

FILM REVIEWS

Sunday in the Country

Just what we need, yet another *profound* film: this time something from John Trent about the morality of violence. And that apparently excuses the fact that *Sunday in the Country*, itself, is a rather violent film. A classic contradiction. If violence breeds violence, as Trent tries so hard and so enthusiastically to suggest (giving his sincerity the benefit of the doubt), then this film is, in a sense, a part of that same process.

Pretensions aside, *Sunday in the Country* chronicles the day that order, if not law, returned to Locust Hill courtesy of one Adam Smith. Locust Hill could be Anywhere, America and Adam Smith is presumably but one of the decent folk everywhere who are perplexed and perhaps bitter at the sight of their country "going to damnation" Smith, for one, is particularly disturbed. He is, in fact, something of a nut, no presumption about it, although Trent tries to play the man's instability down.

Smith, in the person of an ever so righteous Ernest Borgnine, owns a farm some five miles back from the highway running through Locust Hill. He's a hard-working, God-fearing man who has lived alone and increasingly apart from the surrounding rural community, with only his granddaughter, Lucy, back from university for the summer; his hired hand, Luke; two dogs, Peter and Paul; and a couple of guns, not deified.

One Sunday after church, this run down Eden is visited by the very devil, himself, a cheeky and psychotic killer named Leroy. With his two partners in crime, Dinelli and Ackerman, he has held up a nearby bank, killing four people. And here they are, standing in Adam Smith's front yard. But Smith is prepared. He knew, or at least guessed, that they were heading his way. For some reason though, he declines to tell the others or, more logically, get them out of harm's way. Smith is not a logical man. Instead, he has made the appropriate plans for their protection. After all, "a man's gotta do what he thinks is right" Everything is under control.



Scene from "Sunday in the Country"

It's the stuff of *Straw Dogs* and *Death Wish*. He is not content merely to blow Dinelli (Louis Zorich) off the front porch with his shotgun. He's not happy just to hold the other two for the police. No, Adam Smith must have justice and justice is a methodical and cold blooded torture which doesn't stop until Ackerman (Cec Linder) is also dead. They must learn, these bastards. And so too must his granddaughter, finely and sensitively played by Hollis McClaren, who objects with good reason to his strange turn of mind. He arranges a little lesson for her, perhaps to prove again to himself, if no one else, that his vigilance is justified. Oh yes, he's in complete control.

This is simply a game. Adam Smith knows no more about the value of life than Leroy. As far as he's concerned, "dyin's good for some folks if life ain't worth living" and for once, he can pass his own judgement on the three cases at hand. Ernest Borgnine's conception of this once rational man's unaccountably deranged reaction to the irrational situation is grim-faced and generally low-keyed, quite in contrast to Michael J. Pollard's now patented interpretation of the personification of Evil, as the animated and incoherent punk, Leroy. Side by side they're

dramatically effective foils and yet they're really two of a kind. Leroy the more impulsive killer and Smith the more deliberate.

Adam Smith explains that he has his reasons. He offers no admission or remorse. Nor does the film suggest that he should: it is clearly drawn in his favour. His rationalizations in turn speak for the film's simplistic morality.

It would be appropriate, although contrary to that same morality, if Leroy were to escape Smith's justice. He is, in fact, "saved" by the police, an irony that only he seems to understand, as he rides away from the Smith farm, chuckling and snickering at his good fortune. Unfortunately, that's not the end of it. Indeed, if it were, then all that the film tries so hard to justify as Right and Good would be denied. But no, it goes three deaths further.

If nothing else, *Sunday in the Country* makes a good case for gun control.

And Adam Smith is satisfied. He has been a busy man. This day, seven people have died in Locust Hill: he has killed three. His granddaughter has left him. Luke too. He's alone now. Such as it is, that seems to be his punishment.

All this, and on a Day of Rest, no less. There must be a moral there . . . somewhere.

—Mark Miller

Gina

It struck me that *Les Ordres* was such an interesting film because it managed to synthesize the aesthetic tendencies that have been developing in Québec cinema over the past decade. As a fictionalized account of a real event and given the expository framework within which Brault worked, it combined two key trends in Québécois cinéma — a propensity for the documentary which allows a fictional work to be rooted in a strong social and political reality. This tension exists in almost all of cinema, yet this familiarity with an environment has eluded English-Canadian filmmakers. *Gina* has a similar structure to the Brault film, although Arcand uses it in a more self-conscious manner.

