Super Eight

Newsletter of the Melbourne Super 8 Film Group

Issue 63 October 1991

INSIDE :- MAEVE WOODS, BILL M, NICK O, GARRY O'KEEFE

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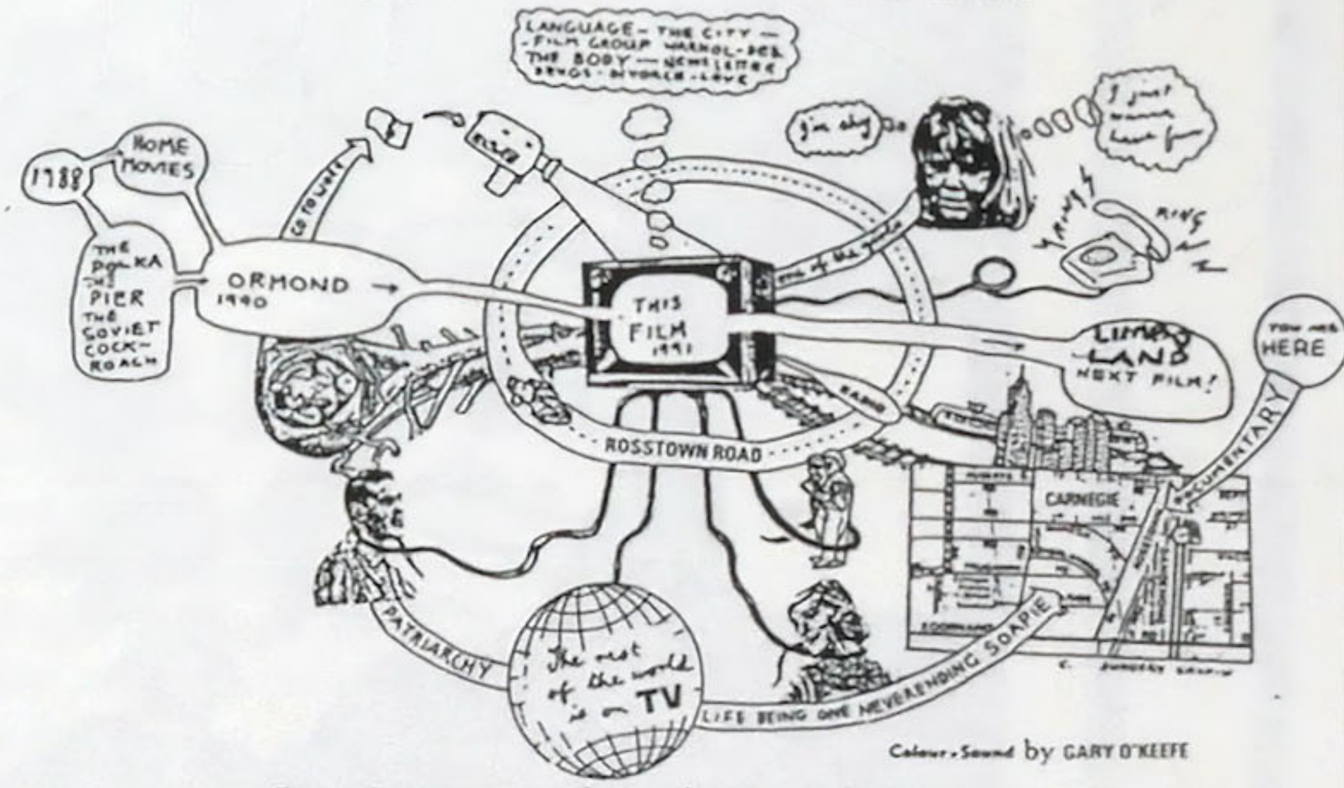
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FAST TURNAROUND *** COST EFFECTIVE

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Identity and personality are shaped by the cultural and geographical forces of .....Rosstown Road.



Colour + Sound by GARY O'KEEFE

Two sisters travel to the city then return home to Rosstown Road. The girls are seen entering a train. Later a car drives through their game. Then a tram rumbles by on its way into the city and sunset. As daylight fades they join their friends for a game of scarecrow tiggy. They surround each other in decreasing circles and they, in turn, are surrounded. I try to explore and film what it is that surrounds them. At times they are unaware of being watched and filmed. Other times I am not watching, just filming with the camera on my hip or held out on extended arms. The camera is then less imposing and obtrusive and I am freed from decisions about composition. This film was made over many days but I try to have it appear to happen over one day. At the beginning and end is darkness and the children invade darkness when they play. The film runs for around thirty minutes which I hope is not too long. I find it impossible to tell.

