

Introduction

Background

Over the past half-century, no American city has been more consistently identified with alternative cinema than San Francisco and environs. There are a variety of reasons for the Bay Area's preeminence in the independent media scene. Obviously, a good many filmmakers (and more recently videomakers) have made the Bay Area their home for extended periods: Sidney Peterson, James Broughton, Jordan Belson, Harry Smith, Bruce Conner, Bruce Baillie, Chick Strand, Robert Nelson, Gunvor Nelson, Nathaniel Dorsky, Stephen Beck, George Kuchar, Mike Kuchar, Ernie Gehr, Warren Sonbert, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Craig Baldwin, Marlon Riggs, Cauleen Smith, and Greta Snider, to name just a few. But what has lured so many makers to the Bay Area and has kept them there is the region's tradition of institutional support for alternative media-making. The San Francisco Art Institute (formerly known as the California School of Fine Arts), Canyon Cinema, the Pacific Film Archive, the Center for Experiments in Television, the San Francisco Cinematheque, and other institutions have maintained a vital independent film/video culture in the region during the past generation. But before any of these organizations began to make major contributions to independent media, the Art in Cinema film series, founded by Frank Stauffacher and Richard Foster in 1946 and run by Stauffacher with the help of friends and family through 1954, had demonstrated not only that there *was* an alternative film history and an audience for it, but that the Bay Area could be one of its nodal points.

Under the auspices of the San Francisco Museum of Art, Art in Cinema presented its first public series in the fall of 1946 (ten events), and continued the following spring with a second series (five events). From 1946 until Stauffacher's death in 1955, Art in Cinema presented film series more or less regularly: fall 1947 (five events); fall 1948 (five events); fall 1949 (four events); spring 1950 (four events); spring 1951 (five events); fall 1952 (four events); fall 1953 (five events); spring 1954 (seven events); fall 1954 (six events)—sometimes supplementing these series with special programs: for example, two presentations of "Contemporary Experimental Films of Importance" in spring 1949; Anais Nin's presentation of husband Ian Hugo's *Ai-Ye* in 1950; and Roger Manvell's illustrated lecture on British cinema in May 1952. Beginning in 1947, a second, related series, also, so far as I know, programmed by Stauffacher (or at least based on Stauffacher's programming), was presented at the University of California in Berkeley; the Berkeley programs were similar but not identical to those presented in San Francisco.

For a museum to present sixty-odd film events over a period of nine years doesn't sound all that elaborate to modern viewers (currently the Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley offers nearly this many events on each bi-monthly calendar). But the presentations of Art in Cinema had an impact well beyond anything suggested by the number of events offered to the public. This impact was simultaneously an accident of history and the result of a remarkable commitment on the part of Stauffacher, with timely support from the Museum of Art. Like others interested in expanded opportunities for seeing the broadest range of cinema during the postwar years, Stauffacher discovered that, for whatever reasons, some audiences, especially in urban areas, were ready for alternatives.

Of course, even the most successful ventures into independent exhibition could hardly compare with the popular success of Hollywood movies at commercial movie houses. But in our era, when an audience of one hundred for an experimental film seems a success, Stauffacher's ability to attract five hundred to his San Francisco screenings on a regular basis, and more than that in Berkeley, seems remarkable (as does Amos Vogel's even greater success in attracting thousands of

members to the presentations of New York's Cinema 16 Film Society, which from the outset counted on Stauffacher for advice and support).

While Stauffacher's initiative resulted in something new for the Bay Area, it was hardly without precedents, especially in Europe. Indeed, the intermingling of Europeans and Americans during and after the two world wars probably helped some Americans become aware of the cine-club movement that had spread across Europe and the United Kingdom in the 1920s and 1930s.¹ In the case of *Art in Cinema*, this European influence seems apparent in Stauffacher's tendency, during most of the years he programmed the series, to combine a feature-length narrative film (usually either an American or European classic) with several short avant-garde films, and/or animations, and/or documentaries. This programming model was common to earlier, European film societies. The London Film Society programs, for example, reveal a similar programming strategy, using some of the particular films Stauffacher presented at *Art in Cinema*.²

There were American precedents as well, including Symon Gould's New York City Film Guild, which was successful enough in offering alternatives to Hollywood that it could support the design (by Frederick Kiesler) and construction of its own theater, which in later years became known as the Waverly.³ Also by the mid-1930s, the Museum of Modern Art in New York—as a result of efforts of the museum's first director, Alfred H. Barr—was creating a film library with a mandate to preserve and exhibit (and subsequently distribute) a broader range of films than was commercially viable in the United States. In fact, the museum was a crucial early resource for Stauffacher and Foster, both for the films they wanted to present and for information about these films. *Art in Cinema*'s earliest program notes quote Iris Barry, one of the major figures in the London Film Society, who became the MoMA Film Library's first film curator.⁴

But if a new interest in alternative forms of cinema was in the air, in San Francisco, New York, and elsewhere during the years following World War II, the particular impact of *Art in Cinema* was a function of Stauffacher's ongoing commitment as an artist-exhibitor, and the supportive contributions of those who, at various moments during *Art in Cinema*'s nine-year run, collaborated with him: Richard Foster during the first year; Harry Smith later on; and during the final years, Barbara Stauffacher (now Barbara Stauffacher Solomon), Stauffacher's wife from 1948. All three assisted Stauffacher in making contact with filmmakers, and in other ways as well. Both Jack Stauffacher, Frank's younger brother, and Barbara Stauffacher remember that Richard Foster's ability with public relations was crucial for *Art in Cinema*, especially right at the beginning. Dr. Grace L. McCann Morley, director of the San Francisco Museum of Art, was also supportive throughout the *Art in Cinema* years.

