

Moving With The Life:

photo: Maurie Alioff

The Passions and Politics of Martin Duckworth

by Susan Schouten Levine and Maurie Alioff

Although he is a man who feels what amounts to a veneration for home and family, the course of Martin Duckworth's life and work has kept him in constant motion. When he was in his teens, he moved with his family from Montreal to Halifax, which he eventually left for Yale University "because of a girl I loved, and because I wanted to work for the UN." Unfortunately, as Martin puts it with his typically wry, deadpan humor, "I got dropped by both because they didn't like my clothes."

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Martin survived the disappointment, as well as the temptation to give in to the crew-necked/crew-cut mentality of Yale in the early '50s, by reading *On the Road*, *The Holy Barbarians*, and taking the train down to New York City every three months. In New York, one could, of course, fall in love with another girl, listen to music, and discover the beat poets. "They were obviously on the cutting edge of new perception," says Martin, "the inventors of that age." (Even today, and even though he hates cars, Martin looks as if he would be right at home beside Kerouac and Neal Cassady in the front seat of a dusty '48 Packard.)

After finishing Yale, where he met his first wife, a Finnish girl named Satu, Martin took an M.A. in history at the University of Toronto, travelled around Europe, taught in London, and then got a job at Mount Allison University in New Brunswick. By this time, he and Satu had angelic-looking twin daughters, named

Marya and Sylvia, who were appearing frequently in the photographs their father was becoming increasingly interested in taking. Martin's interest in still photography, François Truffaut, and in the film society he formed at Mount Allison, led to meetings with Fernand Dansereau, who came down to show National Film Board productions. Several years later, Martin had a job at the Film Board as a cameraman.

Since then, in his work as a cinematographer, and as a director, Martin has travelled to Sweden, Viet Nam, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Chile, Japan, East Germany, Russia, and other parts of the world. He has shot dozens of films, including some of the best-known titles in the Film Board catalogue (like Derek May's *Angel*, Mike Rubbo's *Sad Song of Yellow Skin*, and his own *Accident*). Outside the Board, before he began to focus more on directing, Martin was in constant demand as a cameraman with

political commitments, working on high-profile films like Jim Klein's *Seeing Red*, as well as innumerable labour shorts that earned him "little or no money."

As a cinematographer Martin's ideal is, as he puts it, being able to "move with the life in front of the camera." He has moved with his camera through prisons, paper mills, union halls, farming cooperatives, tin mines, Buddhist temples, opera houses, and the apartments of Russian poets. Often the people he encounters through the viewfinder become friends he stays in contact with years after. Martin's approach as a cameraman and a director (who shoots many of his own films) is like his approach to his life. He carefully observes, even contemplates, the movements of the life before him — a Vietnamese street kid, a lumberman, his own twin daughters, a woman rocking a baby. When you watch his best shots, the fluid,

graceful movement of the camera seems completely synchronized to the movement of the subject.

Martin can give the impression of floating along with things, checking out everything in sight. His camera probes, touches, searches into the distance, looks for another space to move into, returns. People who have worked with him refer to his "sixth sense," an unerring instinct for the right angle, the right moment to move the camera, the right detail to emphasize in the frame. Not only do you sense that he's thinking, but that the camera is part of his body, his way of seeing. You rarely say to yourself, "Oh yeah, he's trying for a fancy shot."

Some of the films Martin has directed induce their audiences to focus on a sudden, unexpected, even catastrophic event. For example, at the beginning of *No More Hiroshima!* (1984), a man describes how the disaster happened. Without warning, as if following the pathway of a bird, an airplane flew over the city, hovered momentarily, and dropped the bomb. Like most people, Martin himself has experienced the kinds of moments when something evil, or, at other times, something good, comes for you right out of the blue. You meet someone you know you have to be with, you find the subject for the film you've been wanting to make, or, one afternoon in 1970, you're almost destroyed when one of the tires on your car blows out, and you find yourself spinning across a Mexican highway.

Marianne, an artist Martin met in Sweden (and who is, at this moment, painting a lushly complicated mural in a Hindu temple), was driving. "We got thrown apart in that car accident," Martin remembers. "I want sailing through the front window, and the rest of the accident was knocked out of my memory." Ten days later, when Martin woke up, he was oblivious to the usual sights and smells of a hospital room. Instead, he had a strange and beautiful experience.

"I woke up under this tree. There were buds on it, no leaves. It was all different shades of green, and the sky was a light green too. It was the most beautiful image I've ever seen. It may have lasted three or four minutes.

Remembering those moments, Martin says, "I'm sure it was the tree on West Hill Avenue that was hanging over me." West Hill Avenue is in N.D.G. (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce), a leafy, pleasant, and still mostly Anglo section of Montreal. The tree was a maple on the front lawn of the house Martin spent his childhood in. He, his brother John, and his sister Eleanor, climbed it constantly, spring, summer, and fall, until the family left for Halifax. The maple tree is still there, as is the grapevine trellis in back of the house, and the wall Martin climbed over to visit his first "serious girlfriend."

In front of the house, there were wide open fields stretching as far as the eye could see. There was nothing, except for the railroad tracks in one direction, and far off on another childhood boundaryline, a sign that read MELDRUM, THE



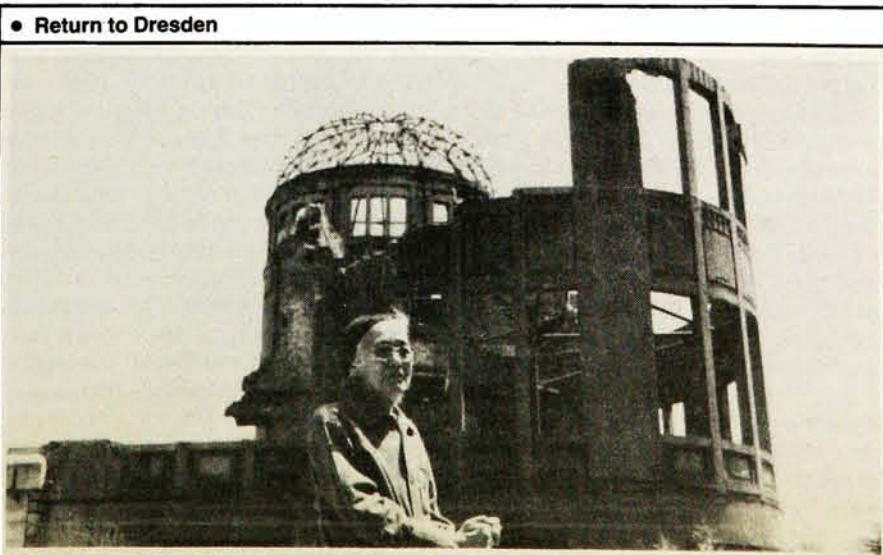
• No More Hibakusha



• Témiscamingue, Québec



• Images of Moscow



• Return to Dresden

MOVER, "hovering," Martin remembers, "against the eastern flank of the Rocky Mountains." "When I was a baby," says Martin, "my father put me to sleep by imitating the sound of a train in the Rockies. He was especially good at one moving over a bridge." (You can't help noticing that trains and traintracks appear often and benevolently in Martin's films, offering promise and release. In *Cell 16* (1971), for example, a prisoner paces his cage, and on the soundtrack, distant trains roll past.)

