

QXQX: Do you find any kind of strong connection between your music and your films?

Snow: Well, me.

QXQX: But do you find that there's an extension, like you can't get one out of the other?

Snow: Yeah, that's true. They really are different in some ways, on the other hand there's 5 people in the group and I'm 1/5 of the decisions that are made to make the music what it is and you just have to fight your way through it and try to... I mean it's really fantastic really, it's really a kind of social kind of thing, but in the playing, in my playing I use everything that I know and I learn also about certain kinds of situations, aesthetic, or sound situations, so it's like, it's a performance thing, it's an active use of whatever I've learned from doing any of the things I've learned. We tape everything and we all try to listen to all the tapes as much as possible because that's one of the ways that we find out from the outside what it is that we've done and if certain things really knock you out you try to make that happen again in some ways and it keeps growing in that way.

[tape ends]

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SURVIVAL IN THE INDEPENDENT-NON-COMMERCIAL-AVANT-GARDE- EXPERIMENTAL-PERSONAL-EXPRESSIONISTIC FILM MARKET OF 1979

by Larry Jordan

“Museums are just a lot of lies, and the people who make art their business are mostly imposters.”

--Pablo Picasso, from A Statement, 1935

“The bourgeois do not hesitate to affirm that their social order has permitted an extraordinary cultural development and that art, among other things, has conquered unexplored regions until then apparently inaccessible to the mind... The very special value accorded to art by the bourgeoisie brutally unmask the vanity of its aesthetic concepts erected under the pressure of class interests totally foreign to cultural preoccupations.

“The ruse consists essentially of warping the normal relationship between man and the world so that it is no longer possible to use the object for itself but always for motives perfectly foreign to it: A diamond is desired not for its intrinsic properties--its only its only authentic qualities--but because, being expensive, it confers on its owner a kind of superiority over his fellow man and constitutes a concrete expression of social inequality...

“Things are no different in art. Capitalist hypocrisy, always refusing to take a thing for what it is, lends to art the characteristics of a superior activity, although it lacks any resemblance to man's general activity. While usually man MAKES something, accomplished some task within an ordinary range, the middle-class artist claims to EXPRESS elevated sentiments

relevant only to himself. Here bourgeois individualism is pushed to the extreme, that individualism which isolates men and permits each one to consider himself superior to his fellow men with whom he has no real contact."

--Rene Magritte. L'Art Bourgeois. London Bulletin, 1939

During the late 1950's and throughout the 60's American experimental film movements paralleled the general political and social movements of the country at large with its counter-cultural, anti-establishment ties and its shock tactics aimed at middle-class values. Along with this sociological alignment, the American avant-garde film movement relinquished, by and large, any claim to aristocratic financial support, choosing to attempt a people's art movement, which in most cases sought support from its own audience. This does not imply that no college funds or private donations ever reached filmmakers' pockets, or that no cinemathèque had its private patrons. But overall, individual ticket sales at cinema clubs, college organizations and museums paid exhibitor's expenses and film rentals of "underground" 16mm films.

This situation of "people-support" was an attempt, unknowingly, to institute a popular art support system more near to the "object-for-what-it-is" concept of the foregoing Magritte statement, and to by-pass the museums and art dealers condemned by Picasso in 1935.

This system, in the late 1970's, has all but failed.

Even though it has been buoyed up by public grants to filmmakers and film organizations, the American Avant-garde film movement is floundering for lack of an audience sufficient to support it; and though far from going under, it has certainly failed to fulfill the expectations of the 60's.

It is not mere coincidence that the sagging of the independent film movement parallels the 70's return of youth to the bosom of "The System." Students in these times want and demand to be trained not for idealistic purposes, but to take their places within a social order they have chosen not to fight, if not to condone. The transition period began with the concept of "changing the system from within". One rarely hears about changing the system in America at all anymore. Even the remnants of the non-commercial film movement, though ailing, have very little desire to change. And the "underground" aspect of the 16mm expressionist film movement has entirely disappeared along with the existence of any really significant counter-culture element.

