

WILLIAM C. WEES

“LET’S SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT”: The International Experimental Film Congress, Toronto 1989

Résumé: Par l’analyse de documents reliés au Congrès International du Cinéma Expérimental tenu à Toronto au printemps 1989, cet article explique les tensions, rivalités et divisions qui déchirent la communauté entourant le cinéma expérimental.

Reviewing the films and videos at the Whitney Biennial in the spring of 1987, J. Hoberman complained in the *Village Voice* that American avant-garde filmmakers were “producing work that is increasingly sterile, derivative, and self-involved.” Although a few individual filmmakers continue to “persevere,” Hoberman wrote, “the movement seems moribund...the shadow of a shadow.”¹ A few months earlier, in the Twentieth Anniversary Issue of *Millennium Film Journal*, Fred Camper published an essay entitled “The End of Avant-Garde Film.” After establishing his criteria for great film art—originality, formal rigor, moral integrity, and single-minded devotion to the medium (all hallmarks of high modernist art, though Camper didn’t use that expression)—he goes on to complain that “the works of the newer generation of filmmakers for the most part lack the authentic power of the original, and often still-active masters, and that the qualities that they do have instead often seem related to, but also only as diminished shadows of, the achievements of the original filmmakers.”²

Meanwhile, many younger experimental/avant-garde filmmakers were exploring new subject matter and new or revised formal strategies

that suited their generation's questioning and revising of hierarchies and values. Influenced by feminism, lesbian and gay politics, multi-culturalism, post-structuralism, various forms of post-modernism, and a life-long exposure to popular culture and modern media, they had, by the late 1980's, produced a substantial body of work expressing these changed conditions and priorities.

But when news of a Toronto International Experimental Film Congress began to circulate in the winter of 1988-89, some of the younger filmmakers came to the conclusion that, instead of highlighting new work and new directions in avant-garde filmmaking, the Congress organizers were more interested in celebrating past achievements of the "old" avant-garde—confirming, in effect, the Hoberman-Camper thesis about the current state of avant-garde film. Consequently, a few days before the Congress opened on 28 May 1989, they denounced the Congress and its organizers in an "Open Letter to the Experimental Film Congress."³

Headed, "Let's Set the Record Straight," the Open Letter was distributed to the media, posted around Toronto, fervently discussed during the seven days of the Congress, and subsequently reprinted in *The Independent Film and Video Monthly*, published in New York, and *Work Print*, the newsletter of the Chicago Experimental Film Coalition.⁴ It had been signed by seventy-six people, among whom were many of the most important and original experimental filmmakers of the '80s and '90s, including Caroline Avery, Peggy Ahwesh, Craig Baldwin, Emily Breer, Abigail Child, Mary Filippo, Nina Fonoroff, Su Friedrich, Lewis Klahr, Tom Rhoades (aka Luther Price), Keith Sanborn, Phil Solomon, and Leslie Thornton. Eventually the letter attracted 122 signatures.⁵

Although it is directed at the Congress and its organizers, the Open Letter can also be read as a delayed response to Hoberman and Camper. And now that the dust has settled, it is possible to see that the letter served as a manifesto for a new generation of avant-garde filmmakers, and like many avant-garde manifestos, it attempted to advance its cause by attacking practices and institutions that appear to uphold the status quo and oppose new developments in the arts. The accuracy of its charges against the Congress is less important today than its attempt to articulate—in aggressive, manifesto rhetoric—the ambitions, priorities and allegiances of the generation of experimental filmmakers who came into their own during the 1980s.

OPEN LETTER TO THE EXPERIMENTAL FILM CONGRESS

Let's Set The Record Straight.

We challenge the official History promoted by the International Experimental Film Congress to be held in Toronto this Spring. The time is long overdue to unwrite the Institutional Canon of Masterworks of the Avant-Garde. It is time to shift focus from the History of Film to the position of film within the construction of history. The narratives which take up this new task must respect the complexity of relations among the many competing and overlapping histories which make up the activity within the field.