From the earliest planning stages, it was obvious that Stauffacher was committed not only to a thoroughly professional presentation of events to an audience with a serious interest in the arts, but to the ongoing education of this audience and to the development of the potential of what he tended to call "experimental" film. That Stauffacher assumed a serious audience is obvious, not simply from his frequent choice of challenging films, but from the length of his programs, which, after the first year, regularly included a feature narrative plus several shorter films, some of which would be likely to test the patience of at least some viewers.

Stauffacher and Foster suggested crucial dimensions of their programming philosophy in their first series announcement:

We hope that this series will accomplish several purposes: that it will show the relation between the film and the other art media—sculpture, painting, poetry; that it will stimulate interest in the film as a creative art medium in itself, requiring more of an effort of participation on the part of the audience than the Hollywood fantasies, before which an audience sits passively and uncreatively; and that it will give assistance to those contemporary artists who labor in obscurity in America with no distribution channels for their work.

For Stauffacher and his colleagues, the relationship between experimental film and modern art was crucial. As they made clear in their announcement for the second series, "The Avantgarde and experimental cinema embraces all attitudes of the so-called 'temper of modern art'—including such forms of expression as surrealism, abstraction, realism, symbolism, non-objective form, etc. The cinema as an art form has undergone—and is undergoing still—all of the exploratory phases that characterize the history of other modern art forms." The first two series were

programmed so as to foreground the relationship of the films shown and trends in the modern visual arts. Relationships between modern film and modern poetry were also suggested in each of the first two programs.

Of course, the fact that “experimental filmmakers” seemed to be dealing with many of the same issues as modern painters endowed the filmmakers’ efforts, as well as the efforts of Stauffacher and Foster, with an aura of respect and dignity; it made the support of the San Francisco Museum of Art feasible, and it allowed them to take their labors in assembling and presenting the events seriously. Indeed, the depth of their commitment resulted in their receiving at first no remuneration for their efforts and, later on, only symbolic remuneration. Art in Cinema was a labor of love in the service of Art: specifically, Art as the focus of an engaged community committed to Modernism.

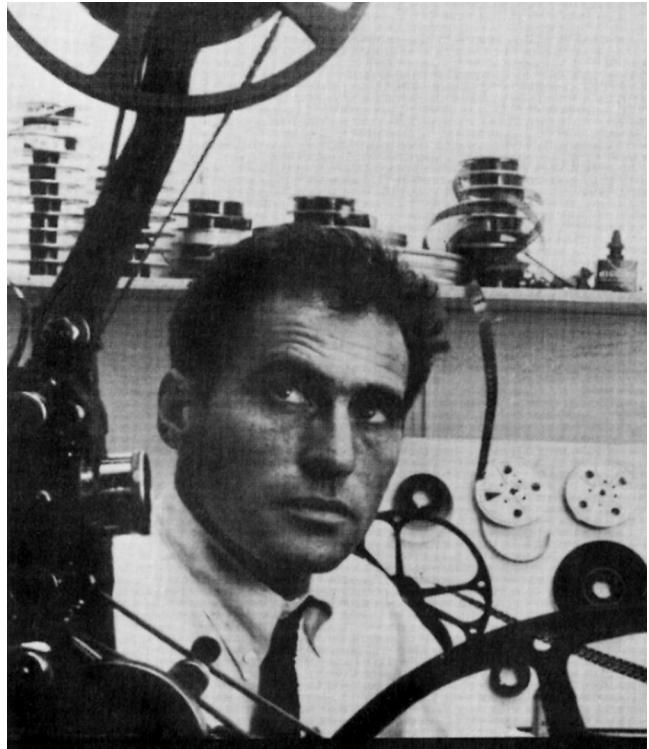
While the first series announcement claims that the ten-event program “as originally conceived has no principle of organization” and that the method of organizing the series “has been a highly personal one,” it was precisely the parallels between modern art and experimental film that provided Stauffacher and Foster with both the moniker, “Art in Cinema,” and the organization of their programs. The first two series were chosen so as to provide a historical review of the accomplishments of what has come to be known as the First Avant-Garde: films produced by European artists who were interested not so much in being *filmmakers*, but in using cinema as an alternative medium for artistic experiment. While several Americans were included in the first series—Mary Ellen Bute, Maya Deren, the Whitney Brothers—the majority of filmmakers included were Europeans. The second series also emphasized Europeans but included a larger percentage of Americans; by the third series, American filmmakers were in the majority.

The pedagogical dimension of Stauffacher’s programming and his commitment to the idea of film as a fine art were evident in the decision to produce a catalogue to accompany the first Art in Cinema series. While the logistics of assembling the contributions of a dozen or so writers and designing the catalogue postponed the publication of the volume until after the first series was over, *Art in Cinema: A Symposium on the Avantgarde Film*, edited by Stauffacher, became the first American attempt to assess the history of alternative cinema. *Art in Cinema*—available originally in late May 1947, reprinted by Arno Press in 1968, and presented as a facsimile in this volume—includes the programs and program notes for the first season, introductions by Foster and Stauffacher, and Henry Miller; essays by Hans Richter, Elie Faure, Man Ray, Luis Buñuel, James and John Whitney, Erich Pommer, Oskar Fischinger, Maya Deren, George Leite, and Paul Velguth; as well as a bibliography and a listing of sources for the films in the program. The catalogue is illustrated with stills, filmstrips, and drawings. *Art in Cinema* cost \$2.00 (\$1.50 for members of Art in Cinema and the Museum of Art). One can only conjecture what the impact of *Art in Cinema* was on the Art in Cinema audience, but since Stauffacher’s book was the *only* guidebook to the new field of avant-garde film, its publication must have convinced many in the audience that *these* screenings were at the forefront of developments, *were* the avant-garde.