Membership Super 8 Group

Cost only $15, $10 Concession annually, which includes a copy of **Super Eight** each month, opens doors to open screenings, a wide selection of equipment hire, the invaluable experience of our long standing members as well as contact with other film makers.

BULLWINKLE'S

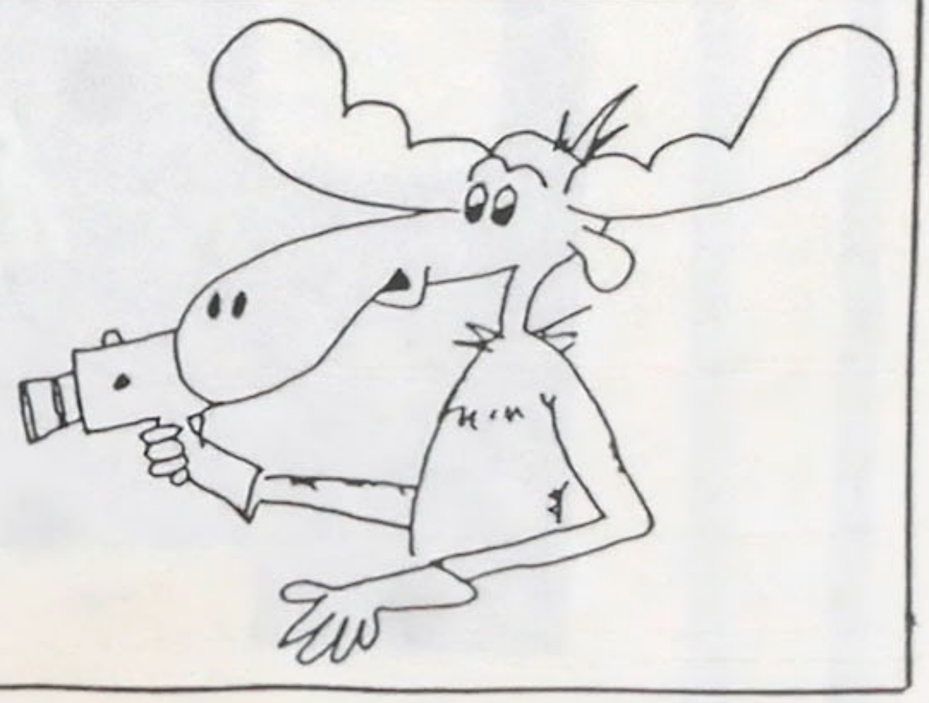
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TRANCE MOSAIC 8 min super-8 by Nick Ostrovskis

A fast energetic film completed this year. In Trance Mosaic many short sections of film (some 2 to 5 frames in length) are used like the colored stones of a mosaic picture. The rhythm created produces a dream/trance-like examination of personal imagery.

The short shots are repeated often enough to register on the viewers eyes. At times many things appear to occur almost simultaneously.

Showing at the October open screening.



SOUND AESTHETICS IN SUPER-8 FILM.

Is it not possible for music to speak ideas and for dialogue to be structured according to some abstract form ? I have seen a number of Super-8 films in Melbourne this year where I would argue that the above takes place.

