

UNIV. OF MD BALTIMORE COUNTY



1429 02449561 0



PN  
1995.9  
E96  
A12  
1982

10 YEARS OF LIVING CINEMA

PN  
1995.9  
E96  
A182  
1982

PROGRAM	2
NOTES ON THE FILMS AND PERFORMANCES	3
LIST OF DISTRIBUTORS	38
GESTURALISM AND THE FILMS OF KEN ROSS Jacqueline Austin	39
BARBARA LATTANZI: NOTES ON THREE WORKS Tom Brener	42
ROBERT BREER: <i>FUJI, 77, LMNO AND T.Z.</i> Fred Camper	44
A PHILOSOPHICAL POSTSCRIPT TO THE WORK OF MARTHA HASLANGER Raymond Foery	46
SOUND OF MIND: ON IIMURA'S <i>24 FRAMES PER SECOND</i> Larry Gottheim	49
PETER VON ZIEGESAR'S <i>ALCHEMY OF THE WORD</i> R. Greenwald	52
LOOKING BACKWARD: KEN JACOBS PRESENTS THE PAST Tom Gunning	53
NOTES ON FILMS BY DAN EISENBERG, FRANKLIN MILLER, PETER GIDAL AND JIM JENNINGS Vincent Grenier	56
DREAMS DIE HARD: FICTION AND REALITY OBSERVED Martha Haslanger	58
CHARLES WRIGHT'S <i>SORTED DETAILS</i> Marjorie Keller	60
STAN BRAKHAGE'S <i>MURDER PSALM</i> Marie Nesthus	61
BARRY GERSON'S <i>INVERSION</i> Stuart Liebman	63
ERNIE GEHR'S RECENT WORK John Pruitt	65
YVONNE RAINER'S <i>FILM ABOUT A WOMAN WHO...</i> B. Ruby Rich	68
CHANTAL AKERMAN'S <i>JEANNE DIELMAN</i> Andrea Weiss	71

*Coordinating Editor:*  
Vincent Grenier

*Editors:*  
Kathy Dieckmann (program notes), John Pruitt  
(essays)

*Editorial assistance:*  
Kathleen Baum, Hank C. Linhart, Michael Martin,  
Ken Ross

*Layout:*  
Vincent Grenier, Ken Kobland

*Cover:*  
Esther Shatavsky

This catalogue is a special issue of NO ROSE magazine,  
Renée Shafransky, Managing Editor

© by Collective for Living Cinema, Inc. 1982. No material  
may be reproduced without written permission from the pub-  
lisher. Published by the Collective for Living Cinema, 52  
White St., New York, NY 10013

ISBN 0-910351-00-7

Printed by Chicago Books and typeset by V. in the U.S.A.

Distributed by New York State Small Publications, P.O. Box  
1264, Radio City Station, New York, NY 10019

The Collective for Living Cinema is funded by the New York  
State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) and the National Endow-  
ment for the Arts (NEA). This publication was funded in part  
by the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines.



# 10 YEARS OF LIVING CINEMA

## DATE DUE

APR 01 1991		
FEB 28 1994		
MAR 29 1994		
JMBC RTD APR 08 1994		
OCT 19 1994		
NOV. 12 1994		
JMBC RTD NOV 21 1994		
APR 01 1996		
JMBC RTD AUG 16 1996		
APR 01 2000		
JMBC JUN 28 2002 RECEIVED		
GAYLORD		PRINTED IN U.S.A.

## FOREWORD

The Collective for Living Cinema celebrates the beginning of its tenth year with a special program of films and para-cinema events that reflects the programming the Collective has stood for since its inception.

Since 1973 the Collective has emerged as one of the most active showcases for current avant-garde cinema. This period is relatively diverse and relatively undocumented, particularly new works by new filmmakers. This retrospective presents an occasion for an assessment.

During the selection, there was a desire to give the emphasis to films rather than filmmakers, i.e. as much as possible, the choice of the film was not effected by the reputation of the filmmaker. While it was an important concern that most tendencies be represented, we thought the selection should not only be a sampling, but, in some measure, really present what was valuable to us. The selection is not so much a definitive statement as it is one which represents our particular perspectives.

The films were chosen from those which were shown in New York City from 1973 on, no matter where they were made. The retrospective includes films that were shown in other showcases as well. Films which had been shown publicly before 1973, and which were later altered and redated, are not included.