For Stauffacher, the curatorial mission of Art in Cinema was, first, to educate his audience about the history of alternative film, and *then*, to provide a space where American film artists could present their newest contributions to the tradition of film as modern art, a space which indeed might *instigate* American contributions to this ongoing international history. That this second part of Stauffacher’s mission was successful is clear in the correspondence between Stauffacher and the many filmmakers who were in touch with him during the making of their films and in James Broughton’s memories of how Stauffacher’s “discovery” of him and Sidney Peterson “was the spur that changed our lives” (see Broughton’s “Frank Stauffacher: The Making of ‘Mother’s Day’” on pp. 181–183). Through Art in Cinema, Stauffacher was able to create something like a Bay Area community of independent filmmakers. On the other hand, while it is obvious in many letters (some of them reproduced on the following pages) that the opportunity offered by Art in Cinema energized the production of films, Stauffacher frequently complained about the scarcity of avant-garde films worth showing and sometimes asked the Art in Cinema audience for tips on new experimental work.

All in all, Stauffacher’s efforts were successful enough to simultaneously frustrate and reward his own creative efforts. In a letter to Hans Richter, written sometime after the special presentation of two programs of films by American experimental filmmakers in the spring of 1949,

Illustration 1. Frank Stauffacher in his studio on Montgomery Street, during the editing of *Notes on the Port of St. Francis* (1952). Photographer unknown; courtesy Jack Stauffacher.



Stauffacher laments that there is no one who can take over Art in Cinema: “It is developing into a full-time job ... and I want to get away from it so that I can make films myself—which was the reason I came into it at first. We wanted to establish an outlet for this type of film, and then make the films. But the job of presenting them has grown into a huge task” (see p. 191). Stauffacher had begun including films he was involved with—James Broughton’s *Mother’s Day* (1948), for which Stauffacher did the cinematography, and his own film *Zigzag* (1948)—in the fall 1948 series. He would continue to present his own films during the following years: *Sausalito* (1948) was shown in September 1949; *Notes on the Port of St. Francis* (1951) in November 1952; and apparently at least one rejected television commercial in May 1950 (a film called *Goethe in San Francisco* was listed in the fall 1949 program announcement, but judging from the program notes, it was not shown).

Near the end of the first Art in Cinema series, Stauffacher distributed a listing of the individual films shown, along with instructions for indicating which of the films audience members wanted to see again, which ones they did *not* want to see again, and which were “adequate.” Judging from the instances of the questionnaire included in the Art in Cinema papers at Pacific Film Archive, not much useful information seems to have resulted, though Stauffacher did indicate that “The Spring showing of films will include reshowings of the works most requested ...,” and two films—the Whitney Brothers’ *Film Exercise #1* (1944) and Alexander Alexeieff’s *En Passant* (presented as part of *Chants Populaires* on October 25, 1946)—were repeated on April 18, 1947, as “Request repeats from Series One.” Also, the first announcement for the Berkeley series instigated by Art in Cinema indicates that “Most of the films ... were selected by the Series One audience at Art in Cinema.” I am unclear as to the nature of this selection process, though the flyer indicates that an Art in Cinema Committee oversaw the University of California programs. At the beginning the committee included George Leite (who is also listed as Program Manager), Douglas MacAgy, and Grace L. McCann Morley, as well as Stauffacher and Foster (who supplied the program notes).

Stauffacher seems to have accepted that it was *his* job as curator of the series to decide what the audience might find most interesting, and having decided this, he was relentless in tracking down the newest interesting experimental work. His commitment to the filmmakers and films he showed was evident, year after year, in his continuing correspondence with them and in his informal efforts to distribute their films and to help other programmers learn about this new work. In an era before phone communication was economical, Stauffacher's ability as an affable, straightforward correspondent—an ability quite evident in the letters included in this volume—seems to have served him well.

After the fall 1946 and spring 1947 series, the Art in Cinema programs ceased to provide contextualizing titles, like "Poetry in Cinema," "The Surrealists," and "Experiments in Fantasy." Beginning with the fall 1947 series, Stauffacher apparently assumed not only that his audience would come to the films he presented as active, creative viewers, but that this audience didn't need the implied assistance of such titles. From fall 1947 until fall 1952, Stauffacher seems to have decided on programs not on the basis of definable categories, but so as to offer the audience programs of interesting films that would suggest the variety of non-Hollywood film history. Any given program might include several quite different avant-garde films, along with a classic silent feature, a foreign-language feature, and/or a documentary.

Stauffacher was dedicated to instigating a more varied, energetic, and serious independent film culture in America and in developing a sophisticated audience interested in more than conventional "passive" entertainment; however, he never seems to have seen avant-garde cinema as separate from other cinematic arenas. Implicit within the Art in Cinema programs, especially from fall 1947 through fall 1954, is a suggestion that *all* forms of "experimental cinema," made by individuals outside the industry or within the industry, are a significant part of film history, and that films are worth presenting—regardless of genre, of where they were made, of the nature of the audience they were originally made for—when they reflect their makers' inventiveness and their courage to try something new.

