and confinement of his wife is rendered palpable through the use of elaborate masking and lighting techniques, superimposition, split-screen, prism and graphic effects that include some of the most radical uses of the filmic frame of the period. Dulac's continual projection and shattering of theatrical illusionism call into question the most basic assumptions about the film form.

In effect, in the final shot of the film, her narrative itself, though necessary for the investigation and visualization of a woman's schizoid psyche, is ironically undercut. I view Madelaine Beudet as a proto-feminist revolutionary; she attempts to overthrow the husband who is her oppressor. We see in that final shot, after the murder attempt has backfired, that the husband has not even understood the act and is returning to his "normal" role in the sham marriage. As we watch an ever unsmiling Mme. Beudet staring blankly into the camera as she is embraced, a superimposed curtain is lifted within the large wall mirror above them to disclose a Punch and Judy couple recapitulating their actions below. And if we have not understood the implicit joke of the mirror's double illusionism as an autonomous object, we are certainly convinced when the word "T-H-E-A-T-R-E" materializes on that mirror frame, which is a frame within the cinematic frame. One could say a great deal more about this extraordinarily rich little film and Dulac herself, but given the 100 or so remaining films in the festival, I shall exercise restraint.

Interestingly, of those 100 odd films, under 10 of those screened were made before 1950. In fact, close to 85% of them were filmed after 1965. For the record, though, despite the larger number of films made by women recently, and given the opening industry and less costly techniques, there are a far greater number of films directed by women before 1950 or '60 than were represented. For example, Alice Guy Blache, perhaps the first woman director, was assistant to Leon Gaumont at the very inception of the cinematograph. She made hundreds of one-reelers independently for the Gaumont Company even before her arrival in America to begin her own "Solax" Film Company in 1910. More films, many under her personal direction, were turned out from Fort Lee, New Jersey, until 1920, when she retired from filmmaking.

In Hollywood too, in the '20s, when studios still in their adolescence were producing large numbers of low budget films, they could afford the gesture of giving a few women their own projects. Among them, the name Dorothy Arzner remains perhaps best known because of her successful career sustained from 1920–1940 with Lasky, then Paramount, Columbia, and RKO. Growing up in San Francisco and beginning as a script typist, Arzner made incredibly rapid progress as a reader, then scriptwriter, until her adroit cutting and editing of such films as the Valentino vehicle *Blood and Sand* (1923) and Cruze's *The Covered Wagon* (1929) won her the coveted job of director and, finally, producer director. With several box-office

successes behind her (and her sex was obviously no liability while the money was flowing), Paramount assigned Arzner, billed as their first woman director, to their first talking picture, *The Wild Party* (1928).

A rather standard studio film, it is not terribly interesting stylistically. One may note in the visuals, however, that it is a film Arzner chose to shoot almost entirely at night. For a film about women in a college for girls, the emphasis on night scenes accentuates the easy, casual sexuality of Clara Bow and her daring young compatriots. Images of full-bodied, lush and braless young women draped in satins and furs, evokes something of the happy decadence and sexual freedom of that era of Hollywood filmmaking pre-Hayes code. For all the posturing and delightful overacting of Clara Bow, *The Wild Party* is a film in which women display an enjoyment of each others's company and even embody some of those generally fraternal traits in their dealings with one another. The dialogue is not so strained as one might imagine in a first sound effort and Arzner uses fast motion in several of the action scenes. She also hired a young male actor named Frederic March out of the theater to play the young professor, giving him his first film role. In effect, Arzner's taste in actors has proved rather remarkable. Among familiar names she introduced are Sylvia Sydney, Rosalind Russell, and Katherine Hepburn.

For superb and subtle direction of actors, and a good deal more, one can turn to Leontine Sagan's *Maedchen in Uniform* (1931). It is a film which compares well stylistically to Fritz Lang's *M*, made in the same year, and has thematic similarities to Jean Vigo's *Zero de Conduite* (1933) made two years later but sharing with *Maedchen* and *M* an early exploration of the creative possibilities for filmic use of sound.