If you ask Martin what went on inside the house on West Hill Avenue, he'll pause and then slowly reel in the memories. "Back... Paul Robeson... Eleanor Roosevelt... J.S. Woodsworth... Reinhold Neibuhr... Mahatma Gandhi... Harry Emerson Fosdick..." Who, Martin? "Harry Emerson Fosdick, an evangelist, who used to broadcast from the States. Oh, talk flowed on our meals and on my childhood. Oh boy, did it ever."

Martin's father Jack grew "out of the social gospel movement, which came out of the Methodist Church along the Prairies." Jack met his wife, Muriel, "at McGill in those exciting years of Bethune, the Spanish Civil War, Frank Scott, Stanley Ryerson, and Eugene Forsey. My parents were both brought up in serious Christian households, but they were very excited about getting communists in to speak to the Social Christian Movement and form united fronts over Spain, over unemployed workers and starving farmers. McGill was a real hotbed of radicals in the late '20s and '30s."

Muriel, who recently received an Order of Canada and still lives in the Maritimes, has been an activist all her life, working out of her unswerving belief that Christianity should be put into practice. Jack, who is no longer alive, was a professional fundraiser for the YMCA (the "Y" in N.D.G. used to be called the "House that Jack Built"). Martin says, "He saw the YMCA's role as training other social gospelists, people who would leave and turn into organizers."

The fact is that Martin is one of those rare people, who can look back at a childhood where things flowed, where affection was given freely, where you were encouraged to question rather than obey, and to live for the ideals, rather than the exigencies of life. "My parents took their children very seriously," Martin says. "They taught us how to enjoy life and work."

Martin's mother is still a close friend, as are his sister and brother. In a half-joking verbal riff, he says about Eleanor and John: "They are like rivers with many tributaries and outlets. Together, they form a great big delta flowing into the ocean of the universe. I float along behind them. She plays the violin beautifully; she's a mountain climber, deep sea diver, child psychologist. John is a canoeist, father, fantastic mouth organ player, and great storyteller."

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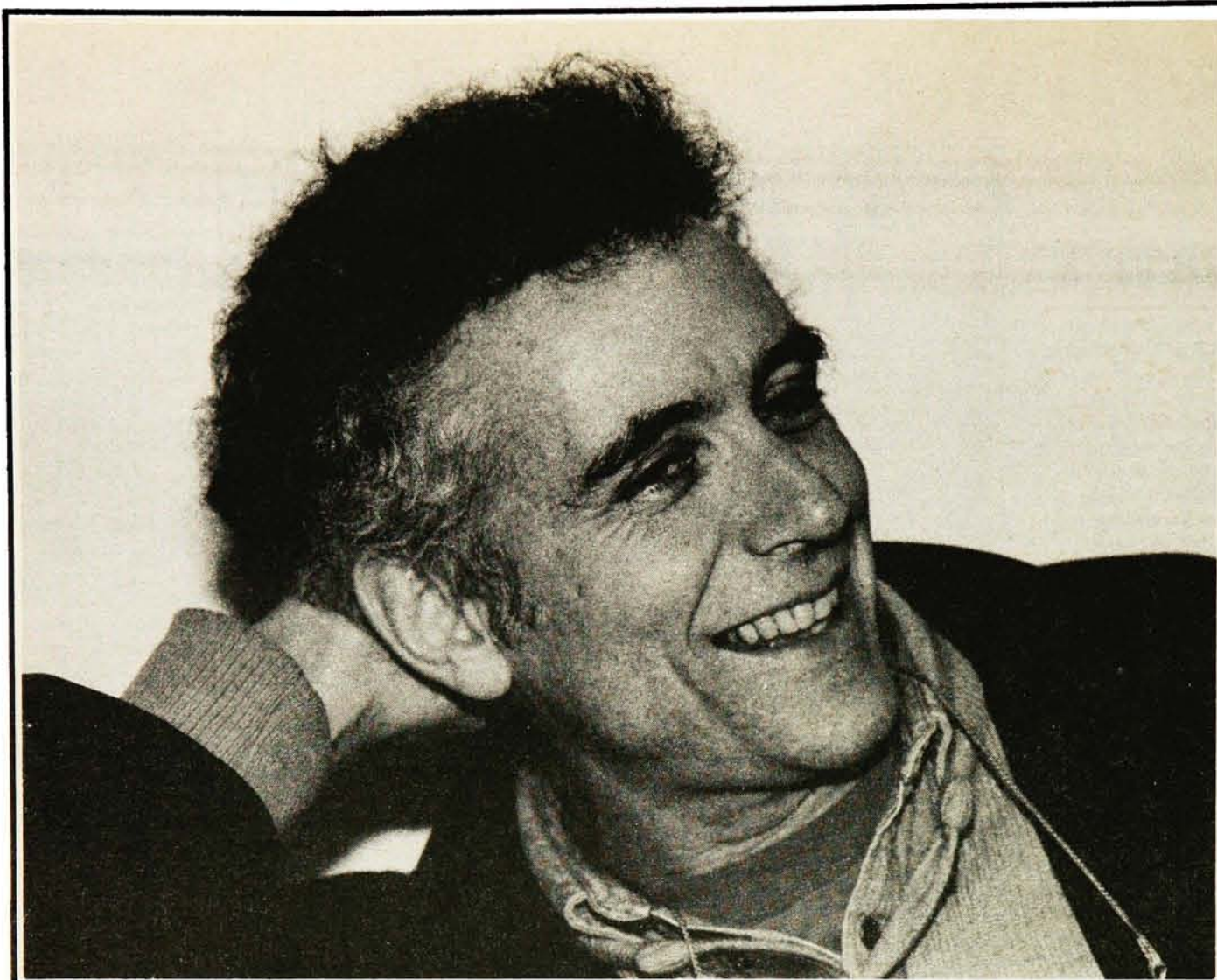


photo: Maurie Allot

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Cinema Canada: *You've just finished a film that you shot in Moscow. And your next film will also have a Russian connection. What's the subject?*

Martin Duckworth: A Soviet jazz pianist called Leonid Chizhik. I love the guy and his music. You can hear all kinds of jazz in his playing, and what impresses me is the technical skill with which he does it. He's a real *maestro*, virtuoso pianist, who puts an emphasis on the poetic and romantic. I've arranged for him to come to Montreal, and he'll play at the Jazz Festival the night of July 5.

