

FILM REVIEWS

Bob Clark's Breaking Point

d. Bob Clark, asst. d. Tony Thatcher, sc. Roger E. Swaybill and Stanley Mann, ph. Marc Champion c.s.c., sp. Bud Cardos, ed. Stan Cole, sup. ed. Ian McBride, sd. Russ Heisse and Mel Lovell, a.d. Wolf Kroeger, cost. Debbie Weldon and Judy Gellman, l.p. Bo Svenson (Michael McBain), Robert Culp (Frank Sirrianni), Belinda J. Montgomery (Diana McBain), Steve Young (Peter Stratis), John Colicos, Linda Sorenson, Jeffrey Lynas, Gerry Salsberg, Richard M. Davidson, exec. p. Harold Greenberg and Alfred Pariser, p. Claude Héroux and Bob Clark, p. manager David Robertson, p.c. Twentieth Century-Fox and Breaking Point Production Ltd., 1975, col. 35 mm, running time 94 minutes, dist. Astral.

The full house was encased in the plush environment of the Ontario Science Centre auditorium, the comfort that your bottom experienced totally forgotten as the extreme punishment your mind was subjected to overwhelmed it. **Breaking Point**, a co-production between Twentieth Century-Fox of Lotus Land and Astral Communications of Canada was unfolding on the screen.

The main cause of the discomfort was more indirect, but the movie itself must be faced first in this discussion. If you're lucky, you didn't have to face it. Another formula picture combining **Walking Tall** morality (you've got to take the law into your own hands) with revenge (you're the only one who can make them pay properly for their dastardly deeds) and plenty of action, preferably violent in ways not seen recently on the screen (break the guy's neck so the sound effects department can

search for a new sound); in short, let's get the action market and take the money and run.

Bo Svenson is a good citizen of a North US city who testifies against crummy mob hoods after witnessing a murder. He appears in court only after impotent cop Robert Culp assures him that he will be protected. But archvillain John Colicos wants revenge, and so kills Svenson's assistant and threatens his family. Culp arranges an identity change and a move to Toronto. Svenson likes Toronto because he likes to play hockey. But Colicos lures him back by killing his sister's boyfriend; Svenson takes things into his own hands and destroys Colicos' hoods, plush office cabin at the real estate tycoon's construction site, and finally the archvillain himself.

There are several inconsistencies. Svenson runs a karate school and never uses karate to protect himself or get revenge; maybe it's too lofty a technique for the dirt he's after. Neither, strangely enough, does his assistant, who prefers to be killed without any protest, probably for the higher good of furthering the plot. Svenson's wife is divorced; her ex-husband, played with some life by Stephen Young, stupidly endangers all their lives by finding the group after being told he must never see them again for their own good. He promptly leads Colicos' hood, played with excellent but one-dimensional leering by Gerry Salsberg, to the group, and, in an idyllic scene in High Park, is set on fire by Salsberg's fire bomb. Young, burnt to a crisp after being enveloped in flames, is thrown into the pond by Svenson's mighty, split-second leap, and survives with hairdo perfectly intact.

Nor are we presented with any indication of motivation. Why Colicos cares about such crummy hoods is not only left unexplained, it hardly suffices to make Colicos go mad, which he becomes instantaneously. Nor can we discover how Culp ever got his job, because he spends the entire movie telling Svenson how sorry he is. But he probably got a lot of money for having to memorize so little dialogue.

Perhaps it's the fault of the script. The story is by Roger Swaybill and



McBain (Bo Svenson) uses his judo expertise on mobster Vigorito (Gerry Salsberg)

the script by Swaybill and Stanley Mann. Their forte is not dialogue; a love scene between Svenson's sister, played totally incognito by Belinda Montgomery, and her boyfriend, contains a remarkable collection of clichés – all the clichés possible, according to my count.