His film ties together two narrative threads. A film crew is shooting a film on the textile industry, and we see what they shoot — interviews and scenes inside the factories — as a film within a film. On the other level the crew is staying at a hotel where they meet Gina, a stripper, who is working the hotel for a couple of nights. This structure allows Arcand to develop certain ideas by having the two parts of the film play off against each other. It is fitting that this particular framework allows Arcand to look back at his first feature film — a documentary made for the NFB on the textile industry which is still unreleased although made in 1968 and 1969, *On est au coton*. Arcand is interested in different modes of exploitation, all of which are interdependent and finally embrasive. Within this dual structure Arcand places two people, both women, who reflect the differing components of the film. There is Gina, an outsider, a visitor, who is essentially rootless, a wanderer, exploiting her body as her job. On the other hand we have Dolorès, who is a worker in one of the factories visited by the film crew. She is the polar opposite of Gina — she looks old before her time, she is passive and submissive, yet kind and sympathetic — but essentially she has

been ruthlessly exploited by an industry, and she is trapped within her life.

One level of *Gina* exists almost on this level of an analysis of exploitation and the interesting paradoxes and contradictions that result. But perhaps more essentially we are shown a group of people who slowly and tentatively try to establish contact — one of the film crew is attracted to Gina, while the director of the film shows an interest in Dolorès. These relationships do not even reach a sexual level, they are played out by lonely people striving for warmth.

The key moment of the film comes with Gina's strip-tease where all the diverse elements of the film converge. It is indeed an incredible scene — a group of snowmobilers who live in an abandoned boat frozen into the ice, have come to leer and jeer at Gina; the film crew is there, with a tension already existing between these two very different groups. And finally the director has also brought Dolorès. The scene has been set with one of the most revealing moments of the film that is magical in its power and its implications. Dolorès and Gina are in the bathroom together — Gina preparing for her strip act and Dolorès combing her hair. Facing the mirror, side-by-side, Gina asks Dolorès in a completely emotionless voice how much she earns a week working at the factory. After telling her that she gets about \$85 a week, Dolorès returns the question to Gina who replies that it varies but sometimes she earns as much as \$400. Suddenly while the two are talking, we realise that they almost look alike — for this split-second. Separated totally as people in their lifestyles, their sudden resemblance is tragically stated. With the strip Gina exerts total power over her audience, especially the snowmobile gang. Yet after this, alone in her hotel room, Gina is brutally gang-raped by this same group. Enraged she phones the heavies who handle her act and releases a violent brutal climax to the film.

Interestingly the film crew, throughout all this, is totally inactive and ineffective. Arcand cross-cuts the rape to the member of the film crew attracted to Gina, reading a book in

bed. Next day he drops by to see her but any real form of contact has vanished. It is then that the film crew is recalled to Montréal, unable to finish their documentary. Having seen the snowmobile gang wiped out, Gina flies out of Montréal on holiday, while we see the film crew shooting a commercial police drama.

In many respects *Gina* is also the flip-coin to Réjeanne Padovani. While Padovani explores the lifestyle of those who hold the power, *Gina* looks at those who are exploited by that power. And ultimately Arcand shows us that nothing changes, indeed most kinds of action, except those that are violent and essentially selfish, are ineffective. In the same cold and unemotional way that Padovani orders his wife killed, Gina obliterates the gang of snowmobilers. The difference is that in *Padovani*, the wife embodies certain human values, while *Gina* has no such equivalent force, except perhaps Dolorès.

Patrick MacFadden once described Larry Kent's *High* in *Take One* as a "bleak etching of a society deep in spiritual winter." This comment can also be applied to *Gina*. But perhaps more disturbingly Arcand questions the role of the cinema in working for change. The last image of the crew, shooting a cop-film with Donald Pilon, (a swipe at *The Collaborators*) is of a lonely, lost, directionless group. If Arcand is pointing at a bankruptcy amongst the film community then the future does not augur well.

— Piers Handling

Orillia: Our Town

Martin Lavut, sociologist? Yes, but with a sense of humour. His first film (reputed to be autobiographical), *At Home*, concerned a trivia maniac who wound up collecting people. Since then, Martin Lavut has directed shorts for series such as *Of All People*, numerous dramas which he describes as "atrocious; we wouldn't want to mention those", a recent one-hour CBC drama called *Melony* which was "almost detestable but at least it was my own script" and many commercials "which we *do* want to mention. . . ."

His three strongest works, *Life Game*, *Without A Hobby It's No Life* and *Orillia: Our Town* are documentaries made for the CBC. These three most clearly depict Lavut's use of the social documentary and his uniquely enjoyable style.