### Programming:

Vincent Grenier, Ken Ross, Renée Shafransky, Andrea Weiss

In consultation with Kate Flax, Bette Gordon, Ken Kobland, Richard Levine, Andrea Sacker, Lushe Sacker, Esther Shatavsky, Phil Weisman

### Special thanks to:

Anthology Film Archives, Belgian Consulate, Ted Barber, Castelli-Sonnabend Tapes and Films Inc., Downtown Review, Raymond Foery, Sally Ferguson, Film-makers' Cooperative, Ingrid Scheib-Rothbart of the Goethe Institute, Ann Knutson, Terry Lawler, Karen Mason, Museum of Modern Art, PIPR (Public Interest-Public Relations), Yvonne Rainer, Serious Business Co., Mark Swartz, Young Filmmakers Foundation Speakers Bureau and all the participating filmmakers.

A project of the Collective for Living Cinema Council

# October

Events begin at 8 pm

## Friday, 1

Richard Levine, **In The Eye Of The Child**  
Marjorie Keller, **Daughters Of Chaos**  
Peter Von Ziegesar, **Alchemy Of The Word**  
Betzy Bromberg, **Petit Mal**  
Helene Kaplan, **Rose And Seymour At Home In Queens**  
Manuel DeLanda, **The Itch-Scratch-Itch Cycle**

## Saturday, 2

Ken Kobland, **Frame**  
Ken Ross, **Blessed In Exile**  
Vicki Peterson, **Parallels**  
Bette Gordon, **Exchanges**  
Vivienne Dick, **She Had Her Gun All Ready**  
Brian Hansen, **Speed Of Light**

## Sunday, 3

Myrel Glick, **Sentiment**  
Bruce Conner, **Valse Triste**  
Bob Fleischner, **Max's Shirt**  
Kurt Kren, **Tree Again**  
Tim Kennedy, **Suspended Animation**  
Dan Barnett, **White Heart**

## Thursday, 7

Taka Iimura, **24 Frames Per Second**  
Esther Shatavsky, **Fishes Eddy**  
Jim Jennings, **Dispatch**  
Jim Jennings, **Counterpane**  
Phil Weisman, **nothing, but...**  
Su Friedrich, **Gently Down the Stream**  
Julian Samuel, **Formation**  
Heather McAdams, **We Hope You Enjoy This Film**  
Heather McAdams, **Scratchman**

## Friday, 8

John Knecht, **The Primary Concerns Of Roy G. Biv**  
Peter Wollen and Laura Mulvey, **Riddles Of The Sphinx**

## Saturday, 9

Gail Vachon, **Jealousy**  
Ken Kobland, **Vestibule (In 3 Episodes)**  
Richard Levine, **Falling Awake**  
Heinz Emigholz, **Arrowplane**  
Peter Hutton, **Images Of Asian Music**  
Jim Hoberman, **Mission To Mongo**

## Sunday, 10

Bob Schneider, **It's Beautiful When The Pain Stops**

## Thursday, 14

John Dunkley-Smith, **Rotunda**  
Vincent Grenier, **While Revolved**  
Vincent Grenier, **World In Focus**  
John Porter, **Cinefuge**  
John Porter, **Down On Me**  
Ellen Gaine, #3  
Warren Sonbert, **Noblesse Oblige**

## Friday, 15

Stan Brakhage, **Sincerity I**  
Stan Brakhage, **Sincerity IV**  
Stan Brakhage, **Duplicity III**

## Saturday, 16

Amy Taubin, **In The Bag**  
Leandro Katz, **Splits**  
Sharon Couzin, **Deutschland Spiegel**  
Scott and Beth B., **Letters To Dad**  
Ericka Beckman, **The Broken Rule**

## Sunday, 17

Robert Breer, **Fuji**  
Robert Breer, **77**  
Robert Breer, **LMNO**  
Ken Ross, **Crisis In Utopia**  
Klaus Wyborny, **Pictures Of The Lost Word**

## Thursday, 21

Alphons Schilling, **Binocular Works**  
Bogdan Mync, **Annuniation**

## Friday, 22

Gail Vachon, **Mary Smith**  
Yvonne Rainer, **Film About A Woman Who**

## Saturday, 23

Robert Attanasio, **Lens Sound**  
Martha Haslanger, **Frames And Cages And Speeches**  
Larry Gottheim, **Mouches Volantes**

