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Piers Handling

David Rothberg's

My Friend Vince

A film by: David Rothberg. Cinematogra-
phy: Howard Alk. Sound: Peter Rowe. Per-
fomers: David Rothberg, Vince, Howard
Alk. Producer: David Rothberg. Produced
in 1975. Running time: 40 minutes.

David Rothberg, a young Toronto
filmmaker, has made a film which
reopens the old question of the hon-
esty and involvement of the filmmaker
with his subject, and which answers at
least one old question for me, to wit:
What does it look like when during
the course of his movie the filmmaker
does reveal his own involvement and
question his own motivation concern-
ing choice of subject and approach in
his work?
In the first portion of this forty min-
ute film Rothberg interrogates Vince,
a small time con artist and exploiter
of human gullibility whose varied activi-
ties range from stealing from stores
to conning acquaintances, women and
even friends. The more we watch Vin-
ce talk of himself and his reasons for
what he does, and of his relationships
and how they matter to him (intercut
with excerpted comments from these
friends), the more we see him expose
himself as a poor pathetic bastard
with minimal appeal.
But when the film suddenly changes
tone, a new layer of truths is revealed.
"On Sunday we got drunk," the narra-
tive voice of the filmmaker, David
Rothberg, confesses, and with that the
suddenly swerving camera, the dedi-
catedly out-of-focus long close-ups
and various inept shots of flashing
mike and dipping frame keep us a-
mused as we watch the filmmaker shift
from an interviewer to an interviewee
and Vince change roles and begin to
question him. In fact this jagged cam-
era work, the disconcerting appearance
of out-of-focus faces and visible mikes
give us also the extra awareness of the
presence of the crew and of the actual
creation of the film, intensifying the
sense of veracity.
A rotund hirsute fellow scrunched in
a corner asks a lot of pertinent and
uncomfortable questions of Rothberg.
This man is Howard Alk, himself a
filmmaker of perception and reputa-
tion, and his questions are good. For a
while one wonders uncomfortably if the
film is going to degenerate into a col-
legiate bull-session on truth-in-art
eccetera, but after a laggy spot where
the audience squirms as much from
boredom as the discomfiture of these
almost unanswerable questions, the
film picks up again.
Under interrogation Rothberg is as
vulnerable as Vince, and we begin to
see that anyone suffers from this in-
spection. Rothberg appears however
to enjoy this public self-examination,
and attempts to discover in front of us
just what his real motives were, and
understand who is exploiting whom and
why. His explanation of his changed at-
titude toward Vince activates the film
again, and keeps the investigation in a
crooked lively present tense. Finally,
confounded and tired, attacked by Alk
and questioned by Vince himself,
Rothberg withdraws saying "I've noth-
ing more to say". "That's show-
biz," responds Vince, bringing the
film to an appropriate ironic close.
Technically adequate, rather over-
looking but basically full of interesting
material, the film undoubtedly is an
excellent prod for leading students and
groups into worthwhile discussions of
motives and integrity in film, of the
use and misuse of documentary style,
and perhaps of the hidden values in
some of these investigations.
"I know now I'm not going to call
the film My Friend Vince," says
Rothberg, and the audience, aware of
the title, chuckles happily.

Natalie Edwards