An agglomerate of measured staccato utterances accompanying tableaux in clean kitchens. The protagonists/the chess pieces are twentyfive year old men and some women of that age. We also see a workplace: a clean office with computors. There is a scene in a car, a scene in a tram and a scene at a party where people don't get too close and don't move about too much. Regular spaces, regular pace...it made me think of the paintings of Mondrian : A yellow square evenly applied, a grey square simply painted, a red rectangle made up of meticulously regular brush strokes, two parallel black lines, one black line at right angles to the axis of the canvas and so on. This last hyperthetical painting of the Dutch de Stijl movement was brought to mind when I saw Richard Touhy's "ORDINARY FLUX" and listened to his use of 'sensible'comprehensible dialogue as also a form of abstraction in sound. It was the self contained nature of the encounters between people that interested me. Each little scene is framed or backed by walls or furniture elements sitting as oblique planes in relation to the camera's lens (or screen) and mostly the figures 'converse' at the same measured distance from us....All this creates such a sense of tension and containment which is further heightened by the actors carrying on conversations with their faces reversed right away from the audience (fully frontal-back !). But, to return to the subject of sound. What do these persons say and how do they say that and how could all this dialogue with location sounds of tram and telephone and television possibly be argued as 'Music' ?..... There is chat about everything ordinary such as dating, having a beer, getting clients at work and other nothingness. Nothing-everything in a certain middle comfortable suburban world. There is no overt passion conveyed through the voices by employing a dynamic effect. No shouting-no whispering-no outrage or joy is heard over the text. Even at the party the sense of the tutti is avoided and the proceedure is that of speaking in turns. This is perhaps some of the sense of sadness that emanates from this film also, because all the actors have their chance to say just what it is that is for them and they hesitate, only to skirt around 'IT'. This seems to me to be reflected in and integrated by the metaphors in sound. So dry are these little utterances,so beautifully crafted as almost familiar word segments, so uncomfortable and yet so expressive are the little spaces, the tiny pauses between each shot and speech. I was very conscious of the artificiality of the set up situations of actors moving ,sculpted or rearranged like elements of still life. I felt the structured pace of the words with their barriers both in meanings and at the same time in pace, in rhythms, in conflicts and congruences between meanings and musicality. No part of this film is easy to watch but I found it involving as a totality.

Another approach to sound which interests me is the film sound which is not. As Irigaray and others could tell us the force of an absence is very great. I made a number of experriments with silent slide works in the early eighties and concluded then that projected images without sound could set off the stream of consciousness mechanisms in the (potentially sympathetic) viewer's mind to an extroardinary degree. Physical limitations such as the problem of showing works in real darkness and in silent venues made the presentation of such work an uphill battle. This was then more of a problem because most audiences were infatuated with the noise and shifting image of television and quickly lost patience. Those viewers who had stamina found the silent slide experience very rewarding. It's been exciting to see Nick Ostrovskis's silent films which are so daring and yet elegantly put together (using in Super-8 re-photographed slides) The success of these films is partly in the pace of changes and the intrepid use of saturated hues. Because there is no auditory experience, I for one tune into something which is not music but is a kind of meta-music when I see Nick's films.. I find it very interesting that viewers of S-8 are receptive to these 'silent' experiences. In a much more random style, Pete Spence seems to be deliberately utilising non-sound film in such a way that something like music in the mind emerges. Pete usesfragments filmed sometimes in 16mm and developed by rough home means so as to invite all manner of random fluttering textured sights. Subjects are ordinary and available like Dodgem the dog, or his cat or time lapse snatches filmed walking around a garden path. All these things in Pete's films are presented out-side of 'real time' filming. There is a kind of artificiality which has rhythm and drive which is for me an equivalent for music via the ears. He re-photographs many times onto super-8 to emphasise a broken pulse.

Another example of absent sound forcefully creating sounds in the viewer's head is the method used in the earliest Swedish filmed dramas and in American comedies Chaplin et al. I refer of course to the device of the written dialogue interspersed with filmed action. Many Super-8 film makers have used this device and the very incorporation of such a method could be a 'Post-Modernist' reference, but regardless of the many possible reasons for working this way, I found it moving and evocative of real 'voices' when I saw it (and 'heard' it) in Les Hillis's dramitic film. Les uses the printed text very emphatically. He has his act-ors mouth the words clearly so that you can lip read their message, then he intersperses the writing of those same words. It makes me think of two notes bowed on a stringed instrument but with slight-ly added vibrato the second time. Again I tend to see these uses of (absent) sound as a kind of chamber music in my head.It was also interesting to persue the musical analogy and compare the different ways of dealing with what I'll call 'Human Passions': Les Hillis tells of getting out of institutions, of love announced, of states of mind and a kind of resolution of unhappiness (revolver) and although very conventionalised in style and not 'plausible' in any conventional 'real world'sense Les's film came alive and spoke in it's way. Richard's film was all holding back but it also had a life of it's own----albeit through a voice almost totally in con-trast to that of the Hillis film.