Like any creative programmer, Stauffacher grouped films so as to create each evening's experience: that is, he offered audiences a "meta-film" "edited" so as to create a variety of kinds of intellectual and sensual reverberation. On October 24, 1947, for example, Art in Cinema presented two animations by Oskar Fischinger (*Composition in Blue* [1931] and *Allegetto* [1936]); *Flat Hatting* (1946), a U.P.A. (United Productions of America) cartoon made to warn Navy pilots about the dangers of flying too low; *Plastics* (later known as *Transparent Plastics*, 1946), Jim Davis's first film (photographed by Charles F. Schwep); a short abstract film by Harry Smith, *No 5* (c. 1947); *Horror Dream* (1947) by Sidney Peterson and Hy Hirsh, "a choreographic interpretation of a dancer's anxiety before starting upon her theater routine" (to quote the 1963 Cinema 16 rental catalogue), with music composed by John Cage; and then, after an intermission, Edwin S. Porter's *Dream of a Rarebit Fiend* (1906) and Buster Keaton's *The Navigator* (1924). On the program announcement, the Smith and Peterson/Hirsh films are asterisked, indicating that they were premieres, though *Transparent Plastics* was also, according to Robert A. Haller's filmography of Davis, a premiere at Art in Cinema and was never shown publicly again.⁵ The program notes for the October 24th show also indicate that both the Fischinger films and the Harry Smith were replacements for films still at the laboratory (Smith's *Absolute Films No. 2*, *No. 3*, and *No. 4* were announced in the series brochure) which would be rescheduled and presented later in the series. There was nothing unusual about this rescheduling. Even after the announcements for series were distributed, Stauffacher would continue to adjust the particular screenings on the basis of what was/wasn't available, and from time to time Stauffacher would discover a film he decided to show in place of a film already announced.

If we examine Stauffacher's program for October 24th in more detail, several implicit polemical assumptions seem evident. The show includes both classics and the newest of the new. More specifically, it includes a trick film made just as the studio system was beginning to solidify (*Dream of a Rarebit Fiend*), a feature made at a Hollywood studio, and an animation (*Flat Hatting*) by an independent animation studio that was founded by animators who had broken with Disney in the name of economic and creative freedom,⁶ as well as four films by five independent makers, one of whom (Fischinger) had worked for Disney. The films were originally aimed at very different audiences: *Flat Hatting* was a U.S. Navy training film; the Keaton feature and *Dream of a Rarebit*

Fiend were made for a mass audience; the Davis, Peterson/Hirsh, and Fischinger films assume an audience interested in film as a fine art. Even this last grouping includes various expectations with regard to audience: before immigrating to the United States, for example, Fischinger was accustomed to substantial audiences for his work, and after his arrival in this country he continued to hope, to no avail, for something like a popular following. James Davis, on the other hand, assumed a far more limited audience.

And yet all these films have both general and particular elements in common: each is visually inventive, and all, in one sense or another, are externalizations of inner states: *Horror Dream* and *Dream of a Rarebit Fiend* visualize dreams, or at least mental states analogous to dreams; the Fischinger, Smith, and Davis films can be read as attempts to evoke spiritual states; even *The Navigator* includes a number of dreamlike moments in a quietly surreal narrative. While the program is split between animation and live action, the live-action films either use animation (*Dream of a Rarebit Fiend*) or are related to animation (Smith's film was one of his first not to have been created one frame at a time, though Smith himself later indicated that *No. 5* was an "Homage to Oskar Fischinger"), and even *The Navigator*, along with other silent comedies, seems to have paved the way for later cartoon characters and plots.⁷

The sequencing of the October 24th program (assuming Stauffacher adhered to the order indicated in the program notes) moves viewers through a series of moods. The intermission ends the more challenging portion of the screening and delivers the audience to the pleasure and relative conventionality of the Porter and Keaton films. Of course, since these were films from the silent era, seeing them would *also* have been *unconventional* in 1947.

Overall, Stauffacher's program for October 24, 1947, makes several arguments about the nature of film history. First, like the French avant-garde filmmakers of the 1920s before him, and Tom Gunning and Bart Testa more recently, Stauffacher was implicitly arguing for the relationship between what for many viewers must have seemed like opposites: early commercial cinema and modern experimental cinema.⁸ And he argues for a revision in the way audiences approach an evening at a movie theater. In the first section of the October 24th program, the audience was asked to look at a series of films made with unconventional means by filmmakers working independently. In the section of the program after the intermission, the audience was asked to re-examine the Hollywood past in light of the avant-garde films surveyed during the first half of the program, as well as through the filter of nearly two decades of sound film.