Perhaps it's the fault of director Bob Clark. He can infuse a suspense plot with some good psychological effects, as evidenced in **Black Christmas**. Here the characters just leap from script page to script page, killing someone as often as possible. Clark's use of under-exposed lighting and much graininess (Reg Morris was DOP on **Black Christmas** and Marc Champion did this film, but both visuals bear the stamp of Clark more than the individual DOPs) can be effective, but the editing, credited to Stan Cole, renders any psychological effect useless by its fast jumps, more for TV than film; no scene contains less than millions of cuts, and each scene seems to last seconds.

Perhaps it's the budget. Producers Claude Héroux and Bob Clark had a tight one million dollars to spend, including a last scene of mass destruction. That explains why so few extras turned up for a gala project party that Colicos threw for the town elite. Maybe the town didn't have any elite.

Film Credit Abbreviations: d.: Director. asst. d.: Assistant Director. sc.: Script. adapt.: Adaptation, dial.: Dialogue. ph.: Photography. sp. ph. eff.: Special Photographic Effects. ed.: Editor. sup. ed.: Supervising Editor. sd.: Sound. sd. ed.: Sound Editor. sd. rec.: Sound Recording. p. des.: Production Designer. a.d.: Art Director. set. dec.: Set Decorator. m.: Music. m.d.: Music Director. cost.: Costumes. choreo.: Choreography. l.p.: Leading Players. exec. p.: Executive Producer. p.: Producer. assoc. p.: Associate Producer. p. sup.: Production Supervisor. p. man.: Production Manager. p.c.: Production Company. col.: Colour Process. dist.: Distributors.

REVIEWS OF SHORT FILMS

At any rate, Colicos did say that his part had been cut drastically when it hit the screen, so perhaps there was more editing than was intended by those listed on the credits. That's beside the point, because the audience judges what is actually on the screen, and on this screen is a mess.

The violence is not mindless, to use a much-employed term. It was conscious, and each disgusting event revolted because of that fact, not because we felt sorry for the victim or awe for the doer. And after the group leaves the city to move to Canada, they travel on a superhighway, until they near the border. Then the road becomes single car-width through dense, scary bush, and the border consists of a well-armed threatening guard who asks for papers; exactly, we know, how one gets to Toronto, because Toronto is now some Eastern European city in a Graham Greene World War II thriller.

I may seem to be harsh on what is, after all, only another junk movie that even failed at the box office. But I don't think so. I'm not against "commercial" movies (that's a misnomer if there ever was one; every movie is commercial because the filmmaker wants someone to see it and wants to make another movie). In fact any industry needs action films as well as every other kind of film. I'm against this kind of film because, first of all, it's badly made. If you're going to do it, do it right. It can be cheap, good and make good money. Roger Corman proves that. And so did David Cronenberg; his horror film was a first-rate example of the genre. But the bargain basement party scene and insulting violence in **Breaking Point** is inexcusable.

Furthermore, at the preview I attended, held for the press, cast and crew, a disturbing note was sounded, or rather blared. Several heavies, first from Fox and then from Astral, conveyed the wisdom that this film was an example of the kind Canadians should be making in order to establish a film industry, a film made for the world market that shows what Canada can do.

Well, this is most emphatically not the film to hold up to international scrutiny. It insults its audience, and Canadians can surely make action pictures that are first-class and have respect for their audiences. Certainly Canadians working in the US and Europe have done so.

Stephen Chesley

A Sense of Place

d. René Bonnière, narrator Barry Morse, ph. Michel Thomas d'Hoste, ed. Barrie Howells, sup. ed. Tina Viljoen, sd. ed. John Knight, sd. re-rec. Jean-Pierre Joutel, exec. p. Colin Low, p. Roman Bittman, p. manager Marcel Malacket, p.c. National Film Board of Canada and the Canadian Habitat Secretariat, 1976, col. 16 mm., running time 56 minutes 50 seconds, dist. NFB.