We have seen a number of interesting uses of direct (presumably unrehearsed) use of the microphone on the camera recor-ding something a little closer to real time events. Sandy Munro's lovely film "SIDES OF SEA", all in-camera edited and consisting for the most part of little glimpses of the sea's edge from between lined up bathing sheds used at the same time the sound camera's

little on-off, on-off snatches of 'what was really there' sound. Minimal colour in this almost white noise uder some wind but audible in it's turning on, turning off, huff, huff, hu-u-uff, like a breath-----quite MUSICAL. Another film to use the camera's mic in a skillfull way was Gary O'Keeffe in"ROSSTOWN ROAD". It's a day's adventure at home, shopping, travelling, drawing, quarelling, joking with the film maker's two little girls. The cinematography is very fluid, very spontaneous, a 'Thinking Eye' indeed. It's the instant grabbing of compositional opportunities of someone who has listened to jazz or played jazz.He's not afraid to present the most lusciously full on image of a tram and an ogange, absolutely extreme orange sunset. He moves nimbly to film in small spaces, on moving vehicles and always frames what he sees with flair. He has turned on so it seemed to me throughout and I don't think there was any dubbing (?). What resulted in terms of sound was chatter chatter, some of it addressed directly to the film maker, much of it very self conscious and shrill. That shrillness was for me quite waring to experience for a long period but I think it was interesting to express a form of tension by letting the shrieks remain with the images of architypal little girls.

Various things are done by either mixing segments of recognisable music (much of it with audible lyrics which in their turn provide a text), or by combining music with noises occurring wherever the film is shot. Some such films appear to aim at reinforcing or underscoring what is visible through the film. Other film makers like to go against those images we view on the screen. I have found a number of Steven Ball's films complex and enigmatic in their sound. In "m-dot-report" he created a sad, somewhat questioning feeling by having far away voices reading something from a newspaper, set against the images there was a poetic sense of unresolvedness. He also makes some computor generated sounds and at other times uses slabs of popular music. It's fairly obviously a "Mix" and works well as part of a layering process.. There is a bouncing back and forth from text which is spoken in a coloured way to music that might carry a certain ambience or recognisable meaning. He pulls these disparate elements together into a 'composition "

Many cameras have high quality microphones attached. Some have booms which slot into the top, although if the drive motor is noisy it could be a lot better to purchase a cheap extension lead. The mic can be concealed near the actors or source of sound. It is also possible to get lip sync by using a specially equipped separate microphone and tape recorder with a beeping device that matches with film. Of course sound film is considerably dearer and many excellent cameras have provision only for silent film cassettes. Then, if you need or want speech you have to be crafty ! There is the question of the ubiquitous 'voice over'. That Big Sister sound can bring in all kinds of other meanings and feelings depending if it's intimate, persuasive, authorative, innocent etc. It can be very much a textured 'instrument' in your sound mix.

Although projectionists at festivals can be wonderful in their preparedness to cue in sound cassettes to silent reels of film one cannot always rely on the efficiency of the person in the bio-box. Therefore what is to be done when works are shot on black and white stock which comes only in the silent version ? For short films it is not expensive to get a print made which carries a sound stripe. For longer films it is probably cheaper to have a transfer onto video, although the price here can blow out if all stages are not carefully planned. Films with much dialogue such as ORDINARY FLUX cannot be transferred onto a Super-8 print. You lose some optical quality but the video sound is probably superior.

As most of my film is shot silent and there are drastic shifts and contradiction from shot to shot I realised that the sounds could also be brought in from many directions. It occured to me that sending out to friends I could gather sound contributions from the world at large. It became a kind of conceptual aspect of the film "OUT OF PLACE". Enough people trusted me to participate in this Cagean exercise in Indeterminacy and I received such a spectrum of sounds: letters about life, ambient sound from a tropical swamp, music of various kinds some of which was very lovely in itself, even strange music played on rocks in Iceland. I cannot 'play' instruments in any conventional sense but over years I've collected 'ethnic' instruments and bits of broken 'instruments' and I've checked out the sound making potential of most of the kitchen stuff and listened to the reverberation time in most parts of the house. This made it possible for me to make about half the necessary sound elements for that film. Sometimes I'd record one layer , put it on cassette and play back to that sound. The only big money came with mixing in a sound studio but it was worth every cent to be working with an imaginative musician who viewed the whole project positively. The recurring questions were about 'with or against' the image on screen. I wish now that we had used the eight track machine with it's costly tape than trying to econ omise using a four track with cheaper tapes but subsequent problems with compatability when dubbing sound onto video. I felt grateful for lots of advice over the telephone from friends in the Super-8 group but I found that nobody else had been around quite the same set of hurdles and I was in a Kafkaesque situation amidst the professionals (who were all pretty helpful as it turned out in the end as well). There is no written down guide for all of this and it makes for anxious days when the project is coming together. What I made was not in my opinion a 'Nature Film'. You can call it pantheistic eroticism or whatever you like but it was very much a composition of sounds used mainly for emotional effect. I'm not interested in films which are only about information but so called information/observation can be a resource for the film or for any other art. I presume that those films,seemingly at the opposite end of the scale, that is not conventionally regarded as 'Experrimental' because of the customary categories and their mutually exclusive slots, can be compositions also. Any film can be a composition through the image and through the sound. The barriers are merely invented for convenience and should be challenged.