One distinctive dimension of Stauffacher's attitude toward cinema that had an important impact on his programming is evident in the program note for Davis's *Plastics*. Not only is *Plastics* a new film using unusual procedures for recording imagery, but it is described as part of a work-in-progress: "At present he [Davis] is making further cinematic experiments which, he says, 'begin where this leaves off.'" In the program notes for the third program of Art in Cinema's previous series, a similar comment is made in reference to the Whitney Brothers' *Five Film Exercises* (1943–1944): "These revolutionary film studies are the result of a film technique—still imperfect—whereby sound and image may be created simultaneously. The Whitneys do not consider these results as works of art. Thus they have called them 'exercises.'" Stauffacher certainly recognized that avant-garde filmmakers sometimes made remarkable, finished works, but he was also drawn to work that was "experimental" in the sense that it was an interim report on a cinematic investigation still underway. Indeed, for Stauffacher, the advantage of working outside the industry and its commercial pressures was the opportunity to *play* with cinema, to make films just to see what the results might look like. This attitude accounts for Stauffacher's commitment to presenting "imperfect" films, and is evident in his own filmmaking as well. Stauffacher later wrote to Amos Vogel in reference to *Sausalito*, "I feel an experimental film carried to a point of perfection can really no longer be called experimental"; "I felt it legitimate to let it [*Sausalito*] go as a truly experimental piece with the good and bad left as they were; in the nature of a 'sketch.'"⁹

If one compares Stauffacher's programming with Amos Vogel's at Cinema 16, the other pre-eminent American film society of the era, additional dimensions of both programmers' goals and strategies become more obvious. Of course, Stauffacher and Vogel saw their missions as ideologically similar and practically related: each was an important resource for the other. But their senses of the film history they wanted their series to reflect and the practical realities they needed to deal with reveal important differences. On the practical side, the most crucial difference is probably that Vogel made Cinema 16 his livelihood and the sole focus of his attention, while for Stauffacher

Art in Cinema was an activity he did, in addition not only to his own filmmaking but to supporting himself as a commercial artist, which he seems to have hated. As Cinema 16 grew more successful, Vogel became busier and busier with Cinema 16 and financially secure. Stauffacher, on the other hand, stopped working as a commercial artist so that he could make his own films, and he and Barbara struggled financially for some of the years when Art in Cinema was functioning (see my conversation with Barbara Stauffacher Solomon).

Insofar as programming itself was concerned, Vogel's particular commitment to film history led him to present a variety of forms of film-making that seem to have held no particular interest for Stauffacher: scientific films from a variety of fields, for example. In general, Cinema 16 was at least as committed to documentary as to avant-garde film, and Vogel's balance of these two cinematic arenas created the particular Cinema 16 audience dynamic. At Art in Cinema, *art* and *artistic experiment* were the foci, and those documentaries Stauffacher showed tended to be those traditionally identified with both documentary and avant-garde history, such as the European City Symphonies he presented in Art in Cinema's first series and *A Propos de Nice* (1928) by Jean Vigo; classics of the poetic documentary like *Song of Ceylon* (1934) by Basil Wright and *Vinden Fran Vaster* (The West Wind, 1943) by Arne Sucksdorff; and documentaries about artists, like Henri Stork's *Le Monde de Paul Delvaux* (The World of Paul Delvaux, 1947).

Further, Vogel was interested not just in the artistic or the experimentally innovative, but in the forbidden. Early on, Cinema 16 became a membership society specifically in order to avoid the New York censors. For Vogel, the presentation of such outrageous films as George Franju's *The Blood of the Beasts* (*Sang des bêtes*, 1949) and Kenneth Anger's *Fireworks* (1947) was a Cinema 16 high point. Indeed, Vogel's predilection for the edgy, the bizarre, even the horrific seems to have been an important audience lure at Cinema 16—and, at least in a few cases, a cause for rebellion. P. Adams Sitney has indicated that for some film-goers (including himself) Cinema 16 had the aura of a circus sideshow.¹⁰ Stauffacher, as the "Art in Cinema" moniker suggests, was less inclined to focus on the forbidden, though he certainly didn't hesitate to show films that might be expected to offend the sensibilities of some members of his audience.

Stauffacher didn't compile information about the kind of people Art in Cinema drew, though he learned something of their attitudes from their responses on questionnaires. A note on a questionnaire from Eliot Finkels, for example, argues that *The Potted Psalm* (1947) by James Broughton and Sidney Peterson was "a perfect example of how to misuse the camera, how to misinterpret dream sequences & the subconscious, a perfect waste of hard-to-get film, & an excellent way to insult an intelligent audience." That Finkels was hardly alone in his response to *The Potted Psalm* is clear in Broughton's memory of the November 1, 1946, screening, where his film met with "boos of bewilderment."¹¹

Some of those who attended screenings remember them well. In her autobiography, in draft as this is written, Barbara Stauffacher, who was a young art student during the early Art in Cinema years, recalls the audience this way:

The audience was the best part of the performance. Berkeley professors with tweed jackets and frumpy wives ... arrived early to get good seats. Architects and their dates, high-styled with expensive haircuts, dressed in black-and-white, or grey, or black-and-grey, looked for seats near each other or rich looking, potential clients. Young lawyers arrived in three-piece suits with ladies in pearls and little black dresses. The Woman's Board of the Museum, socialites, and rich blondes devoted to the arts, and Frank, wore cashmere sweaters, Pre-Columbian jewelry, and pageboys, and walked as if they owned the place and their gay escorts. Pretty young women, recently graduated from Art Appreciation 101, who had practiced how to eat hamburgers without smudging their lipstick, looked for sensitive young men. Artists on the GI Bill, recently attacking the Axis, instead of big canvasses, jazz musicians, and poets arrived late, wore black turtlenecks and Levis, and slinked into the remaining seats or slumped against the walls.... It was a pity to turn the lights off.¹²

Barbara Stauffacher also provides a picture of Stauffacher that is in tune with her sense of the audience:

Frank loved parties. Every night was a different party.

Friday nights, Art in Cinemas were his parties. As the audience gathered, Frank slipped into an invisible door in one of the galleries to climb up the narrow iron spiral stairway to the projection

booth high under the rotunda's entablature. He held cans of 16mm films in one hand, a pitcher of chilled martinis he'd gotten from the bartender across the street in the other, and a martini glass in his teeth. He'd already screened the films, organized the programs, had announcements printed and mailed, written program notes, and selected music.

