

Philip Hoffman's
**passing through/
torn formations**

The most important Canadian film made in 1987 will not be playing in a theatre near you, neither subject to those journalists charged with turning images into verse nor to an audience whose unflagging allegiance to American stars has so recently nurtured Mulroney's latest sellout of Canadian theatres. Instead this brilliant meditation on violence must be relegated to the backwaters of Canadian expression, unwilling to conform – to change the how of its expression to suit Telefilm's turning of Canadian light into American money.

A turn of a different sort has been negotiated by a group of filmmakers belonging to the *Escarpment School*, so named by Zone Cinema founder Mike Cartmell. Born and raised along the steep slope of the Canadian escarpment (or else subject to its looming beneficence in Ontario's Sheridan College) the filmmakers are technically adept, well-versed in experimental film (most are teachers), inclined towards autobiography and landscape, work in 16mm and have cojoined the formalist traditions of the international avant garde with the Canadian documentary tradition. As a body their works have moved from a lyrical formalism to a concern with the nature of representation and the reconstruction of the autobiographical subject. Central to the emerging mandate of Ontario's *Escarpment School* has been the work of Philip Hoffman.

Hoffman's sixth film in 10 years, *passing through/torn formations* is a generational saga laid over three picture rolls that rejoins in its symphonic montage the broken remnants of a family separated by war, disease, madness and migration. Begun in darkness with an extract from Christopher Dewdney's *Predators of the Adoration*, the poet narrates the story of 'you' – a child who explores an abandoned limestone quarry. Oblivious to the children who surround, it is the dead that fascinate, pressed together to form limestones that part slowly between prying fingers before lifting into a horizon of lost referentiality. The following scene moves silently from a window drape to enfeebled grandmother to her daughter, patiently feeding her blood in a quiet reversal of her own infancy. Over and over, the camera searches out the flowered drape, speaking both of a vegetable life cycle of death and rebirth and the literal meaning of the word 'apocalypse' which means the tearing of the veil or drape. The film's theme of reconciliation begins with death's media/tion – and moves its broken signifiers together in the film's central image, 'the corner mirror', two mirrored rectangles stacked at right angles. This



Passing through / torn formations: joining the formalist traditions of the international avant garde with the Canadian documentary tradition

looking glass offers a 'true reflection' – not the reversed image of the usual mirror but the objectified stare of the Other. When Rimbaud announces 'I am another' he does so in a gesture that unites traveller and teller – confirming his status within the story while continuing to tell it. It is the absence of this distance, this doubling that leads the Czech side of the family to fatality.

Each figure in the film has a European double, as if the entry into the New World carried with it not only the inevitable burdens of translation (from the Latin 'translation' – to bear across) but also the burden of all that could not be said or carried, to all that needed to be left behind. There are two grandmothers in the film – Babji, dying in a Canadian old-age home and Hanna whose Czech tales are translated by the filmmaker's mother. There are likewise two grandfathers, Driououx, married to the dying Babji in Canada and Jancyk, shot by his own son after refusing to cede him land rights. This son is returned to the scene of the shooting by Czech authorities and asked to recreate the event for a police film three months after the shooting. Unable to comply he breaks down instead, poised between death and its representation. The murderer's Canadian double is Wally, the homeless outcast whose wanderings are at the heart of the film. It is Wally who builds the corner mirror and whose accordion-playing marries the notes of the right hand with the chords on the left like the multiphonic layering of sounds and images that must be married by its viewers. Hoffman's imaging strategies recall the doubled tracks of American avant-gardist Owen Land. An avowed Christian, Land posits a simultaneity of expression as the precondition for conversion, parodied in Land's own *Wide Angle Saxon*. But while Land's conversions transform the institutional settings of auto

shows, instructional films and supermarkets into sites of individual revelation, Hoffman's turning is a movement away from the violence that has marked generations already passed, using the home movie to reshape the way history reproduces its truth within the family.

"The darkroom, a ceremony of mixing potions, gathering up the shimmering images, the silvery magic beneath dream's surface. In the morning Babji would tell us what our dreams meant, and then stories of the 'old country' would surface, stories I can't remember... now that she's quiet, we can't hear about where it all came from, so it's my turn to go back, knowing at the start the failure of this indulgence, but only to play out these experiments already in motion." (from *passing through/torn formations*).

This connection between things made in the dark – doesn't this aspiration lie at the heart of every motion picture? We can say this for certain: that this darkness has occupied the centre of Hoffman's film work since *Somewhere Between Jalostotlilan and Encarnacion* (1984). While *Somewhere Between* moves around his real-life encounter with a boy lying dead on the Mexican roadside, the boy is nowhere to be seen – Hoffman relates his death in a series of printed intertitles that punctuate the film. Similarly, midway through ?O. Zoo! (*The Making of a Fiction Film*) (1986) an elephant's heart attack is related in voice-over while the screen remains dark and the voice explains, somewhat abashed, that showing its death could only exploit his subject. The centre of *passing through* is likewise 'missing' – while the film performs a series of balletic turns around the filmmaker's uncle, showing as many as three images simultaneously in a counterpoint usually reserved for music – he is usually present only in Hoffman's narration. Unnamed and barely photographed we learn nevertheless of the uncle's homeless vagrancy, his affinity for

pool and the accordion, his building of the corner mirror and his abandoned daughter. Hoffman searches out the reasons for his homeless wandering in the home he never had, in the place of his conception, in a Czechoslovakia ravaged by plague and occupation. That he should bear the stamp of this history, this sickness, without a glimpse of the death camps that would claim his ancestors or the soil that had nourished thousands of his forebears, recalls for us the movement of this film around a figure that is hardly seen. The filmmaker moves in his place – drawing his camera over the places 'he' could never go, looking for reasons 'he' could never guess in his restless quest for dry dock and food, for his perfect game and the delirium of the accordion.