We are concerned by the tone which pervades the announcements for the Congress. The recognition belatedly accorded to "the founding women of the avant-garde," the ceremonious embalming of lively, refractory work, the minimal attention given to new work, the organization of screenings along nationalistic lines, and the "open"—read "unpaid"—screenings for those willing to pay \$100 for the privilege, all betray a tokenism blind to any activities outside the officially sanctioned margins. And if our analytic concerns seem to prejudge the event, they are borne out with desolate clarity by the record of the Congress organizers in attempting to suppress dissent within their own community. Their efforts in Toronto against the Funnel Experimental Film Centre and against feminist film theory speak for themselves.

And while the putatively timeless Internationalism of the Congress should make it all things to all people, the overwhelming majority of the announced participants consists of representatives of the 60s Avant-Garde and its decaying power base. Only one or two younger filmmakers have been made part of the official program, though some of us will at least be discussed in our absence. Workshops are dominated by technological values and are lead [*sic*] exclusively by older men. In this context, the organization of screenings along nationalistic lines promises a replay of the results with which we have become all too familiar over the past decade: a government-subsidized inventory of products suitable for export. Work is chosen to minimize linguistic, sexual, and cultural difference, typically to conform to the model of the "universal language of form" so dear to institutional esperantists. Difference is recognized only where it can be recuperated and diluted to a tepid pluralism.

The "open screenings" at best provide an image of damage control. These screenings, as the de facto venue for new and unrecognized work, have been scheduled mostly for late in the evening at the end of full days of featured panels, workshops, and screenings. Even without average festival delays, this scheduling usually bodes poorly for attendance. The priorities of the Congress organizers are clear: those without established institutional credentials are to be marginalized within the

consolidation of the official margins, to be presented as Film Historical leftovers.

There is a spirit of mind which continues to challenge the hegemony of industry, of government, of bureaucracy. The revolutionary fame of mind pervading activity in film in the Teens and Twenties and again in the Fifties and Sixties—which seemed to die in the Seventies—continues to thrive, but only where it has shifted and migrated according to changing historical conditions. The issues which galvanized the Cinema Avant-Garde of earlier decades arose from different conditions than those which confront us today. An event which promotes itself as of major importance to Experimental Film and fails to reflect the vitality and breadth, the vulnerability and urgency of current oppositional practice in the media renders nothing but obeisance to a moribund officialdom. It risks nothing but its own historical relevance.

The Avant-Garde is dead; long live the avant-garde.

May 23, 1989

**We, the undersigned, find ourselves in agreement with the attached
declaration concerning the Toronto Experimental Film Congress.**

Caroline Avery	Jesse Drew	Jim Hubbard	Lincoln Schlensky
Peggy Ahwesh	Barry Ellsworth	Barbara Lattanzi	Sarah Schulman
Timothy C. Allen	Steve Fagin	I. Lempert	M. M. Serra
Craig Baldwin	Bruce Fiene	Lewis Klahr	Esther Shatavsky
Susan Banas	Mary Filippo	Mark LaPore	Joe Shepard
Jay Blakenship	Nina Fonoroff	Mark McElhatten	Jeffrey Skoller
Emily Breer	Su Friedrich	Ross McLaren	Karl Soehnlein
Don Brennan	John J. Gallagher	Deborah Meehan	Philip S. Solomon
Barbara Broughel	David Gerstein	Andy Moses	Carty Talkington
Edmund Cardoni	Joe Gibbons	Allen Mukamal	Christine Tamblyn
Abigail Child	Arnie Goldson	Linda Peckham	Leslie Thornton
Romy	Barbara Hammer	John Porter	Christine Vachon
Charlesworth	Peter M. Hargrove	Berenice Reynaud	Luis E. Vera
Tom Chomont	Todd Haynes	Tom Rhoades	Susanna Virtanen
Catherine Clarke	Eve Heller	Fabio Roberti	Jack Walsh
Bill Daniel	Peter Herwitz	D. Rogers	Dan Walworth
Moyra Davie	Robert Hilferty	Ron Rogers	Andreas Wildfang
R. Dickie	Chris Hill	Lynne Sachs	Sarah E. Wright
Paul Dickinson	Kent Howie	Keith Sanborn	Tom Zimmer

