

movie JOURNAL



by Jonas Mekas

Before I forget: Public Access Cable TV is having a celebration on Thursday and Saturday, July 6 and 8. At viewing centers in various places of the city you'll see works by Emshwiller (Thursday, 8.30 p. m.), the Women's Video Collective (Thursday, 1 p. m.), the Gay Revolution Video Project ("Lesbian Mothers," Thursday, 6.30 p. m.), the Film-Makers' Coop (Saturday, 10.30 a. m.)—etc., etc. With program ideas and questions call 781-9830. Some viewing centers: Riviera Bar (Sheridan Square), Automation House, Bethesda Fountain (Central Park), Union Square Park, West Side YMCA (5 East 63rd Street).

June 22: At the Kitchen. Tapes by Ernest Gusella and Ed Emshwiller. Gusella's tapes: "Garden of Venus" and "Three Short Pieces." Mostly lines and varia-

tions and combinations of lines, moving horizontally or vertically across the frame. His strength is that he's not basing movements on constant changes of lines and shapes but is working with only a few of them—a cross shape, a square shape, a rounded line. His structuring is based on repetition. Sound: electronic variations.

Ed Emshwiller's tape, "Computer Graphics 1," dated 1972. Length: 18 minutes. In the background, abstract shapes, landscape-like. In the foreground, variations on a figure, a drawing, in the early Emshwiller style. The tape was made with two computers. One controls the background, the other the foreground. Drawings and colors are controlled, in constant movement, in change. There is a touch of surrealism, because of the figure, or its fragments, reminiscent of the later De Chirico (after 1940). The activity, the colors are effective, mysterious, slightly science-fiction-like. I find "Computer Graphics 1" Emshwiller's most interesting work since "Relativity." Again, it's to Emshwiller's credit that he chose to work with few elements. In most abstract video works one gets the impression that the artist is out to demonstrate how many different forms, movements, and techniques he knows.

on projector N. One begins to fade in. Etc. Both slide projectors are perfectly synchronized, the effect is of a series of images connected with short fade-out fade-in dissolves. There are some 50 or so slides on each projector. All slides from the same action, the girl in a circle. What Denis Oppenheim did was to shoot a series of slides in a fast succession. He said he has a motorized still camera capable of six stills (slides) per second. This, of course, is the equivalent of a movie projected or shot at six frames per second. The effect of Denis Oppenheim's piece is of a slow, very controlled, minimal quality. Of course, this piece is a perfect bridge from slides to cinema; it is also a perfect piece to confuse those who are too certain about what cinema is or is not.

June 22. I attended three symposiums at the Festival of Women's Films. At all three, on various occasions, men rose up and asked questions. Almost without exception, the questions were dumb, with no point, out of context, really dumb. I came to the conclusion that serious men either agree with the women's liberation movement and sit silently, feeling no need to say anything about it, or they disagree so violently that they don't even come to women's meetings. The only ones who come and talk are weird, totally confused, totally dumb. That's my fair opinion.

June 23. At the Kitchen. Stan Vanderbeek show. "Violence Sonata," originally performed (and done) on Boston tv, transmitted on two different channels, to be watched on two tv sets.

The big question for me is this: will Stan even come out on top? For almost two decades, Stan has been engaged in mastering every possible technique and style that one can find in cinema. Straight images; animated filmed images; animated paintings and drawings; one screen; two screens, three screens; movie-dromes; computer image; newsreel footage; old movie footage; one video set, two sets; etc., etc.

The big questions is: is it possible to do a concentrated creative work and still follow and master every new technique that comes within the eye's reach? I see this as Stan's obsession, his glory, and his defeat. His work remains a process, a testing ground of various techniques and styles. As soon as he has mastered one technique and is at the point of completing something, a new technological aspect opens up, and there goes Stan. With every new technique he reworks his earlier pieces. His earlier work, in fragments and pieces, seems to reappear in his later works again and again, in different colors, shapes, or styles. There is a constant frustration of things left half-completed, half-created.

For some time, I took this constant change as an exciting way to work. But now I am beginning to doubt. My doubts come from the accumulation of frustrations. Show after show, work after work, for 15 years I have watched Stan's struggle, waiting for all the techniques and different materials, and feelings, and politics, and science, and video, and computers, and more and more to jell together. And it all jelled together, I thought, at least once, in "Newsreel of Dreams," parts One and Two. But at the Kitchen I heard Stan saying that he has eight parts, not two, of "Newsreel

of Dreams," and they should be all watched at the same time, on either eight screens or eight walls. So there he goes again, Stan, leaving me in another frustration. Maybe I should steal those two parts, before he destroys them, and watch them by myself. I really don't know what to do. A full aesthetic experience of one screen is worth 1000 half-experiences on eight screens, from where I stand.

But Stan stands somewhere else. He has been condemned to go through his own hell. He is a perfect victim of his times. Of times in transition. Of times when there is no one way of looking at anything or one way of doing anything. Times where we became conscious of too many possibilities. So he keeps going from place to place, from view to view, from style to style, from technique to technique, from frustration to frustration. No stillstand, no time to perfect anything, everything is a process toward something else. The only time when Stan's work will come to a full and round completion will be the day, far away in the future, when his beard will be all white and gray and he'll be 100 years old and won't be interested in making any movies anymore, and everything will be behind, in one clear and completed piece. Until then, we'll watch his work and we'll ask: but what about Art?