Based on Christa Winsloe's play about the repressive and ultimately fascistic practices in a girls' boarding school in Germany circa 1913, *Maedchen* has been described by Siegfried Kracauer and others as a film concerned with the Prussian roots of Nazism, but it is primarily a filmic examination of the visual and psychological structure of authority. Inheriting much about its style from the German Expressionism of the '20s, *Maedchen* uses a series of oblique camera angles and subtle, but psychologically aggressive, camera movements which explicate the nature of hierarchy. From a series of opening shots of Prussian army statues silhouetted against the gray sky of Potsdam, Sagan cuts to a high angle shot of the uniformed girls marching in military formation. From the camera's vantage high above the marching girls, we see the rigidly geometric formation of their ranks. Then, within the school, we are introduced to the deep circular stairway which is, with Dorothea Weick and Hertha Thiel, the central character of this film. A frequent motif in Expressionist theater as well, the first stairway in this film, which we learn is reserved for the principal and teachers, appears as wide and expansive in its camouflage of height as the young girls' rear stairway is steep, angular, and treacherous in its straightforward description of the actual authority structure. Shot beautifully through the grating of the stairway, the girls experiment early in the film with a kind of measuring of the extreme depth of that stairway by spitting and dropping objects from the top to the small dark space far below. In an extreme high angle shot, the camera recapitulates their sightline as they dangle from the top railing, then as they hear the distant echo of their objects finally hitting the ground below in that ambiguous area known as offscreen space. The inferences the unseen source of this sound evoke involve a sense of the absoluteness of that chasm of vertical space of the stairwell and its isomorphic analogue, the authoritarian hierarchy of the school—the ruler and the ruled. The sequence serves also, of course, as a reference to the final scene.

Manuela, the new girl, whose emotional imbalance is activated by the harsh discipline (combined with the hope offered in the repressed passion of her substitute mother/lover, the lovely, aging teacher Fraulein Von Bernburg), is forced to try to violate that vertical space. She attempts suicide leaping from the precarious upper heights of the stairway. Her own mental imbalance thus becomes almost a pun on the notion of balance as it relates to height and gravity and fall. Because the principal, the school's small tyrant, has been shot consistently from low angles and low angle protozooms, stressing her height and therefore—by the visual logic of the film—her power, so a discomfiting full screen close-up of only the mouth of her lady sergeant emphasizes the mouth or voice as the issuer of orders. Similarly, the echoes through the hallways of the school describe again that distance between the aural issue of those orders (cause) and those who must adhere to them (effect) in an authority structure.

The dramatic lighting, the shadows, the elegant round windows which become frames within frames within frames also counterpoint Sagan's preoccupations in that they explore in visual terms light sources as separate and distant from their resultant visual configurations and reflections. The use of light makes for some excruciatingly lovely shots, notably the one in which light pours down through a high

semicircular window as the camera tracks down two lines of young girls dressed all in white to receive their German princess. How fitting that the contours of repression be explored so movingly and with such technical artistry by a woman. The narrative as a film form has clearly reached near perfection by 1931.

Maya Deren, less than any other female filmmaker, needs defense but perhaps merits tribute, discussion, and study more than any other. She was both a highly articulate cinema theorist and responsible more than any other single artist for the realization of those filmic understandings in her own six film works and the countless 16mm experiments that her creation of a milieu for independent filmmaking in this country brought forth.

We are less familiar with the world of tangible things than any human tribe has ever been. And thus, in Maya Deren's films, the familiar world captures us by its pervasive strangeness. The white hands press against a window pane that is not there. The human body drifts through weightless space. Geographic distances give way to new visible connections.

—Rudolph Arnheim, "To Maya Deren"

Arnheim writes about Deren in a kind of worshipful ode. In his final sentence, he alludes to the single most important quality of Deren's work: a refined and highly integrated mastery of montage, in a tradition divergent from, but whose locus is centered in Sergei Eisenstein. Her use of that basic notion of cinematic space is, of course, less as a disciple of Eisenstein in practice and more in a direct line from some Pabst in terms of rhythmic cutting on movement; Cocteau in terms of objectification of certain "surreal" and highly personal patterns of consciousness; Welles, obviously vis-à-vis disjunctive editing.

Only two of her six works, her first and best known *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) and *At Land* (1944) were screened. Deren's imagery itself, which has a great deal to do with the graceful persona of the filmmaker/dancer herself, reflects its nourishment in the dance, in magic (she spent years in Haiti studying Voodoo) as well as in a set of disassociative, schizoid fantasies, often identified with women as a group and corresponding structurally to the disjunctive editing techniques of which she is master. Disciples of Deren's in this festival, in radicalism if not in style, include Marie Mencken (*Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*, 1961, and *Dwightiana*) whose films are also part of the Anthology monthly cycle; and Gunvor Nelson: *Schmeerguntz* (1966) with Dorothy Wiley, *My Name is Oona* (1969) which has a remarkable soundtrack composed of progressively dense chantings of the title, and *Kirsa Nicolina* (1970) a semidocumentary film recording a natural childbirth more coherently if less expressionistically than Brakhage's *Window Water Baby Moving*.