Since the authors of the Open Letter made no pretense of offering a balanced, impartial evaluation of the Congress, it should be pointed out that the screenings and panel discussions at the Congress were more diverse in content and more open to competing positions on the nature and state of health of avant-garde film than the letter allowed. Curated programs offered many films from the 1980s made in Canada, the United States, Latin America, the U.K., France, the Philippines, West Germany and Eastern Europe—including work by some of the filmmakers who signed the Open Letter: Su Friedrich, Leslie Thornton, Nina Fonoroff, Phil Solomon, Lewis Klahr, Caroline Avery, Mary Filippo, and Abigail Child (whose controversial 1987 film *Mayhem* was shown and discussed at a panel on “Experimental and Textual Strategies in Avant-Garde Film”). Considerable variety of new work also appeared in the nightly “open screenings” (though the venue, a smoky and noisy bar on Queen Street, did not offer optimal conditions for appreciating the visual and thematic complexities of many of the films shown there).

On the other hand, many events at the Congress seemed to justify the assertion in the Open Letter that the Congress favoured the “old” avant-garde and its “official History.” The first panel of the Congress, entitled “Cinema’s Phoenix: Deaths and Resurrections of the Avant-Garde,” was chaired by NYU’s Annette Michelson, a noted champion of canonical avant-garde figures like Stan Brakhage and Michael Snow, and it included a presentation by Fred Camper, who reiterated his “end of the avant-garde” argument (though he was taken to task by another panel member, Germany’s Birgit Hein). The Congress opened with a retrospective of Jack Chambers’ films, and closed with a retrospective of films by Hollis Frampton—“another dead white man,” as Manohla Dargis put it in her highly critical review of the Congress published in the *Village Voice*⁶ Stan Brakhage, Robert Breer, Pat O’Neill, Joyce Wieland, and David Rimmer (younger than the others, but a pillar of Canadian avant-garde filmmaking since the late sixties)—were invited to show some of their work and conduct workshops “demonstrating techniques or personal approaches to specific issues of concern to experimental film.”⁷ Among special presentations were William Moritz’s “Abstract Films of the 1920s”; Paul Arthur’s “Buried Treasures,” with films made between 1950 and 1981; Lauren Rabinovitz’s “Women Filmmakers and Past Avant-Gardes,” in which there was no film made later than 1970; and Standish Lawder’s program of “Collage Films,” with no film more recent than Bruce Conner’s *Take the 5:10 to Dreamland* of 1977. In other words, a substantial portion of the Congress highlighted past accomplishments of the avant-garde and granted privileged status to older,



Collage by E. Jay Sims, *Work Print* [Newsletter of the Chicago Experimental Film Coalition] 6.3 (Fall 1989): 14-15. The message on the post card reads, "Toronto, the International Shopping Mall. The place where people buy things for a living.... The Exp film congress—an interesting, sometimes, event. There's lots of films to look at though the open screenings have been shunted off into the back room of a Bar—a smoke filled noisy room. We've been showing films any way due to the fact that the "organizers" are uncooperative in trying to find a better place. We

established avant-garde filmmakers, thus intensifying what Manohla Dargis called "the generational rift that deepened as the week unfolded."⁸

While this "generational rift" prompted a *Globe and Mail* headline, "Avant-garde filmmakers split along generational lines,"⁹ and other reports on the Congress inevitably alluded to the "generational conflict,"¹⁰ or "generational difference,"¹¹ the truly substantive issues were only generational in the sense that a set of aesthetic values associated with an older generation of avant-garde filmmakers (the values and generation celebrated by Hoberman and Camper) came into conflict with a different set of values associated with younger filmmakers. Fundamental disagreements about the nature and purpose of avant-garde film were at the heart of the matter—which was, as I have suggested, what the Open Letter was really about.