Maeve Woods, Sept. 1991.

PET FILMS

Strap a super-8 camera to your dog or cats back and let it roam the streets for a day with the camera in timelapse mode. The resultant films will be shown at the 7.30pm session of a forthcoming open screening.





FIVE EASY PIECES

by Bill Mousoulis

(1) **Rosstown Road** by Gary O'Keefe

At the last Open Screening on September 10, Ian Macintosh's **Vanities** spooked me, Michael Cutts' **A-Lone-Apparition** delighted me, but Gary O'Keefe's **Rosstown Road** truly had me reeling.

For me, the greatest moments in cinema-watching are those moments when I feel I'm experiencing something truly alive, or, for the first time. The film-maker taps into something he or she has an absolute investment in, and, because of that, it is easily communicated to the viewer.

Genre film-making (98% of films) is the antithesis of this - it is prescribed, cautious, lacking any sense of discovery. Even variations within genre are purely safe because they are within an initial framework. With a film that is truly alive, one is on the edge of one's seat, not knowing how long each shot or scene will last, not knowing what will happen next, or what is even happening currently, not knowing anything in fact. (This is the sense one gets with Godard's films.)

Rosstown Road is like that.

Let's go back to an old idea. The idea that cinema is cinema and life is life and never the twain shall meet. I don't know. For me, the gamble of realism is very much still on. (By 'realism' I don't mean a style; I mean film as truth, reality, life, as opposed to film as genre, entertainment, exposition, etc.) I think documentary illusionism is out though - a personal/perspectivistic seeing and shaping of raw material is essential. Science-inspired objectivity is not only a fallacy, but extremely limited in practical application.

Gary's presence in/behind his film renders it completely alive. What I feel as I watch the film is his love, his care, his fascination, his excitement. It's translated. But it's not personal, individual authorship as an end, but as a means. This is not a film about Gary O'Keefe, or even Gary O'Keefe's life; it is about life itself, as it passes through Gary O'Keefe.

In any 'normal' film, with the conventional, omniscient/God, third-person narrator guiding us, the sunset/trams shot would have been beautiful, transcendental, magical, etc. In **Rosstown Road** the shot is all that, but multiplied by the immeasurable investment (in that shot) of a living, reasoning, feeling person.

If cinema were cricket, that shot would have been a six.

(2) The Death of Life

"The untenability of one interpretation of the world, upon which a tremendous amount of energy has been lavished, awakens the suspicion that all interpretations of the world are false."

- Friedrich Nietzsche, **The Will to Power.**

Nietzsche's madman, of course, was being the devil's advocate when running down the street yelling "God is dead!" The order of Nietzsche's nihilism finds a modern-day manifestation in the phrase "constructive criticism" - like Socrates, Nietzsche wanted to show up the inadequacies of any system of belief. As a means to the end of creating a better set of values. An interesting paradox thus develops.

If we follow through on the Socratic "complete knowledge is unattainable", we are left paralyzed: totally able to form questions, but totally unable to draw answers. I.e. philosophy as thought, but not as (a guide to) action, committment. Which is not very practical or even existent. Reason proceeds us to the only solution, which is paradoxical: the combination of paralysis and committment. Or, as Bruce Springsteen sings in "Brilliant Disguise", we must become "the man who doubts what he's sure of."

It's like Hegel's idea of "synthesis" - one never has a good set of values, one has a better set of values. And they are not static - existence as becoming, not being. The Platonic or Christian ethic is hateful because it dogmatically forces set values down the person's throat. Remember what Sartre said: that he would be preaching his philosophy of the responsibility of the individual even if he wasn't atheistic.

