

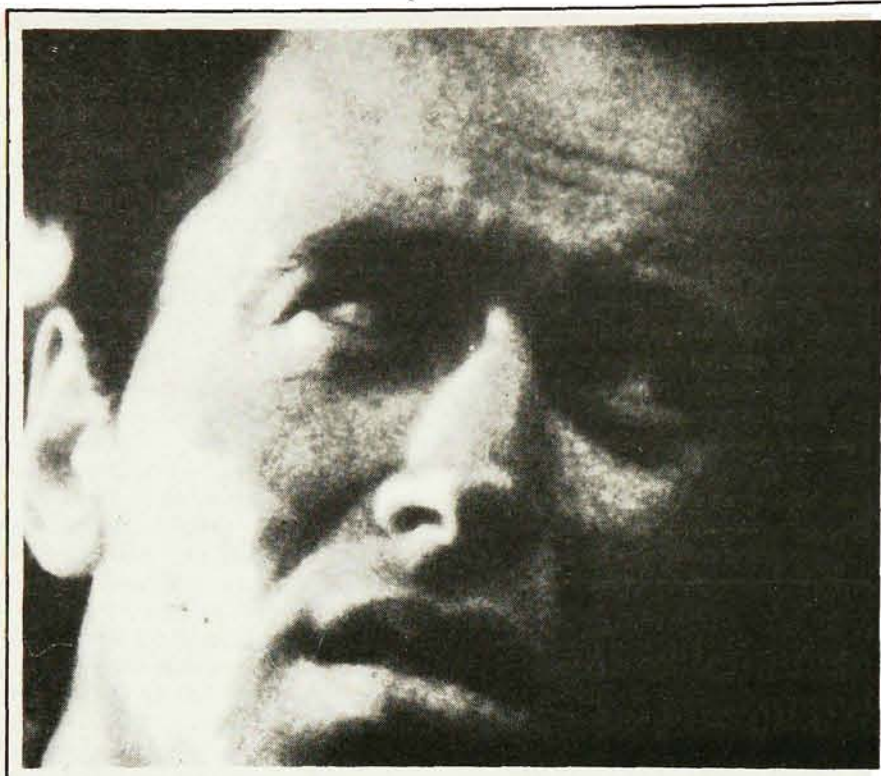
Perry Mark Stratyckuk's
Savannah Electric

There's never been much room (or need) in Canadian culture for the conception of alternative worlds. Chiefly a nation of naturalists and documentarists, Canadians are more likely to put their arts in the service of what is than to allow them to ponder what might be. As such, fantasy and science fiction are relatively anomalous genres in Canadian fiction and filmmaking (David Cronenberg comprising a classically rule-proving exception), and have not developed even the renegade literary status they enjoy in countries like Britain, Japan, the U.S.S.R. and the United States.

Interestingly, those few examples of Canadian science fiction that do exist offer ironic testimony as to why the genre just doesn't come naturally to corporeally-centred Canucks. If this fine fictional hair can be split, there appear to be two identifiable strands of Canadian SF: first there are the inevitable, commercially-generated products of imitation – those films, (such as *Defcon-4* or *The Last Chase*, or a TV series like *Starlost*), which by their very awkwardness – and commercial failure, demonstrate the genre's (ahem) alien status in terms of predominant Canadian fictional tendencies.

Then there are those films, like Cronenberg's and Perry Mark Stratyckuk's *Savannah Electric*, which mobilize the generic conventions of SF to cast some perennial and deep-seated Canadian cultural concerns in a new light. If the dominant strains of Canadian cultural practice have been thematically (indeed obsessively) drawn to a condition of profound alienation – be it individual, social, psychological, political or sexual – this kind of film permits the expression of this alienation to shift from the level of the literal (or at least naturalistic) to the metaphoric. Commercially viable and internationally celebrated as they are, the thematic concerns of the films of Cronenberg, with their constant and obsessive return to the metaphoric site of the mind's separation from the body, couldn't be more Canadian. In the generic confines of science fiction and horror, Cronenberg has found as inexhaustibly fertile cinematic discourse for the expression of the same, kind of (if slightly more extreme) alienation that has haunted practically the entire history of postwar Canadian feature filmmaking.

(Not that this is without precedent. Significantly enough, one of the most highly-awarded Canadian films ever, the 1960 'speculative documentary' *Universe*, which introduced model anima-



• Documenting alienation in science fiction *Savannah*

tion techniques that would become instrumental to the realization of films like *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Star Wars*, ventured to the heavens only to find cosmic vindication of our national inferiority complex. Consider Peter Morris's description in *The Film Companion*: "...this literally awe-inspiring film makes extraordinary use of animation to present an image of the universe and humanity's insignificance in the face of it." (pp. 304-4) No wonder Canadians have avoided the potential for interplanetary frontierism offered by speculative fictional forms: why travel to other planets for proof of our ultimate puniness?.