In an astute analysis of what he called "congressional politics," Paul Arthur showed that the Congress was dominated by the older set of values, which holds that engagement with social, political and theoretical issues unbalances, dilutes, debases the work of art. Summarizing several of Stan Brakhage's impassioned interventions at the Congress, Arthur writes, "[F]ilms that attempt to 'illustrate' or otherwise engage theoretical constructs (of any sort), or, relatedly, explicitly argue against or for immediate social conditions violate the tenets of genuine Art. This radically conservative ethos emerged as Toronto's password, articulated and demonstrated subtextually over and over again as the week progressed."¹² Arthur also draws upon comments by Jim Shedden, Coordinator of the Congress, and Bart Testa, one of the five members of the Congress's Executive Board, to support his argument that "the desire to rescue, to celebrate and extend, the threatened virtue(s) of the old avant-garde peeped through the folds of nearly every program and every global decision informing the Congress."¹³ Other commentators offered similar, if less carefully argued, views of the underlying agenda of the Congress, usually citing the scarcity of feminist films and filmmakers as a prime example of the organizers' bias against socially, politically and theoretically engaged films.

But the organizers had, in a sense, already addressed these charges by stating in the Introduction to the Congress's catalogue, "In planning the Congress, we have limited ourselves to aesthetic concerns..."¹⁴ That limitation was precisely the problem, according to the Open Letter and other critics of the Congress, but read in the context of the complete Introduction, it at least provides a rationale for the inclusions and exclusions that gave the Congress something like a coherent objective. Moreover, the Introduction also made it clear that the original impetus for the Congress was Camper's "End of the Avant-Garde" essay and the debates it produced

within the Toronto avant-garde film community. Without explicitly saying so, the Introduction suggests that the Congress organizers accepted Camper's premises about film art, but not necessarily his conclusions about the current state of that art among newer, younger avant-garde filmmakers. Although written before the Open Letter's charges had been made public, the Introduction offers a kind of rebuttal simply by describing the Congress's inception and intentions.

INTERNATIONAL EXPERIMENTAL FILM CONGRESS

Introduction

It has been a decade since The Third International Avant-Garde Festival in London, and over these years, the contours of the imagination of avant-garde cinema have grown blurry. The range of articles and interviews in the 1987 anniversary edition of *Millennium Film Journal* witnessed to this impression, just as it did to the variety and strength of this cinema. The direction of experimental film, its purposes and significance, once heated topics of constant debate and probably still much on people's minds have never seemed more uncertain. This issue of *Millennium* contained an article that spoke bluntly to this question of direction, Fred Camper's "The End of Avant-Garde Film." Camper argued that the formal recognition of experimental film by the teaching academies and grant-giving agencies had resulted in a practice of avant-garde film lacking in spirit and originality.

In Toronto, where interest in experimental film has always been strong, Camper's essay found a sympathetic ear among filmmakers disillusioned by the internecine rivalry that accompanies such institutionalization. Others, however, optimistically refuted his claims, discerning in the work of some artists at least the energy and rigour that has characterized the best experimental film, whatever its trials as a movement, over several generations. This mixed response to Camper's article was not unique to Toronto, of course. And coming as it did, at a time when the very future of film as a technology seemed in doubt, suggested to some of us the need to examine the situation. Hence the idea for this Congress began.