Life Game was the first, and dealt with successful middle-aged middle-class executives suddenly unemployed, providing a frightening look at the phenomena of human obsolescence in a technocratic society. *Without A Hobby It's No Life* was the delightful film about people indulging in some of the strangest hobbies, an offbeat, funny look at this very North American occupation. Both these films reflected Lavut's growing style which becomes clearest in *Orillia: Our Town*.

Recently aired, *Orillia* is actually a detailed portrait of small Canadian towns. Lavut chose that particular Ontario town because it was so typical of the thousands of places which still form the backbone of our society. Focussing on Orillia, he could explore the fabric and structure of life as most Canadians live it; including the clear distinctions between various economic levels, the handful of families who invariably own and control entire towns, the historic insulation from the rest of the world, the family businesses endangered by corporate chains, young people moving to cities for work, the shifting economy – in Orillia's case – towards tourism. All of these social elements are intelligently and subtly explored.

But what makes Lavut's films more than good social fieldwork are his characters and his style. In the *Orillia* film, for example, he included not only the newspaper editor, the fire-chief, the leading families, etc. but some fascinating characters – a mother and a daughter team who teach ballet, an old German immigrant who has resisted multiculturalism for decades, two recluse brothers who have made home movies since the 1940's, and a newlywed couple (in their sixties) living in a log cabin. And the things people say in Lavut's films are priceless! This quote comes from a man who has worked in the same foundry for 30 years, talking about the Owner, "He used to go around hollering at everyone! But he doesn't do that anymore – you know why? Because he's dead! That's why!" Followed by a big grin. . . .

The other trademarks of a Lavut film are his cyclical editing and portrait filming. He introduces first one character, then another, then another, returns back to the first to continue

his story. This non-linear editing weaves a rich tapestry showing how people's lives interconnect. His portrait-style (Classic Canadiana) consists of filming in people's livingrooms from a long shot, but with the subjects snuggling close enough so that the same set-up can be used for medium shots and close-ups. As a result, people are not only being mirrored by their created milieus, but by sitting uncomfortably close (normal range on an average sofa is from one to three feet apart – *Body Language – Soc. I*) the dynamics of their relationships are forced out.

It all works. Perhaps what is most exciting about Martin Lavut's films is that he never makes fun of his collected "characters". He studies them, smiles at the intrinsic humour of our "human condition", but never loses the dignity of his subjects. It is this humanism, coupled with perceptive social understanding, which makes Lavut one of the most interesting directors working in documentaries. And, of course, his most wonderful trademark – at the end of these films after the credits have rolled, someone always looks right into the camera and asks, "How come it takes so many of you people to film one old man?" Cut to: "This has been a CBC Network presentation."

—A.I.—K.

Grass Roots

This is the first serious, in-depth documentary we've seen on communes, and it's excellent! Communes were not a passing fad of the sixties – many are very successful, still functioning, and the phenomenon is growing as a serious and viable alternative life-style.

Grass Roots, a one-hour colour documentary, is part of a trilogy called "Alternative America" by Montreal filmmakers Luciano Martinengo and Thomas Wahlberg. This particular film in the series deals with rural communes: why they were formed, who lives in them, how they are structured economically and politically, what their future plans are and to what level they integrate with the world around them.

A large part of the film concerns Twin Oaks, the commune based on The Father of Behaviourism – B.F. Skinner's book, *Walden Two*, some of the other groups include back to nature dropouts, anarchists, and a large religious community. Each is explored fairly, and their different ways of approaching communal living are

intelligently detailed.

One of the most excellent aspects of this documentary is the "inside look" so antithetical to news reportage. The main reason for this intimacy is that the series was entirely self-financed (it took three years to make). The filmmakers worked for one year to raise seed money, then lived in each commune, working as labourers between shoots to complete the film – it is that dedication to making an accurate and detailed documentary which makes *Grass Roots* so worthwhile.

Every screening we've been to was followed by several hours' discussion – whatever bias the filmmakers may have, they must be doing something right! Their next film will concern alternative sexual relationships – if it's anything like *Grass Roots*, it will be fascinating. Contact: The Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre.

—A.I.—K.

Backlot Canadiana

This little 20-minute item will tell you more about the Problem of Canadian Filmmaking than the last 20 briefs you've laboured through. And it's more fun. . . .

Filmmaker Peter Rowe (responsible for films like *Neon Palace* – the first nostalgia movie ever made; *Good Friday in Little Italy* – a documentary on exactly that; and recently a one-hour CBC Drama originally intended to put together a film of references to Canada in foreign films. Researching those great lines about our Mounties and Eskimos and Snow, he noticed a surprising increase of mentions after 1946 in Hollywood movies and uncovered the Canadian Cooperation Project (the subject of *Pierre Berton's next book* – see *Film News*).