While Art in Cinema privileged forms of cinema made outside contemporary Hollywood, Stauffacher was not simplistically doctrinaire. His commitment at Art in Cinema was to provide opportunities for seeing films more challenging than "the Hollywood fantasies," but this did not keep him from recognizing that filmmakers working in the industry in his own era were also capable of levels of creative expression that were as fully ignored by the mass audience, and even by the industry itself, as any of the obscure experiments that found their way into Art in Cinema programs.

The longest hiatus between Art in Cinema series was between the spring 1951 series and the fall 1952 series. During this eighteen-month period, Stauffacher finished *Notes on the Port of St. Francis*, then joined Barbara Stauffacher, who was pregnant, in Europe. They were in London for the birth of their daughter Chloe, then lived in New York for a time, while Frank tried to find work, and in one instance worked for the U.S. Department of State, curating a photography show about American commercial directors that apparently toured Europe (I have not been able to locate details about this show). When he became ill with a brain tumor, he and Barbara and Chloe moved back to San Francisco, where Stauffacher had his first brain operation in 1953. As he recovered from this operation, he worked at bringing accomplished commercial directors to Art in Cinema. On October 2, 1953, Art in Cinema hosted director George Stevens, who presented an illustrated talk about his work. The success of this event led to the final two seasons of Stauffacher's career as programmer.

A two-part series called "Aspects of the American Film: The Work of Fifteen Directors," a spin-off of Stauffacher's work for the State Department, was organized for the spring and fall of 1954. Films by major Hollywood directors (and by non-Hollywood makers whose work was widely seen) were presented and represented, either by the directors themselves, or by other directors/producers close to their work. Fred Zinnemann, Vincent Minnelli, Gene Kelly, William Wellman, and Frank Capra represented their own work; Rouben Mamoulian presented D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916), Willard Van Dyke presented Pare Lorentz's work as well as his own; Merian C. Cooper presented Robert Flaherty's *Man of Aran* (1934), and excerpts from his own *Grass* (1925) and *Chang* (1927); Mitchel Leisen presented Cecil B. DeMille's *The Crusades* (1935) and an excerpt from *Reap the Wild Wind* (1942), and Stephen Bosustow discussed animations by the U.P.A. Studio, which he founded. Stauffacher explained in an early description of "Aspects of the American Film," "This treatment of the American film has been patterned after a large circulating exhibition designed for the Smithsonian Institution and the U. S. Department of State a few years ago by this writer. Made to circulate abroad, it sought to show some of the really positive achievements in the American film."

Stauffacher recognized that some of his audience might see his attention to accomplished Hollywood directors as an abandonment of his commitment to the avant-garde. But he argued that during "these nine years of outstanding programs, no stringent policy has existed but that of being concerned with what is worth your [the Art in Cinema audience's] interest in the film. True, our programs grew out of the avant-garde, but there is only so much avant-garde available." From Stauffacher's point of view, recognizing the artistry of the commercial directors he showed was not only part of his mission, but related to his avant-garde sensibility, since even the best Hollywood directors were rarely, in the mid-1950s, accorded the status of *artists*. Indeed, judging from some the directors' comments, Stauffacher's presentation of them and their films at "Art in Cinema" felt risky. Barbara Stauffacher, who worked closely with her husband on "Aspects of the American Film," remembers Fred Zinnemann saying, "God forbid my producers ever hear I'm doing something that has anything to do with the word *art*! They'll fire me!" (see the interview with Barbara Stauffacher Solomon, pp. 243–244).

"Aspects of the American Film" was the concluding chapter in Stauffacher's career as a curator, and its considerable success obscured the fact of Stauffacher's fast-failing health. In Stauffacher's Art in Cinema correspondence, there is virtually no mention of the surgeries; his weakened condition is never, even implicitly, used as an explanation for slow responses to letters.

Indeed, until near the end, Stauffacher carried on in his public role at the Art in Cinema screenings, despite his failing health. Barbara Stauffacher recalls an incident following Frank Capra's presentation on October 22, 1954: "After his talk, Capra, his wife, Frank, and I went for a drink to Tosca's on Columbus Avenue. They were staying at the Fairmont Hotel. We were walking across the lobby when Frank had a seizure.... Frank lay on the ground shaking. We kneeled around him. Then, Frank Capra picked Frank up in his arms as he might a sick child, carried him outside, and put him into the green Mercury I'd bought for \$250."¹³

By August of 1955, after a second brain operation, at the age of thirty-nine, Stauffacher was dead (he was born August 13, 1916). Although various Bay Area film series during the following years used the Art in Cinema name, the energy and excitement of Stauffacher's Art in Cinema programs would not be revived in the area until the 1960s. In a letter to Barbara Stauffacher soon after Stauffacher's death, Amos Vogel sang Stauffacher's praises, focusing on what may have been Stauffacher's most remarkable qualities as programmer, his decency and his diplomacy:

Those of us who knew Frank intimately have lost a true and rare friend, a true and rare human being. In an industry with more than the usual share of cut-throats and slick businessmen, he was the one and only person I knew who had no enemies; the only person, in fact, about whom nothing bad or negative or unpleasant was said behind his back. His integrity, devotion to his life's work and his sincerity were too transparent to be misunderstood by even the most narrow-minded. He pioneered in this field and set standards for all of us, Cinema 16 included.¹⁴

