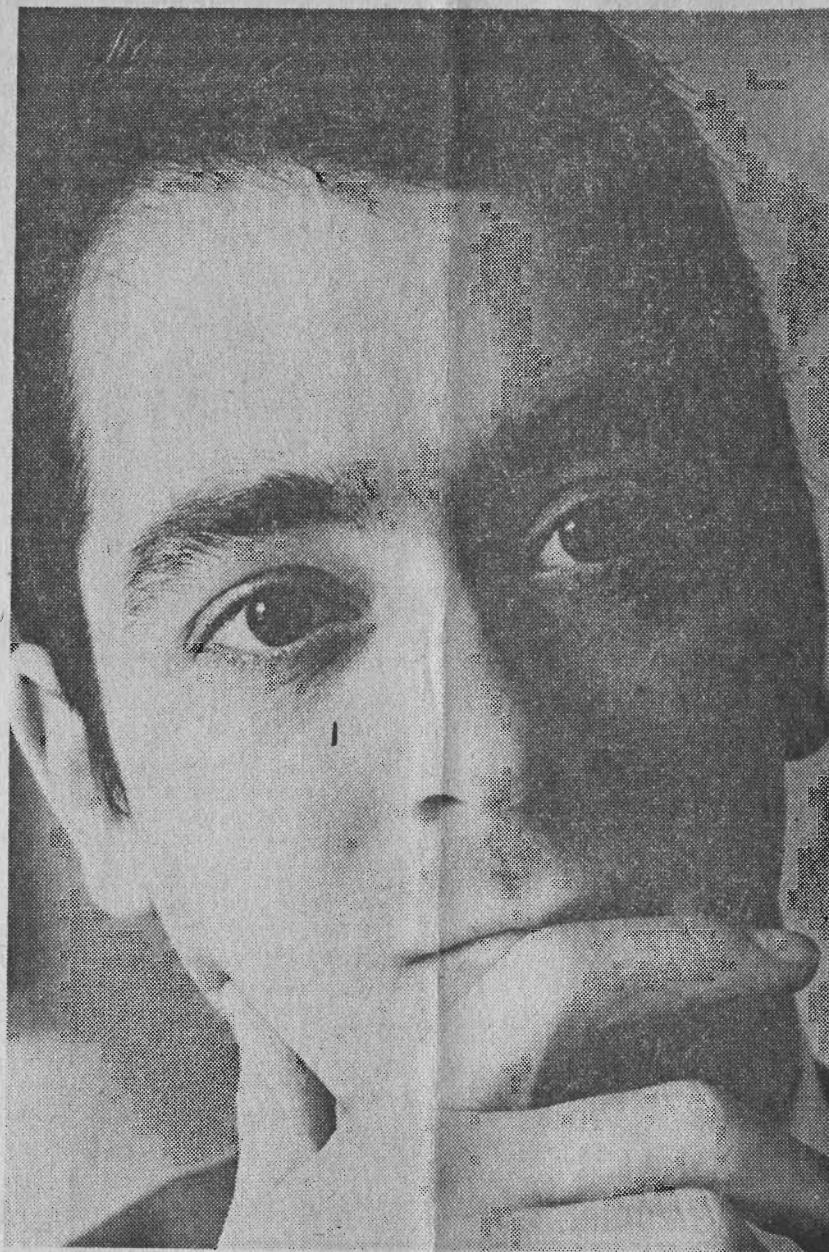




THE EYE AND THE I — a shot from Robert Beavers' "Still Light" (above), the eye of the film maker (below) and the film maker at ease (right).



Close-up



(Photo by Vin Alabiso)

A Particular Type of Film, a Particular Film Maker

By Robert Setlik

It's been a busy month for film maker Robert Beavers. Numerous trips between Boston and New York and some stops in between. Arranging screenings, setting up interviews, bargaining with art gallery owners, talking to museum directors. . . .

If Beavers were the latest hot director from M-G-M or 20th Century Fox, none of that would be news — except that the director wouldn't be doing his own leg work and wouldn't be dealing with galleries and museums. Instead, Beavers falls into the category of the underground-experimental-avant-garde (or, whatever you'll call him — he often uses the word "creative") film maker.

Quit School

Raised in Weymouth, Beavers quit Deerfield Academy when he was 16 and took a job in a New York photo lab. Shortly afterwards, he made his first film. Now 22, he's made about ten films — "The Diminished Frame," "Still Light," "From the Notebooks of. . ." etc.