Like Cronenberg, though with radically different formal means and interests, Winnipeg's Perry Mark Stratyckuk has found in certain SF conventions a profoundly versatile medium for the representation of certain dyed-in-the-flannel Canadian concerns. A post-apocalyptic survival fable (*à la A Boy and His Dog*, *Defcon-4*, *Le Dernier combat*, *Planet of the Apes*, *Road Warrior* and *Stalker*, to name a select few), Stratyckuk's film occupies a SF sub-genre that usually offers two metaphoric alternatives: the post-apocalyptic world as an opportunity for the reconstruction of a better society from scratch, or the deterministic presentation of that world as a logical but extreme projection of contemporary social ills onto a future canvas. Following the latter route, the decidedly Canadian *Savannah Electric* conjures a future world where certain negative national characteristics have run rather amok. In fascinating ways, it suggests the future – oppressive and industrial – as Don Shebib might once have imagined it.

Made for a miniscule \$30,000, and set in an indeterminate future of equal economic and ecological blight (with prairie dunes evoking global drought),

when men labour under machine rule on the production of life-sustaining chemicals, *Savannah Electric* can be even more precisely situated in terms of SF sub-genres. The story of one drone's rebellion against the omnipotent rule of a computer called The Benefactor (who, significantly enough, is also the film's narrator), Stratyckuk's film is firmly of the assertion-of-individual-will type. In this popular, usually cautionary strain of speculative literature and film, an individual (or group of individuals) rises up against a conformist, totalitarian regime. Within generic parameters, that regime can be represented by people (the crypto-fascist regimes of 1984, *Things to Come* and *Metropolis*), aliens (the *Star Wars* trilogy, *War of the Worlds*, the V TV series), machines (though usually, as in *Westworld*, *Colossus: The Forbin Project* or *2001: A Space Odyssey* it's machines doing the revolting), or any number of assorted significant Others (*Planet of the Apes* and its successors). In the political terms these films set, the greatest threat faced by contemporary society is the threat to individualism and free will, and the films present a dramatic assertion of individual free will in a world which has suppressed it. So does *Savannah Electric*: inspired by a fellow 'Drone' who has lost his life in an attempt to escape the computer's control, another drone 'goes renegade' and is pursued into the desert by a human bounty hunter dispatched by the none-too-happy Benefactor.

In these human rebellion SF films, the degree of faith in free will as a revolutionary force is usually expressed in the outcome of the revolt itself: in 1984, the hero's poetic insurrection is quashed like so much fudge, in the *Star Wars* trilogy the evil regime is triumphantly dumped. In *Savannah Electric* the as-

sertion of individualism in a totalitarian context is presented as a minor but portentous victory: while the Benefactor remains in firm control at film's end (he's still narrating, after all), he interprets even this small, personal gesture of revolt as a potentially contagious one: with a worldweary (and decidedly human) sigh, he acknowledges that he's presided over the beginning of his own demise. There will be more renegades.

Canadian as this measured, hesitant conclusion may be (this has never been a nation comfortable with the idea of revolt – an American film would have relished the spectacle of The Benefactor's final defeat), it is not the only aspect of *Savannah Electric* that surrenders a certain cultural particularity. Alternating constantly between confined, industrial settings or expansive, establishing long shots (highlighted by Stratyckuk's brilliant convincing miniature models), the film seems actually more interested in documenting oppression than revolt against it. Although the opening chase sequence (in which the bounty hunter tracks a renegade to an abandoned farmhouse) is an exquisitely rendered (if a tad overlong), bargain basement homage to Sergio Leone, it's actually the documentation of drudgery which is *Savannah Electric*'s strongest suit.

Stratyckuk's rendering of The Benefactor's steam-choked chemical plant, with its hissing valves, droidlike Drones and omnipresent thugs, is easily the film's most convincingly conceptualized element. Reminiscent of David Lynch's epochal confections in *Dune*, Stratyckuk's desert-bound chemical factory is like a 19th century sweatshop chugging away in a bleak, distant future. And while the presentation of character would barely qualify as minimal (no doubt due to the dramatically debilitating budgetary necessity of using post-synched sound), the reasons for revolt are never less than obvious: drone life is vividly presented as a cycle of exhausting labour and electronically-induced narcosis, so that while our revolutionary hero coheres as a psychological presence, his function as a moral and political force is perfectly clear. Besides, the revolt itself seems of less interest to the film than the documentation of the conditions that necessitate it. If there's any aspect of *Savannah Electric* that qualifies it as Canuck SF, this is it: not only is it too grounded in political practicality to indulge cathartic fantasies of full-scale revolt and social upheaval, it has a documentarist's fascination with the minutiae of social and behavioural process: strange as it seems, it qualifies as sort of SF *vérité*.

But realistically, it is precisely this refusal to indulge the more kinetic conventions of SF that will probably ensure low visibility for *Savannah Electric*. Lean on plot and psychology, paced with a Tarkovskian fidelity to *ennui* and indecision, Stratyckuk's film is both unlikely to please mainstream SF zealots (who will find it deadly, short-on-FX bore), and unlikely to reach those artier

types most likely to applaud its ambitious, homemade modernism. And frankly, it is too long. Given the slight and ultimately vague nature of *Savannah Electric's* political campaign (the assertion of individual will making for pretty thin manifesto material), not even Stratyckuk's formidable formal talents justify the film's 80-odd minute running time. (It would have made one amazing short).