## Sunday, 24

Peter Kubelka, **Pause!**  
Charles Wright, **Sorted Details**  
Andrej Zdravic, **Sunhopsoon**  
Chris Welsby, **Estuary**

## Thursday, 28

Ken Jacobs, **The Impossible Ch. 3, Hell Breaks Loose**

## Friday, 29

Chantal Akerman, **Jeanne Dielman**

## Saturday, 30

Cheryl Gorman, **Trail Of Dreams**  
Phil Solomon, **Passage Of The Bride**  
Roger Jacoby, **Two Portraits**  
Diana Krumins, **Divine Miracle**  
Gail Camhi, **An Evening At Home**  
Jon Rubin, **At Home And Away ... In The Late 70's**

## Sunday, 31

Bill Lundberg, **Failure**  
Anthony McCall, **Line Describing A Cone**  
Al Wong, **Shadow And Chair**

# November

## Thursday, 4

Joel Singer, **Spliced Light**  
Hollis Frampton, **Otherwise Unexplained Fires**  
Jonas Mekas, **Lost, Lost, Lost (Parts 1 & 2)**

## Friday, 5

Linda Klosky, **Aquatennial**  
Larry Gottheim, **Four Shadows**

## Saturday, 6

Vincent Grenier, **Interieur Interiors**  
George Kuchar, **Wild Night in El Reno**  
Robert Breer, **TZ**  
Aline Mayer, **XX**  
J.J. Murphy, **Print Generation**

## Sunday, 7

Stan Brakhage, **Short Films 1975, #1, 2, 3, 4, 9**  
Paul Sharits, **Color Sound Frames**  
Abigail Child, **Ornamentals**  
Abigail Child, **Is This What You Were Born For?**  
Barbara Lattanzi, **Skins**  
Vincent Grenier, **Closer Outside**  
Ernie Gehr, **Table**

## Thursday, 11

Morgan Fisher, **Projection Instructions**  
Stuart Sherman, **Tree Film**  
Stuart Sherman, **Flying**  
Stuart Sherman, **Scotty And Stuart**  
Barry Gerson, **Inversion**  
Ernie Gehr, **Eureka**  
Rudiger Neumann, **Zufalls-Stadt (Random City)**

## Friday, 12

Richard Serra, **Railroad Turnbridge**  
George Landow, **Wide Angle Saxon**  
James Benning, **One-Way Boogie Woogie**

## Saturday, 13

Ken Jacobs, **The Doctor's Dream**  
JoAnn Elam, **Rape**  
Saul Levine, **The Big Stick**  
Marjorie Keller, **Misconception**

## Sunday, 14

Henry Hills, **Kino Da**  
Gail Camhi, **Bellevue Film**  
Pat O'Neill, **Foregrounds**  
Al Berliner, **Myth In The Electric Age**  
Stan Brakhage, **Murder Psalm**  
Andre Zdravic, **Phenix**

## Thursday, 18

Dan Eisenberg, **Displaced Person**  
Henry Hills, **North Beach**  
Ernie Gehr, **Untitled**  
Ernie Gehr, **Shift**  
Paula Gladstone, **Dancing Soul Of The Walking People**

## Friday, 19

Alan Berliner, **City Edition**  
Andrew Noren, **The Adventures Of The Exquisite Corpse, Pt. III, Charmed Particles**

## Saturday, 20

Klaus Wyborny, **Six Little Pieces On Film**  
Esther Shatavsky, **Bedtime Story**  
Jim Jennings, **Leaves**  
Jim Jennings, **Wallstreet**  
Sally Potter, **Thriller**

## Sunday, 21

Ken Jacobs, **Urban Peasants**  
Franklin Miller, **Stores**  
Joe Gibbons, **Spying**



## ERNIE GEHR'S RECENT WORK

by John Pruitt

... But the most important thing about the chair is that at times I sit in it and see nothing except what is directly in front of me, a single line of sight these notes attempt to deliver to a world hungrier for them than it probably knows. Of all things, it needs most to look one way with all its eyes...

