

Russell Stephens' **Regeneration**

In Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Gulliver is told of a race of immortal humans who never die but, unfortunately, never stop aging either. The romantic notion of eternal life, deflated in *Gulliver's* by Swift's icy irony, is treated with equal scepticism in Russell Stephens' intelligent and original new film, **Regeneration**. In this peculiar variation on the theme of eternity, dead people can be brought back to life, 're-generated', from photographs by means of a complex computer process. From this startling premise Stephens constructs a film which not only satirizes scientific utopianism, it also investigates the nature and significance of the image. And although **Regeneration** stumbles occasionally, it does represent, with its striking imagery and ambitious thematic concerns, the product of a distinctive cinematic imagination.

Premiered at the Vancouver International Film Festival, **Regeneration** evolved out of a shorter version Stephens made while attending Simon Fraser University. After graduation, he decided to expand his idea to feature-length and, with former classmate-cum-producer Tony Dean, a budget (including deferrals) of \$330,000, and three years of shooting, the film was completed.

Using a fairy-tale narrative structure replete with storyteller (an Irish one, at that, telling his tale to two gravediggers) as well as some extreme character types, **Regeneration** concerns the unique discovery of "idiot savant" professor Andrew B. (John Anderson). From a photograph plucked from the lobby of Discovery Park (his high-tech employer), Professor B resurrects a dead colleague, Mr. Bright, bringing him back in the

form of a mobile, articulate video camera (Clearly, this regeneration requires some physical adjustments by the regenerated!).

Revealing his achievement to a journalist, and lost in fantasies of fame ("smoked salmon steaks and the Letterman show"), the professor soon encounters unforeseen problems: thousands send snapshots to have loved ones or pets brought back; rabid crowds demonstrate to force the 'regeneration' of Elvis (Stephens' sly comment on the domination of American images in Canadian culture); a corporate crackdown is instigated by Mr. Bright's life insurance company which, after learning of his spectacular violation of policy, wants its money back - with interest. Discovery Park's board of directors decides to "terminate" Mr. Bright, seizes the Professor's lab, and dismisses him. Overhearing the news of his imminent disconnection, Mr. Bright heads, quite literally, for the hills.

Meanwhile, the head of Discovery Park, an executive shark named Mr. Funk (portrayed by Dermot Hennessey with a chilling Kubrickian blend of venomous charm and restrained madness), wants to use the professor's findings to prevent his own death. When his stooges, stealing B's research, fail to regenerate him from an old 8 X 10 glossy, Funk calls for the capture of Professor B.

It is evident from these strange happenings that this film explores its principal themes (immortality, power, ontology of the image), in an intentionally artificial cinematic universe. **Regeneration** is not traditional Canadian realism. The effects, comic or otherwise, arise out of the film's own set of idiosyncratic and provocative narrative possibilities. For Stephens, like John Paizs, form is content.

Throughout the twisted tale are examples, verbal and visual, of Stephens' witty, ironic perspective on myths of scientific progress and on utopian thinking. Indeed, his storyteller describes Discovery Park as "one of those high-tech places where all sorts of immoral experiments take place". In **Regeneration's** world, parking meters don't work, cars don't start or are piled in scrapyards, and doors won't always open. When you add human fallibility, self-delusion (when B talks of regenerating whole civilizations from mere fragments, Stephens visually subverts his protagonist's grandiloquence by cutting to an extreme long shot), and bestial corporate interests (the walls of Funk's office are adorned with animal heads) to the equation, a sceptical response to 'progress' isn't just appropriate, it is essential.

On another level, this deceptively whimsical film also ponders the significance of images, from the family snapshot to the life-size poster of Elvis. The politics of image-making, particularly the manipulative construction of television images, is explored, as is the notion of image as replacement for experience (cinema itself?); after all, Bright is actu-

ally a regenerated image trapped in an image-making device: a camera. These understated philosophical concerns give the film an interesting self-reflexive dimension.

Within the deliberate fairy-tale artifices of narrative and character in **Regeneration**, then, are found Stephens' strengths and weaknesses as a director. These artifices permit him to play more freely with ideas and images, but sometimes force the film's comic infrastructure to groan under the weight of the intellectual superstructure placed upon it. Moreover, his film is hurt by John Anderson's uneven and, despite the context of artifice, unconvincing performance as Professor B, for it often impedes **Regeneration's** tone and rhythm. Some bad post-synchronization doesn't help either. Nevertheless, **Regeneration** is generally well-written (there are some howlers, however), competently shot (several images are brilliantly composed), crisply edited, intellectually energetic, and, ultimately, a satisfying first film.