"He stares out, Fingers pound the keyboard. Magically. Melodies repeat, Again and again. Fingers dissolve into fingers. He was past the point of practise. The music took a vacant place to return to. Over and Over. His playing gave him passage." (from *passing through/torn formations*).

Mike Hoolboom ●

PASSING THROUGH/TORN FORMATIONS
d/ed. Philip Hoffman sd. Tucker Zimmerman l.p. Leesa Karczmarczyk, Wally Karczmarczyk, Susan Karczmarczyk, Sue Hoffman, Sam Cartmell, Hanna Sikora, Andrea Sikora. Post P. Bruce Johnson. Still photo. Zviath Rozenewig p. ass. Keith Spencer, Mike Walsh, Hugh Bissett, Phil Hahn. narr. Marian McMahon, Christopher Dewdney, Philip Hoffman. Produced with assistance of Ontario Arts Council. Distributed by Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre. color 16mm. running time: 45 min.

Michael O'Herlihy's
**Hoover vs.
The Kennedys**

The year 1988 marks the 25th anniversary of the assassination of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Most people in North America, at least those who were over the age of 10 at the time, remember exactly what they were doing when they first learned JFK had been shot. Somehow, we had all been swept up, however slightly, into the mystique of Camelot. Perhaps all that was just a projection, a reaction to the excesses of McCarthyism and the dull conformism of the Eisenhower years. Canada may have been – and may still be – a sovereign nation but political barriers have never been able to stop the zeitgeist of the strongest nation in the world from flowing over the 49th parallel.

Over the past quarter century the lustre of Camelot has become somewhat tarnished by news of Kennedy's excessive philandering, the old man's mob connections, their breeches of civil liberties in the name of anti-communism,

the suspicious circumstances surrounding Marilyn Monroe's death and more. But the Kennedys were kings of the hill at a time, however brief, when people felt hopeful about the future. So they continue to fascinate.

Hoover vs The Kennedys: The Second Civil War, a four-hour-long mini-series broadcast on CTV last month, had therefore a built-in mass appeal. The production focussed on John and Bobby from just prior to the 1960 Democratic convention to JFK's assassination in Dallas, a little over three years later. During that short time the Kennedys not only had to govern a nation made unruly by expectations unleashed by the successes of the civil rights movement, they also had to consolidate power without ruffling too many corporate and bureaucratic feathers. One of these bureaucrats was J. Edgar Hoover, head of the FBI, a man loyal to the ideals and the style of Kennedy's post-war predecessors.

As depicted in the series, Hoover is childish, power-hungry and bigoted. He is obsessed with signs of status. He has so long had a direct line to the presidential ear and, it would seem, the presidential psyche, that the Kennedys' insistence on Hoover's operating through proper channels (i.e., through the Attorney General) infuriates him. The result is a series of kindergartenish power-plays between him and Bobby, that neither completely wins. But Bobby is fighting for a principle, Hoover only for his own self-aggrandizement.

Hoover no doubt cloaked his pursuit of power in the mantle of patriotism, but these were raw ambitions all the same. His anger at the Kennedys' intrusions into what he considered to be his rightful domain seems to have been augmented by his frustration at being kept from elevation to a 33rd-degree Mason. According to screenwriter Lionel E. Siegel, even while Hoover adamantly battled to retain his position, he continually abused his privilege, never officially taking a vacation but spending much of his work time at the racetrack and requiring numerous G-men to work voluntary overtime landscaping his estate. He is also a bully, headily abusing his assistant and reputed lover Clive P. Tolson.

Hoover is shown to have at least emotional ties to the conservative southern political establishment, to be rabidly anti-black (Negroes' brains are 80 per cent the size of white brains, he says at one point) and virulently anti-communist. He operated most comfortably within an old boys' network. His idea of America was that of an orderly straight-laced nation ruled by an oligarchy of white men, a vision not all that different from that of the leaders of many of the countries Hoover so vigorously condemned.

Still, we never get a strong sense of what really made Hoover tick. What was the nature of his ties to the southern power-brokers? Where did his deep-seated racism, his insecurity and his



Jack Warden as J. Edgar Hoover and Nicholas Campbell as Bobby Kennedy



dangerous impulsiveness come from? We are never really sure.

As Hoover, Jack Warden has the dastardly job of humanizing this incredibly vile man. He succeeds all too well. But he is also much too fit and handsome for the bloated, bulldog-faced creature that Hoover was, at least in his later years.

Lyndon Johnson (Richard Anderson) seems to have much the same values as J. Edgar Hoover. The difference between the two men, it is suggested, is that Johnson was more controlled and patient, capable of biding his time until the moment proved more propitious. Johnson was also more attuned to public opinion. One senses that the passage of the civil rights bill the summer after Kennedy's death was motivated not by any personal commitment to liberty but by his understanding that the public wanted this bill to go through in honour of the slain president.