—Robert Kelly, *A Line of Sight*

I am still struggling with Gehr's latest film (UNTITLED '81) which premiered at Millenium, January 31, 1982. I sensed that most of the viewers were disappointed, perhaps even taken aback by it; for, in at least one respect, it represents a departure for the filmmaker. It's the kind of film one has only truly seen long after the screening is over and some mental effort has been brought to bear on what so deftly eluded one's expectations. Of all the Gehr films I know, I can't think of any which forces the viewer to consider the *psychological* position of the filmmaker to quite the same degree as in this particular work. One doesn't come to expect such things from Gehr, yet there it was, and my initial shock has proved quite rewarding, because it gave me new insight into his work as a whole.

The entire film appears as if it was shot from a single vantage point—most likely a second or third story apartment window overlooking a more or less typical New York City street. With a single exception (thus, in effect, reminding us of the rule), the film is comprised of close-ups, or at least medium close shots, through the use of a telephoto lens. The content of the many brief shots is deceptively familiar: pedestrians, sometimes chatting with others, often carrying groceries or inspecting pieces of fruit. We guess that the camera is positioned just above a market. From a conversation with Gehr, I got the impression that the film had been scrupulously edited and that many of those decisions were of a formal nature, but on one viewing of the film, I couldn't find a significant formal strategy, nor could I be sure that the film was not simply edited in the camera. In addition, the shots taken by themselves, do not offer the overtly rich sensuousness, especially in

terms of color, so often associated with a Gehr film. Superficially then, one could write the film off as a collection of street scenes and nothing more. The fact that such a misinterpretation can be so easily made is in itself significant.

The film opens up in meaning when one shifts one's attention to the filmmaker, voyeuristically perched in his eyrie, seeing down/out into the world below. Unlike some of Gehr's other fixed-camera-position films, we tend to reflect on the person behind the camera because here the content is really the people as individuals before the camera: their gestures, gait, facial expressions, etc. This quite vivid human presence, unaware of being photographed, reminds us of how removed the filmmaker has chosen to remain. We may even begin to search for a reason why the cameraman has stayed so detached. Is it fear? Curiously enough, the shots begin to help us on this particular point. If memory serves me correctly, all the figures in the film are elderly or at least recognizably older, and since most of the shots are close-ups, significant details reveal themselves: a slow painstaking walk, a cane, a wrinkled hand offered in sad affection, and so forth. What ultimately comes forth is an obsessively morbid vision tinged with nostalgia. As if to confirm our worst fears of loss, at the end of the film, an aged, stooped figure literally fades away as his image whites out due to camera flare.

What at first glance, then, seem like loosely recorded impressions of street life, emerge as the product of an active, intrusive vision, bent on transforming and interiorizing—significantly, as is typical in Gehr's case, all through the simplest of cinematic means, the close-up and the cut. Despite an evidently real spatial unity with its own separate integrity (an element emphasized by the fixed, removed camera), the images subtly become disconnected, free-floating signs, which, when pieced together express a painfully private vision. The close-ups are created by a telephoto lens, a device with undisguised optical characteristics that remind us of the mediation of that very lens, of the act of looking. It is simply *the look itself* which creates the close-up, and thus generates meaning. That ideally passive eye, the camera, is never really passive but always engaged because by merely getting a piece of the world through its aperture (and it will always be a piece, never the whole), it wrests meaning from the endlessly continuous flux of events before it. With camera in hand, we may attempt to step away from the world, allowing it to speak its own language to us, but we always force the world to speak *our* language. In this case, it is "framed;" and on its own terms, the world just doesn't acknowledge the validity of the frame. Because he employs a single, fixed camera position so often, almost all of Gehr's films are a great reminder of how much imaginative effort can be behind even the most apparently rudimentary decision of when and where to



turn on the camera in a so-called direct engagement with the world.

In the state of what we call for convenience "mere perception," we are already well on the way to naming, to the making of metaphors. The final flare-out of the film (a purely cinematic trope, a metaphor on vision, if you will) recalls Brakhage's mythopoeic mode. For Gehr, that last crucial shot is an oddly direct allusion, a bit of rhetoric, towards which the film has been moving all along. Piling synecdoche on synecdoche, the film closes with a much delayed and brief leap out of the real and into a purely symbolic realm, a gesture which is at one and the same time "The End." Death. Commencing with the documentation of a ruthlessly exterior space, the film very slyly and subtly deposits us into an interior one, one that, as the image flares to pure white, (to pull the words of the poet Robert Kelly only slightly out of context) "cancels any further sight, and leaves us only Vision."

