

Sundance as Documentary Support Group

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U.S.A." for six months when he ran the Orson Welles Cinema in Cambridge, Mass., and who is now involved in distributing "Some Nudity Required," an incisive, firsthand feminist look at the world of exploitation films, noted that some distribution problems could be traced to an unlikely source. "The success of the independent film has done a lot to hurt the documentary," he said, since both compete for the same space and interest.

But Ms. Kopple made a forceful case for the special merits of the documentary. "Fiction films come and go, but documentaries talk about who we are as people," she said. "They can take you where you've never been before."

"Like Woody Allen's hotel room," said Anne Makepeace, since Ms. Kopple's film about Mr. Allen and his jazz band on a European tour shows Mr. Allen and Soon-yi Previn, in bed. ("He has a cold and she's nursing him," Ms. Kopple explained.)

Ms. Makepeace's own film is "Baby, It's You," a touching, fearless account of her efforts to become pregnant while simultaneously exploring her family's abundant eccentricities. (One brother raises goats, another aspires to polygamy.) It will be shown on the "P.O.V." series on PBS and is thus limited to an hour, as is Todd Phillips and Andrew Gurland's "Frat House," which has at least as much to do with the decline of Western civilization as Ms. Spheeris's film does. Mr. Phillips



Sussanne Hoppe in Katharina Otto's documentary "Beautopia."

hinted repeatedly that he would love to have HBO's permission to make the film longer and find it a theatrical run.

The whole group, which included Katharina Otto, a first-time feature filmmaker (whose "Beautopia," about the manipulation of young girls who dream of being supermo-

dels, is a lively feminist analysis), agreed on two things: that any subject could lend itself to first-rate documentary filmmaking ("Look what Errol [Morris] did with albino mole-rats!" exclaimed Ms. Kopple about last year's "Fast, Cheap and Out of Control") and that the whole form suffers when mediocre work is rewarded.

"They're informational. They're totally objective. Their hearts are in the right place," said Mr. Broomfield, not only about Oscar nominees but also about so-so Sundance winners from previous years.

Though all of these filmmakers except Mr. Broomfield were showing their films in competition here, the atmosphere among them was admirably collegial. "If one of our films gets out there, that just means more can come," said Ms. Kopple. "Has everyone been telling you how courageous you are?"

Ms. Makepeace was asked by Odette Springer, who drew on her experience scoring the music for seamy B-movies to make "Some Nudity Required." Of her own film, Ms. Springer said that the subject matter did nothing to entrance potential financiers. "So I was crazy enough to put everything I had into it." Ms. Spheeris, in black leather biker chic, leaned across the table and beamed at Ms. Springer. "That's not crazy," she said. "That's wonderful."

The impact of documentaries (and there are many more contenders in that category) is being felt in some of the festival's dramatic features. The best-received drama so far, Walter Salles's film "Central Station," has