

# Independents

## Berlin's Independent Forum

by Amos Vogel

The beauty and nuanced cadences of Goethe, Kafka, and Freud rang through the hushed cinema as the young German haltingly, with deep feeling and sorrow, attempted to express his emotions on seeing *Brussels-Transit*, Samy Szlingerbaum's film of his family in the Nazi period, spoken entirely in Yiddish. Present-day, night-lit, and empty Brussels streets, stylized tableaux of lyrical power, and his mother's unrehearsed, taped recollections served as poetic representations of a past no longer available.

The discussion that followed this important work was held with an international audience of press, film professionals, and Berlin citizens, all present at this year's Film Festival. Its intellectual level and emotional fervor was typical of the quality of the events put on each year by the Festival's unique International Forum of Young Film. Apart from the (mediocre) competitive portion of the Festival (see Elliott Stein's Berlin report in the May/June FILM COMMENT), the Forum is its most important and co-equal component; in fact, it presents more films, attracts more international attention, and is, from the perspective of film as art and social communication, far more important.

The Forum is a veritable orgy of independent features and shorts, fiction and fact, political and avant-garde—a priceless opportunity to keep abreast of current trends (and crises) in international production. Created, programmed, and administered by the Festival's Co-Director, Ulrich Gregor, Erica Gregor, and colleagues, it presented its forty-two programs at three theatres (10 A.M.-2 A.M.), with each program presented three times. Here is where one finds the German youth, the international cineastes, and those international critics who view film from a more serious perspective.

This year, the basic Forum structure was supplemented by an entire series of

Black Cinema features and shorts from America (programmed by Warrington Hudlin of *Street Corner Stories*); a further series of more specialized avant-garde films (already well represented in the main program); two programs of experimental films for children; and a Super-8 Series which included American new-wave punk films.

The Forum's thematic and aesthetic, diachronic and synchronic range remains astonishing, year after year. It reflects the informed internationalism of its director Gregor, one of Germany's foremost film scholars and author of the widely acclaimed *History of Film*. A few examples from this year's schedule will have to suffice: Ruy Guerra's *Mueda, Memory, And Massacre*, created by the Cinema Nuovo master (*Os Fuzis*) in Mozambique, a stirring episode in that country's struggle against Portugal; Richard Dindo's *Max Frisch, Journal I-III*, the locales and women of the Montauk book, poetically transformed; the early avant-garde(!) films of Joris Ivens (1911-1931); Mario Peixoto's newly rediscovered Brazilian masterpiece *Limite* (1930), closely linked to Eisenstein and the French avant-garde; Boris Lehman's *Symphony*, in which a Jewish survivor of years in claustrophobic hiding in Belgium delivers a tragic, dissociated, sardonic monologue; a retrospective of an important find, the Portuguese Manoel de Oliveira, only becoming known in the post-Salazar period; Andrei Tarkovsky's (*Andrei Rublev, Solaris, The Mirror*) newest work, *The Stalker*, a turgid, secretive, philosophical set-piece by one of the great Soviet Russian directors; Leo Hurwitz's four-hour *Dialogue With A Woman Departed*, simultaneously a moving, controversial tribute to his wife, and a philosophical, leftist reflection on America from the Depression to Vietnam; Pape Rottraut's amazing short, *90°*, its camera (unbenownst to the viewer) secretly tilted throughout at a 90° angle, with all of the director's sparse furniture nailed to one wall of her apartment during the production while she continued living there; and Claudia von Alleman's *The Journey To Lyon*,

tracking-down the traces of nineteenth-century French feminist/socialist Flora Tristan, which ends with the failure of the mission and the realization of the searcher—a woman history student—that the past can only be recovered through one's own actions in the present.

The sample is rounded out by *The Time of the Mumuilas*, a six-hour Angolan ethnographic investigation, set in the context of colonial domination; a most original recent American avant-garde work, *Sigmund Freud's Dora* (by Pajczkowska, Weinstock, McCall, and Tyndall), a poetic/political confrontation of Freud and feminism; the Zurich Film Collective's *To Kill Hitler*, the discovery—through documents and witnesses—of a Swiss theology student who tried to kill the Fuehrer; and Peter Greenaway's *pièce de résistance, The Falls*, a BFI Production which features individual biographies of "ninety-two random victims (out of nineteen million) of a Violent Unknown Event," consisting of "whatever material is now available about each of their lives visually, literarily, musically, acoustically."

If one considers the programmatic and administrative magnitude of the "Forum," what is one to say of its "Documentation"? Each of the films shown was accompanied by four to ten pages of printed (!) program notes (approximately ten times the length of this column per film): filmmaker's statement, interviews, background material, reviews, complete biofilmography.