At this moment, *Savannah Electric* is most richly regarded as a fascinating footnote to the search for cultural specificity that has faced English-Canadian filmmakers since foreign films first found a home on our domestic screens. Principally and most successfully, it is a generic exercise which rather audaciously borrows a more or less alien cultural form – and scales it to suit the domestic sensibility. For now, that is, it is of primary interest in terms of its position within the ongoing project of developing indigenously Canadian forms of popular culture. In the future, I hope it will be that and something more. I hope it will be remembered as the first feature made by an extraordinary intelligent and innovative Canadian filmmaker.

Geoff Pevere ●

SAVANNAH ELECTRIC p./d./d.o.p./ed. Perry Mark Stratyckuk orig. m. comp. and perf. by Tom Paterson add. m. Perry Stratyckuk rerec. Chris McPherson ward. Catherine Stratyckuk mattes and miniatures Destiné Films animated titles and post prod. fx. Audience West pyrotechnics Shawn Wilson, Dave Peter, Steve Hegyi video fx Keith McKenzie, Visual Marketing Systems prod. asst. Peter McDonald, Donald Stratyckuk m. rec. Chris McPherson, Wayne Finucan Productions credits Steven Rosenberg lab services Mid-Can Labs Inc. neg. cutting Dawna Dobbs l.p. Dean Beckman, Jack Urbanski, Peter McDonald, Donald Stratyckuk, Jack Salzberg, Dave Hologrosky, Armand Baptist, Christopher Sigurdson, Ann Hodges. **The Producer wishes to thank:** The National Film Board of Canada, J. D. "Del" Martin, Coleen Ryan, CP Rail, William Kachur, Keith Gans. Produced with the assistance of The Manitoba Arts Council. **running time** 78min **colour** 16mm **distrib** North American Releasing Inc. (604) 925-2565.

Paul Lynch's *Blindside*

Paul Lynch has spent the last decade directing genre exercises. In *Blindside* he attempts to return to the low-key style that characterized his early films, *The Hard Part Begins* and *Blood and Guts*. Unfortunately for Lynch and his debuting writer Richard Beattie, it takes more than a complex story line, stark cinematography and morally ambiguous characters to make a film noir.

This is one of those stories in which a professional voyeur sees too much and becomes involved in a conspiracy. It specifically descends from *Rear Win-*

dow by way of *Blow-Up* and *The Conversation*. It borrows rather too much from the latter, but shows little of the brilliance of Hitchcock, Antonioni or Coppola.

Penfield Gruber (Harvey Keitel) was once a leading behavioral scientist and an expert in surveillance techniques. Then his wife Janine killed herself, and he dropped out. Now he owns a run-down motel on the Toronto lakeshore. His clients consist of aspiring exotic dancers, deadbeat musicians, Elvis Presley impersonators and would-be gigolos. Then, a pair of hoods knock on his door.

Peters (Sam Malkin) wants Gruber to spy on a recent arrival at the motel, William Freelong (Michael Rudder). To convince Gruber, Peters' muscleman, Collinson (Kenneth McGregor), threatens to smash his face and torch the motel. Gruber is already suspicious of Freelong, and reluctantly agrees.

While planting listening devices in the room next to Freelong's, Gruber hears something from the apartment on the other side, which he also decides to bug. He soon discovers a connection between Gilchrist (Durango Coy), his girlfriend Julie (Lori Hallier), and the shipment of heroin Freelong and his gang ripped-off Peters' boss, Hawk.

By this point the audience should be thoroughly involved with the film, but *Blindside* remains curiously remote in tone. Lynch seems to be unsure of how to handle his main character; unlike the undone voyeurs played by James Stewart, David Hemmings or Gene Hackman, Gruber is just not interesting as a person.

Harvey Keitel has always been at his best as an actor when called upon to play men who desperately try to control their natural propensity to violence, but who eventually blow up. This slow burn is quite different from the more flashy explosions of Robert De Niro, (which may explain why Keitel has not achieved his friend's stardom), but Keitel's style works well for guilt-obsessed figures he played in Martin Scorsese's *Mean Streets*, James Toback's *Fingers* and his role as the censorious detective in Nicholas Roeg's *Bad Timing*. In *Blindside*, however, Keitel holds himself in to such a degree that he becomes colourless.

Lynch also fudges other aspects of the film. Though considerable attention is paid to the technology of Gruber's surveillance equipment, his video cameras are seen to pan, when they have been explicitly shown earlier to be stationary. What is more surprising is the director's decision to downplay any exploitation of the Toronto atmosphere, in contrast to the attention to detail he used to show.

Because the audience doesn't care about Gruber as a person, there is no interest in his guilt feelings. Guilt is why he involves himself with Julie, who reminds him of Janine, his wife – the tryst between them in an apartment over a bookstore, brought groans and guffaws

from the sparse audience I saw the film with. Gruber's other relationship, with Adele (Lolita David), the aspiring exotic dancer, is handled better, but fails to convince, although their big scene together, huddling in a car while a gunfight takes place some 50 feet away, is the one place where the *noir* atmosphere is successfully achieved.

Michael Rudder's portrayal of the wired Freelong is the only really lively character in the film, with his continuing rap about the need for more "ordinance", bizarre non sequiturs ("they're used to gun control in this country"), and delight in shootouts. These are shot in clichéd Peckinpah slow motion – one's main reaction to this is to observe how nicely Dwayne McLean's stunt team takes its falls. What can one say, though, about the would-be Great Canadian Gangster, whose greatest ambition is to throw a brick off the Eiffel Tower?