Also, there is Joan Jonas' "enigma," *Last Year* (1971), which was originally shot in video then transferred to 16mm, and is a very mellow lovely 20 minutes of extreme close-ups of two pregnant bellies from different angles. The entire action of the film is the almost invisible movement of the fetus within the womb and the mothers' hands touching and exploring their own and each others' bellies. It is a drama solely of the round pendulous shape of pregnancy. *Left Side, Right Side*, also by Joan Jonas, is a film in which the illusionism of directionality within the frame is analyzed. The filmmaker draws a vertical line down the center of her own face in close-up and identifies by pointing and speaking on a sync soundtrack, the left and right sides, as they are reflected on the screen, across mirrors and on a split screen, with finger to face, then to camera.

Among films dealing with color abstraction, I found *Circles* interesting. Its central image of spiraling, revolving circles is reminiscent of Duchamp's *Anemic Cinema*, and enlists the viewer in a pleasurable optic game of distinguishing color and shape transformations. Although Doris Chase, the filmmaker, says she has never seen Duchamp's film, her film, like his, begins with a motif of her own sculptures, made for a theatrical production which she wanted to "spin in space." The basic visual images were generated on a CDA computer and plotted on a 40/20 microfilm plotter.

Rosalind Schneider, at a press interview after the screening of her film, *Orbitas*, proposed an alternate theatrical method for the exhibition of films like her own unprogrammable color abstractions. She suggests that they be projected simultaneously upon a large wall in a space through which an audience might move at will as if viewing paintings in a gallery, absorbing the tone rather than the sequence of different works, reserving the option to concentrate, pause, or move on.

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Agnès Varda, a Parisian who began as a photographer—official photographer, in fact, for Jean Vilar's Theatre National Populaire—has, since 1955, had a full and varied filmmaking career, often in flux but growing (sometimes in questionable—directions) with the honesty of a committed intellectual. This festival saw three films, each totally different in conception, style, and content but united by the “seeing” eye of Varda who wrote, “In my films, I always wanted to make people see deeply. I don't want to show things but to give people the desire to see.”

In *L'Opera Mouffe* (1958), her second film which she calls a “subjective documentary;” she “makes people see” through the subjective vision of a pregnant woman living in the Mouffetard district of Paris. The film is actually a series of titled, loosely edited episodes introduced, as the orchestra tunes up on the soundtrack, by a shot of an extraordinarily pregnant figure seated against a black screen. According to legend, Varda herself was apparently pregnant when she made the film. Since she cuts next to a gourd in closeup, also isolated within the frame, whose juicy insides are being scooped out, one may assume that this obvious metaphor has prepared us for a major motif of the film. And in fact, the film is unified by a formal, metaphoric, and symbolic concentration on the shape and supposed preoccupations of pregnancy. A quickly cut series of close-up shots of the feet, then the faces of the women shopping in her district, shot documentary style, can be seen as the physical landscape of the pregnant woman. This sequence, accompanied by romantic music is followed by a more theatrical, almost balletic one shot in the style of a truncated narrative, edited according to that same subjectivity which has molded the highly associative motifs of the whole film. Round gourds and cabbages, camera tracking the women in the street, more lovemaking, mirrors, documentary footage of some less fortunate of the area (who seem to capture the obsessively “humanistic” eye of our unseen pregnant chronicler) follow in swift succession. The line of fleshy animal parts in the meat market, shot from the angle of a fixated, perhaps slightly nauseous passerby, is particularly effective since it is followed by a shot of an eating woman. The net impact of the film, however, is to involve its audience in a kind of imagist stream of consciousness, suggestive of the premises of some films of the avant-garde in this country. That is to say, Varda has cast aside both the rules of narrative and of documentary film for the form her camera and her ironic sense of symbolism gives to the experience of pregnancy.