On the other hand, we are led to believe that John F. Kennedy (Robert Pine) did have a strong vision of renewed American life. The civil rights bill did seem to be of relatively high priority, but his agenda timetable seems moulded by the restraints of *realpolitik*. One result is an explosion of verbal outrage by some understandably angry and frustrated black activists.

Perhaps Kennedy's commitment to civil rights was formed by his knowledge of how badly the Irish were treated when they first began emigrating to the United States and his awareness that being a Catholic made his candidacy more chancy. Again, we are never

really sure where he is coming from except that his strongest belief seems to have been in the family, particularly in his father and his brother, Bobby.

Like Hoover, Kennedy seems most comfortable within an old boys' network. His advisors were mostly liberal-minded college conferees. The civil war between Hoover and the Kennedys was in one sense a battle between two conflicting notions of oligarchy. The Hoover version is restricted, mean-spirited and lawless. The Kennedy version was more expansive in spirit, had a sense that governments have some role in protecting the interests of the governed and a belief in lawful procedure, at least within the bounds of the United States. The Bay of Pigs fiasco suggests that in external affairs, commitment to above-board process was not as great. Both Kennedys, Robert and John, seem to be as anti-communist as Mr. Hoover himself.

But the series never gives us enough information to draw such conclusions. We are rapidly introduced to a number of advisors whose names are probably quickly forgotten. With a couple of exceptions the longstanding connections between these men are not made particularly clear by the program.

At one point, a technical gaffe provides some unwanted hilarity. A recording problem during the shooting of one scene made it necessary to dub some lines spoken by White House advisor Byron White (Stan Coles). Coles was unavailable at the time the producers wanted to do this, so they substituted an actor whose voice and accent in no way resemble Coles'. The dubbing is so

badly done that White comes off as a man unexpectedly possessed as by a demon.

At the start of the series Bobby Kennedy (Nicholas Campbell in a fine performance), is presented as an idealistic, fairly conservative young man who still hero-worships his father and his older brother (despite objecting to John's infidelities). Unlike John, who seems fairly set in his ways, Bobby appears capable of substantial change, the motivating force for which is not ideological but personal. A major turning point occurs after a close associate is brutally beaten during a civil rights demonstration. Instead of the traditional close-up, a bowed and grieving Bobby is seen in long shot surrounded by the empty accoutrements of power. With all his status, Bobby has been unable to protect his friend. But he has also come to the realization that civil rights is not an abstract legalistic notion; civil rights is a matter of flesh and blood.

Martin Luther King (LeLand Gantt) was also a man capable of political growth, moving from a purely civil rights orientation to an analysis which included anti-war activism. In that, he was like Bobby Kennedy. His frequent philandering showed him to be, in terms of women, like JFK, rooted firmly in mainstream sexist America. By showing King with black women only, the production panders to the presumed racial prejudice of the audience. Perhaps this was a misguided attempt to protect King's heroic status. But King was a hero because he kept working toward ever more generous ideals even while succumbing to human sexual frailties.

King's dismissal of female concerns is highlighted in a discussion he has with his wife after receiving the Nobel peace prize. Coretta pleads for a new vacuum cleaner and fridge but King is determined to donate the entire sum to the movement. Never mind that she has served the cause well, providing domestic services for him and for his followers for years.

Despite its flaws, *Hoover vs The Kennedys* is a cut above the run-of-the-mill TV drama. It provides no last word but at least it attempts complexity.

Randi Spires •

HOOVER VS. THE KENNEDYS: THE

SECOND CIVIL WAR p. Paul Saltzman exec. p. Daniel Selznick. Joel Glickman d. Michael O'Herlihy sc. Lionel E. Siegel exec. pro. Paul Quigley assoc. p. Barbara Kelly d. o.p. David Herrington 1st a.d. Brian Cook sc. sup. Penny Cook unlit/loc. man. Debra Beers p. des. David Jaquest art d. Ian Brock cost. des. Patti Unger makeup Irene Kent/hair Bryan Charboneau sd. mix Doug Ganton ed. Ralph Brunjes cast. Karen Hazzard unlit/pub. Laura Goldstein l.p. Jack Warden. Nicholas Campbell, Robert Pine, Barry Morse, Richard Anderson, Leland Gantt, Marc Stange, Tom Butler, Errol Sive, Elliott McIvor, Paul Taylor, Paul Soles, Michael Hogan, August Schellenberg, Djanet Sears, Jennifer Dale, Linda Goranson, Heather Thomas, Stan Coles, Dick Grant, Charles Gray, Helen Hughes, Lloyd White, Robert O'Ree, Damon Redfern, Broni Farrell, Enid Rose, Phil Aiken, Carlton Watson, Peter Williams. A Sunrise Films Production in association with Selznick/Glickman Productions.

Peter Watkins'
The Journey

The *Journey*, by the British director of *The War Game*, Peter Watkins, is an epic global film about nuclear weapons, defence spending and information to the public. Watkins is a determined, uncompromising director and he has created a 14-hour work.

The film weaves together several narratives, going back and forth, with a cyclical rhythm, between the news coverage of the 1984 Reagan-Mulroney summit, the construction of a NATO base in Scotland, film footage of the White Train in the U.S. that carries nuclear warheads to Trident submarines, photos about the uranium/nuclear weapons construction cycle by Robert Del Tredici, Hiroshima Memorial Park, a farming cooperative in Mozambique and so on. Watkins' concern about the use of the language of the audio-visual medium leads him to comment very explicitly on the techniques of network television news, and leads him to draw attention to the structure of his own film. For example, he introduces all the voices we will be hearing as narrators or translators throughout the film.