However, very few people — even among those who are hip to experimental film making — are acquainted with Beavers work. He now resides in Switzerland and does most of his work in Europe. Thus, his films generally haven't been available for viewing in the United States (there's no distribution network for Beavers and his colleagues and, anyway, not a whole lot of places where their work can be shown).

But it's safe to say that Beavers is in the process of being discovered—a glowing tribute from film maker Gregory Markopoulos in the spring, 1971, issue of "Film Culture" magazine, praise from the influential Jonas Mekas in the Village Voice a couple weeks ago, and, enough of a rep to attract the likes of film writer Parker Tyler to one of the screenings last week at the Anthology Film Archives in New York.

Self Promotion

Beavers arranged the screenings and generally has generated everything else

medium and thus establish the context for criticism.

"I feel it's my responsibility to develop a vital interest in these films. . . . I'd like to find someone who has an insight into my films and who will voice it articulately. It's a zero right now — I haven't been represented at all. But I shouldn't cry too much about being ignored by people who don't know what their writing about."

Beavers shows total disdain for the critics who have put out books (there aren't too many) about the experimental film. For one, he thinks that what they say generally shows no relation to what the film maker is actually attempting to do. Another problem — a tendency to discuss the experimental film in relation to the commercial film — "it's almost a different art — it's very different from what I do."

And, more recently, a tendency to consider the experimental film under the category of "art", as mobile paintings of sorts. Recently, the influential "Art Forum" magazine just devoted a full issue to such experimental film makers as Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton among others. Art galleries are suddenly hot after the experimental film — in fact, a couple in Boston recently held film showings. Before long it's likely that galleries will be establishing absurd prices for prints of films as they now do for paintings.

Dead Ends

"It's just as sure death in one direction as the other," says Beavers. "It's not art — it has its own vitality. I'm not an artist and I don't bring their problems to the medium. I think there's a tremendous amount of vitality lost in doing this — in approaching this type of film making through an art background like Snow and Frampton. I think what I do should be treated as a particular type of film by a particular type of film maker."

Yet, of course, Beavers just finished selling a film to a New York gallery and has arranged a showing at one art

But, what transitions! As Beavers changes his light sources, his color blends, and his frames, he's actually conjuring different personalities out of a single person.

Lastly, "From the Notebooks of. . .", the most ambitious and complex of the films. Set in Florence, and originally based on a plan to film Leonardo Da Vinci's notebooks, the film eventually evolved into an attempt to film Robert Beavers' notebooks. But then, there's still a lot of Leonardo Da Vinc mixed in. Among other things, the film deals with anatomy, forces, geometrical shapes. Images are often encased in pyramidal forms, triangles, and various other geometrical shapes. One effect of the film — the viewer loses consciousness of the conventional rectangular screen. Or, at least, he realizes how unimaginatively the normal film maker adheres to that shape.

None of that says a whole lot about those films or Beavers' film making in general — it would take a few more screenings, a lot more space and probably a few more interviews. But a few things are suggested — an interest in light and color, a concern with the frame, and at times a geometrical approach to the film. And, through it all, a sense of rigorous undertaking, of precise intentions behind

each film. "I guess you could say that my particular concern has been to control the space between the lens and the object," says Beavers.

"I almost believe a film exists somewhere and I'm going to it," he explains. "I believe in an idea of geometry — that you can go in space and time (which are the elements of my films) to that particular film. I'm on the outside completing something on the inside."

If there's an overall goal, it's to develop projection in his own way.

He started on that path after reading a book out of the UCLA Press on the history of the technology of the film. "It was very interesting because each person who created films in the beginning did it in a different manner. It was only afterwards that film was standardized — in order to make money, of course. They did all kinds of things that have since gone into oblivion — the early optical theater, three-part color process, different ways of doing sound.

However, as Beavers emphasizes, "I'm not an inventor, but a film maker. . . . I'm getting at my own beginnings and perhaps the beginnings of film also. I hope that the two coincide."

The Bookshelf

Describing or Discovering

STREETS, ACTIONS, ALTERNATIVES, RAPS: A Report on the Decline of the Counterculture. By John Stickney. G. P. Putnam's Sons, N.Y. 352 pages. \$6.95.

By Pauline Dubkin

Patriot Ledger Correspondent

Oh yeah, another first-hand report of Where It's At in Countercultureland.

always friction and division within the "counterculture." The political people scorned the dopers, whom they considered anti-revolutionary escapists; the moderates broke with the militants, and almost everybody felt a hate-envy duality toward the successful rock stars and the hip capitalists. Now, yes, there is more division because many, women are beginning to rebel against the male

Beavers arranged the screenings and generally has generated everything else that's happened to him since his return from Switzerland. He's sold 20 prints of his "View" to the Gimpel Gallery in New York, worked out an arrangement that will assure future financial backing for his films, arranged for a showing of all his films at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Conn., early next year, expects his "Still Light" to go into the permanent rotation at the Anthology Film Archives, has interested the editor of Prose Magazine in New York in doing an article on him.

