

## Little Big Films

By Armond White

SHORT FILMS. New York Film Festival.

Ericka Beckman's *You the Better* weakens and exhausts its own ideas and considerable technical élan through 30 minutes of repetition without effect. Beckman uses a centrifugal, live-action pinball game (and a soundtrack of Soho cheerleaders) as a *Tron*-like metaphor for—no surprise—dehumanization and industrialization. But what's genuine here is a command of screen space, an appreciation of complementary tonalities (blue and yellow superimposed for depth), and a terrific sense of edited rhythm that even the millionaire technicians of *Tron* could envy.

Believe it or not, most of the world has already caught up with and surpassed George Kuchar's wet-dreams-as-gaudy-nightmares as seen in his festival entry *The Woman and the Dress*; the only ones who haven't might be those who feel compelled to reread *Edie*.

There should be no controversy about Jacki Ochs's *The Secret Agent*; its facts about dioxin poisoning, the casualties of Agent Orange that attack and haunt Vietnam veterans and their families, are very clearly presented. But what Ochs has performed as a public service is more a specious, rigged soap box than an example of documentary craft. Slack on the drama of investigation (what are the personal views of the executives who manufactured Agent Orange? What answer did the obtuse legislator give to the question, "Why do we have to have cause and effect in notebooks before we take care of these men and their families?"), Ochs prefers to rely on hectoring and instigation.

Animation has always been the festival's weakness. (Have they never heard of the National Film Board of Canada?) Of the three animated shorts presented this year, Robert Breer's *Trial Balloons* offered his usual impressive but less than compelling vision of fleet, real, and fancied imagery. Howard Danelowitz's anti-industrialization message was unworthy of the intense, vivid graphic skill in *Lady Tree*, and James Picker's puppet show