Rather than simply presenting the graphic images of the aftermath of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, he brackets these through interviews with families, to whom he shows these photos. These interviews evolve as the film progresses and provide the bulwark for Watkins' message of global unity. About 14 countries are represented and almost all of the families are shown videotapes of the other families, whereupon they express their feelings that people are the same all over and that it is governments who are bringing us to the brink of world war, not the people.

Watkins is careful to make the film accessible to a global audience and, therefore, brings up many other issues besides nuclear war. Our relationship with the earth is called into question and, given his global perspective, it is inevitable that the resources poured into the military are seen as absurd, even psychotic, particularly in the face of extreme poverty. The Africans we see working the land together demonstrate another way of living, one that makes our industrial way of life, full of posturing and propaganda, war and pollution, seem unconnected to reality, unresponsive to the daily needs of our people for food and shelter. What is it that we are really protecting with our nuclear weapons?

Watkins is especially good at revealing the dream-like, fantasy world-view of the media. He uses coverage of the Shamrock Summit with Reagan and Mulroney in Quebec City, adding an audio beep every time there is a cut or any information is added to the image, thereby revealing every editorial decision made for the

newscast. Watkins demonstrates that the summit is a carefully orchestrated media event, allowing politicians to seem like they are doing something (about acid rain, for example). The media dutifully play their role, ultimately keeping the public from being informed and leading it to believe that the politicians are concerned about the issues when, in fact, they are the source of the problem in most cases (nuclear weapons and government-subsidized industrial pollution, to cite two examples.)

What is the media's responsibility towards the public? Certainly in Canada, the airwaves are supposed to belong to the public, according to the Broadcast Act. Will we see *The Journey* broadcast on CBC? We certainly should.

The film presents a lot of little-discussed information: The fact that South Africa supports rebels carrying out bombings in Mozambique, or that the French government's atomic bomb tests near Polynesia have had a direct effect on the weather in the area, or info about the Allied bombing of Hamburg, or the Nazi occupation of parts of the Soviet Union. It deals with enactments of crisis relocation plans in the event of a nuclear war, with participants commenting on the exercise after. Along with photos by Del Tredici, and the footage of the White Train, these represent the hidden facts, the hidden images, the underbelly of the military-industrial complex that the public is not supposed to see, the reality behind all the rhetoric, behind the political charade. Seeing the people whose work contributes to the construction of bombs, but who don't realize that they work for the eventual destruction of the world and hearing the concerns of Tahitians living near French nuclear test sites, draws the audience into identification with people who experience nuclear weapons as part of their daily life.

I was shocked by Jay Scott's review of the film in the *Globe and Mail*. To criticize the film by saying that it is too long is to insist that the film conform to the commodity requirements of the mainstream media industry. It's a sign that we take for granted the restrictions imposed by the current economic structures in the media biz. There is effectively no place for short or very long works. The resulting conformity is part of the problem, according to Watkins. News as entertainment serves to obfuscate the issues. Watkins takes 14 hours, but he says some very intelligent things. That the film has to be so long is in itself a comment on the shortcomings of the medium. While it's nearly impossible to say something intelligent in a four-minute newscast, TV is ideal for selling products. As Jerry Mander points out in his book, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, "Products are inherently communicable on television because of their static quality, sharp, clear, highly visible lines, and because they carry no informational meaning beyond what they themselves are. They contain no life at all and are therefore not capable of dimension. Nothing works better as



PHOTO: BORIS DE SWAAN

Conversation with a Mexican family in *The Journey*

telecommunication than images of products. Might television itself have no higher purpose?"

Broadcasting such a valuable film as *The Journey* may help redeem TV somewhat, but it would be just a start.

Peter Sandmark •

THE JOURNEY p. d. Peter Watkins prod. co-ord Catharine Bragée post prod. coord. Peter Wintonick ed. Peter Watkins, Petra Valier, Manfred Becker, Peter Wintonick assts. Michel Juliani, Anna Fudakowska, Gerry Vansier sd. ad. Peter Watkins, Manfred Bleker, Tony Reed Vida Urbanavicius, Raymond Vermette sd. assts. Nancy Hughes, Matthew Wuiss, Alison McGillivray graphics and anim. Ron Lee coord Joan Churchill graphic des. Jane Churchill, Joan Churchill assts. Heidi Quedneau, Paul Rosenbaum anim Jonathan Amutay, Huibert den Draak, Pierre Hébert, Don McWilliams, Robert Mistysyn, Richard Slye trans Daniel Desmarais, Tochi Honda, Patricia Nazal, Howard Scott, Stuart Siltitz inform. sys. Mark Achbar Assistance in the filming of the Canadian section and post production services were provided by The English Program Branch and Programme Français of the National Film Board of Canada. A Special thanks to Peter Katadotis, Daniel Pinard and Georges Dufaux and to all the helpful people at the NFB, especially Tamara Lynch, Pierre Landry, Jacques Avoine, Raymond Dumas, Claude Lebrun, Robin K. O. Bain title and credits. Louise Overy typesetting Serge Gaudreau graphic art dark. tech. Jean-Pierre Joyly sd. mix Jean-Pierre Joutel. Also thanks to Jim Bell Bernard Bordeleau, Claude Chaevallier, Jimmy Chin, Grant Dearmaley, Arlette Dion, Angie Flores, Winnie Gosselin, Wally Howard, Robert Leblanc Dianne Masciotra, Alex Murdoch, Conrad Perreault, Sayed Rawji, Marie de Sousa, Rose Aimee Todd, Gilles Tremblay. TV and video sources Australia: ABC, ACT-7, ATV-10, GTV-9, Monash University; Canada: CBC, CTV, Global, House of Commons, Radio-Canada; Denmark: DR.; France: A2, TF1.; Japan: JNN, NHK; Norway: NRK; Scotland: BBC-1, ITN, STV; Sweden: SR-TV; United States: ABC, CBS, NBC, West Germany: NDR (ARD), ZDF. Add res: Alistar Carr, Neil Courtney, Joanne Lee Dow, Richard Tanter, Mark Achbar, Gwynne Basen, Dinae Chaurrette, Carla Delenbos, Kim Jackson, Glen MacDonald, Alison McGillivray,