Tom McSorley •

REGENERATION d./sc. Russell Stephens p. Anthony James Dean prod. co. International Heliotrope Ltd. ed. Shirley Anne Claydon lighting design John Houtman d.o.p. Tobias Schliessler m. Bill Napier-Hemy cast. co-ord David Findlay assop p. Michael Tang prod. man. Jim Hamm prod. des. Keith Grout 1st a.d. Bruno Pacheco 2nd. a.d. Attila Bertalan sc. cont. Tracy Jeffrey assoc. film ed. Haida Paul gaffer John Houtman key grip Peter Reynolds dolly grip John Christie grips Gary Viola. Craig Kelpin add. photog. Cam North. Tom Turnbull asst. cam./2nd unit photog Dan Novak sd. mix. Tony Giacinti boom. Linda Andrews, Margo Vanderham ward sup. Jori Woodman ward asst. Dianna Paterson, Judy Radul make-up sup. Kathy Lofton make-up assts. Jenny Dodsworth, Kelly Faraday, Roy Richard prop co-ord Todd Pittson robotics co-ord Peter Reynolds Mr. Bright's Construction Ivo Kokan. Andrew MacFadyen set dec. Chris Beudet asst. set dec. Tom Crowe, Bill Mullen carp Chryse Gibson craft services SFU Student Union Pub, Andrew Dolemy driver Robin Mossley prod. assts. Nick Dharsee, Lavonne Girard, Paul Guenette, Gary Harvey, John Halliwell, April Hawes, Marcia Krendenster, Steve Mitchell, Maureen O'Hearn, Neil Thompson add. sd. rec. George Leger, Bill Napier-Hemy sd. eds. Shirley Claydon, Tony Dean asst sd. eds. Michael McGarry, Marek Cieszewski, Leanna Pietrobrown, Lodi Bulter m. ed. Debbie Rurak re-rec. mix. Barry P. Jones, Peter Kelly neg. conforming Gay Black prod. acc. Roland Dean post prod. admin and acc. Lodi Butler auditor Paul J. Masse, C.A. pub. David Hauka stills photog. Karen Hill storyboards Ken Lum, Keith Grout typing Carmen Michaud logo des. Don Wimbles title des. Dorothy Cameron stunt d. Ken Zirzinger Fil Lab Alpha cine Services titles and film opticals West Coast Film Opticals Video Post Prod. C.K.V.U. Television, Northwest communications With Special thanks To: Cineworks Independent Filmmakers Society, Telefilm Canada, National Film Board of Canada, the Canada Council, Tegra Industries, The Cutting Edge Video Service, BCE Development Corporation, Standard Building Supplies, Westminster Volkswagen, Benndorg Verster, Discovery Park (Burnaby, B.C.), University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, I.p. John Anderson Marek Cieszewski, Suzanne Ristic, Dermot Hennessey, Dennis Shooter, Michael Gandle, Rob Johnson, Toman Dimitri, Len Greenwood, Stephen Huddart, Rob Morton, Jeannette Wall, Colin Griffith, Wade MacIntyre, Chris Marioni, Gordon Anderson, Henry Flam, Rod Graham, Phil Smith, Kay Jackson, Tony Bardock, John Cotton, Hugh Coulson, Edna Drake, Paul Fruit, Robert Grace, Emma Hill, Eric Horsfall, Roman Podhora, Mark Jaworski, Harold Bernot, Dan Novak, Lorrie Peppin, Ian Tiles, Bob Molley, Terry Harrasym, Joy Dumaresque, Andre Renaud, Beatrice Zelinger, Don Marsh, Zena Dearwallor, Tim Dean, David Eddy, Branch Lyons, Neil MacDonald, Joseph MacLean, Ken Montgomery, Alison Stevenson, Dorothy Tinkley, Martin Cieszeski, Przemek Fedyczowski, Cleo Corbett, Jane Bull, Tracey Jeffrey, John

Christie, Ken Lum, Bill Mullen, Robert Mossley, Bill Napier-Hemy, April Hawes, Ellen Kareses, Maria Karases, Harry Rankin, Michael Jones, James Dean Hirtschfeld, John Jewel, Terry Birs, Roby Arden, Jim Hamm, Stan Rogel, Stokely Seip, Martin Jensen, Brandon Aiken, Judy Blair, Keith Grout, Jane MacDonald, Heidi Peltzer, Leanna Sheckter, Lila Stephens, Michella Armachello, Cindy Block, Julia MacIsaac, Norman Barrington-Foote, Steve Harrison, Valeda Hett, Michael McGarry, Tracey Stephens running time 85 min.

Francis Mankiewicz's **And Then You Die**

The publicity release for **And Then You Die** describes the film as "English Canada's first gangster movie." It isn't; having been preceded, at the very least, by Les Rose's **The Life and Times of Edwin Alonzo Boyd** (1983). Moving constantly between documentary and fiction sequences, Alonzo attempts a fascinating, open-ended examination of the changing relationships between a real-life Canadian gangster, the socio-economic milieu from which such a figure is spawned, and the contemporary media (as well as the film itself) which both (re)fabricates the gangster's image and exploits that image for profit. **And Then You Die** accomplishes none of these things.

And Then You Die tells the story of the final nine days of fictive Montreal gangster Eddie Griffin (Kenneth Welsh). Griffin's life and minor empire of drug dealing and loansharking come to an abrupt end due to a coincidental combination of betrayal, bad luck, misinformation, and uncharacteristically incorrect judgments on the part of the protagonist. In addition, Eddie is hounded by detective James McGrath (R.H. Thompson), apparently the only cop on the force whom Griffin cannot buy.

True to the sinuous weave of the plot, McGrath is only partially responsible for Griffin's death. It is McGrath who forces Griffin's cohort, Wally Deagan (Wayne Robson) to become a police informant. Later, attempting to extricate himself from this situation, Deagan asks Garou (Pierre Chagnon), the leader of a bike gang and one of Griffin's associates, to kill McGrath. Instead, Garou convinces Deagan to set up a hit on Griffin.

It is possible to abstract from this plot synopsis the major failings of the film. To begin with, the apparent intricacy of the plot attempts to function both as an index of the complexities of Griffin's dealings, and as a means of suggesting the size of his enterprise (and, thus, how great is its collapse). The size and intricacy of Griffin's 'empire' (to borrow a term from the press release) is loosely implied rather than demonstrated. This is a tactical error on the part of the screenwriters (Wayne Grigsby and Alun Hibbert). Since Griffin's empire is fundamental to character motivation - it is what Griffin

• Demonstrating for the return of the King in **Regeneration**