In a simple and brilliant poem, "We Are Seven," William Wordsworth implies that to know death is really to know first and foremost, its name, the word "death:"

—A simple Child,  
That lightly draws its breath,  
And feels its life in every limb,  
What should it know of death?

Death is not a concrete, palpable thing, it is a concept, a product of our own self-consciousness. Strictly speaking, animals and little children cannot be said to know it. More profoundly, death is bound to the naming process itself; for, while names reveal the world, make it pregnant with meaning, they do so at a cost, the eventual stripping away of external presence, the transforming of it into something alien and interior. At the end of this internalizing process is death itself, wherein personal meaning finds a fullness, since it is the one event that belongs to us and to us alone (not to the world, not even to any other person). For the Romantics, death is an ambiguous sign for the ultimate imaginative act, for in it the exterior world vanishes altogether. As I see it, the flare-out, the final moment of Gehr's film, derives its power by shocking the viewer into an abrupt, delayed recognition of two terrible presences which have been, paradoxically, ubiquitous all along, though *unseen*: the spectre of death, and its agent—the filmmaker himself, also known as the manipulator, the revealer, the ambivalent bearer of only one true and pure vision, that of our own mortality. Here we might offer an equally ambivalent thanks.

I make no excuses for raising issues that recall the opening passages in Brakhage's *Metaphors on Vision*, that text which some might claim is all too familiar. Nowadays there is an unfortunate tendency to glibly brush Brakhage aside as if the man and his work have

been long ago superseded. It is to Gehr's credit, a testament to his conviction and high seriousness, that he realizes Brakhage still legislates certain terms within which filmmakers are forced to operate. No matter which direction a filmmaker may turn, he finds Brakhage has been there before and left his mark. The flare-out is a device with Brakhage's name written all over it. How does one use it freshly? For Brakhage the flare-out marks, among other things, the beginning of a perceptual adventure that tries to escape the mechanistic confines of the camera in conventional photography. But Gehr brilliantly turns this around and makes the flare-out signal a costly *endpoint*, a gesture he can barely face making, partly because it is also Brakhage's. This defensive reaction makes the film.

A similar case in point can be found in another recent work, UNTITLED '81 (tentatively called MIRAGE). Most of the film is comprised of horizontal bands of vivid color produced by shooting through a prism. These out-of-focus strips shift position and change hue, creating a marvelously ambiguous sense of a continual horizontal movement. The viewer cannot tell whether the camera is making a horizontal sweep of some unidentified subject or whether the subject itself is in motion. Or is the sense of movement only apparent (the "mirage" of Gehr's possible title)? In roughly the center of the film, there is an abrupt and quite shocking camera flare which injects a brief sense of *vertical* movement and provides a sense of depth to the otherwise flat image, almost as if a veil were suddenly lifted to reveal a black hole in the screen. By employing such a carefully meditated clash of visual elements, Gehr has re-seen a cliché of avant-garde filmmaking and infused it with new life. Once again, we get only *one* flare-out but it is memorable.

Charles Olson once wrote that all American writers had to confront the immensity of the American landscape and that inevitably:

Some men ride on such space, others have to fasten themselves like a tent stake to survive. As I see it Poe dug in and Melville mounted. They are the alternatives.

The gregarious, always visible Brakhage moves from coast to coast, making film after film, taking time to tame the wilderness on his Colorado mountaintop, as it were. The taciturn, urban Gehr holes up in his Brooklyn apartment, only occasionally and cautiously peeping out of his window. Unlike Brakhage, he does not write numerous manifestoes, nor does he often find himself at the center of one controversy or another. But it would be a mistake not to see that Gehr's working method has its own kind of aggression. A few people have suggested to me that the pedestrians in Gehr's recent film are Jews on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. They are at any rate recognizably Old World ethnic. Perhaps therein Gehr has found the fitting image of his own stubborn intransigence. One could al-

