

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



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 Urbonavicius, 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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