Which ultimately means this: that it is not only God that is dead, but Life as well. It seems funny, I know, but not only do we have to act on beliefs that we know are limited and ending, we have to live and be knowing that we are going to die and not be. And yet the greatest thing that sparks living is this very awareness of mortality. (Check the attitude of people who come out of a long hospital stay.)

Twenty years ago, 16mm. was like Super-8 today: cheap, accessible, flourishing. It slowly became professionalized. Super-8 will just disappear. (Latest news is that Agfa will be ceasing manafacture of their line of Super-8 very soon.) It's not rock-solid. Nothing is. But that doesn't lead us to despair. Oh no.

Because nothing exists and nothing has meaning, that means that we are free to create meaning, magically. We know that that meaning will die eventually, but we can live in THE MAGIC OF THE PRESENT. Yesterday's values are old, 'used'; I am all for A HEDONISM OF THE MIND. Is life, after all, worth living, or is it just a "dutiful" process? The only duty you have is to yourself.

DON'T LISTEN TO ANYONE! And that includes me, of course. As Nietzsche says: "Follow you not me, but you!"

(3) **Ordinary Flux** by Richard Tuohy

The premiere of this film occurred at the Fringe Film and Video festival on September 12 as part of a program of Melbourne Super-8 films.

Richard Tuohy is a film-maker who is here to say. Already, with just his second major work, there is the sense of anticipation and then reaction that is only bestowed upon the most committed and controversial of film-makers. His first major film, last year's **Love Life**, as this one will eventually do, polarized audiences dramatically.

That **Ordinary Flux** is a landmark work is beyond question. It is the longest narrative Super-8 made locally (at around 50 minutes) and also the best technically-achieved one, in terms of dramatization incorporating dialogue. Richard gives one the impression that he can pull off the dream of cheap drama. At the least, he demonstrates the ethical imperative of such. (The AFC is currently funding 16mm. short dramas at around $200,000; Richard's film cost about $1,000. Draw your own conclusions.)

I'll now offer some initial comments on the film, initial because these are my very first impressions and I may write more at a later stage. One has to take this precaution with Richard's work because it is deceptively rich, or, more precisely, the flatness of it disappears the more one dwells in it. Given that, I find myself excited by the film, exasperated by it, and also indifferent to it. Not all at once of course.

Maybe "excited" is too strong a word - the film has none of **Love Life**'s wild, unchecked brilliance. **Ordinary Flux** is so smoothed out that one struggles to find the life in it. The acting, for example, is practically anemic; only Julian and Amber's actors are somewhat expressive, and even then not continually. The pace, overall, is such that the film threatens to come to a stop occasionally - there is no sense of economy. Julian's drawn-out rejection of Amber on the phone is an act of sadism; on Julian's part, and on Richard's. In **Love Life**, extended duration of scenes served a purpose; in this film one wonders. This isn't Akerman we're watching (duration creating tension, liveliness, the unexpected); it's Ozu (duration creating calm, order, harmony.)

Two things in the film do excite me: the main character Julian, and the film saying that compatibility is not necessary in relationships. But ultimately I am disappointed with the resolution and context, respectively, of these. Julian is an interesting person, very cool and independent, almost inhumanly so. That isn't developed though: Julian turns out to need love and interaction just like everyone else. Shucks. The questioning of the compatibility myth (in Gary's attitude to Mark) implies, I believe, a very radical philosophical proposition. But the context here is a warm, gushy, patriarchal one - I feel the tone to be overharmonious, as if a beautiful God were enveloping his beautiful world, with none of his sheep straying, and all of them loving one another.

Well, that's it for now - one paragraph on style, one paragraph on content. I'm keen to see the film again - I'm sure my response will change and mature. On viewing again and again, films like these only get better.

(4) The Death of Cinema

This short piece is devoted to a comparative study of the films that played in the Fringe program: **Gritty** by Maeve Woods, **Bridget Among the Ten Thousand Things** by Mark La Rosa, **Sides of Sea on the Shortest Day of the Year** by Sandy Munro, **Event Horizon** by Sarah King, **253M** by Les Hillis, and **Ordinary Flux** by Richard Tuohy.

There are many ways one can look at films and discuss them. The particular way I have in mind currently is to see how much of a spirit of modernism they have. That is to say, how much they kill cinema as we know it and come up with something new. Or, more precisely, to see how alive and fresh they are.