The social tendencies of the 70's have effectively destroyed a people-supported film-art movement. In the present mood of conservatism the "people" wish more and more to identify with the establishment, the System, with success. This leaves any counter-culture element virtually defenceless, since the System (not the government, which has almost become a counter-culture element itself) is embraced by so many of the people. Today the Establishment is in a position to simply approve counter-culture and absorb or neutralize it. That is why the glamor of the Hollywood story-film has recaptured the imaginations (certainly the attentions) of the young people who once delighted in the irreverencies of the underground film. In the 60's the underground film spoke to and reflected the post-dadaist tendencies of youth.

On reflection it can be seen that it was not an American public who abandoned support for the avant-garde film. During the 60's the support was not for art: it was not even for avant-garde film. It was for a form of social change coincidentally advocated by the "underground" or counter-cultural film.

This social movement has had its effect and is over.

Times move on. In the late 1970's we are faced with an entirely different situation. Many experiments have been tried to establish new support systems for that part of the avant-garde film movement which remains intact. However, hundreds of new films and filmmakers join the ranks each year (from the film schools), and the attempts have been sporadic and decentralized. None of the more recognized filmmakers who emerged from those movements of the 1960's now make a living from the rental or sale of their works, exclusively, whereas the top painters and sculptors do.

Today's filmmakers in the U.S. make films and pay their food, utility and mortgage bills by a complicated combination of:

- Teaching
- Grants (public and private)
- Tours and appearance
- Film rentals
- Print sales
- Commercial film jobs
- Private patronage (rare)
- Non-film-related employment

This is a very time- and energy-consuming system. With even the best-known film artists in the United States unable to make a living at what they do best, there is a lid on the top of this profession which is as firmly sealed down today as it was 20 years ago--a lid which does not exist for painters, sculptors, print-makers and others in the plastic arts. These artists, or those at the top of their profession, have achieved one very important result unavailable to personal filmmakers: the opportunity to work full-time in their studios, and get paid for it.

Of course the reason painters and sculptors get paid for their work is that they give up their paintings and sculptures. They sell them, with the knowledge they will make many others. I am told by painters that the sale of work not only frees them from time-consuming business dealings, but it makes a very healthy draw on their sources of creativity: new paintings are drawn forth by the sale of older canvases. Not so with filmmakers.

Film, by its very nature, seems to cry for duplication. And film exhibition seems to call forth a proliferation of prints from any given original. Avant-garde filmmakers have tried to buck the art system, become independent of it too. These and other highly emotional reasons have caused the American avant-garde filmmaker to shy away from any serious consideration of selling originals of films. Many who began as painters say they became filmmakers for the very reason that they did not want their works bought by one private collector and hidden away from sight. To suggest to most filmmakers that they sell an original film will bring on a reaction similar to suggesting they sell a child. It is a more or less violent reaction implying a certain degree of immorality on the part of the one making such a suggestion.

Yet filmmakers seem to accept this business of scattered film rentals, prints being eaten alive in deteriorating school projectors, teaching a few days a week, running here or there for an appearance (most of the money going to the airlines), trying to get a grant every three or four years--and work on their films--year after year. Perhaps it is just this disruptive, distractive and martyrly system which is responsible for so many disjointed and unsatisfactory avant-garde films. That element of primary concentration on the work at hand, which commercially financed films do at least have, is almost entirely lacking in the production of personal films. True artists

will work under any circumstances, from Van Gough to Picasso. But one imagines a society which pays its artists for honest labor, just as it does its other professionals.

The question is: Who will pay the film artists?

It is quite possible, even probable, that avant-garde filmmakers will never be paid properly for their work so long as they insist on remaining aloof from the support systems of the established arts—that is, from galleries, museums and private collectors.

When one looks closely (and honestly) at who has always supported “personal” art since its emergence in the Renaissance, one finds that it is private wealth. The fact that I do not like that statement does not make it less true. The church has supported church art. With some exceptions, the state has supported approved social art. Private patrons and collectors have supported “personal” art. Possibly wealthy persons imagine there is an affinity between their own individualism and that of an artist who is concerned principally with his or her inner world of images, allegories and metaphores.

