

His three strongest works, *Life Game*, *Without A Hobby It's No Life* and *Orillia: Our Town* are documentaries made for the CBC. These three most clearly depict Lavut's use of the social documentary and his uniquely enjoyable style.

Life Game was the first, and dealt with successful middle-aged middle-class executives suddenly unemployed, providing a frightening look at the phenomena of human obsolescence in a technocratic society. *Without A Hobby It's No Life* was the delightful film about people indulging in some of the strangest hobbies, an offbeat, funny look at this very North American occupation. Both these films reflected Lavut's growing style which becomes clearest in *Orillia: Our Town*.

Recently aired, *Orillia* is actually a detailed portrait of small Canadian towns. Lavut chose that particular Ontario town because it was so typical of the thousands of places which still form the backbone of our society. Focussing on Orillia, he could explore the fabric and structure of life as most Canadians live it; including the clear distinctions between various economic levels, the handful of families who invariably own and control entire towns, the historic insulation from the rest of the world, the family businesses endangered by corporate chains, young people moving to cities for work, the shifting economy — in Orillia's case — towards tourism. All of these social elements are intelligently and subtly explored.

But what makes Lavut's films more than good social fieldwork are his characters and his style. In the *Orillia* film, for example, he included not only the newspaper editor, the fire-chief, the leading families, etc. but some fascinating characters — a mother and a daughter team who teach ballet, an old German immigrant who has resisted multiculturalism for decades, two recluse brothers who have made home movies since the 1940's, and a newlywed couple (in their sixties) living in a log cabin. And the things people say in Lavut's films are priceless! This quote comes from a man who has worked in the same foundry for 30 years, talking about the Owner, "He used to go around hollering at everyone! But he doesn't do that anymore — you know why? Because he's dead! That's why!" Followed by a big grin. . . .

The other trademarks of a Lavut film are his cyclical editing and portrait filming. He introduces first one character, then another, then another, returns back to the first to continue

his story. This non-linear editing weaves a rich tapestry showing how people's lives interconnect. His portrait-style (Classic Canadiana) consists of filming in people's livingrooms from a long shot, but with the subjects snuggling close enough so that the same set-up can be used for medium shots and close-ups. As a result, people are not only being mirrored by their created milieu, but by sitting uncomfortably close (normal range on an average sofa is from one to three feet apart — *Body Language* — Soc. I) the dynamics of their relationships are forced out.

It all works. Perhaps what is most exciting about Martin Lavut's films is that he never makes fun of his collected "characters". He studies them, smiles at the intrinsic humour of our "human condition", but never loses the dignity of his subjects. It is this humanism, coupled with perceptive social understanding, which makes Lavut one of the most interesting directors working in documentaries. And, of course, his most wonderful trademark — at the end of these films after the credits have rolled, someone always looks right into the camera and asks, "How come it takes so many of you people to film one old man?" Cut to: "This has been a CBC Network presentation."

—A.I.—K.

Grass Roots

This is the first serious, in-depth documentary we've seen on communes, and it's excellent! Communes were not a passing fad of the sixties — many are very successful, still functioning, and the phenomenon is growing as a serious and viable alternative life-style.

Grass Roots, a one-hour colour documentary, is part of a trilogy called "Alternative America" by Montreal filmmakers Luciano Martinengo and Thomas Wahlberg. This particular film in the series deals with rural communes: why they were formed, who lives in them, how they are structured economically and politically, what their future plans are and to what level they integrate with the world around them.

A large part of the film concerns Twin Oaks, the commune based on The Father of Behaviourism — B.F. Skinner's book, *Walden Two*, some of the other groups include back to nature dropouts, anarchists, and a large religious community. Each is explored fairly, and their different ways of approaching communal living are

intelligently detailed.

One of the most excellent aspects of this documentary is the "inside look" so antithetical to news reportage. The main reason for this intimacy is that the series was entirely self-financed (it took three years to make). The filmmakers worked for one year to raise seed money, then lived in each commune, working as labourers between shoots to complete the film — it is that dedication to making an accurate and detailed documentary which makes *Grass Roots* so worthwhile.

Every screening we've been to was followed by several hours' discussion — whatever bias the filmmakers may have, they must be doing something right! Their next film will concern alternative sexual relationships — if it's anything like *Grass Roots*, it will be fascinating. Contact: The Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre.

—A.I.—K.

Backlot Canadiana

This little 20-minute item will tell you more about the Problem of Canadian Filmmaking than the last 20 briefs you've laboured through. And it's more fun. . . .

Filmmaker Peter Rowe (responsible for films like *Neon Palace* — the first nostalgia movie ever made; *Good Friday in Little Italy* — a documentary on exactly that; and recently a one-hour CBC Drama originally intended to put together a film of references to Canada in foreign films. Researching those great lines about our Mounties and Eskimos and Snow, he noticed a surprising increase of mentions after 1946 in Hollywood movies and uncovered the Canadian Cooperation Project (the subject of *Pierre Berton's next book* — see *Film News*).