The group that initiated the months of discussion which preceded the actual planning of the International Experimental Film Congress was formed by several people involved in exhibiting experimental films, as well as filmmakers and teachers. We had one thing in common. We wanted to see avant-garde films shown more widely and frequently in Toronto. Some of us working to this end, had successfully brought artists from other countries to our city and all of us were struck by how good their films were. When we argued over Camper's views (and our opinions of their accuracy varied wildly), we found ourselves becoming fascinated with the prospect of an

open and wide debate, among filmmakers and critics and everyone else who takes an interest in avant-garde cinema. Only a film festival or a conference devoted to experimental films could provide a proper forum for such a debate, or the start of one.

The plan the Executive Board devised was made in the hope that this event in Toronto would be different from the London festival, but we also rejected the idea of an academic conference. The London event sought to be as wide a survey of works as possible. Camper's article and the debate it engendered, not least among ourselves, indicated to us that a more focused 'congress' that would combine elements of a festival (with many screenings) and that of a conference (with panel discussions and a critical agenda), could best raise questions about a crisis in the life of avant-garde cinema.

This decision meant that the International Experimental Congress [sic] would have to be, in large part, a curated event. No one in any single place has the breadth of programming experience to select even a portion of the significant work of recent years. Moreover, we believed that a group of diverse curators would mean a diversified set of critical questions could emerge. Aided by suggestions made by our Advisory Board, the executive selected the most interesting international curators to develop programs of new films in three series, the Thematic Screenings, the National Screenings, and New Horizons which run for the whole congress. We gave these programmers a mandate—that they give up the impossible task of making their selections surveys and instead choose what they believe to be the very best new films. We also sought other curators who could establish parameters for the assessment of this new work. Their programs, the Special Presentations, serve to refresh our collective memories about the often submerged history of women in the avant-garde; about one crucial genre, the collage film; about the way this cinema has enfolded and demanded a whole life of imagination, as it did Hollis Frampton's; and about the origins of experimental film, in the abstract cinema of the 1920s. In that process of recollection, we could be aided to reformulate the critical terminology that we use to describe experimental film and ground it more solidly in the cinematic material itself. To the same end, we have organized Practica sessions with filmmakers whose working methods lend themselves to that approach and the panel topics were developed to ensure that these issues are carefully foregrounded. At the same time, we have tried to address the very practical concerns about the future of experimental filmmaking in light of advances in related technologies by looking at possible interfaces between the media. We have also sought to ensure that the experience of the films themselves, and of the unplanned discussions and debates that arise from them, be as rich as possible within an event that is more focused than a conventional festival. And so the extensive Open Screenings run throughout the whole course of the Congress.

In planning the Congress, we have limited ourselves to aesthetic concerns and have not addressed the equally pressing issues of funding, exhibition, and distribution.

These remain for another group of individuals to take up. At this juncture, we thought it more important for filmmakers to reflect on those aspects of their work that set them apart from the other arts, and indeed from other branches of the cinema. We hope that the opportunity the International Experimental Film Congress provides will result in a rich experience of experimental films and a full and stimulating exchange of ideas. We also hope that it will be an occasion for avant-garde film which, like the anniversary edition of *Millennium*, marks the decade of important film work that has been made since the London event ten years ago.¹⁵

If the Introduction offered a general, non-contentious and before-the-fact response to the Open Letter, Bart Testa's direct reply to the charges made in the Open Letter called for a different tone and rhetorical strategy. His response appeared in the October 1989 issue of *The Independent*.

RESPONSE FROM A CONGRESS EXECUTIVE

The editor of *The Independent* asked me to remark on a petition that originated in New York City that was to be published as a sidebar to Paul Arthur's report on the International Experimental Film Congress held in Toronto. I served on the Congress executive board. Both the petition and its cover note (which is not reproduced here) speak of themselves in a passive, anonymous voice. This is an issue for me since I am being asked to answer charges against the Congress but do not know their author. The petition bears about 80 signatures, so I suppose these charges can be said to have been made by those who signed. But that's a fiction, since they were framed and circulated by somebody. Somebody unnamed. Anyway, the petition only came into the hands of the Congress organizers the day before the event through a Toronto newspaper reporter. It was distributed to the press but not sent to us. This was a deft PR move since it made it impossible for us to respond to the charges while ensuring that the charges were part of the news story of the Congress.