If *Blindside* fails, it is clearly because Paul Lynch does not manage the busy plots into a coherent whole; at one point Gruber has to write the connecting threads down, so as to make sense. Later, Gruber visits a former colleague who is conducting a sleep study on a patient that looks remarkably like torture. The scene is a piece of scientific black humor worthy of Cronenberg; it is unnerving and it has energy. It also has little to do with the rest of *Blindside*.

J. Paul Costabile ●

BLINDSIDE d. Paul Lynch p. Peter Simpson co-p. Ray Sager assoc. p. Ilana Frank asst. d. David Robertson (1st), Sam Mahony (2nd), Martha Bean (3rd) prod. man. Robert Wertheimer prod. co-ord Fran Solomon asst. to p. Jane Schmelzer sc. Richard Beattie sc. sup. Diane Parsons d.o.p. Rene Ohashi focus puller John Hobson 2nd asst. cam. David Parkins cam. trainee Cudah Andarawewa stills Ben Mark Buchanan sd. ed. Nick Rotundo assts Alastair Gray, Stephen Lawrence asst ed. Alastair Gray app. ed. Kerry Simpson sd. mix. John McGill boom Jack Buchanan sd. ed. Nick Rotundo assts Alastair Gray, Anthony D'Andrea, Shan Barr Foley Peter McBurnie re-rec Film House Group mix. Tony van den Akker, Marvin Burns art d. rick Roberts assts Catherine Basaraba art dept. co-ord. Sandy Kybartas set dec. Alan Fellows set dresser Chery Junkin, Linda Del Rosario asst set dresser Bob Cross set construct. Hot Sets construct. Man. John Bankson prop mast. Emil Glassbourg asst. Woody Stewart, Paul Haigh, Kim Stitt carp. Ted Samuels cost des. Nada Healy assts Alan St. Germain, Aline gilmore make-up Nancy Howe hair Debi Drennan art dept. trainee Ken Watkins story board artist Robert Ballentine gaffer Maris Hansons best boy Cactus gen. Eldie Beson ele. Dave Moxness key grip Brian Kuchera grip Dee Embree asst. Mike Pendola, Mike Corrigan, Blake Ballentine m. Paul J. Zaza choreography Kelly Robinson sfx Tedd Ross min. and explosions William Lishman and Assoc. Ltd. Video Unit co-ord Karen Pidgurski segment co-ord Paul French op. Terry Gallie cam. op. Jan Zuchlinski playback Video Options stunt. co-ord Dwayne McLean stunt performers Anton Tyukodi, Larry McLean, Randy Kamula, Larry Hoson, John Stoneham loc. scout John Board loc. asst. Woody Sidarous, Lillit "Hank" Williams, Michael Curran, David Flaherty post. prod. sup. Suzanne Colvin prod. acc. Joyce Caveen bookkeeper Susan Stewart prod. assts. Paul Smith, Andrea McCabe prod. office assts. Paul Persofsky prod. receipt. Robin Wardop craft service Debra Earhardt, Michelle Milner, Tonby Robinson transport co-ord Dan Dunlop drivers Bill Hoddinott, Allan P. Mestel, James Am Smith, Mark Moore, Steve LaFleur unit pub. Karen Pidgurski cast d. Media Casting/Lucinda Sill, C. D. C. extra casting Film Extras Services/Peter Lavender equip. rental Lightsource Inc. lab. Film House titles and opt Film Opticals Prod Co. Norstar Entertainment in association with Telefilm Canada, CFCN Communications Ltd., British Columbia Television, TBA Films S. A. colour 35mm running time 102 min. dist. Norstar Releasing.

Stavros C. Stravides' *God Rides a Harley*

Stavros C. Stravides's excellent independent documentary, *God Rides a Harley* (launched at Montreal's World Film Festival), rolls us into a world of ex-motorcycle outlaws who, by some miracle, met with God on the highway of the damned – and were transformed by the encounter. The bikers in the film believe they have been saved, and they embrace their saviour.

However the people who appear in *God Rides a Harley* don't come across as intolerably smug, self-congratulatory convertoids.

These people are not country singers whose careers went on the skids, or failed fast-food entrepreneurs, taken to hitting the bottle. The bikers have been around. They have seen much dirt – in the world, in other people, in themselves. Their experience of – and admission to – real heavy-duty sinfulness ironically gives them a certain moral authority. They seem to have a right to talk about their salvation, because they lived for years on the edge of hell.

For instance, one of the bikers describes a flaming night when an enemy pulled a knife, lurched toward him, and stabbed him in the groin. The biker didn't feel anything. He stood up, and like a super-maniac in a slasher movie, he kept going, loaded with energy, ready to kill his assailant. His 24-hour-a-day "bloodlust," the biker tells us, could render him oblivious to terror and pain.

Another motorcyclist jokes that wanting another round of violence was like wanting "another cookie." Drugged and drunken bar fights were commonplace. Vendettas were frequent. We hear one biker confess that if he had been with his pretty, blonde wife in the days when she had sex, as she tells the camera, "with a lot of men," he would have castrated some of them. Another guy admits that he once actually hired someone to murder his wife – although he cancelled the contract before it was fulfilled. The outlaw level of morality was exemplified by one biker's favorite way of grossing-out his buddies. He would stick his face into a toilet and drink all the water.