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William Sorochan's
Chimera

Chimera is an interesting departure from the acceptable norms of documentary filmmaking. It presents a traditional theme (the search for one's cultural identity) and reinvests it with a unique visual language that gives the film broader scope and wider meaning. While not entirely successful, the film's virtues outweigh its flaws. Director William Sorochan is an interesting addition to the Canadian film scene.

Chimera is a 103-minute experimental documentary that, at its best is reminiscent of the works of Michael Snow and James Benning. The film is made up of 47 stationary sequences, each lasting from one to two-and-a-half minutes, exploring man's relationship with his environment. The film was shot in rural Alberta over a six-month period in 1986.

Due to its unique form, the viewer goes through numerous emotional responses towards the images presented - joy, sadness, intrigue, boredom, frustration, action. One of the film's flaws (or virtues) is that you can never pigeonhole where the director is coming from. This is somewhat irritating when viewing the film but adds to its resonance and power when looked back upon. The soundtrack accompaniment is Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier* as performed by Glenn Gould, and it is here where the film becomes problematic. Bach's intellectual approach is at odds with the emotional imagery, creating an irritating paradox which detracts from the final presentation. One feels that the director felt obliged to add this soundtrack and the viewer can sense the uneasiness in this marriage. The flow is truncated, it's too herky-jerky for immediate acceptance, resulting in an alienating

effect. However, this effect may have been imposed by the filmmaker for a reason, which, if true, adds to the enigmatic nature of the work.

The film's strength is its visuals, and it is for them the director should be commended. Each sequence is carefully balanced and framed for maximum emotional response. The prairies, always somewhat stereotypically portrayed as loving sunsets and waving fields of grain, are depleted in a natural, straightforward manner which eschews pretty pictures and relies on truth (both ugly and beautiful) to communicate the unique beauty of this region of Canada. It is this aspect of the work that tends to bring across the emotional understanding that the director tried to express. It is in his images that the director creates a dialogue with his viewer, never digressing to unnecessary stagginess or preaching. The film is full of cinematic wonders and it's unfortunate that the uncertain structure of film and music takes away from this virtue. The film is somewhat similar in the visual aspects to the works of the great American film director Anthony Mann; it will be interesting to see if Mann's emotional manipulation of images can be duplicated by this director if he decides to embark upon narrative filmmaking.

Chimera lives up to its enigmatic title. There is a lot to belittle, yet, it's hard to get the beauty of this film out of your head. The more you think about it, the more you forget about disliking this film, concentrating more on the warmth the film successfully conveys. It might be best classified as a minor work from a potentially major artist. G.H. Lewmer ●

CHIMERA *pid/ed/cam* William Sorochan. *Neg. Ed/ Lenka Svab. Mus.* "The Well-Tempered Clavier-Book 2" by Johann Sebastian Bach performed by Glenn Gould. Made possible through the assistance of: NFB PAFPS Program, Alberta Cultural Heritage Foundation, CBS MASTERWORKS, Dept. of Radio and Television-Univ. of Alberta / Apple Canada Inc. *Running time:* 103 min. Colour, 16mm. A FAVA production *dist.* Film and Video Artists Society of Alberta.



From *Chimera*, Alberta director Bill Sorochan's feature-length experimental documentary



Jack Huggins is *Mr. Nobody* in Lyn Wright's film about elderly abuse

Lyn Wright's
The Elderly at Risk

Mr. *Nobody* and *A House Divided* are the first two films in Lyn Wright's trilogy about the abuse of the elderly produced by the National Film Board. As North America greys, and as the baby boomers grapple with their own aging and dying parents, the elderly are emerging from the long shadows of the North American youth culture.

Mr. Nobody is Jack Huggins, reclusive and eccentric. We first see him slowly hobbling up a steep concrete sidewalk. It's a long walk as he moves through patches of sun and shadow. He advances towards us framed on one side by lush greenery and a flower bed; on the other by an endless row of cars parked against the curb. Finally, he turns to take his last few steps, the most difficult ones, to the front door of his home.

Jack Huggins' life has been difficult, much like the walk we just witnessed. After many years of

cares for his aging and ailing parents, Jack is on his own, ready for some relief. Instead he is faced with a barrage of well-meaning but misplaced intervention for refusing to conform to our notion of 'the golden years.'

Jack has a hobby. He collects things. He spends hours roaming the city streets and parks searching for discarded treasures. He does this in spite of warnings by nurses and doctors that he must stay off his swollen and infected feet. He rescues abandoned cats and kittens. He also rescues discarded junk: old radios, TV sets and other electrical appliances.