These charges—formalism, canon-mongering, technologism, sexism, nationalism, hatred of the young, "esperantism," and so on—are broad enough to make any fact irrelevant in the case at hand, even after the event. As categories their definition is impossible to grasp in any particular way. For example, I wish I knew just what official history of the experimental cinema might be, in what its "institutional" canon might consist. However, I doubt that the Congress' request to many of its programmers—to select the best work of the last six years—could have conformed to a canon or its history. We wanted to make a follow-up to the Third

International Avant-Garde Festival in London 10 years ago, and we felt the avant-garde film had become so varied that only a wide curatorial group could do the selection effectively. As for the several retrospectives, like the Chambers, Frampton, and twenties abstract films, not all of them could be said to have belonged to the "60s avant-garde and its crumbling power base." As for the "universal language of form," nothing so neat or naive was imagined. The curators had their own agendas, as we hoped they would. The whole point of organizing the Congress partly along national (really geographical) lines was to ensure the curators could work in "linguistic" and "cultural" areas with which they were familiar. Please note the contradiction between the charge "nationalistic" at the top of the petition's third paragraph and the charge of "timeless universalism" a few sentences later. I could go on: the open screenings were often SRO—people who work days came out for them, as we hoped; the practica were led by "older" filmmakers (and Joyce Wieland was one of them), but why have young and inexperienced filmmakers do them? And, frankly, a workshop not concerned with technical questions would be just a lecture.

Anyone could make charges like these against any event like the Congress. Any look to the past is under a cloud of canon-mongering. Any selection of international films can look like the work of "institutional esperantists." But there are other, more personal charges against the organizers arising in the petition that pretend to knowledge of the film scene in Toronto: that we worked against the Funnel Experimental Theatre and feminist film theory, both supposedly embodying "dissent within their own community." Well, the Funnel was a well-funded, state-sponsored, artist-run theatre/production operation for experimental film that ran itself into the ground through mismanagement. This culminated in an ill conceived relocation into a newly gentrified neighborhood and renovations for which the Funnel did not have the money or the planning sense to carry off. Before the Congress planning was well underway or funds solicited, the Funnel committed suicide. Now someone—but who?—wants to lay murder charges.

No one could substantiate the charges that the organizers of the Congress make efforts against feminist film theory. Only one of the executive board members works in film theory, myself. Another member, Barbara Sternberg, is arguably a feminist filmmaker (I have made that argument in writing about her *A Trilogy*). The other members, who are curators, have done much to keep women's films on the movie screen. (Cathy Jonasson of the AGO ran a Chantal Akerman retrospective last year, for example; for another, Doina Popescu of the Goethe Institute is just now organizing a feminist aesthetics symposium.) I should add that feminist film theory enjoys such a prominent place in film education here in Toronto that it is quite ridiculous to think of it as a "dissenting" view. It is actually a varied and highly self-reflective orthodoxy.

It is absurdly easy to make charges like those contained in the petition, and to pick up signatures. It is not so easy to answer them, or to bring oneself to sign a defense as its author and so be subject to nameless accusers' further slanders.

BART TESTA¹⁶

In late 1998, a question about film manifestos posted on FrameWorks, the electronic discussion group devoted to experimental film, produced a burst of renewed interest in the Toronto Congress and accompanying controversies. Apparently the event had become so deeply buried in the past that a reference to the Congress was greeted with surprise and incredulity by some on the list. Assurances that the event had indeed occurred quickly followed, including a post from Fred Camper who recalled that the Congress had been, at least in part, a response to his essay in *MillenniumFilmJournal*, and he added parenthetically that "the quality of new a-g film and filmmakers has improved greatly in the last decade."¹⁷ Someone else on the list posted the original Open Letter, complete with the seventy-six names at the end.¹⁸