Then something came riding toward each of the motorcyclists. One biker saw a vision of "God's Death Angel" about to kill him. All of them experienced themselves as loathsome creatures wallowing in the devil's pit. They hungered to drag themselves out, and they felt the lightning bolts of grace. These days, having renounced drugs, rumbles, bestial sex, and all other ultra-cheap thrills, they ride their motorcycles to spread the "beauty of The Word" to others like them. Theirs



• Riding to heaven on a Harley

is an evangelical movement for bikers. The characters in the movie are a subculture within a subculture.

Stavrvides, who once made a film about Inuit teenagers, approaches his subject like an ethnographic documentarian. He records a tribe – the Christian Riders Motorcycle Club – as the band members go about their daily business, attend their rituals, and talk about their lives. Stavrides keeps a certain distance, framing his subjects (the cinematographer was James Crowe) in cool, uncluttered shots that allow us to observe and evaluate – or simply observe out of interest, and not even bother with judgments. The movie has no narrator, and most of it is not cut in a way that makes editorial points, or turns your head with biting ironies.

However, the picture often induces you to sympathize with the Christian Riders. Not only does their thirst for salvation seem genuine and reasonably unsentimental, they display eccentric individuality and a sense of irony. At a revival meeting, one of them grins and describes the way he sees Jesus's face. The Lord's long hair is crowned by a motorcycle helmet, and he's wearing shades. God is motorcyclist. And naturally, he rides a Harley.

The ex-outlaws in the film have cast off all their former ways, except for one: they haven't stopped being bikers. Images you expect to see in any motorcycle movie, whether it is called *The Wild One*, *The Wild Angels*, *Easy Rider*, or *Satan's Choice* (the first Canadian biker picture, which was, not surprisingly, also a documentary), appear in *God Rides a Harley*. Stavrides gives us the close-ups of boots, buckles, and chains; he pans across icons stitched into jean jackets and leather vests. The images are familiar, even though crosses and 'Jesus is Lord' have replaced skulls and 'Born To Lose'.

The Riders are still bikers, not self-righteous prudes who have renounced all their pleasures. Stavrides cuts regularly to liquidly edited shots of the club enjoying the feel of their big choppers on the roads of southern Ontario. How-

ever, they don't swarm aggressively. Accompanied by gospel rock on the soundtrack, they float peacefully past autumnal trees, through dark tunnels, and back into the light. A run is both a sensual and a religious experience. When the Riders approach us, a filter on the cameraman's lens turns the beams of their headlights into rows of spectral yellow crosses.

The Christian Riders Motorcycle Club is compelling because its members convince you they have gone through real turmoil and because they are a striking cross-breed of born-again and biker. However, near the end of the film, you might worry a little about them. A preacher who only *borrow*s bikes now, and who would not be out of place on a TV evangelist's show, delivers a real fire – and – brimstone sermon. It is the first time in the picture that we hear so much disturbingly violent religious rhetoric. And some of the Riders – dressed straight, no colors – don't look like bikers anymore.

The fact that *God Rides a Harley* rolls toward this scene suggests that Stavrides is implying the film's characters could become something other than what they are now. But then he cuts away from the revival meeting and back to the highway, to the Riders on their bikes. He repeats a travelling close-up of a female biker in a black leather jacket. In profile, she smiles serenely, taking pleasure in the sensation of being up there on that motorcycle which is carrying her toward Heaven's gate.

Maurie Alioff •

GOD RIDES A HARLEY d. Stavros C. Stavrides p. Andreas Erne, Stavros C. Stavrides assoc. p. Michael Wainwright story consult. Spencer Frazer liaison Janet McCreadie d.o.p. James Crowe film ed. Steve Stephenson sd. Peter Sawade add. m. by. Carlos Lopes, Adian Mason m. "Are You Ready" (Charlie Allen and John Hill), performed and arranged by Ben McPeek and Jerome McPeek, synthesizer programming by Don Baird; "Questions" (Justin Hayward) performed and arranged by Ben McPeek and Jerome McPeek, synthesizer programming by Don Baird, "Gospel Plow" (Bob Dylan), performed by Paul James. colour 16mm running time 81 min An Arto-Pelli Motion Pictures Production distributed by Creative Exposure (416) 690-0667.

Jacques Godbout's **En Dernier Recours**

When Quebec labour minister Pierre Laporte was kidnapped and murdered in 1970, news spread quickly across the country. Overnight, the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) and the issue of Quebec's independence were thrust to the forefront. Newspapers labeled FLQ members terrorists and the public branded them murderers.

But was it really murder and terrorism? Was the FLQ not fighting, perhaps, for a legitimate cause? Quebec filmmaker Jacques Godbout grapples with these questions in his latest documentary *En Dernier recours*. In it, he explores terrorism in Canadian society, analyzing events like the FLQ years, the Denis Lortie assault on Quebec's National Assembly and the actions of the 'Vancouver Five'.