He collects much more than he can deal with. His home becomes a storehouse packed with hoarded items from bottles and papers to television sets and pieces of wood. Neighbours concerned about the fire and health hazards call in the Health Department. Jack is slapped with cleanup orders he can't or won't comply with. Finally, he is shipped off to a hospital where he is forcibly sedated and certified incompetent. To top it all off, his estate is taken over by the Public Trustee.

"I never owed a cent," Jack protests, "and now I'm being treated like Mr. Nobody. Just Mr. Nobody out on the street."

The film raises interesting questions about public care. To what extent does society have the

responsibility or the right to intervene when an individual neglects his or her own welfare? How does one determine neglect and who does the determining?

If the film can't answer those questions, it at least opens a door for us into the world of the elderly. By the end we know that Jack is a treasure—a quixotic character with a refreshingly independent spirit.

Jack, without family support, happily found an ally in Senior Link, a neighbourhood organization which arranged a lawyer from the Advocacy Centre to go to bat for him.

For the elderly in *A House Divided*, the family was the problem. The film tells four stories of elderly abuse within the family. In the first, the distinction between the abuser and the abused becomes clouded. A long-suffering 50-year-old daughter 'gets along' for many years with her aging mother whom she loves dearly and has taken into her home. The relationship changes when the care-giver is pushed beyond the limits of her endurance. Love turns to hate and outside help is necessary to bring some balance back into the family.

Financial abuse is the topic of the second episode. The father, completely disabled after a severe stroke, survives only because of the constant care of his wife. Their children convince them they should pool their life savings and buy a large house where they can all live together. When the diverging needs of the two families bring the situation to a crisis, the financial arrangement they have entered into tears the family apart. The older couple are not allowed to go their separate way because of the son-in-law's intransigence. What starts as a suspicion that they have been cheated financially now becomes a reality. The older woman must turn to the courts to escape her own family.

In the third story, a 73-year-old woman must deal with her 33-year-old alcoholic son. The formerly perfect, mother-adoring son has turned into a monster. Unfortunately, we never hear his side of the story. We hear her litany of beatings, forgiveness and hope for a change which never comes. She begins to report the beatings. Once again the courts must intervene with an order barring the son from entering her apartment.

For the final story, the film goes south to San Francisco. The surprise is to find elderly abuse a problem within the Chinese family system. An older Chinese father is pushed aside by his wife and adopted son. He's forced to live in the basement while wife and son take over the rest of the house, take away his social security cheques and even deprive him of food. He longs to return to China but doesn't believe he will ever be able to fulfill that dream. Rather than meekly accepting his fate, he has the courage to seek out redress. He finds a friendly and effective support community and discovers he is not alone. There are others like him who have

been neglected and abused. The love and support he expected to find within his home and family he now finds outside the home.

Along with child abuse, elderly abuse has for too long been a shocking and often taboo subject. Wright, who previously dealt with children of divorce in *Dad's House, Mom's House*, has broached the topic of the elderly with tact and sensitivity.

John Friesen •

THE ELDERLY AT RISK. PART ONE: MR

NOBODY *d. lsc.* Lyn Wright *ed.* Leslie Borden Brown *cam.* John Walker, CSC *sd. rec.* Ross Redfern *sd. ed.* Gary Oppenheimer *mus.* Randolph Peters *narr.* Tedde Moore *add. cam.* Leonard Gilday, CSC; Doug Kiefer, CSC; Joan Hutton *add. sd.* Ian Hendry, Ervin Copestake *ass. cam.* Gillian Stokvis, Cathryn Robertson, Phillippe Champion, Per-Inge Schei, Joel Guthro, Yvonne Dignard *ass. sd. ed.* Robert Benson *tech. coord. rerecording* David Appleby *marketing* Doug Eliuk *unit admin.* Sonya Munro *p.* Silva Basmajian *exec. p.* John Spotton *running time* 35 min, 16mm § video, colour. Produced and distributed by the NFB.

PART TWO: A HOUSE DIVIDED *d. lsc./narr.* Lyn

Wright *ed.* John Kramer *cam.* John Walker, CSC; David Meyers, Charles Knowal *loc. sd.* Ross Redfern, Stephen Longstreth, Michael Mirus *sd. ed.* Eva Jaworska *mus.* Randolph Peters *re-recording* Jack Hereen *marketing* Doug Eliuk *unit admin.* Sonya Munro *p.* Silva Basmajian *exec. p.* John Spotton *running time* 35 min, colour, 16mm, video.

IFVA Film and Video Showcase

Venues for the work of independent film and video producers are generally scarce in this country, especially compared to those available to more commercial productions. But during this year's Independent Film and Video Alliance annual general meeting in early June,

Vancouver was treated to a curated showcase featuring one program of films and another of videos.

Titled 'In Absentia'—meaning, in the absence of—and organized thematically around this concept, the programs were put together by Maria Insell (film) and Paul Wong (video). And although the two curators each interpreted the concept slightly differently, the essential aim of each seems to have been to give a presence to otherwise marginalized voices.

The film program featured 12 films, three of which were excerpts from longer works, and was described overall by Insell as raising "important questions about the representation of an experience of loss, alienation or social tragedy." Janis Lundman's *Las Aradas* operates very effectively within this context.