Cinema Canada: *What about the Russian connection?*

Martin Duckworth: The Soviet Union is an even more alienated society than we are here. Nobody believes in the system at all. The most common way of dealing with the restrictions imposed on life is through black humor, or surrealism, or vodka, or art. The trick in art is to be able to say what you want to in ways subtle enough that will pass by the censorship. And this guy has found a way of doing that through his jazz. It's sad and funny and very beautiful and neurotic.

Cinema Canada: *Has the official Soviet attitude toward jazz changed at all?*

Martin Duckworth: A little. Frederick Starr, who wrote *Red and Hot: the Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union*, argues very forcefully that jazz and rock are a universal phenomenon — there's absolutely no way of stopping this music of the people

for most of the century. Jazz has always been a music of protest, hasn't it? The way that musicians have of being themselves against oppressed surroundings.

Cinema Canada: *You're now in the pre-production stages of our 14th film as a director. What attracted you to film in the first place?*

Martin Duckworth: As an art form, it was Abbot & Costello in the gymnasium of the NDG "Y" on Saturday afternoons. And as a profession, it was *Golden Gloves*, by Gilles Groulx. That film changed my life.

Cinema Canada: *At this time, did you watch films by experimental filmmakers like Maya Deren and Stan Brakhage?*

Martin Duckworth: On yeah. Maya Deren's dancing films were the ones that turned me on, and *Meshes of the Afternoon*. But I saw them before I saw *Golden Gloves*, and it was only *Golden Gloves* that made me determine that I was in the wrong business, and I had to get into cinema, I had to do that. Maya Deren influenced me here and there, but didn't change my life the way Gilles Groulx did. What he did was make art out of ordinary daily life. She made art out of something that was already art. He eliminated the distinction between art and daily life.

Cinema Canada: *Did you try to get into the 'right business' immediately?*

Martin Duckworth: I told Fernand

Dansereau I wanted to do that kind of thing with my life, and asked how to do it. He said, "Come to see me at the Film Board in Montreal," which I did. He introduced me to Tom Daly, and that's how it happened. There was two years of communication between me and Daly and Dansereau before I got to the Film Board. Meanwhile, I bought myself a 16mm camera and became the Sackville, N.B., reporter for the Moncton TV station. Whatever great events happened in Sackville, I was the camera there to cover them during those two years.

Cinema Canada: *And then you went to the Film Board in 1963 to begin training as a cameraman?*

Martin Duckworth: Before I joined the Board, I came up from Sackville at the invitation of Dansereau to meet people, and the way he had me meet people was to send me out on a shoot. So I ended up in the tail of an NFB station wagon riding around St-Henri with Guy Borremans. And that day with Guy Borremans was one of the most influential days of my life. I'll never forget it. It was the first time I ever saw a 300mm lens, the first time that I became aware that there was a picture to be taken of puddles and telephone lines and balconies and that there were things of beauty all around you every minute of the day. I watched him work and he let me look through the viewfinder at what he was shooting.

Cinema Canada: *And what were your early years at the Film Board like?*

Martin Duckworth: Some of us found a sense of a new human liberty, a new order by experimenting with forms of beautiful images. I tended to see films and camerawork in terms of pure beauty. At the same time, I had a foot in the civil rights and anti-bomb movements, but didn't see any connection between that and my need to make images. Then I went to Viet Nam with Michael Rubbo, and I saw the way to make the connection. *Cell 16* was my first attempt at bringing those two things together.

Cinema Canada: *Did Grierson's philosophy of filmmaking influence you?*

Martin Duckworth: It certainly did — not through Grierson himself but through Colin Low, Tom Daly, Guy Glover, and Joe and Wolf Koenig. Those men influenced all documentary filmmakers of my generation. When I say that we were influenced by the Grierson philosophy through those people what I mean is that they carried on his sense of a conscious obligation towards social needs. Maybe they weren't as politically involved as Grierson, and I don't know why he didn't surround himself with more politically committed people, but they were all concerned with the world in which we live and wanted to make films that would help Canadians come to terms with it. I am quite sure of that. I also know that those first Grierson protégés were all artists and humanists, and unfortunately what has replaced many of them are filmmakers who are not only



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non-political, but they are also non-humanist.

Cinema Canada: *When did you quit the Film Board?*

Martin Duckworth: I quit in 1970. It was half idealistic – I wanted to join the rest of the world and avoid ending up in a cocoon. The other half of the reason was I didn't like signing time sheets.

Cinema Canada: *After quitting the Board, then shooting and directing there as a freelancer, you stopped working in English Production.*

Martin Duckworth: The death of *Challenge for Change* was also the death of me in English Production. The last thing I did for them was a terrible film that led to my falling out with them – rightfully so too. It was an attempt at reducing the history of the Canadian labour movement, and its relations to the state and the capitalist system, to a film of 55 minutes. I just couldn't pull it off.

Cinema Canada: *Did someone else finish the film?*

Martin Duckworth: Yes.

Cinema Canada: *Were you upset?*

Martin Duckworth: Oh yeah. But it was too pedantic. That film came out as a result of my going to the other extreme of art for art's sake. It was an expression of my belief, at that time, that beauty was an impediment to the truth. Therefore I was determined to cut out all beauty from that film. A straight, functional piece. As a result, it was a complete dud. That was a good lesson to learn too.

Cinema Canada: *How did you start working in French Production?*

Martin Duckworth: Even while on staff as an English assistant and then cameraman, the people who meant the most to me at the Board were in French Production. Dansereau, Groulx, Jean-Claude Labrecque were the guys I learned the most from. In fact, Dansereau had asked me to join French Production even before I knew a word of French. I said no. I was too chicken. He was a real innovator, who got a lot of things going, and there he was, willing to take the tremendous risk of hiring an English person to join French Production. I didn't have the guts, but I always remembered that. It wasn't until many years later, after I made *On l'appelait Cambodge* and *Histoire de femmes* with two independent French producers that Jacques Vallée, who I consider to be a kindred spirit, invited me to make films in his studio back at the Board.

Cinema Canada: *Is French Production more autonomous?*

Martin Duckworth: From outside influences? Yeah. You know the Film Board has a much bigger place in Quebec cultural life than it has in English Canada. Almost anybody who's anyone

in Quebec cinema was trained at the Film Board.

Cinema Canada: *What suits you about the Québécois?*

Martin Duckworth: The Québécois are not afraid of their passions. They let their passions speak freely.

Cinema Canada: *So you think a filmmaker should be a passionate person.*

Martin Duckworth: It's love and passion that help you deal with the challenges of life and move you forward. I mean a love for the subject, a deep concern, and commitment and a willingness to sacrifice. I get enraged when I look at a film where there is cynicism. It does not fulfill a creative function. It eats up your nerves. I see cynicism in *The Decline of the American Empire*.