Another post came from Phil Solomon, who had signed the Open Letter, but thanks to the passage of time and developments in his own career, saw the letter and his decision to sign it in a new light. His post also alluded to a much smaller and more informal version of the Toronto Congress which he helped to organize at the University of Colorado at Boulder where he teaches film studies and film production.¹⁹ This event took place in June 1992, and resulted in charges of exclusiveness and elitism posted on FrameWorks, including sardonic references to "King Stan" and "Prince Philip" (i.e., Stan Brakhage, Solomon's colleague at the University of Colorado, and Solomon himself—both major figures in their respective generations of avant-garde filmmakers). Solomon's bemused response to seeing his name among the signers of the 1989 Open Letter provides a wry and insightful postscript to this brief documentary history of Toronto's International Experimental Film Congress.

MANIFESTO DESTINY

Comrades,

Had to laugh, seeing my name on the LIST. I distinctly remember that a bunch of us Bostonians and New Yorkers went out for dinner after I had a show at the Collective

for Living Cinema, and a petition was passed around the table. I didn't read it very carefully, but I felt that the spirit of this group statement was to announce that, HEY! there was lots going on in that Spring of 89 (see [Mark] McElhatten's programming at the, er, Collective, for that Spring some time...) that needed to be seen and heard, that the 'avant-garde' was not, indeed, dead.

I signed onto Frameworks some two years ago when my name was mentioned in a few posts that challenged an event that I put together in Boulder (someone made a somewhat sarcastic reference to King Stan and Prince Philip in Boulder, as I recall... well, so much for my revolutionary credentials...) which subsequently inspired many posts about a kind of counter-event to the 'elitist' Boulder thang, an all-inclusive gathering to take place in Chicago, etc. Good luck, I wished. A few of us here in the mountains managed to squeak a small grant from the school and the community to bring some friends out to program some films and talk a bit. And even THAT local gig caused a bit of an electronic tiff amongst people I assumed were 'comrades-in-film' (and some are, indeed, co-signers with me on this resurrected doc of 89).

Well, we're all still working out here/there and I hope all still friends, even without a 'congress' to sanctify legitimacy. Jim Shedden told me a lot of great stories from his vantage, so maybe we'll hear from him.

So I find myself, some ten years later, laughing at the email version of my signature on this declaration of, er, independence—the final hypo-cracy being that I actually had a film SHOWN at Toronto 89 (under the heading of 'emerging filmmakers,' which I thought sounded somewhat like Michelangelo's Slaves trying to emerge from stone...) Which, quite fortuitously, somehow, led to my getting a position in a STATE school, where I just used a lot of STATE money to bring out that old leftie, Ken Jacobs (bastion of the 'old' garde? You should have seen him work!) for an event called OCTOBER! TEN DAYS THAT SHAKE THE WORLD!

Tonight, I'm having seafood with King Stan, who just told me today how excited he is about Luther Price, Jenn Reeves ('emerging' ??) and on... Somewhere, Trotsky is spinning, and some young filmmaker is out there, waiting to declare that the avant-garde is not dead (and what do you know? it isn't...), about to sign—

Long live anyone who still creates individually made films. And a glass raised to those that still shows em. And God help those who organize an 'event' that dares to leave one of us out—pass the petition, please...

Watch what you sign. It may come back to email you.

PHIL SOLOMON²⁰

Notes

I would like to thank the following individuals for assisting my research on the Toronto Congress: Peggy Ahwesh, Patrick Friel, Catherine Russell, Keith Sanborn, Jim Shedden, E. Jay Sims, and Ines Sommer.