This eight-minute film successfully conveys the horrible story of the 1980 Sumpal River killings, in which members of the El Salvadoran army massacred the inhabitants of a refugee camp. As the narration becomes more obscene with details, the juxtaposition of the pastorally calm imagery, devoid of people, assumes a kind of unpredicted grotesqueness and reflects the lack of photographic documentation of the incident.

Justin Hall's *On Rooftops*, described as "a cultural memory of St. John's, Newfoundland... depicting the original architectural monuments of the city," is also without people, but attempts and achieves a much different effect. This film was the most powerful in the program and best exemplifies some of the strongest qualities of the work shown—the use of tonalities and textures. *On Rooftops* also made good use of the relationship between sound and

image with its appropriate, music soundtrack, and the emotional attachment of the film never deteriorated into sentimentality.

Which is perhaps where the technically and visually appealing *Waterworx* (*A Clear Day and No Memories*), by Rick Hancox, may have erred a bit. Memory—including film as memory—cannot be trusted unequivocally. Hancox's film doesn't consider the potential danger here.

The 11-tape video program, in general, felt less tentative, consequently a bit more dynamic, than the film showcase.

The excerpt from Michael MacDonald's *What Price An Island?*, which featured scenes of clear-cut hillsides and coverage of a native Indian rally to preserve Meares Island, allowed the speakers to make a strong statement—not mere rhetoric, but an eloquence of integrity and true feeling.

Following this came James Solkin's music video, *Tarde Gris*, in which children's drawings of war, violence and torture in Latin America articulated these horrors more powerfully than photographs or actual film footage could have. It also demonstrated that our society has become so accustomed to violent news images, we almost expect them and have built up a resistance to their potency.

Amherst, by Jim MacSwain, uses a resemblance to news documentary to question the accuracy of memory in his return to small-town Nova Scotia. A strange but effective silence to the images that accompany his monologue of discovering his homosexuality enhances the underlying suggestion that the viewer must reinterpret the film—or video-maker's point-of-view.

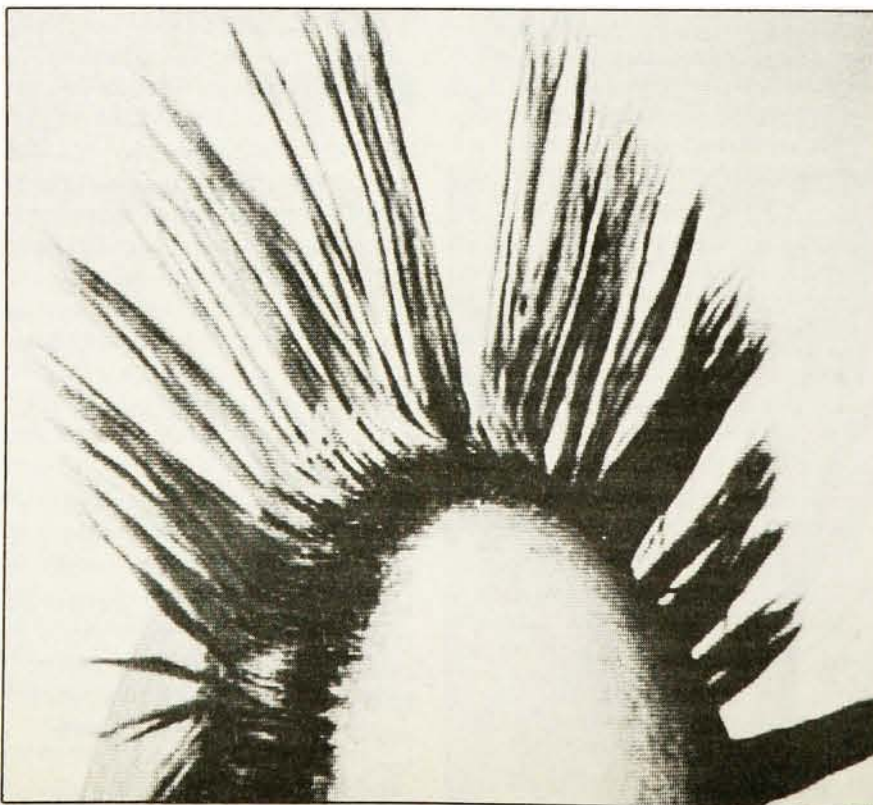
Joe Sarahan's *Rise And Fall Of An Empire* is a visually interesting investigation on the waning world of "punk." However, the ideas of the subjects come across as secondary to the look—the fashion statement of the movement—and in fact seem more superficial than the sophistication of the production suggests.

Least successful in this program is John Greyson's *The AIDS Epidemic*, a rock-video look at the paranoia surrounding AIDS. The message, that "Acquired Dread of Sex" is unhealthy, is fine. Unfortunately, its presentation is weak, particularly given what we have come to expect in terms of dynamic from the rock-video format.

But, on the whole, the two programs worked well. The thematic considerations of the curators shaped the showcase in a manner perhaps more powerful than a less-organized sample of Alliance members' work might have done. And certainly these productions are segregated outside the main avenues of contemporary "cultural" views.

If nothing else, the IFVA Showcase demonstrated the strength of its membership aside from its lobbying power—the ability to create powerful, 'other' voices, and have them be heard.

Calvin Wharton •



Punk hairstyle 'statement' from Joseph Sarahan's *Rise and Fall of an Empire*

Pierre Sarrazin's The Canadians

Andrew Malcolm's book, The Canadians, charmed readers by wrapping all those truisms that send a frisson of comfortable recognition up our collective spines - Canadians are polite, cautious, self-denigrating, etc. - in the attractive packaging of a quirky, original American voice.