Cinema Canada: *What tends to start you off on a subject for a film?*

Martin Duckworth: I think the best films happen when you grab a subject that appears before you, unplanned and unexpected. My film *Accident* is a good

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It's not surprising to discover that Martin is genuinely shocked by the extraordinary degree to which human beings are capable of causing pain to other human beings. He means it when he asks questions like, "What produces people like Pol Pot? I just cannot figure that out, so a lot of the world is absolute nonsense to me. Where do prostitution and pornography, mass murder, and genocide come from?"

Martin says he was "politicized from the day I was born, being brought up by the people who brought me up." His first political act was writing a valedictory address at Queen Elizabeth High School in Halifax. It was, he recalls, a little self-mockingly, "a passionate appeal to the youth of the world to rise up against the adults who had created the cold war, to declare friendship between the peoples of the east and the west, and to work for peace." The principal of the school refused to let Martin deliver the speech, and when he left Halifax for Yale University, the "censored speech was still ringing in my ears."

Many of Martin's ingeniously con-

structed and often innovative documentaries can be seen as confrontations with the "absolute nonsense" of evil – or celebrations of any human attempt to eliminate it. In some films, he seems driven by more personal concerns; he's after something enigmatic and intangible. In almost all of his work, the frames burst with images of vibrant life.

Passing through Sweden (1969) and *Half-Half-Three-quarters-Full* (1970 – a visual ode to crew racing), are films made when Martin was, as he puts it, "a new director in search of an image." *Sweden*, elegantly put together by Ulla Rughe, Ingmar Bergman's editor who was, says Martin, "looking for a way of dropping Bergman," is a kind of anti-travelogue. It avoids visual and verbal clichés, and approximates the experience of travelling – the strange juxtapositions of sights and sounds, the seductive moments and the bewildering ones. During the same period, Martin shot *Untouched and Pure* (1970) for Mort Ransen, who gave his friend a co-director's credit. This film is also a witty, unconventional tour of Sweden, and Martin acknowledges that Arthur Lipsett's films were "very much on my mind" when he worked on the two pictures.

Many people feel a special kind of attraction to *The Wish*, which documents a summer that Martin's twin daughters, Marya and Sylvia (then 8, now 28), spent with their grandparents at the Duckworth family's countryhouse. *The Wish* lyrically evokes the fairy-tale world of two beautiful little girls and captures the sudden bolts of affection that occur between children and adults. But an undercurrent of pain also runs through the film. There are moments when the children turn, and Martin cuts to an old photograph of himself and their mother, Satu, whom he hadn't been with for years. In the photo, Satu is blonde bright-eyed and smiling.

The most crucial scene in the picture occurs near the end. The grandparents and the children are enjoying a picnic – in a cemetery. They joke and laugh; the girls play. Then there's a timeless moment when Marya, Sylvia, Jack, and Muriel stand together, fascinated by the tombstone of some long-gone relative.

The two films that follow this little ghost story both plunge into more extreme experience. To make *Cell 16*, an expressionistic film about the total entrapment of prison, Martin collaborated with Peter Madden, a convict he met at Collins Bay Penitentiary in Kingston. (As a result of the collaboration, Madden, who was a professional criminal at the time, got paroled and became a professional writer.) *Cell 16* focuses on the endless pacing, the mind-grinding clatter, the pure white noises, the shadows and deathly patches of light that form the prisoner's suffocating world. Madden's voice-over prose-poetry counterpoints the images: "I'm small, afraid, like a child in a museum at midnight."