Design of This Volume

This documentation of Art in Cinema was initiated by Robert Haller of Anthology Film Archives in New York City, who explored the Art in Cinema files and then, in July 1989, proposed a book on Art in Cinema to Edith Kramer, director of the Pacific Film Archive. At some point during the late 1980s or early 1990s, I learned of Haller's interest in this project, during a conversation with him about my own documentation of Cinema 16. At the time, I was becoming dubious about the possibility of finding a publisher for my project (*Cinema 16: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society* had been accepted for publication by U.M.I. Research Press and announced in the summer 1989 catalogue, only to be abruptly canceled during the reorganization of the press, and it had been rejected by a variety of other presses). I found solace in the fact that at least one other scholar of independent cinema believed in the need to document not only the histories of those organizations that had established and maintained public spaces for the remarkable history of independent cinema, but also the individual men and women who had labored to create them. As I was doing my research on Cinema 16, I had, like Haller, come to the conclusion that if documenting Cinema 16 were worthwhile, a comparable documentation of the film series that helped to inspire Vogel's efforts would also be valuable.

When Ruth Bradley, editor of *Wide Angle*, published a substantial portion of the Cinema 16 documentation in two double issues in January and April 1997, and indicated her enthusiasm for continuing to use *Wide Angle* to document institutional histories crucial to the development and maintenance of independent media culture, I contacted Haller and asked him about the state of his Art in Cinema project. He indicated that he had made a selection of documents from the Art in Cinema files, but had become so busy with other projects, relating to his work as director of Collections and Special Projects at Anthology Film Archives in New York, that he despaired of finding the time to finish the Art in Cinema project. Haller expressed a willingness to turn his selection of materials over to me, if I were interested in seeing the project into publication. He gave me his materials in 1998.

In exploring the very useful selection Haller had made, I realized that there were dimensions of Art in Cinema that needed to be more fully represented, and I made contact with Kathy Geritz, film curator at Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley, where the Art in Cinema materials are housed. Geritz examined the files and sent me a supplementary selection of materials that filled some of the gaps I had discovered in Haller's selection.

Finally, in the summer of 1999, I visited the Bay Area to explore the Art in Cinema files myself. With the assistance of Pacific Film Archive librarian Nancy Goldman, I examined the several boxes

of Art in Cinema materials (using the "Guide to the Archives of Art in Cinema Series Pacific Film Archive Collection," compiled by Marci Hoffman in the fall of 1989). I found a considerable variety of useful materials that I added to Haller's original selection and Geritz's supplement. I also talked with Jack Stauffacher and with Barbara Stauffacher Solomon. Later on, I talked with Jordan Belson, one of the filmmakers whose work Stauffacher championed at Art in Cinema. I only wish I had begun this project earlier, when other filmmakers who knew Stauffacher and whose films Stauffacher presented were still alive.

When Temple University Press agreed to publish the Art in Cinema manuscript, we decided that this volume would be presented as a companion to *Cinema 16: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society*: that is, it would use a comparable moniker, its organization and design would be based on the earlier volume, and there would be a variety of intersections between the two histories (though as little repetition as possible). Indeed, in this introduction I have avoided, insofar as has been practical, repeating information presented in the introduction to the earlier volume and recommend that the reader interested in a more detailed history of the film society movement refer to *Cinema 16*.

I have arranged the Art in Cinema documentation in chronological order. My goal is not simply to present the documents, but to provide a sense of the life of Stauffacher's film society. I have restricted the documentation to the years when Stauffacher himself was curator of Art in Cinema and have arranged the various materials so that the reader can get a sense of the various activities by Stauffacher and others that were required to develop and maintain the Art in Cinema experience. I have tended to privilege letters and other materials that seem of historical import and, whenever possible, to include letters to and from filmmakers and critics who continued to play a significant role in alternative film history. Since most readers were born long after Stauffacher's Art in Cinema ceased to function, I have, in many instances, included explanatory textual comments (in italics).

A complete listing of the film events announced in advance by Art in Cinema is included, and in all cases but two we have reproduced the flyers announcing the annual series (I have not been able to locate a copy of the announcement for the eighth series or a reproducible copy of the third series). A sampling of the Art in Cinema program notes, compiled and/or written for each program by Stauffacher, is also included. I have chosen to focus on the series *as they were announced*, since this provides a sense of Stauffacher's vision for Art in Cinema during each particular series. But Stauffacher was a flexible programmer, in part because he had to be—independent distribution being what it was in the 1940s and early 1950s—and in part because he seems to have felt that it was his job to respond to what he knew was going on around him. Instances where the announced program was changed by the time of the actual presentation—sometimes only a few weeks later—are not hard to find.

A particularly dramatic example is the September 24, 1948, program. In the series announcement, Stauffacher indicates that four Hans Richter films will be shown, along with "two fragments of work in progress: John Whitney's form and synthetic sound; Albert King's production, with Frank Collins and Don Myers of *Moonlight Sonata*," plus Elwood Dekker's *Light Modulator*, Luciano Emmer and Enrico Gras's *Racconto da un Affresco*, Ernest Beadle's *In the Sea*, Vladimir Nilsen's *The Brazen Horseman*, and "a dance film by Sydney Peterson and Hy Hirsh of Marian van Tuyl's *Clinic for the Study of Stumble*." The program notes for the September 24th screening begin with an announcement:

Tonight's program will be without several films originally scheduled and announced, one of them being the *Racconto da un Affresco* of Luciano Emmer and Enrico Gras. This film, as well as one other by Emmer and Gras on Hieronymus Bosch, has been mysteriously withheld by the Italian consulate in Canada without explanation. It is a circumstance beyond our control. When these films are again available, they will be shown at a special Art in Cinema program, free to you as subscribers to this present series. An announcement will be forthcoming. [Four films by Emmer and Gras, including *Racconto da un Affresco*, were part of the fifth series.]

