

By J. Hoberman

Unlike last year when, as a part-time film critic, I recklessly matched apples and pears (Stan Brakhage and Fred Silverman) for my "Ten Best," I've decided to experiment with a pair of separate but equal lists. The first is for films that don't subscribe to narrative conventions; the second is for those that do. This is not a simple experimental/commercial dichotomy but rather a question of film language.

I. Avant-Garde, New Cinema

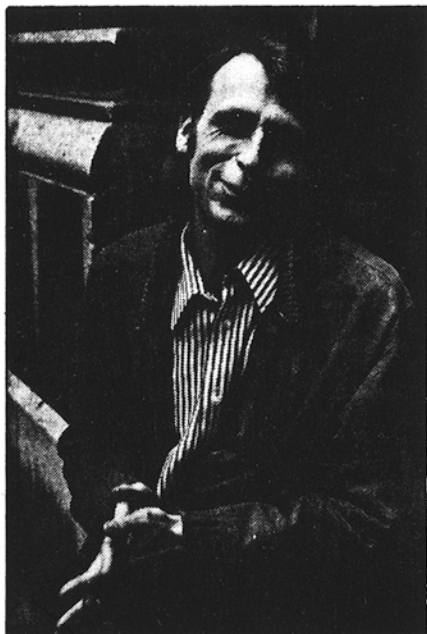
1. *Unreachable Homeless*—Klaus Wyborny. With its staccato rhythms, layered superimpositions, and complex system of fades and filters, this incredibly precise half-hour barrage of German suburban/industrial landscapes synthesizes and recapitulates much of the avant-garde vocabulary developed over the last 20 years. I put it first not only for itself but also in recognition of the other extraordinary films that the versatile Wyborny premiered here last spring: *Pictures of the Lost Word* (a looser "landscape" film parodying romantic weltanschmerz); *Elementary Film History* (super-8 compressions of televised movies); and *The Scene of the Action* (a fractured adaptation of Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener" made for West German TV).

2. *The Red Tapes*—Vito Acconci. An epic 2½-hour video-projection, this sprawling autobiographical meditation on America by a leading performance-artist played to near-empty houses at the Whitney last January. Perhaps made to celebrate the Bicentennial, Acconci's self-dramatization is a masterpiece of art-world vaudeville—funny, paranoid, Whitmanesque, moving. It's the real *Renaldo and Clara*.

3. *Mindfall* parts 1 and 7—Hollis Frampton. In the midst of a wildly uneven one-man show at Millennium, Frampton unveiled his startling farrago of color-wipes, supers, fragmented Caribbean landscapes and archival footage of epileptic seizures accompanied by a strident track of looped sound-effects. *Mindfall* ranks with Wyborny's *Unreachable Homeless* as '78's most kinetic piece of film, and it's the best excerpt from Frampton's 50-hour work-in-progress that I've yet seen.

4. *Valse Triste*—Bruce Conner. Conner is a master of found-footage constructions and this five-minute montage of shots taken from newsreels, industrial films and home movies (all relating to his Kansas childhood) is

The Best of the Apples and Pears



Klaus Wyborny, first among avant-gardists

premiered at the New York Film Festival as the token entry by a well-known American avant-gardist.

5. *Charmed Particles*—Andrew Noren. Film-diarist Noren's 1968 *Kodak Ghost Poems* was notorious for its explicit sexual scenes; *Charmed Particles* is equally libidinal but its eroticism seems sublimated into the play of light and shadow to suggest a form of sexualized seeing. Eschewing color, Noren uses high-contrast black-and-white, macro close-ups, pixillation, and jagged bursts of imagery to achieve an intensity which, if not sustained over the film's hour-length, goes far beyond the lyrical.

6. *Hart of London*—Jack Chambers. Powerful and brooding, though uneven, this ambitious 1970 feature by the late Canadian painter mythologizes his industrial Ontario town through an unlikely synthesis that recalls both Brakhage's subjective visions and Conner's found-footage assemblages. The complexity of Chambers's imagery is brilliantly counterpointed by a hypnotic "con-

ployment of four sound and four image sequences in their 16 possible permutations has an all-American pragmatism. More pedagogic than the structuralist blockbusters of the early '70s, *Four Shadows* has an obvious value for filmmakers, students, and theorists; but in demonstrating the effect that sound has on one's perception of an image, it should be illuminating to anybody who has ever been "moved" by a movie.