Nothing at the beginning of *Accident* (1973), one of those classic short

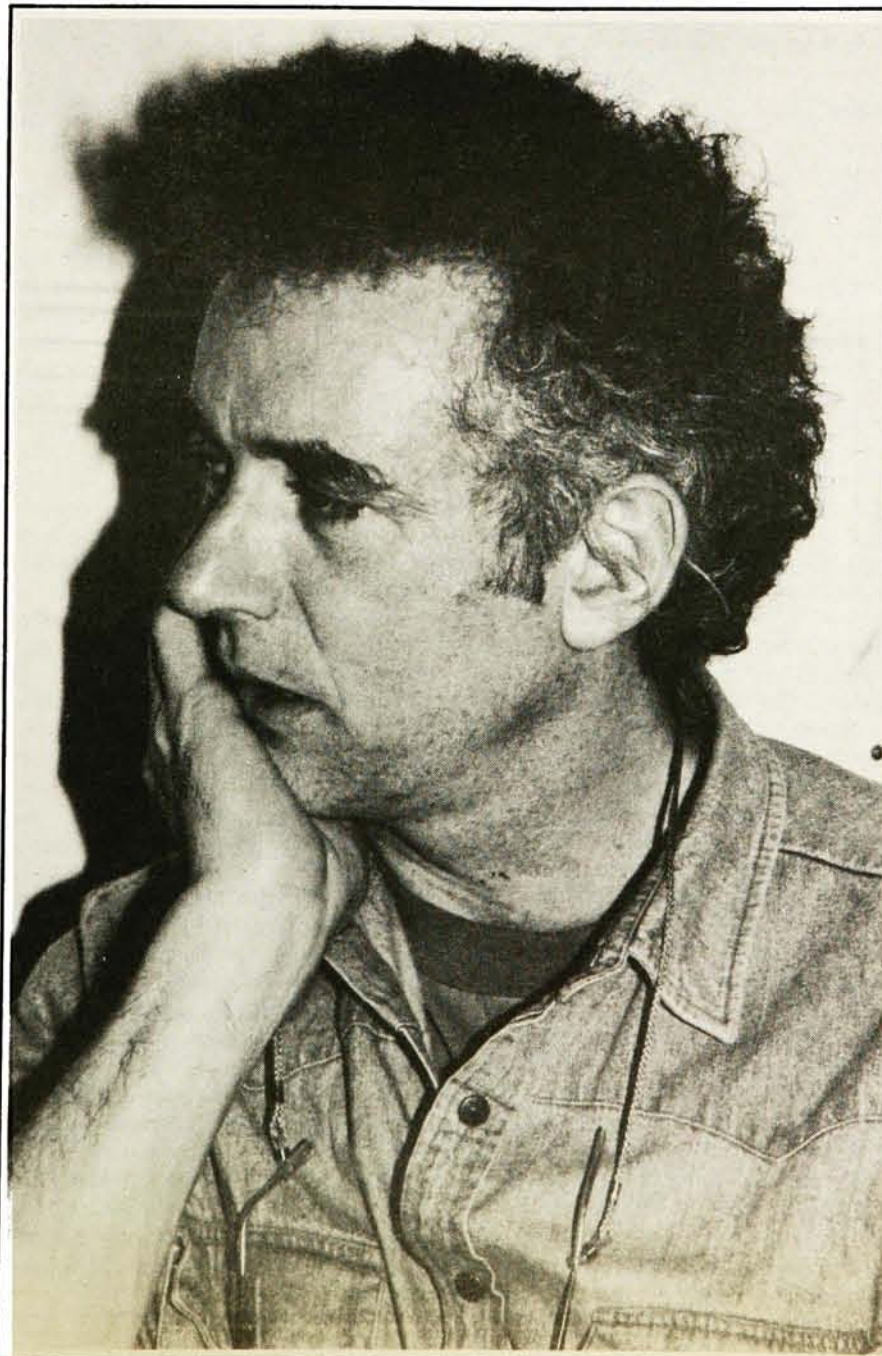


photo: Maurie Alioff

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example of the right thing coming along to meet the kind of thing you're looking for, and being able to recognize it and jump at it. My friend Pat Crawley had an airplane accident. I went to visit my old chum Pat to say hello, give him my condolences, and tell him that I'd been through the same kind of thing. When we got to talking, it struck me that this was a film I had to make. The next time I went to visit him, I had a camera in my hands. That film *Accident* brought me back on my feet and helped me gain control of myself after my skull fracture in Mexico.

Cinema Canada: *There are a lot of striking and unusual juxtapositions of images and sound in your films. Do you get a special pleasure out of creating effects like that?*

Martin Duckworth: Oh yes. That's eroticism for me. That is eroticism pure and simple. Blatant. Outright. And I'm glad to admit it. As long as other people get the same feeling about it as I do, I guess it's OK.

Cinema Canada: *Is it also being involved in some sort of magic? You put something together and what you get is more than what you expected.*

Martin Duckworth: Yeah. Well, the best parts of life are like that, eh? When you're enjoying life to the fullest you're always juggling contradictory things and getting a kick out of it. One of my children's greatest pleasures is playing with words, turning words backwards and upside down, throwing them back and forth between each other. They get huge laughs out of that.

Cinema Canada: *Many years ago, you reported Audrey asking whether sex is a sublimation of creativity, rather than the other way around.*

Martin Duckworth: That sounds more like an idea of mine, than Audrey's. It probably comes from the same internal drive, a very fundamental drive, to create and express commitment. The feelings I have when making love are the same feelings I have when getting a good cut, or a good frame.

Cinema Canada: *When you are shooting a film, do you have a sense that it is working?*

Martin Duckworth: I know that if I am looking through the viewfinder, I get a feeling in my throat. I start shaking and salivating. I can tell right away if it is going to be good. But the last two films, which I didn't shoot myself, I haven't been able to tell until I saw the rushes.

Cinema Canada: *Why didn't you shoot Return to Dresden and Images of Moscow yourself?*

Martin Duckworth: My producer convinced me that I could do a better job as director if I didn't have to worry about the camera at the same time. Those two

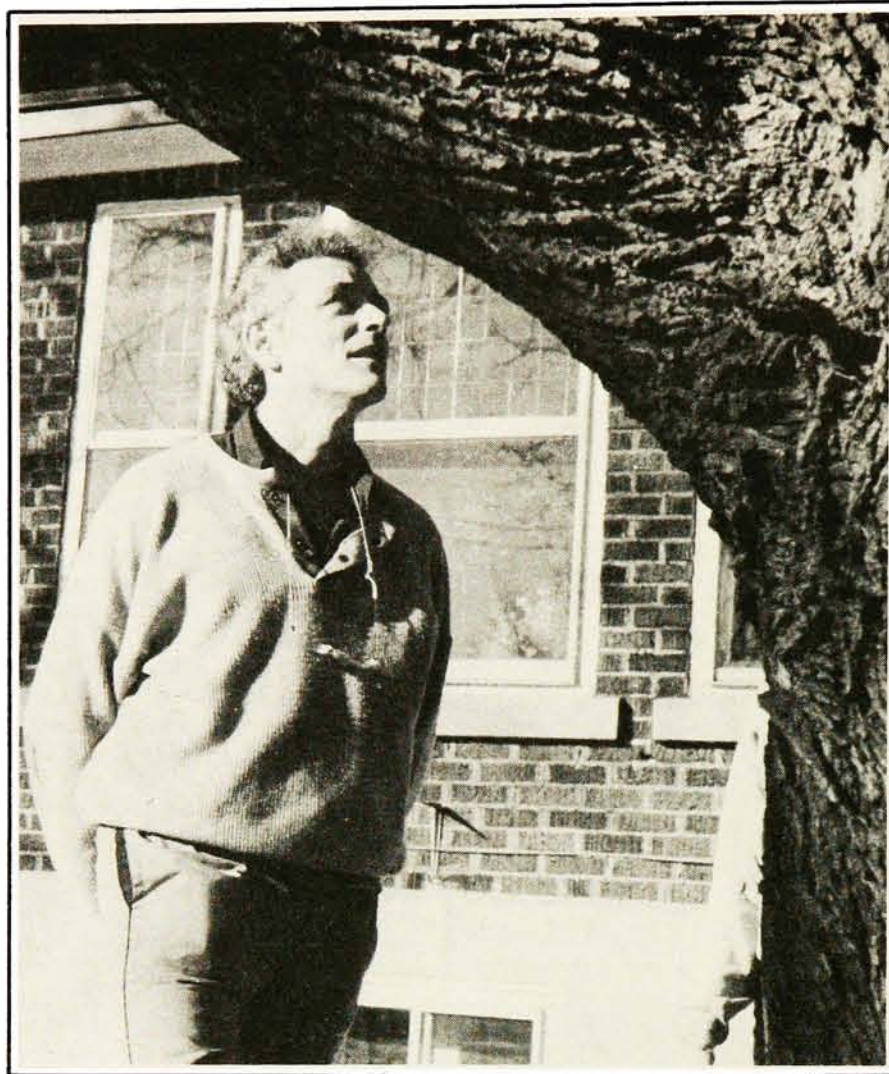


photo: Maurie Alliot

films were both shot in very complicated circumstances under communist regimes and under constant surveillance. He may have been right. It certainly makes editing easier if you are editing someone else's camerawork. So I think on my next film I will do the camera and let someone else do the editing. Although I like editing almost as much as camerawork. I would say about the same amount. I love it.

Cinema Canada: *What do you like about editing?*

Martin Duckworth: Total control and unaccountability to anybody except myself. I love being alone because it is what is missing in all the rest of my life. But in more honourable terms, you know I was a serious student of music until I dropped it for football at the age of 18. I had no social life at all throughout high school. All through those years I practiced about three hours a day on the piano and the pipe organ. And, you know, in good music, the structure of the overall piece and the structure of the passages within it are as important to its life as its musical themes and harmonies. I guess it's as a frustrated musician that I like being an editor.