The material from the works in progress by John Whitney and Albert King are also absent from the program, as are the Dekker film, the Beadle film, the Nilsen film, and one of the Richter films (*Filmstudie*). The new program includes five unannounced films: Viking Eggeling's *Symphonie Diagonale*, Oskar Fischinger's *Motion Painting No. 1*, Ralph Steiner's *H₂O*, Chaplin's *The Pawn Shop*, and a film by Harry Smith called *Primitive Visual Rhythm*, dated 1947–1948.¹⁵

The catalogue *Art in Cinema* (presented here as a facsimile through the gracious permission of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art) includes revised versions of Art in Cinema's program notes for the first year's presentations (I have included several of the original program notes for this first series so that the reader can have a sense of how the catalogue evolved from the original presentations).

Insofar as possible, we have done our best to provide accurate texts of the letters to and from Stauffacher, Foster, and others who worked with Art in Cinema, and to present them with enough graphic variety to suggest the original letters without allowing the book to become too busy. We have justified margins left and have placed regularized versions of addresses, dates, and signatures on the left, regardless of how the writers presented them. We have generally retained the writers' idiosyncrasies of grammar, usage, capitalization, and spelling, in order to provide readers with a more complete sense of the period during which Art in Cinema was active—except when an idiosyncrasy of spelling would be likely to cause confusion; then we have corrected it. We have normalized punctuation and spacing between words. When letters, or additions to letters, are handwritten, we have indicated this with *[hw]*, and when we have abridged a complex letterhead, as we have done in most instances, we have used [...] in the heading. Inevitably, I have worked in some instances with original letters (generally, letters to Stauffacher) and in others (generally, letters from Stauffacher and his colleagues) with copies. In the case of the copies, it is not always possible to determine how a letter was signed: when I am clear about who signed a letter, but not how the letter was signed, I have placed the name of the sender in italicized brackets. Finally, permission to reprint letters is indicated at the end of each text. All program notes and flyers for Art in Cinema are reprinted by permission of Barbara Stauffacher Solomon.

Notes

1. In the third chapter of his *French Cinema: The First Wave 1915–1929* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), Richard Abel provides a valuable overview of the development of the film society movement in France. See also my introduction to *Cinema 16: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), pp. 1–26.

2. In 1972, *The Film Society Programs, 1925–1939* (New York: Arno Press) was published. The volume includes a complete listing of the films shown by the London Film Society, along with the contextualizing information offered to audiences.

3. So far as I know, the particular nature and accomplishments of Symon Gould's Film Guild remain to be documented and explored.

4. Haidee Wasson reviews the early history of the Museum of Modern Art film library in "Some Kind of Racket': The Museum of Modern Art's Film Library, Hollywood and the Problem of Film Art, 1935," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Spring 2000), pp. 5–29; and in *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

5. Haller's filmography is included in the catalogue *Jim Davis: The Flow of Energy* (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1992), edited by Haller.

6. See David Fisher, "Two Premieres: Disney and UPA," in *The American Animated Cartoon*, ed. Danny Peary and Gerald Peary (New York: Dutton, 1980), pp. 178–182.

7. See Smith's note for No. 5 in *The Film-makers' Cooperative Catalogue*, No. 7. I am also assuming here that the No. 5 listed in this catalogue is the same No. 5 presented at Art in Cinema.

8. See, for example, Tom Gunning, "An Unseen Energy Swallows Space: The Space in Early Film and Its Relation to American Avant-Garde Film," in *Film Before Griffith*, ed. John L. Fell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 355–366; and Bart Testa, *Back and Forth: Early Cinema and the Avant-Garde* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1992), a catalogue for a film series presented at the Art Gallery of Ontario, April 24–May 17, 1992. See also my own *Avant-Garde Film/Motion Studies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

9. Letter from Stauffacher to Vogel, January 6, 1951, included in MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, p. 174.

10. The formation of the New American Cinema Group, which came to be represented most obviously by Jonas Mekas, had in part to do with the desire to see filmmakers accorded the dignity of a less sensational screening situation than Cinema 16 had to offer.

11. Broughton remembers the Art in Cinema screening in his *Making Light of It* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1992), pp. 1–2. That this screening is the focus of the opening paragraphs of Broughton’s reminiscence suggests the importance of Art in Cinema to aspiring filmmakers.

12. Jordan Belson also remembers Art in Cinema presentations as both artistic and social occasions. See my conversation with Belson on pp. 173–175.

13. From Barbara Stauffacher Solomon’s unpublished manuscript.

14. Letter to Barbara Stauffacher [Solomon] from Amos Vogel, April 22, 1955.

15. The program notes include this description by Smith: “The forms used in this film have been limited to two classifications: a circle (or circles) moving across the field of vision, and a stationary circle segmenting itself on its own axis. These two simple actions are arranged in a slowly accelerating rhythmic series, with angular movements and highly saturated colors in the body of the film, replacing and being replaced by oblique movement and a grayed spectrum at the beginning and end of the work.” I’m not positive whether this film is one of those currently in distribution.