In choosing Canadian terrorism as a subject, Godbout opens the door on a

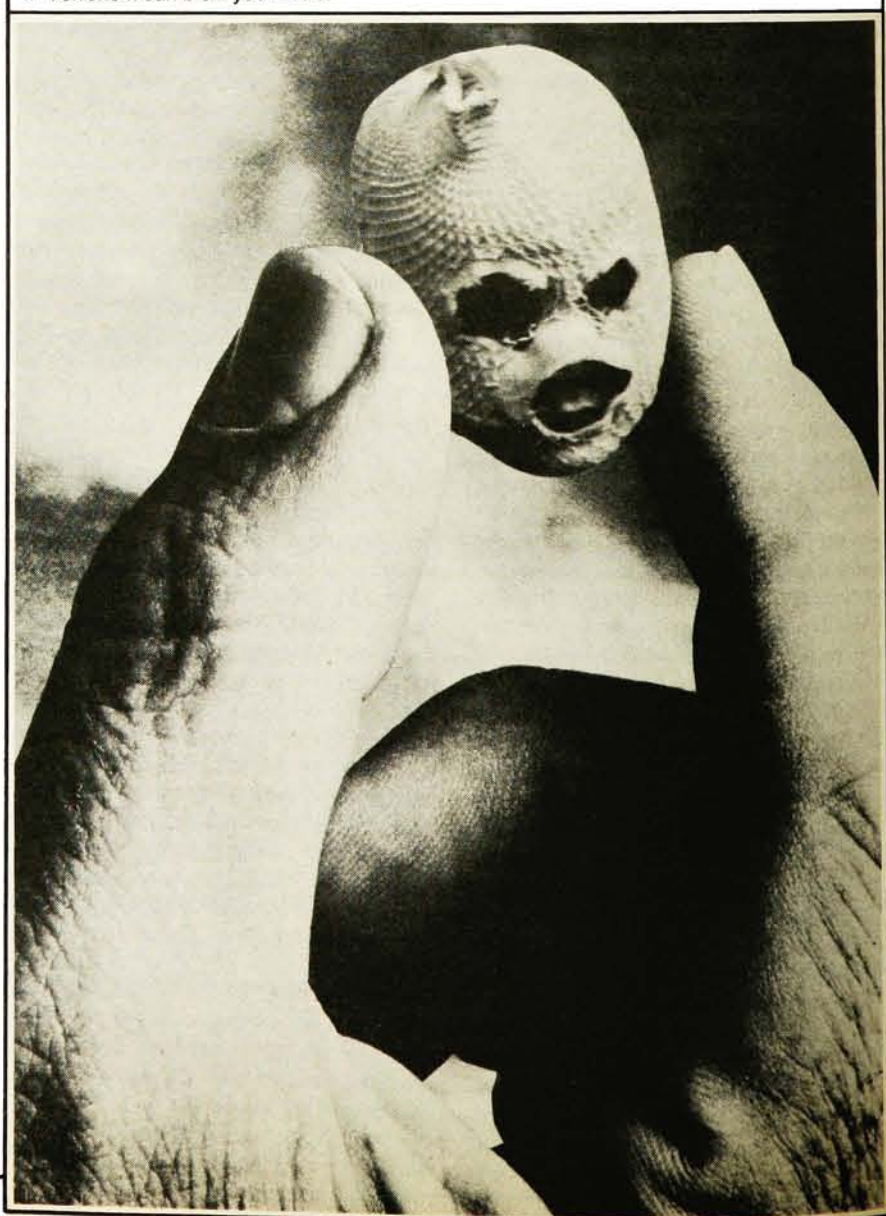
complex issue. He rises to the challenge by presenting views from a wide range of personalities: former FLQ activist François Schirm, Quebec writer Pierre Vallières, an ex-Red Brigade militant and a Montreal police officer. Throughout the 70-minute documentary, Godbout deftly juxtaposes their views to present the film's main themes.

The on-camera interviews form the structure of *En Dernier recours*. To complement them, Godbout relies on archival footage of the 1970 October crisis, the Denis Lortie affair, the Brigham bomb aimed at Pope John Paul II and the Cruise missile tests in Northern Alberta. In fact, there are very few scenes in the film shot by Godbout (the opening and closing scenes in which a bomb explodes on a barren airstrip are probably the best examples).

In the interviews Vallières and Schirm draw distinctions about terrorism. Schirm claims violence is justifiable if used for a popular cause. "Terrorism," he says, "becomes more than just an attack on innocent victims." Vallières adds to this view, asserting that armed struggles in South Africa, Northern Ireland or Central America are not terrorism, although opposing governments and the media label them as such.

In defining terrorism, Godbout fails to distinguish between democratic and

• Terrorism can blow your mind



non-democratic contents. To North Americans and European, most forms of political violence equate terrorism. But in Latin American or African countries, political violence is used to gain independence from a violent oppressor. Can the FLQ's call for an independent Quebec be fairly compared to the African National Congress' struggle against apartheid?

Godbout is clear, though, in making one point – terrorism, like most events depend on communications and a mass audience. Journalists, he explains, become key players in its transmission. Without them and a powerful media system, terrorism has less of an impact. Godbout twists this point in one sequence probing two Canadian journalists who witness a destructive Paris bombing. The two are perplexed when Godbout asks if they thought first of their photo assignments or of helping the burning victims.