Cinema Canada: *You once said that you wanted to make a film that was equivalent to a Bach concerto.*

Martin Duckworth: *Our Last Days in Moscow* is the most conscious attempt I have made so far to do that. *Dresden* was also an attempt, but *Moscow* goes further.

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documentaries like *Corral* or *Paul Tomkowicz*, prepares the audience for the true subject of the film. "Keep on the Sunny Side," chirps the song on the soundtrack as a happy-go-lucky montage of shots shows us some guys getting a small airplane ready for the shooting of a film. The plane takes off; the camera on the ground is rolling. Suddenly, the cameraman in the cockpit of the plane finds himself spinning out of the blue and crashing to the ground. "It's not the kind of thing I do," he says later, lying in a hospital bed. "It destroys the mythology I built up."

But Pat Crawley, the guy in *Accident*, not only survives the crash (the pilot was killed), the experience gives him new perceptions and a new life. Martin zooms into tight close-ups of Crawley's face, which looks alien and outer-planetary, partly because of the pins that are holding his jaw together. And we discover through his words, the shots of frosted light and shadows moving on snow, the obsessively recurring images of the plane tumbling from the sky, that the survivor is in an altered state of consciousness, where everything is luminous, and everything can be accepted. The accident was and wasn't meaningless.

After *Accident*, the films Martin directed became increasingly political. *Temiscaming, Quebec* (1975), *12,000 Men* (1978) and *A Wives' Tale*, have a strong, rhythmic narrative thrust — a sense of the movement of people and events, the shifts and tremors of political struggles.

Temiscaming traces the story of the resurrection of a town and the paper mill it depends on for its existence. After Canadian International Paper closed its mill in Temiscaming, the townspeople, local 233 of the union, and a group of CIP executives dared an economic and social experiment: the creation of a company owned by workers and management. As we come to know and like the film's central characters — unionists Charlie Carpenter and Émile Brazeau, managers George Petty and Jack Stevens — we follow the dramatic struggle to make the experiment work. In the end, the mill is a financial success, but is it really owned by the workers whose drive created it?

The final sequence of the film is elegaic and somewhat pessimistic. Martin says, "Although my political training led my brain to the conclusion that the workers would never really take over a place like that, in the capitalist system, my heart felt that there was something to celebrate in the workers at least getting some recognition for their skills for a passing moment, and taking an initiative toward controlling their lives in the workplace."

12,000 Men, relying heavily on archival material, tells the violent, traumatic history of the Cape Breton mines, making it abundantly clear why Cape Bretoners have, for many years, sought employment elsewhere.

A Wives' Tale began when, one night Martin heard "a talk by one of the women supporting the husbands out on strike against the Inco mines in Sudbury. She gave an absolutely beautiful talk. It was high-class oratory."

Martin made an unusual decision for a male filmmaker. He would make a film about the women, the wives, rather than the men on strike. Because he "thought it was kind of ridiculous for a male to do a film about a women's struggle," he asked two women, Sophie Bissonnette and Joyce Rock, to co-direct. *A Wives' Tale* is, as one of the characters says, the "hidden story that passes into silence." It's the story of women who, after making the choice to aid their striking husbands in the battle against the company, must also battle the husbands on several different fronts. The film finally becomes a celebration of radicalized women energized by, and caught up in, the dance of political action. *A Wives' Tale* won Quebec's Critics' prize for best film in 1980.

The three films that followed *Wives' Tale* also form a trilogy, this one dealing with the most horrendous of all human aberrations, the impulse toward mass destruction. *Back to Kampuchea* (1982), *No More Hibakusha!* (1983), and *Return to Dresden* (1985) all journey backward in time to the scenes of incomprehensible disasters, monstrous acts of cruelty. But Martin doesn't merely want to confront us with Pol Pot's genocide in Kampuchea, the devastation of Hiroshima, and the fire bomb-

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Cinema Canada: *Some people object strongly to Dresden. They feel it ignores the immensity of what the Germans were doing in the war, that the film portrays them only as innocent victims. How do you deal with that?*

Martin Duckworth: I assumed naively that it all had been adequately dealt with, and there was no need for it in my film. I had nothing original to say about that. I also admit that I should have dealt with it. You see, I wanted to make a film that would be of use to the peace movement of today, to remind the rest of the population today that evil is not only on the other side, that it lurks in our own backyards and that we have to be very carefully watching out for it.

Cinema Canada: *You said that you've wanted to get back to The Wish for a long time, and with Our Last Days in Moscow, you "may be getting there."*

Martin Duckworth: I meant two things. First, making a film about something that comes out of my deeper inner self. *The Wish* came out of my very deep concern for my twin daughters, and *Moscow* came out of my long-suppressed desire to be a classical musician.

There's that similarity, and the other is the play with elements that at first glance don't seem related. In the case of *The Wish*, the contradiction is between my love for the children, the lake, my parents and my alienation from my first wife. In *Moscow* it's between the drive for professional development and the need to develop interpersonal relations.

Cinema Canada: *Did you see something unique about the arts in Russia?*

Martin Duckworth: Just that they're so important in many people's lives and also deeply inter-connected. Boris Pasternak, for example, started off by studying music with Alexander Scriabin before he started writing. And his father, Leonid Pasternak, who did the drawings that are in the film, was a first class painter. Bella, the poetess who appears in *Moscow*, gave joint concerts with Stanislav Neuhaus, the pianist, and she's married to a painter, who has pictures of the four great modern Russian poets on a wall in his painting studio. The arts are all inter-connected in Moscow – more so than anywhere else I have been.

Cinema Canada: *Is Images of Moscow a political film?*

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ing of Dresden. He takes us through the scenes of the crimes in the hope of finding evidence of some kind of reconciliation, perhaps even redemption.

