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The New Cinema. Peter Wintonik, director.

Reviewed by Alexander Soifer

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This full length documentary presents interviews with twenty independent filmmakers from all over the world, young and old, famous and known only to a narrow circle of professionals, those who spend \$40.00 to make an experimental film—and authors of 4 million dollar epics, those who would work in commercial cinema if offered and those who would not, those who are “fascinated” by Picasso, and those who call Picasso’s work “garbage.” <p> The film provides a hundred-minute dialog with a fascinating group of artists, that includes, in the order of their first appearance, Wim Wenders, Robert Young, Robert Frank, Les Blank, Mary Ellen Bute, Charlie Ahearn, Chantal Akerman, Michael Snow, Johan van der Keuken, Werner Schroeter, Paul Morrissey, Curt McDowell, Emile de Antonio, Midori Kurisaki, Chris Sievernick, Alexander Rockwell, Doris Chase, Michael Oblowitz, Jean-Marie Straub and Daniele Huilet. Interviews are accompanied by very expressive clips from the works produced by this group: “The State of Things” by Wenders, “Toute une Nuit” by Akerman, “Wilde Style” by Ahearn, “So is This” by Snow, “Hero” by Rockwell, “Electra Tries to Speak” by Chase, and others. (In fact, I chose precisely the same wonderful silent episode in a bar to show in my “European Film Directors” class what Chantal Akerman can do in one clip.) I immensely enjoyed the film, which would contribute to any college film course what no book could: a ‘live’ dialog with explorers and pioneers of cinema. <p> The group of interviewed filmmakers is diverse indeed, but they have some fundamental goals and means in common. Each filmmaker of the group strives to bring in cinema new subjects, observed with a personal vision, with a full freedom of thought and means of expression. Each filmmaker strives to expand the language of cinema. Each artist works to express himself, rather than to please the sponsor. These common aspects of this uncommon group define “the new cinema.” On the other hand, these as-

pects guarantee that a more particular, a more precise definition of the new cinema is impossible, because the new cinema is and always will be in a stage of evolutionary change. <p> All filmmakers of the group stress the distinction between their work and commercial cinema. As Michael Snow defines it: “most ‘commercial films’ are naturalistic, realistic and narrative... Basically, they all stand and fall on the belief in the realism of the image. And any questioning of that which undermines that and brings out other aspects of the medium is dangerous for commercial cinema.” <p> Some filmmakers are concerned about the dangers of ever popular television. Johan van der Keuken calls for resistance against “consumptional approach” that television spreads. Wim Wenders warns that “the language of cinema is endangered by the language of electronic images, video,” by TV aesthetics. “Television totally spoils their eyes,” Wenders says about TV and video viewers. <p> “I think it is frightening that ‘ET’ is all over the place,” Alexander Rockwell says. He admits that Spielberg’s “ET” may be not a bad film, but he sees danger in American people being indoctrinated the same ‘Big Mac’s’ way: “people are thinking the same thoughts, they are eating the same food, they are watching the same TV.” Rockwell stresses the need for more independent human beings in general, and independent filmmakers in particular. <p> Why do they make films that most likely will not make them famous, let alone rich? “I just do them because, I guess, I have to do them, because I believe in it,” Robert Frank replies, and continues: “If I didn’t believe in it, I couldn’t really do it. I do it my way. I don’t want to make compromises. I do it.” These words ring Chantal Akerman’s bell: “I even don’t choose, it’s coming, it is what I have to do.” <p> Copyright (c) 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@H-Net.MSU.EDU. <p>

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