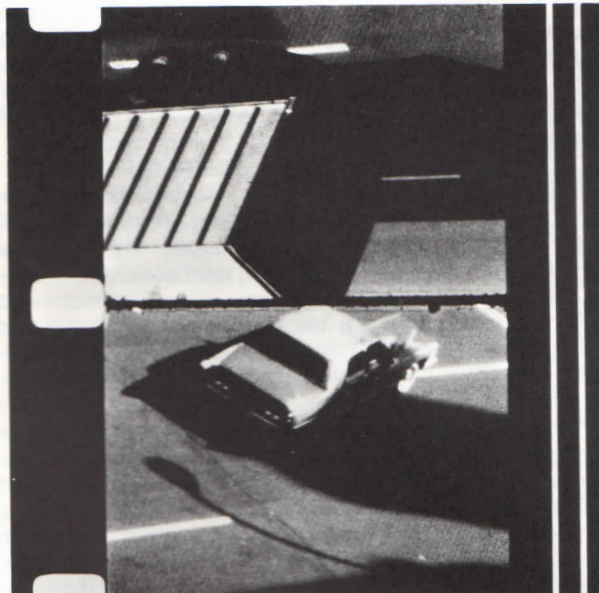


most say Gehr's films celebrate the power of inertia, for amidst a whirlwind of activity, he sets his tripod down and simply refuses to budge.

Though the "street film" (I use this designation for lack of a title) may not be one of Gehr's most memorable films, I do feel that my extended analysis of its circumstances sheds light on Gehr's films in general, because in it we have his situation literally spelled out for us: the filmmaker who is intent upon remaining (or more accurately *must* remain) hidden from the world. In Gehr's other films we might call it a studied impersonality, in which the subjective vision is masked, usually by a purely physical or mechanistic aspect of the camera or film, e.g. emulsion grain (REVERBERATION), the zoom lens (SERENE VELOCITY), the aperture (WAIT) etc. There is even that most remarkable of "found" films, EUREKA, in which an especially quibbling mind would insist that Gehr is not present at all. But he most emphatically is. Indeed, EUREKA could be interpreted as yet another meditation on mortality and the ravages of time.

The apparently impersonal and objective side to Gehr's films creates a trap for the unwary, namely, that his is a decidedly intellectual cinema about cinema and nothing more. A misapprehension of this kind has given birth to a whole school of filmmaking and a body of criticism in close attendance, both of which for the most part prove embarrassing. Frankly, I can't think of anything more boring than a film merely *about* emulsion grain, image-sound relationships, or the deconstruction of the shot-countershot technique. Once in discussing a European contemporary, Gehr praised his early films, but added "and then he went structural." The last phrase he uttered *sotto voce* in the kind of tone one usually reserves for a remark like "and then he died tragically young in a car crash."

Despite appearances, Gehr's films are not made in an air of indifference. There are plenty of filmmakers who offer feeble imitations of him which lack the inspiration, the felt necessity. In trying to distinguish Gehr from his parodists, it is not simply a question of pointing to his superior skill as a technician (which he has in abundance), but also of locating his fiercely individual sensitivity. At the very least, the "street film" boldly reveals (maybe too boldly) how personal and obsessive his films have been all along. After writing a short piece on Andrew Noren, a filmmaker so outwardly different from Gehr, but with whom he shares many affinities, I kicked myself for not adding the following distinction: that the dissolution of the ego is perforce a highly ego-related enterprise. Impassivity is an *active* state, a procedure of wily evasion. One could say that a particular artist's day-to-day dealing with the world is so emotionally rich, that for protective purposes he needs to remove himself through the employment of a



from SHIFT by Ernie Gehr

so-called cold artifice. Though in his latest film, Gehr is one step removed from the street he looks down upon, across the gap that the camera creates, the most basic emotions, pity and fear, serve as a bridge and in fact create the beauty of the work. The film seems to ask at what point can the camera show us what is out there, or does it rather always show us what we want to be, or more to the point, what we fear is out there? Perhaps the outstanding characteristic of Gehr's cinema is that even the most apparently basic and mechanistic aspects of the medium have been made a part of ourselves, tools for the revelation and the expression of feeling. This is what people mean when they refer to the "purity" of a Gehr film.