Made exactly 10 years later, *Black Panthers, A Report* seems to reflect a temporarily suspended interest in filmmaking for an interest in American radical politics. Naive in only the way a European with a relatively clean racial conscience can approach American culture, the film records a series of staged and impromptu interviews, crowd scenes at demonstrations, etc. Although Varda's interest in the Panthers and her desire to “report on” their words and their struggle are certainly to be applauded, one might wish for a more tightly edited or inspired version of this document, especially from the filmmaker who made *Cléo de Cinq à Sept* six years before. *Cléo*, an extremely cleanly shot narrative feature, directly confronts that notion of continuity in time which the narrative film implicitly violates. In this way, like Robert Wise's *The Set Up* (1948), *Cléo from Five to Seven* is an experiment in real time which therefore situates it in more or less close relation to the French New Wave directors. Varda had used a young editor named Alain Resnais on her first feature though her interests seem generally to diverge from, if occasionally to converge (*Cléo, Loin de Viet Nam* with Godard and Resnais) with the filmic (or political) concerns of that group.

Space does not allow a complete treatment of *Cléo* here, and it has received some critical attention elsewhere so that I shall conclude with the claim that both structurally and photographically, it is Varda's best effort and also one of the best at the festival. The compactness of its central theme with its structure in time is perfect; its theme is one of a metaphoric trial and judgment; and its close adherence to actual time articulates the temporal distortions that the anxiety of waiting confers on “real time.” This is counterposed with the complexity of the subjective mental processes of its heroine, as well as the time lapses and nonadherence to either a consecutive present, distant future, or ended past, that comprise one's normal expectations of the traditional narrative film. The beautiful young singer *Cléo*, in the stylized white backgrounds of her home and in the exquisitely photographed Paris streets and parks, waits for a doctor's report on a test she has taken shortly before five o'clock for a serious disease. If some of Warhol's films (also Robert Nelson's *Bleu Shut* comes to mind) explore the nature of boredom in time, Varda in *Cléo* is concerned with the richness and infinity of mindtime in a specific, limited period of waiting for judgment.

Czech Vera Chytilova's *Something Different* (1963) is elaborately and sophisticatedly shot and brilliantly edited in a way structurally consonant with its ideational content. Its inclusion in the festival over some of

Chytilova's later color films, which are more narratively, symbolically, and photographically complex but far less successful than *Something Different*, should be applauded.

The film intercuts footage of Olympic Gold Medalist Eva Bosakova in her rigorous daily training as dancer-gymnast with loosely connected sequences from the life of a Czech housewife. The director's framing of the activities of each, through, around, and among the objects which determine the shapes of their lives, occasionally brings to mind the camera work of Max Ophuls. The large empty space of the gym and the arena (articulated by large mirrors and one long training bar) are counterposed with the cluttered, trivia-encumbered apartment of the housewife with a small whining child close by. One sequence in which the same short series of kitchen action, e.g., the washing of a dish is replicated with the same piece of footage, is so subtle as to require a moment to see that pattern of movement as a pattern as regular and as choreographed as the complicated ballets of physical feats which the gymnast continually practices, also over and over, daily. Bosakova's strongly articulated, dramatic movements expand on, rather than diminish, those smaller more ritualized movements of the housewife. It is as if Chytilova means not so much to attack the tedium and monotony of the housewife against the glory of dance, but to enunciate the essentially ritualistic shape of both.

So *Something Different* is a film about the spaces and forms of the lives of two women, but more than that, it is about the nature of the space of a filmic frame and how it corresponds to camera movements, disparate kinds of human physical movements, and the wholly new movement created by the melding of the two by Vera Chytilova's tremendously adept, rhythmic concept of editing.

Just as the festival took for its structural model an overused, inappropriate (male) one, so Perry Miller Adato with *When this You See Remember Me* takes as its formal principle of organization, a cliché kind of TV documentary format. Of course, it is always a rare delight to see an old friend like Gertrude Stein, but to make a film about a female who was one of the most perspicaciously original writers of this century using a hackneyed format, seems unfortunate.

Two other feature-length documentaries, *The Passengers* (1971) by Frenchwoman Annie Tresget and *Three Lives* by "The Women's Liberation Cinema Co.," deserve particular notice. The first is an intelligent, craftswomanly treatment of the problems of Algerian, immigrants in France being integrated into the labor force and the culture. A series of well-chosen, pertinently edited cinema vérité interviews with the young Algerian worker Rachid, his family, coworkers, Algerian union leaders, etc., intercut with footage of Rachid at work at the most exhausting ill-paid, unexportable labor and with footage of the "Algerian" slums around french urban areas and disenfranchised Algerian children, make the film a singular, thorough, and informative document.

