REVIEWS OF SHORT FILMS

Beyond Shelter


Ron Blumer's Beyond Shelter is educational in the best sense of the word; not only does it teach, it raises questions and goes on inside one's head long after the film has stopped. Subtitled "Ideas from Denmark on Housing for the Elderly", it is an intense and provocative film whose impact is to underline the indifference with which older people are treated in North America. Although the film takes us to Denmark and shows us a variety of housing, it is centered around questions of concern and apathy rather than around questions of architecture.

The opening black and white scenes of Maimonides Hospital (a chronic care facility in Montreal) are eloquent and beautifully done. The antiseptic hallways shine as the camera moves silently across old faces full of character but now subdued with age and helplessness. In 'recreation rooms' the wheelchairs are gathered around the television but little note is taken. No one speaks to anyone else. The air seems heavy with drugs, distress and monotony. When the camera begins to follow an elderly patient shuffling quickly down a long and empty corridor, Blumer has us where he wants us; we know the woman is trying to escape rather than to go for a walk. And we are at once reassured and surprised at our cynicism when she is turned around by an aid and taken back to her room.

What would we become if those people should be out among us? It comes as no surprise when the medical director of the hospital tells us that though Maimonides is the best chronic facility for the aging in Montreal, he wouldn't want to see his mother institutionalized there. The institution itself seems to have made the patients different from the people outside the walls.

The camera moves on to Denmark, this time in color, showing lively street scenes, old folks sitting together on park benches or walking down the street. We see and learn a lot. As a Copenhagen city planner explains a new public housing project geared to make life easy and stimulating for the aged, the emotional tension of the film relaxes. Here are apartments for the aged, built in a low lying complex which includes a grocery store, a laundry and a daycare center for children. There is a communal dining room for those who wish to eat together but each apartment is equipped with its own kitchen. A constant-care wing is there for those people who become ill, and so they are cared for without being uprooted from their neighbors. People exchange services and keep one another company because of the diversity within the living structures: those who are less ill help the others, neighbors do each other a good turn. There is an acceptance that life means change, and that people are resourceful, regardless of age.

The film deals with attitudes. There are scenes in which the elderly themselves tell about being able to look out the window and to see the children. They even complain sometimes about the noise and fuss which the children cause. The film teaches too. There is a marvellous apartment built for the handicapped wheelchair person, complete with adjustable counters, wheel-in showers and emergency cords to alert the support staff in the building. Although the capital cost of
A Matter of Choice


Informing and being entertaining is never easy, and it is to the credit of the team that produced A Matter of Choice that they have attempted to tackle as complex a subject as nuclear energy development in such a lyrical, painless way.

Using a Goderich homemaker, an Elliot Lake miner and the Chief of the Whitefish Indian Band on Manitoulin Island, in addition to Ontario farmers and others, the production team of Tetra Media has tried to give the viewer the “people” view of a major new source of energy.

Obviously there are compelling reasons to examine the question of nuclear development. As energy needs increase, organizations such as Ontario Hydro look to nuclear energy as a possible source of power, without, as this film points out, considering the effects of this development.

A Matter of Choice tries to deal with this question. It does this by staying away from “experts” because, as researcher-interviewer Howard Hutton puts it, it was felt that some of the complicated technical questions involved would confuse the issues. “The basic problems remain the same,” says Hutton.

And so the film takes us on a tour of the after effects of embarking on nuclear development in Ontario. We are initiated into the process and effects of nuclear development with some well done animation. We listen to the Ontario farmer complain of the damage to his farmland, to the housewife concerned for the safety and future of her children. We hear of the sudden effects of an influx of workers and families into a small Ontario community.

Probably the strongest part of the film is when we meet the Elliot Lake miner who like many others has suffered the effects of unprotected work conditions. In a raspy voice that itself is a witness to the years of sweat and toil suffered by this miner we have a glimpse of the raw emotion that this subject can instill. “Cancer,” he says, “is something I can’t change.” All he can hope for, he says, is that others will be warned.

It is just this involvement – this soul, this emotion that is missing from much of the film. Perhaps to the uninitiated the film is a surprise, an awakening to the evils of unrestrained expansion. Even so, it is an awakening troubled by a lack of substance. We know there is a problem, but we aren’t given enough information to go further.

The presentation of many of the interviewees is disturbing in itself. Comments faded in underneath each other present us with an interesting technique but gives the impression that what they’re saying isn’t important.

Great original music, fine color photography and sound that has an unusual presence for a documentary have hurtled this low budget ($25,000) film into the envious position of a solid tool for discussion. As a companion to a more substantive related film, as is presently being considered by Challenge for Change, the film should come off well.

The reason it doesn’t seem to come off as well as it could is the filmmaker’s hesitancy to offer any solution, or at the very least, to make it abundantly clear that we absolutely have to do something about the problem.

Ending a film with a shot of a girl proposing a moratorium on nuclear development to a citizen’s meeting, asking “Will anybody second the motion?” is not the note upon which we will stride to battle.

Connie Tadros

Wojtek Gwiazda

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