And it is at this precise moment that one must face the general outcry against “elitism” in art. In 1939 Magritte condemns an individualism “which isolates men and permits each one to consider himself superior to his fellow men with whom he has no real contact”. (One wonders if this view still remained in his later years.) Be that as it may, does Humanity benefit from the existence of “personal” art, or does it not? If it does, then it should be supported and the cry of “elitism” abandoned. If not, then “personal” art should be abandoned and all the Magittes, Ernsts and de Chiricos junked.

One suspects that it is not so much a questioning of the value of personal statements by artists as the aura of inaccessibility of their work which brings on the cries of “elitism”. (I am speaking of other than the suppression of personal statements by artists in a totalitarian society where “elitism” is but a thinly disguised tool for enforced conformity.) This apparent inaccessibility in the traditional media such as painting and sculpture consists both in the obscurity of the subject matter and in the castle-like enclosures of museums and private collections surrounding many of the works. All this tends to exclude the man and woman on the street from a kind of secret society of art heirophants, and to create a social division as described by Magritte.

But what if there is a natural, even evolutionary meaning to the process of “personal” art? What if it were a first rudimentary step toward the abolition of the very thing it seems to engender, namely class superiority and lack of contact between human beings? And what if it were so revolutionary as to be a step toward the complete abolition of all “government”?

If this were indeed the motivating drive behind all “personal” art then those producing it, the artists, would be justified in keeping it alive--not to enhance the false “superiorities” of the wealthy, but by using private wealth (as they have always done) for their own purposes so long as private wealth exists and is willing to patronize them.

If there really is a quality beneficial to all Humanity concealed in “personal” art, then it is as well for artists to receive a portion of that wealth as for it to go to the manufacturers of expensive automobiles, to criminal gambling interests, or to governmental tax structures which in turn pour it into the pockets of munitions makers. When private wealth no longer exists, we will speak of other means of support for artists. But so long as leftist factions regard “personal” art as “elitist” and refuse to support it, we must use the bourgeois system that exists. It is not the specific duty of artists to abolish private wealth. Nor does the sale of an artist’s work to a wealthy collector in any way condone the principle of private wealth: it merely makes use of that person’s wealth for the pursuit of cultural aims, which is as it should be.

In searching for this concealed quality of benefit to all Humanity, one imagines a world in which each man and woman could make available to every other man and woman pictures of their inner lives. In such circumstances it is hard to believe that fear, isolation and alienation could continue, but would drop away in the evolutionary process like obsolete organs of the human body. Fear having been abolished through individual openness, the dominance of one human being over and other becomes unnecessary, ridiculous even. One imagines a world composed entirely of part-time personal artists, devoid of “geniuses”--those who have led the way--in which no power trips are necessary, and in which each human being looks into every other human being’s inner, personal world without fear, admires it, cherishes it, but is never forced to obey or imitate it--a world in which every human being has developed the capacity to rely on its own inner strength, not in order to hide or escape into it, but in order to share it, to make it available to every other interested human being, but never to force it on another. One foresees a world composed of equal but individual strengths rather than a collective, single ideological strength.

And this, I believe, is essentially what “personal” artists are unconsciously trying to bring about, driven by powerful evolutionary forces toward a natural rather than an artificial equality. It is really only the system of “geniuses” that is “elitist”, not the process of personal art. We are growing out of our primitive “ant-like” collectivism into a new individualized collectivism, one that will have neither a socialist nor a fascist orientation, and certainly not a capitalist one. This society, in which personal film will certainly play a great part, must exist on individual orientation. Masses will look even to fascism for external orientation, because human beings must have orientation in order to have meaning--real or artificial--to their lives. This is basic.