The Canadian Cooperation Project was the deal offered by Hollywood to one of our Federal Cabinet Ministers in 1946. The offer was for Canada to scrap any plans for passing a quota along the lines of Britain's Eady Plan in exchange for more mentions of Canada in Hollywood movies to increase American tourism. The offer was accepted.

Backlot Canadiana is the (painfully) funny account of how this deal was set up which quashed our plans for an autonomous film industry. Included are colourful anecdotes involving ladies in black velvet pumping booze in and information out of Canadian producers attempting to buy equip-



From "Backlot Canadiana"

ment in Hollywood for a multi-million dollar production studio, interviews with the man who was hired to go around Hollywood sets inserting Canadian references, and, of course, clips. Example: cowboys sitting around a campfire. One says, "That was an oriole, wasn't it?", Jimmy Stewart answers, "Yes — it was a CANADIAN oriole!"

It's almost too Canadian to believe. If you're interested in Canada's Film Making (and if you're not — why are you reading this magazine?) you owe it to yourself to see this marvelous little film. Contact: CBC, Box 500, Station A, Toronto M5W 1E6.

What colonialism?

—A.I.K.

Mini-Reviews

Good news for those of us who refuse to watch television: some of those admittedly interesting films we've been missing will now get theatrical distribution through the CBC/NFB agreement recently announced (see Issue 18 — Winnipeg Symposium). We won't have to start watching the tube, we can steadfastly stay in dark screening rooms watching bit coloured shadows on the screen! Details are still hard to come by, but being incorrigible optimists we've decided to start including little write-ups on some of our favourites. (Next issue, we hope to have reviews of the *Pacificanada* and *Atlanticanada* series...). Space limit-

ations abounding, we can only mention a few we would like to see in theatres:

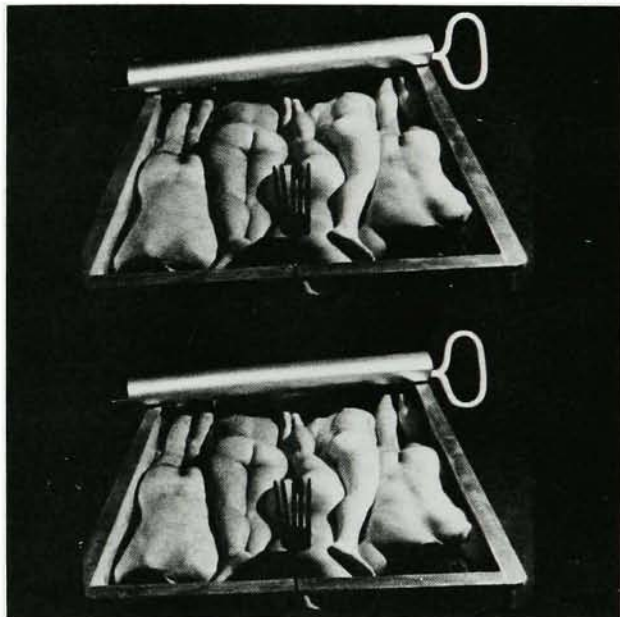
Shown on the *Of All People* series was Clay Borris' film about a deaf-mute couple and their family's attitudes towards this handicap — **One Hand Clapping**. This is a lovely and sensitive documentary in Borris' intimate style (see Issue 7 — Toronto Filmmakers Co-op) with very human insights into the world of the non-hearing. Happily, this film is already available through the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre, 406 Jarvis Street, Toronto M4Y 2G6.

Another documentary recently

aired was Len Gilday's *Yukon: A Portrait* which consists of several portraits of people living in the North — a family raising sled-dogs, an old boat captain, a man working a sanctuary for endangered species and a couple with their life savings invested in the risky business of gold-mining. Gilday's excellent camerawork coupled with approaching this subject through the eyes of Yukon's people make this a unique documentary very different from all the travelogues about Canada's Last Frontier. Write to CBC, Box 500, Station A, Toronto M5W 1E6 for information.

Premiering on *Sprockets* was Sorel Etrog's first film, *Spiral*. Etrog is better known to filmmakers for designing the coveted statuette bearing his name which will again be given this year at the Canadian Film Awards. This half-hour, black and white film set to music is reminiscent of the surrealist cinema of the 1930s and

"Spiral"



deals with the Absolutes — *Life and Death*. Being one of Canada's best-known sculptors, Etrog's visual sense is striking, provocative, and often very powerful. Available through the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre.

Lots more next time. . .

Don't Look at the Camera

By Harry Watt, published by Elek Books Limited, Great Britain (1974) 194 pages.