Gritty and **Bridget** are 'experimental' films and thus not a priori outside convention. Still, their cosmogonies are fascinating, endlessly fracturing yet embracing the details of their worlds. But for all this pluralistic play, the films contain their "ten thousand things" within a strictly-defined framework. Undoubtedly the film-makers are enjoying themselves, but this only creates a barrier for the veiwer, the barrier being the ego of the film-maker. The first minute of **Bridget** is just sheer torture.

Mark's film is pretty strong nevertheless. A newish, rare conjugation in it is that of irony and seriousness. Irony by itself, though, is as common as anything in Super-8, and **Event Horizon** is a current example. The piss-take, the inversion, the variation depend on the old, the conventional, for their existence. We have to destroy known cinema, not send it up!

Like **Gritty** and **Bridget**, **Sides of Sea** has an overwhelming authorial presence. But where the former films are the results of intellectualized constructs, Sandy's film is pure emotion and pure discovery. She goes to the beach completely open and discovers her images. And she finds a visual beauty that matches Maeve's; and an off-handed delight that matches Mark's. **Sides of Sea** must surely be the free-est film made this year.

Ordinary Flux, on the other hand, has the dullness of a realization of a blueprint. Richard may think he's Hitchcock, but I see a failed naturalist drama. Only the actress playing Amber succeeds in adding the necessary emotion within, and to counterbalance, the formalization. Her grace and sadness come to the fore - the states of the other characters are buried under the actors' inept performances and the glut of appropriate, but lifeless, symbols that Richard constantly surrounds them with. As the tram rattles off in the last shot, one has the sense of a perfectly executed film, but a film devoid of discovery and newness, on either the film-maker's part, or the watcher's.

253M, as I've commented on in a previous newsletter, mixes various cinematic forms. On top of that, it is quite free and unpredictable. Where Richard uses symbols, Les uses metaphors and associations. **253M** has mystery and magic; things foreign to Richard's "ordinary static" world. Les loves people as much as Richard does; but Richard's transcendence is deterministic, stripped of tension. I like Les' ending better: a hopeless, harsh world, with no God - just a guy and a girl, battling the elements. "Hi" says the girl. "Hi" says the guy. The magic of starting.

(5) It's So Easy ...

Fuck academic rightness; it's just not write. Write! This isn't my newsletter! These are just my opinions, worth exactly the same as anybody else's. Send your contributions to the P.O. Box at the back of this newsletter. For example, what do other people think of Richard's film? Write in, let the world know. Don't be shy!



RICHARD TUOHY

SCREENING

OF

LOVE LIFE 1990 (38 min) at 8.00pm

PLUS

ORDINARY FLUX 1991 (47 min) at 9.00pm

GRIERSON CINEMA

off St Andrews Place, East Melbourne. (follow the chalk marks)

Admission $3.00

FRIDAY 11th OCTOBER 1991

- - - - - - - -

Richard has taken the bold initiative to hire a cinema and screen his own films all at his own expense. His films were highly acclaimed on radio recently. So if you have Friday 11th October free come along and support his films. (Nick O.)

Last Open Screening

Flit by Pete Spence
Bauhaus Film by Greame Cutts
A Love Apparition by Michael Cutts
Untitled by Graeme Cutts
L'amour que j'ai by Michael Cutts

Vanities by Ian Macintosh
Dodgem by Pete Spence
Ross Town Road by Garry O'Keefe
Untitled Canadian Timelapse by Dirk de Bruyn

Next Meeting Open Screening

- Bring a film of yourself as a kid.
If S-8 didn't exist then, bring a film of yourself from 20 or 30 years ago.

Next Meeting

TUESDAY 8th OCTOBER
Glasshouse Meeting Room
RMIT, 360 Swanston Street

At 7.30 pm

A SPECIAL SURPRISE

At 8.30 pm Open Screening

Everything is screened, time permitting (Finish at 10 pm)

Afterwards, eats at Stalactites

For Sale For Sale

1 Fujica single-8 splicer with 1 roll of tape.
1 Chinon 805S sound movie camera with mic. and case. GC. $150.
Jenny Pignataro 531 4783

Editorial & Layout By: NICK OSTROVSKIS

Contact Number: Jenny Pignataro 531 4783

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Super Eight

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