In order to move smoothly toward such a goal it is essential for artists to drop their paranoid defense of one school, style or form of art. To combat, for instance, “structural” film, or to defend it inordinately, only adds to the confusion and delays the process of wide-spread individual orientation, through personal art, as a means to social equality. “Isms” will fall away in time if we are willing to drop the truly self-indulgent part of personal art-- insistence that only our own aesthetic ideas are valid-- and concentrate on its strengths, which I take to be its infinite variety and its revelatory function.

Personal art by-passes the “how” of feeding the world and goes directly to the “why”. It is vitally important to know that we can live equally without fear or external control before we are motivated to devise the exact systems necessary to provide for our physical needs. In my view it is exactly a hint of this knowledge that personal art provides.

Though the wealthy have a history of supporting personal art, personal art is not a concomitant result of aristocratic decadence. Personal art has always duped and played upon the vanities of the powerful because there was nowhere else to go. When a socialistic state will support personal art with a greater commitment than it will support a military, I will favor that system as a temporary measure, until the totally revolutionary consequences of personal art are fully understood, and those consequences in turn supersede the socialist state itself.

Meanwhile, I suggest that if avant-garde filmmakers want to be able to get back to their work full-time, they had better reconcile themselves to doing what every painter has to do: sell their work.

Admittedly, the system of art-selling depends on overvaluing a work of art, elevating it to the “genius” category, and proclaiming it a safe “investment”. It is important for blood money, amassed by exploitation, to be transmuted into peaceful purposes through art. So long as artists themselves realize the long-term goal and do not fall for the “genius” business, no harm is really

done in selling art at high prices. So long as wealth exists there is no reason why artists should not have enough of it to continue their work in peace and with dignity. This is exactly what any professional expects and deserves.

Purchase of film prints has never greatly interested art collectors for the very reason that a print is of no real value as an investment. Only one-of-a-kind originals (from which the collector can make prints or not) have saleable value--saleable, that is, at prices which will be of any sort of real help to the film artist. Progressive collectors will collect films (as they do Video) under the right conditions. Perhaps when the time is right the withdrawn Warhol originals will be for sale.

My first round of investigation among collectors elicits the following objections to buying films as "collectables":

1. "Why buy an original?" says one. I would inherit the filmmakers' headaches: making prints, renting the films, replacing damaged footage, etc."

I see this as a very superficial objection, and one easily overcome when collectors are made aware that it is exactly the old model of distributing films that they are looking at. Why should they try to rent their films any more than their paintings? They will eventually be asked to loan film prints for "film concerts" and festivals, as they do paintings for exhibitions. When they sell the film original is when their monetary gain will be realized. The model is exactly the same as for any other form of plastic art.

2. Another collector objects to sitting guests down in a dark room and "forcing" them to look at a new acquisition, in which they may or may not be interested. While with a painting or sculpture they can walk around it, talk about it, go to another room if it does not interest them.

At first glance, this may seem like a superficial objection; but it is not. It is a very real one, a human, social one. But this is a technical problem and can be overcome with daylight presentation rear projection. Film prints in Super-8 cartridges can almost eliminate a non-technical collector's loading headaches.

There would be other problems which analysis and technical application could also overcome.

The only major difficulty I find is on the side of the filmmakers themselves. As I have mentioned earlier, suggesting they sell an original is like suggesting they sell part of their soul, or at the very least one of their children. Emotional objections will be the hardest to overcome, because an emotional objection stops further thinking. Or else it will use other supposedly "practical" considerations to reinforce it.

A film seems very fragile and vulnerable to its maker. The fear of its mistreatment is great. "Will a collector muddle it in some incompetent, non-caring lab after all the problems and headaches I've nursed it through?" Again, it is a technical problem. Why cannot filmmakers remain consultants to collectors and educate them in the protection of their investment, which I'm sure they'd be very appreciative of? Wealthy collectors can afford, possibly already have, humidity controlled bank vaults, in which to store originals. How many originals have we seen lost by fire, nomadic tendencies of filmmakers, lab casualties, etc., while in the possession of filmmakers themselves? Collectors who paid handsomely for a film might give it a better protection than the filmmaker. Filmmakers often lose interest in early films, for instance. Collectors would not. And who, by the way, is presently doing anything to preserve the American Avant-garde films of the 50's and 60's? A few black and white negatives have been

put aside by Anthology Film Archives and that is about all. Placing value on film originals and their subsequent sale would go far in this direction alone.