Each year, these program notes are published as a book. This year, the Forum published a complete Index (going back to its inception in 1971) of all the 387 outstanding international independent films presented. Author Sylvia Andresen provides indices of original film titles and directors (or producers' collectives).

The Forum is the direct outgrowth of an eighteen-year-old organization, the Friends of the German Cinematheque, and its year-round Berlin repertory showcase cinema, the Arsenal.

I believe this organization and its

activities are unique in their scope and represent a prototype for Alternative Cinema internationally. It premieres, on a daily, year-round basis, the works of new talents, it presents an extraordinary array of retrospectives, it distributes its films nationally (over 800 titles by 1980), it provides lectures, seminars and documentations, it presents in-person appearances of international major directors, and it organizes exhibitions in major Berlin museums.

Since 1971, special series have been devoted to individual countries, "schools," historical periods, genres. During the last year alone, these included: Soviet comedies of the Eighties; a Straub-Huillet Retrospective; A Week of the Political Refugee; Mike Kuchar; Elisabeth Bergner; the British Free Cinema; Susan Sontag; Cinema Nuovo; Films by Women (including Yvonne Rainer, Maya Deren, and Dorothy Arzner); and a Retrospective of the Yiddish Cinema (extending beyond Maurice Schwartz and Molly Picon to Muni Weisenfeld, Paul Muni, Edgar Ulmer, *Hester Street*, and Ken Jacobs' experimental *Urban Peasants*).

The activities of this organization have led directly to the creation of the so-called Kommunal Kinos, city-financed non-profit repertory cinemas in Hamburg, Frankfurt, and other major German cities. In 1971, the Forum received a special award from Fipresci, the official organization of international film critics. Publication has begun of important, otherwise unavailable screenplays. There is the regular exhibition of international Super-8 and video productions and a new annual series, History of Film in 150 Films. 1980 brings a significant further extension: the presentation of Forum programs and series at other international film festivals, cinemathèques and Goethehouses; in May 1981, a special homage to the Forum is presented at the Cinemathèque Française in Paris.

The scope of the Forum's programming is so broad it could be mistaken for eclecticism. Instead, it is inclusive as regards tendencies, styles, and genres, yet subject to an informed selection process of both the best and most interesting. Simultaneously, the focus of the enterprise, thematically and aesthetically, is political: films for the welfare of the polis; films for change—a necessity if we are to survive. ❀

Further information: Friends of the German Cinemathèque, 1 Berlin 30, Welsersstrasse 25, Germany.

# The 15th International Tournée of Animation



The latest and best of international animation from all over the world. A sixteen-film package including Cannes Film Festival Winner, HARPYA from Belgium; Academy Award Nominees DREAM DOLL (from Britain) and IT'S SO NICE TO HAVE A WOLF AROUND THE HOUSE (from the US); Annecy Film Festival Grand-Prix Winner, APRES LA VIE (from the National Film Board of Canada).

A feature-length program available for rental from:

*Film Wright*

4530 18th Street  
San Francisco, Calif. 94114  
(415) 863-6100

## COLLECTOR SWEATSHIRTS AND TEES FOR MOVIE LOVERS



Trens: "Long live the young Muse, Cinema, for she possesses the mysteries of a dream and allows the unreal to become real."  
— Jean Cocteau



**Tee-Shirt of the Month: BYE BYE BRAZIL,** Full-color on white — exclusive tee from Carlos Diegues' enchanting new film, a carnival of color.

All-cotton designer silkscreened tees. **Cocteau** (navy or black); **Hitchcock** (wheat or black); **Rathbone's Sherlock Holmes** (3 colors on tan); **The Stunt Man** (6 colors on white); **Happy Birthday Garbo** (navy); **Skating Chaplin** (5 colors on yellow or white). Also avail. but not illustrated: **Phantom of the Opera** (2 colors on wheat or white); **7th Seal** (navy on lt. blue or silver on black). S(34-36), M(38-40), L(42-44), XL(46-48), \$9.95. **Sweatshirts:** (white or black only), \$14.95. **Unisex French-cut polycotton tees:** S(30-32), M(34-36), L(38-40), XL(42-44), \$9.95 Add 75¢/shirt post. & hdlg. (\$1.50 Canada) 3 or more — add 50¢/shirt. Cal. res. add 6% tax. Wholesale inquiries invited.

LITERA-TEE SHIRT CO. Dept. FC 4 Box 480469 Los Angeles, California 90048