8. *Foregrounds*—Pat O'Neill. One of two new films in O'Neill's Film Forum show, *Foregrounds* is a worthy successor to his *Saugus Series* (1974). Here too, he makes a virtuoso use of the optical-printer to synthesize 20 minutes of surreal apparitions and spatial ambiguities.

9 and 10. *Incontinence: A Diarrhetic Flow of Mismatches*—Manuel De Landa; and *We Imitate; We Break-Up*—Ericka Beckman. De Landa's manic "adaptation" of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and Beckman's eccentric demonstration of how-we-learn are outstanding works by filmmakers under 30. Both films are characterized by their high energy, formal sophistication, wit, return to content, and punk post-structuralist stance.

II. Conventional Narratives

1. *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*—Chantal Akerman. Over the course of its 3½-hour length, Akerman's feminist polemic, made up of "real time" depictions of Delphine Seyrig's daily routine, achieves something of the monumentality of the early '70s New York structuralist masterpieces. Paradoxically, the film's fanatic attachment to realism pushes the bourgeois melodrama to the outer limits of abstraction.

2. *The Confrontation*—Miklos Jancso. This 1969 film, set in post-World War II Hungary and premiered here as part of Jancso's Public Theater retrospective, treats the seizure and maintenance of power as a formal ballet. Its complex choreography—placing performers and camera in constant motion—and audaciously open-ended attitude make it political art of the highest order.

3. *Celine and Julie Go Boating*—Jacques Ri-

of Resnais, Robbe-Grillet, Duras, et al. The film is over-long and a bit rambling but when it works it's a triumph. Juliet Berto's performance as the insouciant *magicienne* Celine provides an antidote to the project's built-in whimsy.

4. *Symphony For a Sinner*—George Kuchar. This garish shocker (even for Kuchar) was far and away the most inventive color film of the year. Some people have objected to the callousness of Kuchar's student performers, but he's arranged the film in such a way that their posturing becomes an inescapable subtext.

5 and 6. *American Hot Wax*—Floyd Mutrux; and *Perceval*—Eric Rohmer. Mutrux makes Alan Freed the author of a cultural revolution and gives the creation of "Come Go With Me" the delirious spontaneity and Preston Sturges-like clutter it should have had and probably didn't. As his previous L.A.-zombie-scopitones (*Dusty and Sweets McGee; Aloha Bobby and Rose*) were steeped in the mythos of the '60s, it follows that *Hot Wax* would be set in 1959 and end with a police riot, to bring its version of *Happy Days* as close to Mutrux's beloved Vietnam Era as he could manage. As for *Perceval*, Rohmer's wholly unexpected pleasure shares the honors as the year's best costume musical.

7. *Violette*—Claude Chabrol. Chabrol's contribution to the French "popular memory" cycle is smooth, elegant, and absorbing. It's a pity that Bunuel was never moved to build a movie around this surrealist heroine.

8. *The Fury*—Brian De Palma. The turgid script is a far cry from *Carrie*, but De Palma manages to fashion an even crazier spectacle out of Amy Irving's staircase hallucinations, her slow-motion escape, and John Casavetes's explosive performance.

9. *Who'll Stop the Rain*—Karel Reisz. There's good action here despite the waste of Tuesday Weld. Reisz deserves credit for managing to evoke the apocalyptic confusions of 1970 without a total reliance on the Jefferson Airplane, as well as for the climactic freak-out that telescopes Vietnam, communes, psychedelic light-shows, and *High Sierra*.

10. *Halloween*—John Carpenter. I have little to add to the collective praise for the most celebrated and popular "cult film" of 1978, the cinematic equivalent of riding the Cyclone through the Ghost House at Coney Island. It's scarier than Carpenter's *Assault on Precinct 13* (the wierdest cop film since *Across 110th Street*, being a cross between *Bio Bravo*