1. J. Hoberman, "Fear and Trembling at the Whitney Biennial," in *Vulgar Modernism: Writing on Movies and Other Media* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 174. Originally published in the *Village Voice*, 16 June 1987.
2. Fred Camper, "The End of Avant-Garde Film," *Millennium Film Journal* 16-17-18 (1986-87): 109.
3. The principal author of the Open Letter was Keith Sanborn, working in collaboration with Peggy Ahwesh, Leslie Thornton and Ross MacLaren.
4. *The Independent Film and Video Monthly* 12.8 (1989):24; *Work Print* 6.3 (1989): 17.
5. The additional names are Leslie Alpen, Lee Ann Brown, Romy Charlesworth, Ian Cochrane, Sharon Cook, M. Brooke Dammkoehler, Todd M. Edelman, Heather Evelyn, Betty Ferguson, Munro Ferguson, Michaeline Fontana, Kathy Geritz, Jill Godmilow, Brian Goldberg, Annie Goldson, Phillip J. Guilbeau, Marc Heffels, Mark Hesselink, Henry Hills, Karen Holmes, Daniel Jones, Ken Kobland, Ernest Larsen, Tom Kalin, Elizabeth Kolz, Gary McLaren, Sherry Millner, Jennifer Montgomery, Julie A. Murray, Bill Nichols, Bill Quinn, Yvonne Rainer, Joel Roggins- Giroux, Jonathan Rosenbaum, David Schwartz, Patricia Seaman, Pascal Sharp Yseult Sharp, Jason Simon, Andrew Sorfleet, EdieSteiner, Mark Trumble, Melony Ward, Marshall Weber, Ted White, Alexander Wilson.
6. Manohla Dargis, "The Brood," *Village Voice*, 20 June 1989: 92.
7. *International Experimental Film Congress* [catalogue] (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1989), 19.
8. Dargis, 92.
9. *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 30 May 1989, A18.
10. Ines Sommer, "Toronto Experimental Film Congress, Chinese Style: Rebellious Youth Versus Old Party Hardliners?" *Work Print* [Experimental Film Coalition of Chicago newsletter] 6.3 (Fall 1989):18.
11. Catherine Russell, "Will the Reel Avant-Garde Please Stand Up?" *Fuse* 13.1-2 (Fall 1989): 38.
12. Paul Arthur, "No More Causes? The International Experimental Film Congress," *The Independent Film and Video Monthly*, 23.
13. *Ibid.*, 23.
14. *International Experimental Film Congress*, 10.
15. *Ibid.*, 9-11. Reprinted from *International Experimental Film Congress, 1989*, with permission © Art Gallery of Ontario. The Introduction was written by Bart Testa, with some input and final approval by the Congress's Executive Board and Coordinator Jim Shedden.
16. *The Independent Film and Video Monthly*, 25; reprinted by permission of *The Independent* (which is a publication of the Foundation for Independent Video and Film) and Bart Testa.
17. Fred Camper, "1989 Toronto Letter," in FrameWorks [electronic discussion group], 2 December 1989, FrameWorks Archive: <http://thecity.sfsu.edu/users/XFactor/fw/fw9/index.html>.
18. Harry Swartz-Turfle, "Toronto Experimental Film Congress," in FrameWorks, 3 December 1989, FrameWorks Archive.
19. For a report on this event see Bart Testa, "The Two Religious of Avant-Garde Film, or Maybe Three (From Notes Made in Boulder, Colorado, June 1992)," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies/Revue canadienne d' études cinématographiques* 3.2 (Fall 1994): 89-100.

20. Phil Solomon, "Manifesto Destiny," in *FrameWorks*, 3 December 1989. *FrameWorks* Archive. At Solomon's request, a few, slight changes in punctuation, spelling and phrasing have been made in the version published here.

WILLIAM C. WEES, who attended the Toronto Congress, is Emeritus Professor (McGill University), editor of *CJFS/RCEC*, and author of *Light Moving in Time: Studies in the Visual Aesthetics of Avant-Garde Film* and *Recycled Images: The Art and Politics of Found Footage Films*.