The result of his painstaking purification process is that Gehr struggles to re-invent what lazier filmmakers would take for granted. The content of TABLE, a film as visceral in its effect as UNTITLED '81 (MIRAGE), is simple and banal: the filmmaker's own breakfast table. But this is a still life which is shot in an original fashion. Marking two camera positions slightly apart from one another, Gehr spent a day taking shots of only several frames in length, over and over again from each position in turn until he had 16 minutes of film. At times he employed a red filter, sometimes a blue; and sometimes no filter at all. As I see it, the result of this process is twofold. Because the table and the objects upon it continually jump back and forth across the screen in a recognizable and repeated pattern, we are paradoxically reminded of the solidity, of the very stillness of the composition. Without the almost maddening sense of movement, this stasis might have been seen but not so efficaciously *felt*. Secondly, the



red and blue filter effect, in providing a striking series of contrasts that tax the eyes (thus making them more susceptible to light), ultimately makes the shots without the filter stand out forcibly. There, the sunlight shimmers like in no other cinematic still life of which I'm aware.

Similarly, *SHIFT* builds upon the most basic of cinematic foundations, upon what amounts to a number of "shifts" that the film medium produces: the material world changed into a play of light and shadow; movement within a real continuum transformed into apparent movement on a two-dimensional plane; and visual evidence contradicted by sound. Across a flattened (and thus spatially ambiguous) diagonal composition of a city street shot from above, across a composition which may or may not be upside down (we don't know at first), cars and trucks defy logic, traffic laws and gravity, as they move backward and forward, float up, drift down, all under the will of a whimsical filmmaker. We hear parked cars rev up and pull away only to watch them as they never go anywhere. We see a truck rumble by as we hear it putter out. Another parked car "moves" across the screen to the sound of a door slam. It actually has shifted position within the frame on a cut to another camera angle. We are viewing a comedy with a modestly sublime ending: a silent, ghostly coda of cars moving on a diagonally composed split-screen, the noisy hunks of metal now dematerialized into mere gleaming patterns of light and color.

Perhaps the real joke is that like Gehr's "street film," this work was for the most part shot secretly out of an upper story window. One might guess that Gehr is terrified of automobiles, a fear this writer well understands, which cancels any hesitation I might have in relating the following story. A friend of mine once gave the filmmaker a ride to a train station. Noting that Gehr was sitting the entire way with arms extended before him, hands firmly on the dashboard, he asked Gehr if anything was wrong. Artfully shrouding any lightness of tone with a deadpan expression, the filmmaker replied, "It's alright as long as you don't mind dying." *SHIFT* is a kind of artist's revenge, another defensive gesture which is at one and the same time an ironic transforming vision. Some point to the slightness of this particular work. I prefer to point to its cleverness and humor, a characteristic not all that common in an avant garde film, incidentally, and certainly not in Gehr. The comic mode reminds us in a different manner that Gehr's mode has never been one of instruction, but always one of persuasion. □

## YVONNE RAINER'S FILM ABOUT A WOMAN WHO...

by B. Ruby Rich

Yvonne Rainer's *FILM ABOUT A WOMAN WHO...* is the fruition of the compendium of possibilities begun with her earlier film, *LIVES OF PERFORMERS*. Again in black and white, again photographed by Babette Mangolte, this film pushes even further Rainer's initial thoughts on representation, narrative, sexual relationships, and the politics of personal power manipulations. The effect of feminist thinking becomes even clearer in this work, especially as reflected in hindsight by Rainer's own remarks (in 1973) on the attraction of film over dance: that since "rage, terror, desire, conflict et al" were not unique to her experience in the way that her body had always been, now she "could feel much more connected to my audience, and that gives me great comfort." It was during this period, in fact, that a whole new audience was opening up for the work of women filmmakers, and an equally new context for their work. No longer was it sufficient to bring the brunt of film history to bear upon each individual work; new values were at stake. What Rainer was up to, after all, was the reinvention of melodrama as a genre, accented for the contemporary psyche.

This is the poetically licensed story of a woman who finds it difficult to reconcile certain external facts with her image of her own perfection. It is also the same woman's story if we say she can't reconcile these facts with her image of her own deformity... Not that it's a matter of victims and oppressors. She simply can't find alternatives to being inside with her fear or standing in the rain with her self-contempt.

Contradiction is the basic grammar of *FILM ABOUT A WOMAN WHO...*, dialectic its movement, cliché frequently its vocabulary. As always, the title is a significant indicator, for the various characters on the soundtrack are identified only as "he" or "she" while the screen offers us the actions and words of a cast of characters we can match up or discount at will. From the first opening scene, Rainer plays upon audience expectation of filmic tradition and foils its fulfillment. Even as the credits are rolling, the soundtrack sets us up with violent thunder, the cinematic code for horror-movie suspense or emotional revelation, in sardonic