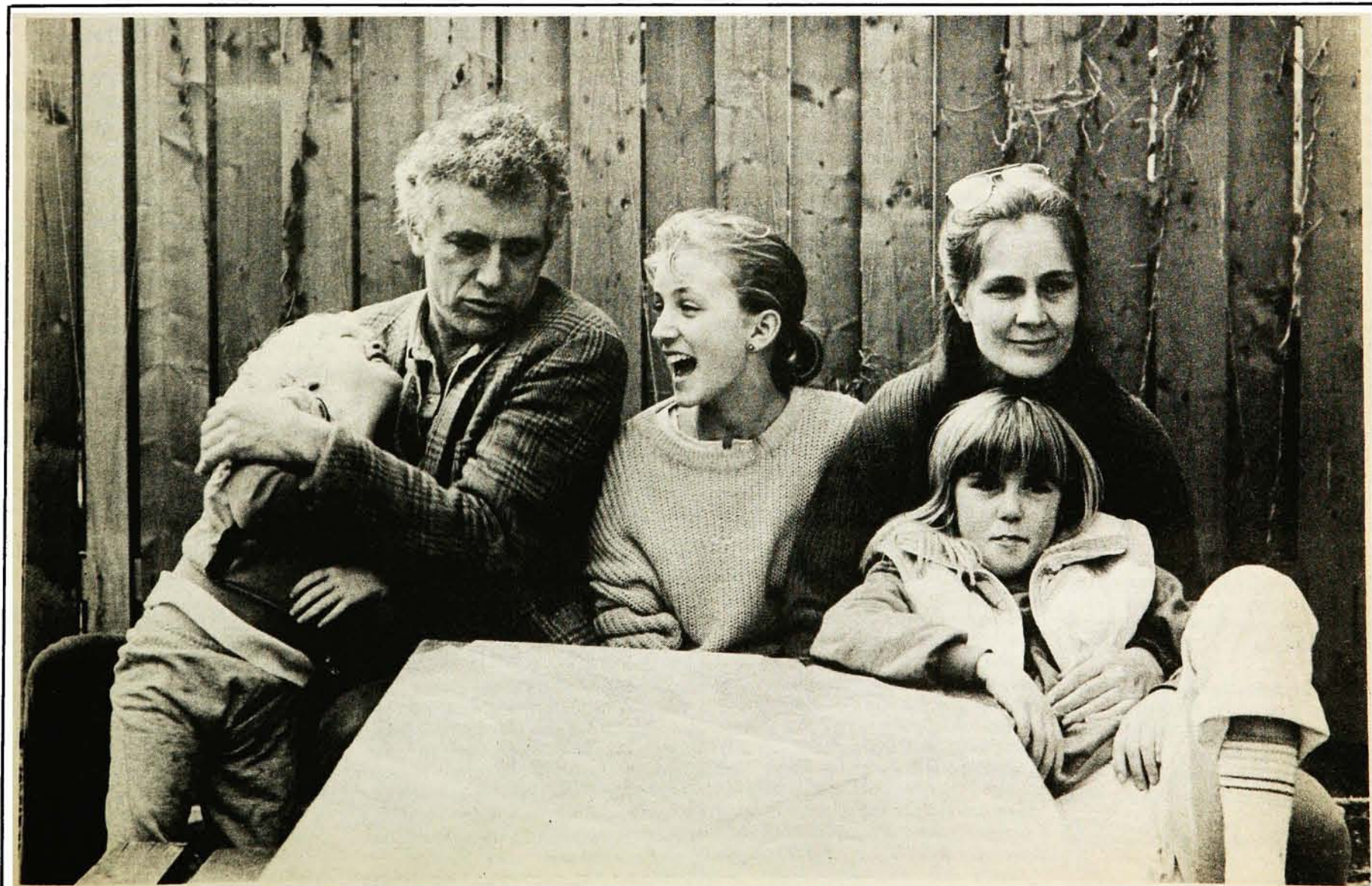
In *Back to Kampuchea* (like *A Wives' Tale*, made outside the Film Board and distributed by Cinéma Libre in Montreal) Chan Bun Han, a Kampuchean, who has been driving a cab in New York for 11 years, returns home in the aftermath of the bloodbath. We follow him through Phnom Pen and the countryside as he looks for relatives and friends who may have survived. In one devastating scene, shot in a museum of Khmer Rouge atrocities, Chan finds the picture of a friend on a wall plastered with the photos of victims. Throughout the film, as Chan meets and talks with survivors, the insanity of Pol Pot's regime, and the degree of indirect American involvement in its creation, come into sharper and sharper focus.

But Martin's camera also captures the delicate, fluttering beauty of the country and its people's brave – and sometimes forlorn – attempts to reconstruct it. There is also some sense of hope at the end of *No More Hibakusha!* (*No More Hiroshima!* is a shorter version), which is about the survivors, and their chil-

dren, of the first nuclear attack in history. The hope is generated by the actions of the survivors (*Hibakusha*) we meet in the film. Despite their fears, their anger, and in the case of one of them, blindness, five diseases, and a dependence on hospitals for 37 years, they travel to the U.N. Second Special Session on Disarmament.

The film cuts to New York, where Hiroko, a young woman, Mrs. Tominaga, in her '70s, and Mr. Murata, who recently stopped hiding the fact he is *hibakusha*, try to express the simplest and most significant of messages. In one scene, Mr. Murata describes how, at the age of five, he tried to save his sister's life, and failed. A tear rolls down his proud face; he says he would like to meet Ronald Reagan face to face and say, "We are all human beings alike."

In *Return to Dresden*, a man called Gifford – a very ordinary-looking, not particularly eloquent man – returns to the city he helped destroy when he was a Royal Canadian Air Force navigator during the war. At the same time, Carl Maria von Weber's *Der Freischütz* (*The Marksman*), the last opera that was performed in the Dresden Opera House before it was blown to pieces, is



● Family portrait – Nicholas, Martin, Danielle, Audrey and Jacqueline

photo: Maurie Allioff

● INTERVIEW ●

Martin Duckworth: Well, in the larger sense of the term, it certainly has political implications in making Russians look attractive. That's a political thing to do these days, I guess.

Cinema Canada: Does the fact you're one of the last people around making politically committed films give you the feeling that you're in some kind of wilderness?

Martin Duckworth: No. First of all, there are still many people around making political films in increasingly subtle ways. And second, the film community is one of many communities that I belong to. There's still a very lively trade union movement, peace movement, and feminist movement that I'm part of. Audrey and I are good rank and filers; we'll turn out when numbers are needed, but we don't take any leadership role anymore, except in the field of medical care for children.

Cinema Canada: What end of the political spectrum are you on?

Martin Duckworth: I would say the red end. Listen, I'm an idealist. I don't like anything about this business of gaining power, so I pay my dues to something called the Mouvement socialiste, and I do that in response to appeals from a friend of mine, a fantastic Roman Catholic priest, who heads up a community centre, which is run by the left wing of the church and which is bustling with activity; the seams are bursting there all the time.

Cinema Canada: You like acting at the local level.

Martin Duckworth: More at the international local level. I get involved in whatever's going on at the local level on international questions.

Cinema Canada: Do you consider yourself a socialist?

Martin Duckworth: I believe in communism, socialism, Christianity, Buddhism - what else...

Susan Schirmer: Aestheticism?

Martin Duckworth: ...preached by their founders and as preached by the people who really put into practice what the founders were preaching.

Cinema Canada: The only way to believe something is to practice it.

Martin Duckworth: What you're getting at is whether I practice what I believe.

Susan Schirmer: Now your idealism is coming to the crunch. We'll have to put you on the line. Do you actually believe in all those things?

Martin Duckworth: Yes I do.

Susan Schirmer: By practicing what you preach?

Martin Duckworth: You have to call on the witnesses.