The Canadian Cooperation Project was the deal offered by Hollywood to one of our Federal Cabinet Ministers in 1946. The offer was for Canada to scrap any plans for passing a quota along the lines of Britain's Eady Plan in exchange for more mentions of Canada in Hollywood movies to increase American tourism. The offer was accepted.

Backlot Canadiana is the (painfully) funny account of how this deal was set up which quashed our plans for an autonomous film industry. Included are colourful anecdotes involving ladies in black velvet pumping booze in and information out of Canadian producers attempting to buy equip-



From "Backlot Canadiana"

ment in Hollywood for a multi-million dollar production studio, interviews with the man who was hired to go around Hollywood sets inserting Canadian references, and, of course, clips. Example: cowboys sitting around a campfire. One says, "That was an oriole, wasn't it?", Jimmy Stewart answers, "Yes — it was a CANADIAN oriole!"

It's almost too Canadian to believe. If you're interested in Canada's Film Making (and if you're not — why are you reading this magazine?) you owe it to yourself to see this marvelous little film. Contact: CBC, Box 500, Station A, Toronto M5W 1E6.

What colonialism?

—A.I.K.

Mini-Reviews

Good news for those of us who refuse to watch television: some of those admittedly interesting films we've been missing will now get theatrical distribution through the CBC/NFB agreement recently announced (see Issue 18 — Winnipeg Symposium). We won't have to start watching the tube, we can steadfastly stay in dark screening rooms watching bit coloured shadows on the screen! Details are still hard to come by, but being incorrigible optimists we've decided to start including little write-ups on some of our favourites. (Next issue, we hope to have reviews of the *Pacificanada* and *Atlanticanada* series...). Space limit-

ations abounding, we can only mention a few we would like to see in theatres:

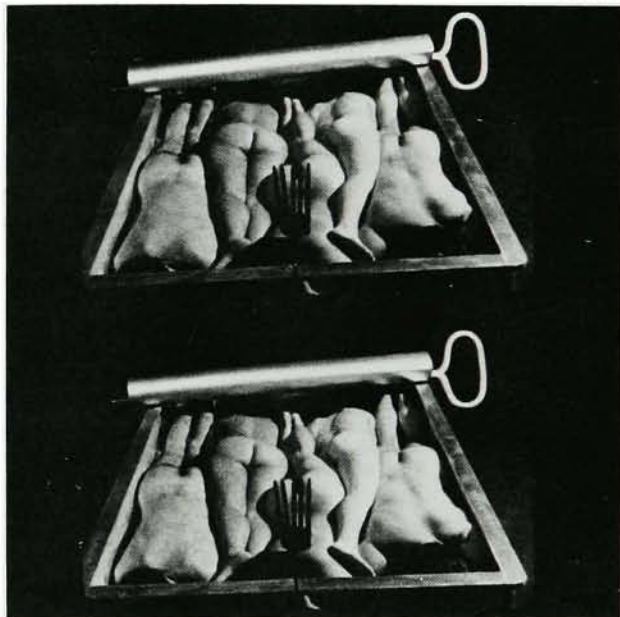
Shown on the *Of All People* series was Clay Borris' film about a deaf-mute couple and their family's attitudes towards this handicap — **One Hand Clapping**. This is a lovely and sensitive documentary in Borris' intimate style (see Issue 7 — Toronto Filmmakers Co-op) with very human insights into the world of the non-hearing. Happily, this film is already available through the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre, 406 Jarvis Street, Toronto M4Y 2G6.

Another documentary recently

aired was Len Gilday's **Yukon: A Portrait** which consists of several portraits of people living in the North — a family raising sled-dogs, an old boat captain, a man working a sanctuary for endangered species and a couple with their life savings invested in the risky business of gold-mining. Gilday's excellent camerawork coupled with approaching this subject through the eyes of Yukon's people make this a unique documentary very different from all the travelogues about Canada's Last Frontier. Write to CBC, Box 500, Station A, Toronto M5W 1E6 for information.

Premiering on *Sprockets* was Sorel Etrog's first film, **Spiral**. Etrog is better known to filmmakers for designing the coveted statuette bearing his name which will again be given this year at the Canadian Film Awards. This half-hour, black and white film set to music is reminiscent of the surrealist cinema of the 1930s and

"Spiral"



deals with the Absolutes — *Life and Death*. Being one of Canada's best-known sculptors, Etrog's visual sense is striking, provocative, and often very powerful. Available through the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre.

Lots more next time. . . .

Don't Look at the Camera

By Harry Watt, published by Elek Books Limited, Great Britain (1974) 194 pages.