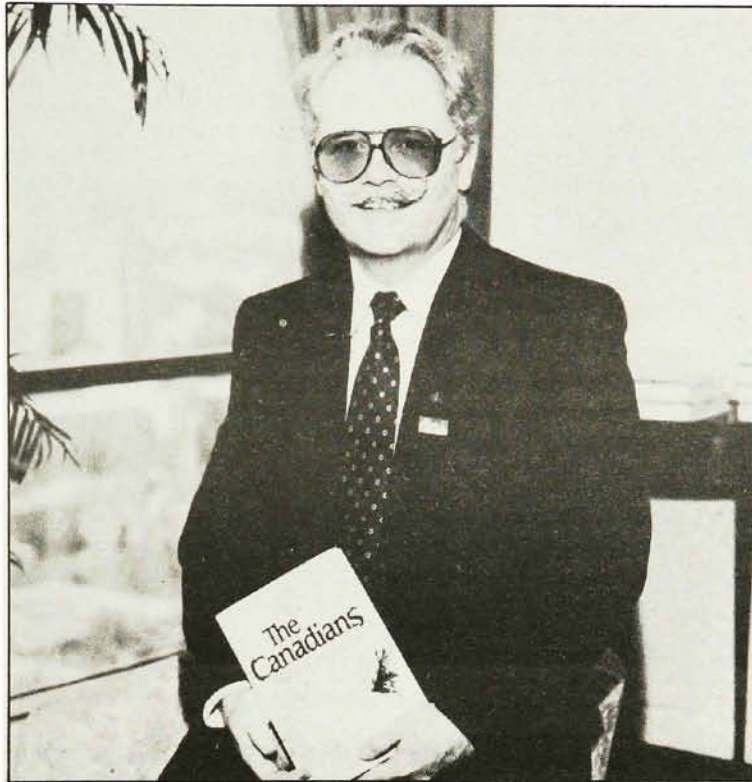
The irony is nowhere more telling than in the framing device for Part One, which opens and closes with a celebration of the Grey Cup. Here is "where east meets west," where "Canadians break out and become uncharacteristically loud, boisterous and plain drunk."

Meanwhile an oblivious Malcolm continues his tour of Canada while we wait expectantly for him to say something. After all anyone who can maintain such an extravagant facial apparatus as his regimental sergeant major handlebar moustache must be good for an idiosyncratic view of the world.

There is an attempt early in the program to suffuse the film with Malcolm's presence. We return with him to his ancestral haunts in Manitoba, meet old family friends and, in a series of recreated sepia-tinted scenes which have all the poignancy of a Kraft cheese commercial, see boy Malcolm treading his way along a railway track, no doubt CP, meandering through Canadian fields, turning trusting eyes towards grandpa as American youth searches for wisdom from the Canadian forebear.

Thereafter it's into the business of crisscrossing the country from east to west on the backs of unsuspecting participants. From an outpost wedding in Newfoundland to the self-satisfied maxims of rags-to-riches Vancouver immigrant, we are drawn what is the purported portrait of Canada. The people, the images, the stories blur in a relentlessly optimistic visual and narrative harangue.

Only at one point is television deflected from its omnivorous homogenizing appetite by an outpost woman who refuses to yield to television. She doesn't speak to camera, she speaks to herself, to her memory, to her people. Her story remains her own.



He of the handlebar moustache, Andrew Malcolm

It's a peculiarly Newfie story. In the '50s the provincial government decided it was economically unfeasible to maintain the outports. The solution - forcible resettlement.

The fishing boats were burned and all basic services were shut off to some 200 outports. Some refused to go, others drifted back to haunt their once thriving communities. After 20

years the government rented and services were restored. But the memory of the dislocation remains. The outpost woman remembers the bewilderment of her 80-year-old mother at having to move from where she had lived all her life. With a shock we realize this is also the story of the 20th century; it's the stories of refugees and the displaced; these outporters were Canada's own boat people.

That window closes. But while the program is off and trotting we remain riveted by the voice of the Mother Courage of the outports who through her particular strength of character has managed a remarkable Brechtian alienation to bypass the medium and touch us directly.

Part Two, an exploration of Canada-U.S. differences about which it has as much insight as the earlier part did into the realities of Canadian football, lacks even the single serendipitous epiphany that graced Part One.

The only time Malcolm is comfortable with his material is when he settles into a chat with fellow journalists and renegade Canadians, Morley Safer and Peter Jennings. What they have to say is not terribly interesting but at least it's watchable TV with an easy intimacy that makes us feel we're eavesdropping on watercooler gossip.

The hiatus is brief and it's back to the tedium of enunciating the tried and true differences between ourselves and our American cousins. Tom Perlmutter ●

THE CANADIANS d. Pierre Sarrazin exec. p. Michael Maclear, Ian McLeod. Produced by Cineworld. From the book The Canadians by Andrew H. Malcolm.

Entertainment Weekly advertisement for 'CINEMA CANADA' magazine. The ad features a large headline 'A passionate voice for Canadian film' and a photo of a man. Text includes 'CINEMA CANADA is an indispensable part of the cultural life of the nation...' and 'SUBSCRIBE TODAY (Use enclosed post card to order)'. The ad also includes a small article snippet about the magazine's history.