As to exposure, it is true that those films sold to collectors would probably not be available for rental to (and destruction by) every film society and college group in the country. But people who own expensive art usually find very effective ways to show it off. Participation at film festivals would surely remain viable, perhaps under the filmmaker's supervision. And the distinct new possibility of "film concerts", handled by professionals, arranged by museums, etc.--film concerts similar in tone to classical music concerts--arises. I find this an exciting possibility.

Later I will discuss what I take to be the advantages gained by young filmmakers, cinematheques, and other showcases for experimental films.

In respect to the soul-wrenching act of parting with one's work: First of all, it is not necessary--or even possible--to sell everything. Nobody does, or hardly anybody. But painters, whose tradition goes back to the caves of pre-history, have grown up somewhat more than filmmakers in this respect. Filmmakers, whose entire history goes back only to Edison (or Lumiere, whichever you prefer) have not yet come to realize that it is possible to be a professional artist and in no way become a "sell-out" to popular taste. (Even now, under the film rental system, filmmakers are constantly tempted to make more and more "rentable" films. On the other hand, collectors tend to acquire the more individualized and distinctive works--those works not usually recognized by the public at large. But it is amazing how soon the public appears when it comes to understand that a work of art is valuable.)

Another serious problem that has grown up with the avant-garde film movement is the identification the filmmakers now have with theaters, cameras, equipment, audiences and the whole mystique of the film world. But I suspect that most, once they overcame their fears about the security and availability of their work, would just as soon see their work in museums as in classrooms and college auditoriums.

Then we have the word, 'filmmaker' itself and that identification. To say that we are not artists (elitist connotations), but 'just filmmakers', places us in that old and useless competition with theatrical filmmaking. It also relegates us to the constant frustration of dwindling audiences who don't know or understand or respect us. Occasionally curiosity brings out an audience for experimental films at a theatre. When that audience discovers there is more "entertainment" at the commercial theater, they fall into the common misconception that experimental films aren't much good, and usually don't bother to return. At least at a classical concert one knows about what to expect.

It is sad that placing a money value on a work of art elevates it to respect. But this is true. (I have not given up on trying to educate a broader public to avant-garde film, but I do not expect them, as I once did, to support it.) At present audiences who do come to avant-garde film showings somehow cannot value the films very highly for the very reason that the filmmaker always owns the films. The subtle, but never-missed implication, is that if nobody else wants to own them, they're not worth much, not important, just a passing phenomenon. This is a poor position to be in when the films have cost so much and taken such a long time to make.

But film artists, in my view, have been too long intimidated by their own counter-cultural identifications on the one hand and fear of the art "establishment" on the other. While this mistrust is natural in a young artist, it becomes highly unnecessary in a mature one, and has put avant-garde filmmakers in a very isolated position today.

Maturity is one of the most difficult problems facing the avant-garde film artists today-- or rather the lack of it. I am speaking of the infighting among filmmakers themselves. I have seen more alienation result from public speeches made by filmmakers, condemning other filmmakers, than by the films themselves. Audiences who hear harangues directed at colleagues perceive filmmakers as immature, paranoid children--another reason not to take them seriously or value their works. (Incidentally, from my own experience I have found that one of the primary reasons governments cite in refusing to give more money to independent filmmaking is what they call a 'lack of seriousness' on the part of the filmmakers. They are referring to the constant bickering and squabbling that goes on between rival film cliques. Of course the filmmakers are under the strong illusion that they are being serious and carrying the banner of the One True Art Form when they defend themselves and their group.) In the United States this disease manifests itself primarily in individual filmmakers taking pot shots at each other, while in Europe, particularly in France, it is the immaturity of factionalism and political intrigue among groups of filmmakers.