Susan Schirmer: He doesn't preach those things.

Cinema Canada: He just practices them.

Susan Schirmer: No, he just likes the sound. He preaches what's in his high school valedictory address. It doesn't say whether he's a socialist, or a capitalist.

Cinema Canada: Martin, what do you think Audrey's political position is?

Martin Duckworth: It's not an ideological matter with her; it's a purely down-to-earth matter. You do what is useful. Whereas in my case, I tend to start off from the other end - what will work artistically. But that's not what the fight is about. It's about eternity versus...

Susan Schirmer: Today.

Martin Duckworth: I tend to think in terms of eternity, and Audrey tends to think in terms of today. That's what's kept us together - the creative tension between those two extremes.

Cinema Canada: You and Audrey disagree about eternity and today. What about the running of a household?

Martin Duckworth: I think I've grown as a partner. In our first years together, I gave myself more time for professional activities, leaving housework up to her. In the last five or six years, Audrey, who has always been a teacher of photography, started to establish herself as a filmmaker. We're getting closer to the proper kind of sharing of duties in the household.

Cinema Canada: Does this affect your work habits?

Martin Duckworth: Yes, I can't concentrate exclusively on my work until the kids are off to school at 7:30. I never stop thinking about my work, even when I am making school lunches, and getting the kids dressed, and doing the laundry, but the time when I can do it exclusively has become more limited.

Cinema Canada: What do you think your children have brought to your work?

Martin Duckworth: Time and more tolerance for other people. I think I have learned to understand that even capitalists can be human through my children. All humans have certain needs and you recognize that through having children. I had a hard time forgiving people for being capitalists before the children came along.

Cinema Canada: Images of homes and families occur in several of your films.

Martin Duckworth: Maybe all evil that I don't understand comes out of the lack of home and family. It's scary, eh? You have such a heavy responsibility as a parent. I've seen photographs of my infancy where I was being rowed around Lake Memphremagog by my father, or displayed to my grandparents in Vancouver. They all look as if they were quite proud to have me. So I probably was really overwhelmed by love. I think I probably was.

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being staged in the reconstructed building. Theatrically colourful images of the opera, about a hunter who makes a pact with the devil ("My purpose calls me. I must obey"), dissolve again and again into black and white footage of the raid - the pilots preparing themselves, the planes swarming in the night sky, the bomb bays opening and releasing glittering streams of death.

Gifford meets with people who survived the raids. They tell him about the flames, the heat, the burning bodies, the garbage cans flying through the air. They see that he has genuinely questioned the orders he once considered to be his purpose. A moment of forgiveness and reconciliation appears on the screen. In the opera, Satan is defeated, and a woman, who was killed by one of the hunter's magic bullets, returns to life.

Martin has just finished his newest film, *Images of Moscow - for Kuo Yen*. After the three war films, he has made a lush, romantic story in which he deliberately set out to "lose a sense of the distance between fiction and reality." The film follows two classical pianists, Pierre Jasmin and his wife Kuo-Yen Lee, to the Tchaikovsky piano competition in Moscow. In this Moscow, the military processions recede into the background, while Pierre and Kuo-Yen walk through the musky light of Red Square toward a huge yellow moon. In this Moscow, despite the rigidity of the system, highly cultivated musicians, poets, and painters flourish like exotic plants.

Martin had been "looking for years for a subject that would be manageable to make in the Soviet Union and that would get on a documentary screen Russian characters." When he met Pierre, who had studied music in Russia, and in Vienna with Kuo-Yen, Martin knew he had found "the kicking-off point. I set up their meetings with their former friends, and with Bella, the Russian poet. But the thing to point out is that these are people whose lives are such that it's difficult sometimes to define the line between fiction and reality. They live in and help to create a continual world of music, which is the world of imagination. They know that film is in the same world and that they're on the stage in front of the camera."

Moscow has a magical, dreamy feeling to it. Martin juggles time, images, and sound all the way through. The sounds of a soccer game between friends overlap with shots of Kuo-Yen playing at the competition, and when we cut to the game, the rhythms of her music are synched to her graceful moves on the playing field. It is also a melancholy film that contrasts the artist's shared, communal joy in creation with the compulsion to win competitions so that honours and jobs will rain down. Pierre and Kuo-Yen are splitting up by the end of the film dilemma.

If you ask Martin how he's doing at this point in his life, he'll answer, "I'm just

trying to raise a family and make decent films." The family he's referring to is the one he has produced with Audrey Schirmer, a Boston-born photographer and filmmaker he met 16 years ago at a conference his mother organized on Viet Nam. "Audrey was there covering the conference with her camera, and she needed a darkroom, and I was there covering it with my camera, and I needed a woman." Martin found Audrey a darkroom, and they've been together just about ever since.

Audrey and Martin have three children - Nicholas, 5, Jacqueline, 10, and Danielle, 13. (In addition to the 28-year old twins from his first marriage, Martin is the father of a 15-year old girl, Anana, who lives in Copenhagen). Since he met Audrey, Martin has felt that she is the woman he wants to spend the rest of his life with. "Audrey is both sensitive and stable at the same time. They don't often go together, eh?"

In recent years, Martin and Audrey, whose parents are also political activists, have begun to collaborate on projects. She was the one who pushed for the film on the *hibakusha*, and she worked on it as assistant director. Martin acted as consultant and cameraman for her film, *La Bombe en bonus*, and they recently did a TV documentary on the Quartier St-Louis, the part of town they live in.

One night, at the end of March, we sat talking to Martin in his dining room, consuming white wine, coffee, tea, and a basket of home-baked muffins. Periodically, Audrey would join us, playfully shoot out some verbal sparks, and then return to the whispering banter of a conversation she was having with Danielle.

The next day, in the back garden, a bottle of Russian vodka lubricated the discussion. Kids appeared, disappeared, and reappeared. Pigeons cooed, and church bells tolled, accompanied by the many other sounds of a typical Montreal alley unlocking itself from a particularly long, cold winter. Sometimes, the soundtrack in the background would counterpoint our conversation in moments of intoxicating synchronicity. Martin mentions a beach, and a seagull screeches somewhere overhead. The subject of warplanes comes up, and the roar of what sounds like a B-52 about to drop its payload annihilates what Martin is saying.

When Martin talks about a particular film, which contains, as he puts it, "elements that at first glance don't seem related," a neighbor starts relentlessly scraping his shovel on a patch of asphalt. Painstakingly, Martin continues piecing together certain thoughts, as if there were no intrusive, unrelated scraping sounds that threatens to destroy all our central nervous systems. Finally, we almost simultaneously blurt out, "Maybe you better talk a bit louder for a few minutes." Martin pauses, considers the observation, and agrees. "Oh all right." He pauses again. "Because of the shovel in the background?" he asks, bursting - as he often does - into a wave of delighted laughter.