En Dernier recours is an analytical documentary raising a number of subtle issues. In one sequence, former Parti Québécois minister Bernard Landry is asked if he felt threatened during the Denis Lortie assault on Quebec's National Assembly, an incident in which seven people were killed. Landry answers a blunt no. "We are all hostages of terrorism... the arms race is an ongoing form of violence." Godbout makes a clear point of this to highlight American and Soviet militarism.

The film's final sequences cover a Vancouver-based group who have bombed and sabotaged Canadian military-industrial targets. But unlike other forms of terrorism or armed struggles depicted in the film, the Vancouver group raises an interesting distinction – their targets, rather than people or innocent victims, are military installations and weapon sites. As Godbout illustrates, are these anti-war militants really terrorists?

Today, military arms and production have become the world's largest industry (\$800 billion annually). Governments, many of them democratically elected, actively promote and support wars. The American Constitution, itself a much-heralded example of justice, guarantees the right of individuals to bear arms. This mass proliferation of weapons has made violence an intrinsic tool in relations between people and states. Unlike the title of Godbout's film, arms and violence have become more than just a last resort. Rather, as **En Derniers recours** effectively depicts, they've rapidly become an effective first choice for those both in and out of power.

Robbie Hart •

Don Shebib's The Climb

Don Shebib has come a long way since his triumphs with **Goin' Down the Road** and **Between Friends** in the early '70s. Since that time, **Goin' Down the Road** has consistently been listed as one of the 10 great Canadian films, and Shebib carries it around with him rather like Orson Welles used to carry **Citizen Kane**. It has become both a blessing and a curse. A source of pride for those committed to the notion of a distinctive Canadian cinema, **Goin' Down the Road** lingers as a reminder of a great talent gone to waste.

In over a decade, Shebib has directed only four features, the last one being **Running Brave** with Robbie Benson in 1983. Disputes with the producers caused Shebib to withdraw his name from that film, which had only limited theatrical release. Since then, he has been active in TV, mostly directing episodes of **The Edison Twins**, **Night Heat**, and **Danger Bay**. Shebib's struggles with the Canadian industry and the CFDC (now Telefilm) have become as famous as his earlier successes.

The Climb, his latest foray into feature filmmaking, is an old-fashioned piece of macho action-drama. It stars Canadian-born Bruce Greenwood from TV's **St. Elsewhere**, with a Canadian supporting cast that includes Kenneth Walsh, Ken Pogue and Tom Butler. However, there is nothing Canadian about **The Climb** subject matter, and in many ways it harks back to the bad old tax shelter days when the deal was more important than the film. It has none of the freshness and vitality of recent English-language Canadian productions, and suffers from a thin, one-dimensional script.

The film is based on the true story of a 1953 German expedition to conquer Nanga Parbat, a treacherous Himalayan peak, described in the film as "the most beautiful mountain in the world". Although not as high as Everest, Nanga Par-

bat became an obsession with the Germans after it claimed the lives of 31 members of a German climbing party in 1932. The script concentrates on Hermann Buhl (Greenwood), a famed mountaineer whose reckless and determined ambition leads him into conflict with the team's bureaucratic leader, Dr. Karl Herrligkoffer (James Hurdle). Whereas Herrligkoffer is climbing for the glory of the German nation, Buhl climbs for himself and the mystical challenge of the mountain.

As they proceed slowly up the icefields, news arrives of Hillary's conquest of Everest. Disappointed and confronted with rebellious porters and dwindling supplies, Herrligkoffer decides to retreat before making it to the top. Buhl disobeys orders to return to base camp and makes the final assault alone, without oxygen or support. After a full day's climb, exhausted and hallucinating, he makes it to the top. Unable to climb down in the dark, he has to spend the night there, keeping himself awake in freezing temperatures. His survival is a credit to his fierce determination, and in the context of the film, miraculous. The ghost of one of the dead climbers helps him down the mountain the next day!

Shot by Richard Leiterman, Shebib's brilliant cinematographer for both **Goin' Down the Road** and **Between Friends**, **The Climb** does manage to communicate some of the mystical allure of mountaineering. The scenery (**The Climb** was filmed on location in Northern Pakistan and the Columbian icefields in Jasper National Park) is glorious and there is plenty of man vs. landscape imagery. Much of it is repetitious, but it is stunning nonetheless.

However, the film is curiously lacking in any real suspense, and the acting is uneven, at best. The oddity of having the Germans speak in accented-English while carrying a German-inscribed plaque to their dead comrades strains the credibility of all the performances.

Shebib's direction is conventional and somewhat stilted. He relies too heavily on the drama of the inert mountains to compensate for the lack of drama in the performances. The conflict set up between Buhl and Dr. Herrligkoffer seems strained and all too predictable. **The Climb** is a film that certainly will have tremendous support from those who

take this sport seriously, but it does very little to enhance the declining reputation of Shebib as a director of merit.

The Climb was produced by Wendy Wacko, an emerging, Alberta-based independent who has become an adept deal-maker. The film was originally financed by CTV, the BBC and Telefilm as a 60-minute drama. By stretching things, Shebib, Wacko and Leiterman produced a feature, but the material and direction still suggest a 60-minute drama.

Wyndham Paul Wise •

Marquise Lepage's Marie s'en va-t-en ville

Marie s'en-va-t-en-ville sounds like the title of a fable or a folktale. And indeed it is the story of a country innocent who comes to the city.