If films succeed best when their structures and subjects are isomorphic, then Nancy Graves' *Izy Boukir* must indeed be a camel film in every sense. Its natural desert soundtrack, the eyelashes, perverse noises, and charming, stupid persona of the camels themselves, Graves has allowed to shape the film, her camera moving with them across the dunes, unassertively letting the suppressed image of the camel flow forth.

The case of *Three Lives* (1970) leads me to the final consideration of this essay, the notion of the feminist film—if and how to situate it, or isolate it, or integrate it with the progressive interests of the film form. This is because *Three Lives* is made "politically" as Godard might now say, by a group known as "The Womens' Liberation Cinema Co." and an all-women crew working collectively. The women, learning to make a film as they went, made a film which, if it simply and explicitly treats through three extensive interviews the stuff of three women's lives, is also filmically retrograde. Several freeze frames and a few changes of camera set-up simply do not constitute an exciting use of the tremendous formal means offered by cinema, but women must learn. And if *Three Lives* and a number of other competent though dully composed documentaries which were screened at the festival, provide a way for them to do that while also making "statements" which must in some form be made, then one must be patient.

The End of the Art World is a new film by an extremely promising young filmmaker. I saw it the last day of the festival and was as surprised as I was excited by the film, since it incorporates the filmic as well as feminist radicalism, the energy, humor, and esthetic sophistication one might wish for from a young female filmmaker. As the title suggests only by inference, *The End of the Art World* takes for its subject matter as well as for its formal strategies some of the hyperbolically refined notions of esthetics held by a

series of contemporary plastic and filmic artists. With a quality of humor possible only with depth of understanding, Alexis Krasilovsky presents a catalogue of interviews with modern artists in which the shooting style as well as the aural material's format rehearses the personal style, the esthetics, and the assumptions of each artist about the nature of his art. The film consistently reveals, through nuance and implication, the presuppositions of each of its cast. Warhol and his cronies have been shot at a Whitney exhibition in which a close-up of Warhol with a color filter applied becomes a full screen rendering of the famous lithograph series of still with filter, of the contours of that public Warhol face; an interview with Jo Baer seated centrally between two of her white-on-white canvases in which the interviewer asks her the "meaning" of her work, then asks her to repeat the response, then asks her to repeat the response; an interview with Joseph Kosuth shot across Fifth Avenue where Kosuth, standing on the sidewalk in front of the Met and blocked intermittently by traffic and road blocks is asked such questions as, "what does Greek art communicate?"—all of which is barely audible over the sounds of the traffic; an interview with Michael Snow, in which the camera is focused on a screen (within the screen) on which is his *Wavelength*, that infamous 45-minute zoom. Her camera is enacting a reverse zoom away from that screen to reveal that the screen is set up before the fact—we are in the loft in which *Wavelength* was shot. And if a further convolution is possible, the voice-over involves another Snow joke for the filmmaker is responding to questions about his height, and the height of objects in the room in the same flat, descriptive tone of voice with which he has narrated Hollis Frampton's *Nostalgia*. In an interview with Geldzahler, curator at the Met, we are unable to hear his voice because the tape recorder has been placed at least a half-inch from the typewriter being busily operated by a young female secretary at the left of the room and screen from Geldzahler. The camera meanwhile is moving left to right across the room, including and recapitulating the sound and action of the key return. Who is being interviewed? Climax. High angle shot of two freaks in a suitably "constructivist" railed and pulled elevator. A bomb. A bomb in Geldzahler's office. Apocalypse. The camera accelerating wildly around the spiraling balconies and stairways of the museum creating phenomenally dizzying graphic patterns. Height. Rarification. Imbalance—explosion! Revolution. The end of the art world. And if, as Krasilovsky proposes, the (male) art world is refining itself out of existence, perhaps one can place one's temporary hope in the opening of that world to the potential creative potential of the people of women.

Before a David can happen, a thousand naked Apollos must be hewn.

There must be readied *ground*, a preparation—in short, a relevant living culture to frame the event.

—Cynthia Ozick, "Women and Creativity"

"We know everything about them and they know nothing about us."

—Clara Bow, *The Wild Party*, 1928

—Joan Braderman

A list of several hundred names of women filmmakers was compiled by a New York University independent graduate seminar (Jean Betancourt, Joan Braderman, Barbara Skulth, Regina McShane, Jennifer Millstone, Madeleine Warren) held in Spring 1972 under the direction of Annette Michelson; the list has been deposited in the Anthology Film Archives.