But once filmmakers--film artists--adopt the broader view of the need and desirability for as many different forms of personal film as there are individuals making them, these problems will be relieved. I have seen this factionalism grow in America in direct proportion as the audiences dwindled and the showcase facilities dried up (in the last five years). I have observed that in France established filmmakers fight to keep new filmmakers from moving in on their already very small territory. It is like overpopulation and too little food. The rats begin to fight. And altruistic principles go for very little when one's very livelihood is threatened. It would be well, in my view, not to take the various "schools" of filmmaking too seriously. We must beware! There are all the signs that the fanatical conversion to, or hatred of "Structuralism" can have the devastating effects of religious warfare. No one wins. Everyone lies bloody and defiled.

Once film artists admit that they are just visual-sound artists who happen to work with the medium of film rather than paint and canvas or some other, and give up the illusion that they work harder, have more difficulties and expenses, and are a special "upper class" of the art world, martyrs all, they can once again have access to money for themselves, their films and their children that will just be spent elsewhere, and for possibly less cultural purposes. Access to every support system available--left-wing, right-wing, or center--goes hand in hand with the maturation of film and film artists.

I think that if several small groups of recognized filmmakers were to form "stables" of artists willing to sell originals of their shorter works, handled by professional art dealers willing to work with the collectors and the filmmakers to solve problems that the lid could be blown off the top of this pressure cooker where there are too many filmmakers, too many films and nowhere for young filmmakers to go.

It would certainly be a first step.

If film became valuable through purchase of originals, the intensity of interest centering on cinemathèques and promising younger filmmakers could only increase. The entire field would once again open. I am convinced that the old models are worn out and no longer serve us, but also that our traditional showcases need not be abandoned. They would function much as they do now, but with renewed interest and appreciation and respect.

The second step would be to re-activate the traditional militancy of the avant-garde film movement to force an awareness among all museums of modern art that the situation as regards film art and artists has changed. No museum should be allowed to feel adequate unless they

have an active film exhibition and acquisition program handled by a film curator who has more than superficial knowledge of personal film and filmmakers.

With the first sale of a five minute film original for \$10,000 or more the face of the art world would be changed overnight. Film would be a valuable commodity, which at present it is not. And no one could ever shrug it off again.

From *The Cinemanews*, 79.5-6:

Peter Seaton HOW TO READ II
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FILM SYNTAX

by Warren Sonbert

This is a potential shot sequence for a film that I'm working on now. I'll list 5 or 6 shots, and describe them. Shot A is a priest in a tent at an ethnic Filipino festival, held in Dolores Park (S.F.) a couple of weeks ago. It's very dark in the middle of the frame; he's sitting down towards the back and he's eating. In the midground, in front of him, are a pair of hands, exchanging money, paying for food. So the hands themselves have a dehumanized feeling because they're detached from any figure we might see. And I think the components of this shot put forward the idea of the greed of organized religion, the Church bloated, stuffing itself, in very conventional cliched terms.

Shot B is a sort of neutral shot: a band of gleaming light on water, moving in contrast to the preceding still shot. It's abstract: water, light. These neutral shots, of which you saw a lot in the last film (*DIVIDED LOYALTIES*) are like after-dinner sherbets, there to cleanse the palate before the next more highly charged image.

The next shot, C. On the left foreground, a little girl is dressed as an angel; it's Halloween in New York. She's got a full set of wings, halo, silk white tape, the works. And she's blond. Her mother is bending over her to tie a bow around her neck. Then on the right back middleground is an old man, gnarled, pushing himself along in a wheelchair. Perhaps an alcoholic, certainly at the end of his rope. The girl is oblivious to his presence; she's looking in the other direction. She's very smug and content; there's a scowl on the old man's face. We have a series of contrasts here, all within the same frame: old/young: she just beginning life, in perfect health, protected by her mother, angel tending angel/he's alone, isolated. At the same time, because they're in the same frame, instead of reinforcing shot A (the bogusness of organized religion), it