Vancouver was the site and Habitat was the conference - the "other" world gathering hosted by Canada this summer. The subject was vast: human settlement and all the contemporary and future problems inherent in living on the planet. Despite the infusion of politics by the small-minded opportunists who deflected the goals of the gathering, some aspects of the conference worked, especially the films shown. Over 120 films were screened, and the National Film Board's one-hour documentary, **A Sense of Place**, was the keynote effort, created to outline the conference's concerns and to raise questions to be possibly answered during the official discussions. How fitting to



Modern contrasts in **A Sense of Place**

have the great Canadian documentary tradition combine with the NFB, the great Canadian documentary makers, and produce the main film. It's too bad the film fails to generate excite-

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ment, and perhaps the reason can be found in that documentary tradition.

Producer Roman Bittman, a veteran CBC producer who has worked mainly with the documentary series *The Nature of Things* – and his past shows directly in the style of this film – heads the NFB's environment studio. His list of consultants drips with prestige: Barbara Ward, Lister Sinclair, and various specialists. He took his crew through eight countries for material, and director Rene Bonnière provides straightforward dispensation of the facts and visuals involved in the current urbanization of the world, wherein people are flocking to cities, abandoning a rural heritage for what is, despite privation, a better life.

Population control, health concerns, the tide of immigrants (emphasized by the gates of cattle-car-like trains spilling out their cargo into congested railyards in Asia), birth control, all are discussed in simple, direct fashion. Fact to example to possible solution with no final answer; the basic documentary formula. At times an

interesting and fresh idea seeps through: in Chicago we see how building codes developed to protect homeowners now prohibit rehabilitation by engulfing the prospective buyer in red tape. In western Canada the farms that offered hope to settlers at the turn of the century now offer hopelessness. Frustration at red tape and a direct uprooting from the family's past are two aspects that present a filmmaker with the chance for emotion, a concept totally lacking in this film.

The style of the film is pure 1950s documentary in its uncluttered, dispassionate examination of its subject matter. But that kind of documentary, so effective when it revealed new worlds, doesn't work when an audience needs to be shown new aspects of that now-familiar world. On a purely functional level of getting the information across, this film works; on the level of audience involvement, it misses. Somehow, the latter is now as necessary as the former.

Stephen Chesley

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Canadian Filmmakers' Distribution Centre	58
The Characters	10
Cinebooks	48
Filmcraft	48
Film Opticals	5
International Rocketship	48
MIFED	2
MS Art Services	5
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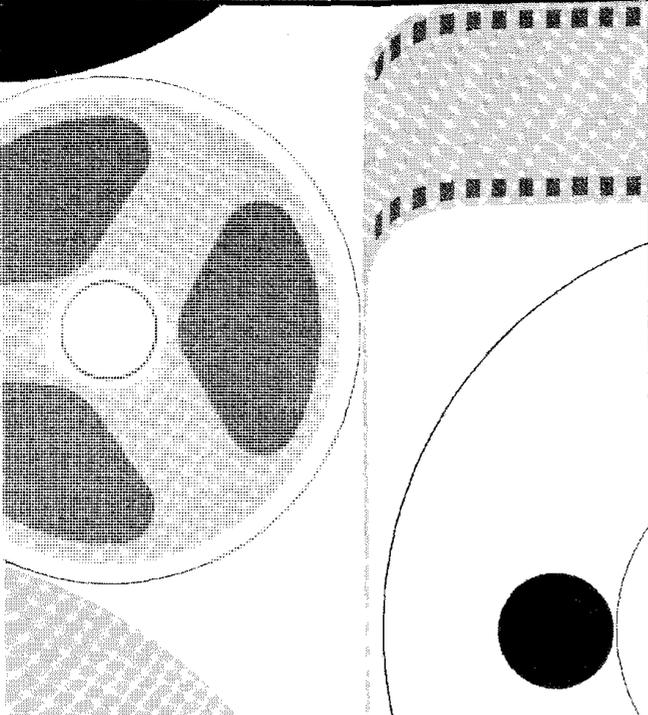
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