A few more things to tie down, and some film shooting in New Jersey, and he'll be back in Switzerland next month. So why the whirlwind of activity?

The gallery visits are obvious — Beavers needs the money to continue making films.

Otherwise, his activities offer an interesting commentary on the way he sees his situation as a film maker.

"I've let this go until recently," he said in an interview in Quincy, "but one has to protect his position. The only way to protect it is to establish it in an articulate manner instead of letting critics and institutions force the way people will look at the films.

Admires Picasso

"That was one of Picasso's great achievements — I think he owns something like five publishing houses. I think it's an important function of the artist to form the

Let, of course, Beavers just finished selling a film to a New York gallery and has arranged a showing at one art museum and is hopeful about a few others. A contradiction, but in view of present circumstances, an understandable one.

Beavers says the art galleries are the only practical source of financial support for him right now. The market, to say the least, is limited in the United States — either a gallery, or the Anthology Film Archives (which has its own limited financial resources). The same can be said for exhibiting facilities — they're limited. Thus, the museums are filling a void, which is alright with Beavers as long as he's sure they'll show his films in the proper atmosphere.

At the screenings in New York last week, Beavers showed his "Diminished Frame," "Still Light," and "From the Notebooks of . . ." The earliest of the films, "Diminished Frame," uses Berlin as a setting, including the exterior of the old SS headquarters (and a careful listening reveals a Hitler rally as a part of the soundtrack) As Beavers frames various objects, buildings, and pedestrians, the effect is a little haunting and eerie. Its almost as if ghosts are still hovering over that city.

"Still Light" is divided into two parts, the first part largely a close up of a face against various Mediterranean settings.

Coming Out

Oh yeah, another first-hand report of Where It's At in Countercultureland, another straight-reporter-turned-longhair hitching across the country to bring the right-on news of the freaks and dopers and revolutionaries home to the people in televisionland, another hip Communicator trying, via the old-fashioned New-York-publisher, \$6.95-a-book route, to close the gap between the print generation and its street and commune offspring.

I'm sorry if I approach this book, which is not really a bad one, in this rather unfair way. It's just that I'm so weary of books that attempt to categorize, explain and dissect the "counterculture," or the "younger generation," or the "longhairs" of whatever you want to call it/them/us.

After all, nobody writes books about where the middle class is at, or what the blue collar workers are up to these days, and the diversity of the "longhairs," as Stickney generally calls his youthful disaffected, is, I believe, every bit as great as within these other artificial divisions.

Thanks For That

"Streets, Actions, Alternatives, Raps" is the kind of book a lot of people could have written. Of course Stickney did write it, and he deserves something for that. He spent a half-year or so visiting all varieties of "longhairs" all over the country, and he wrote a descriptive book that will make many of us feel much sense of *deja vu*: yes, I've been into that scene; yeah, that reminds me of a conversation I had last year in Berkeley; etc. etc.

But beyond simple description, I am puzzled about the intent of this book. Is it to say that the "counterculture" is on

division because many women are beginning to rebel against the male domination not only of the "Establishment" but of the Movement as well; but I can't see that Stickney is talking about anything new or even surprising when he describes the diversity and lack of direction within the anti-culture.

"Streets" etc. is a fairly entertaining book to read. Stickney picks up on some good vignettes as he progresses on his investigative journey from militant Berkeley and Madison, Wisc. to hippie-hating Austin, Texas to peaceful Oregon; weaves back through Isla Vista, Cal., where the famous Bank of America burning took place a few years back; visits Michigan rock festivals and Seattle activists' cells and ends up (the book, not his private, personal journey, I presume) on a communal farm with the increasing number of new pioneers who are trying to make a go of it in the country, an "alternative" remote from "streets" and "actions."

I assume that, by thus structuring the book, Stickney is obscurely trying to tell us that the back-to-the-country movement is a kind of answer to the divisiveness and dissent he has found throughout the far-flung hip megalopolis. So why didn't he simply say it? Why write so many words of description without one single expression of judgment, preference or even simple like or dislike?

WHAT THE TREES SAID: Life on a New Age Farm. By Stephen Diamond. Dell Publishing Co., N.Y. 182 pages. \$2.45.