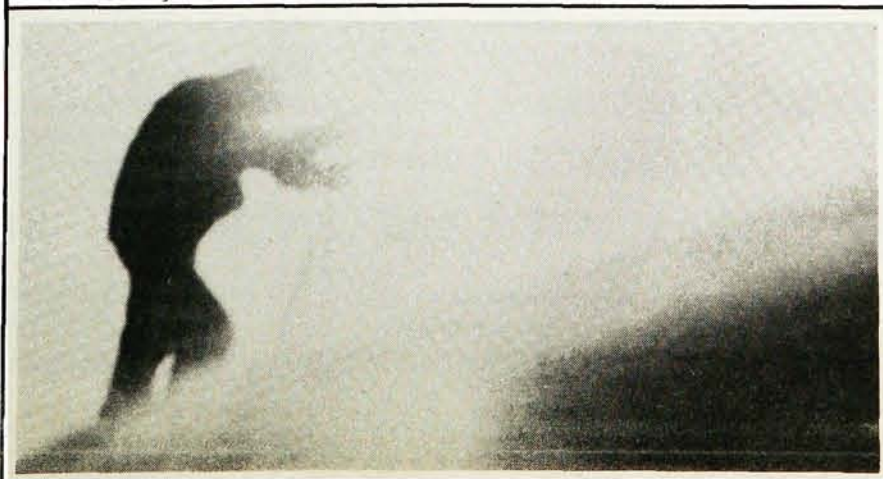
In the folktale, the youngest son or, in this case, daughter leaves home and goes to seek her fortune. After many trials and tribulations she wins out and obtains her heart's desire. In this first feature by Marquise Lepage, we have the story complete with wicked sibling – a brother who sexually harasses our heroine – and a mother who is too busy with the other children to give her youngest adequate love and protection.

In Québécois culture, the country usually represents simpler and more wholesome values than the city. But in this film some sort of reversal of this traditional structure is taking place. Maybe it is because Marie only comes from the suburbs. For, as in the folktale, the innocent finds true love and happiness when she leaves home. There is none of the *misérabilism* of the Québécois films of the '70s here; everything is up-tempo.

In some ways, **Marie s'en-va-t-en-ville** is a gem. It has tight scripting, good acting, nice visuals and nice music. For a first feature, this is quite an achievement. And yet the film disappointed me. Even though I believed in the two main characters, the situation itself seemed incredible and robbed the film as a whole of credibility. Maybe I'm too cynical, but it's hard to believe in the old stereotype of the whore with the heart of gold; would a prostitute (Sarah) really take on the responsibility of caring for a 13-year-old runaway (Marie)?

Once one gets past this incredible situation one can see that the film is dealing with themes that are preoccupying many women filmmakers at present. The relationship between an older and a younger woman is recurrent in many of these films. In **High Tide**, an Australian film by Gillian Armstrong, a nightclub singer comes across the daughter she abandoned 14 years before. Painfully she comes to a realization of the sterility of her present existence and decides to

• Because they are there, mountains cause frostbite and death



EN DERNIER RECOURS A Jacques Godbout film with the collaboration of Janine Kriber and Werner Nold d. Jacques Godbout sd. ed. Roger Boire sd. mix. Adrian Croll admin. Joanne Gallant, Monique Lavoie, loc. man. Michael Dandavino d.o.p. Jean-Pierre Lachapelle assisted by Serge Lafortune sd. Richard Besse sc./ research Janine Kriber sc. ed. Werner Nold m. François Dompierre titles Louise Overy cam. Jean-Pierre Lachapelle asst. cam. Serge Lafortune sd. Richard Besse spfx Louid Craig p. Eric Michel. A National Film Board of Canada Production. colour 16mm running time 70 min. 40

take her child back and assume the burden of love and responsibility this entails.

There is a similar theme in this movie. Sarah is also alone, living a sterile, unloved and unloving existence. It is through caring for Marie that she comes to realize this and, at the end of the film, we are led to believe that she will give up this way of life.

The film is about two people in need, meeting, fulfilling each other's needs and furthering each other's growth. Marie is very naive and believes Sarah when she tells her that she works as a waitress. Like the young woman in Léa Pool's *Anne Trister*, the relationship becomes sexual but in this film, in keeping with the lighter tone, the issue of lesbianism is avoided. There are scenes which surely suggest this possibility and Sarah's apartment has a sensuous, womb-like quality with its deep-blue walls, the pink satin sheets and the black shawl embroidered in gold which hangs on the wall. But the film firmly stays away from any sexual innuendos and, instead, concentrates on Marie's playing different sexual roles as she tries on Sarah's make-up, jewelry and clothes. Just the sort of thing a young girl would do.

Tied in with the typical adolescent's



• Frédérique Collin and Geneviève Lenoir in the city

concern with external sexual codes is the prostitute's use of these codes to attract her customers. Much is made of a series of wigs that Sarah wears. She is no longer young and attractive, and when the villain of the piece (a pimp I presume) snatches off her wig, she looks naked and pathetic. It is at this point too that Marie realizes that Sarah is a prostitute. The fantasy fades and Marie must come to terms with the reality, which she does easily enough for such an innocent. I suppose that her previous experiences with Sarah have prepared her for this. But, I find it hard to see it this way.

Prostitution seems to be taken al-

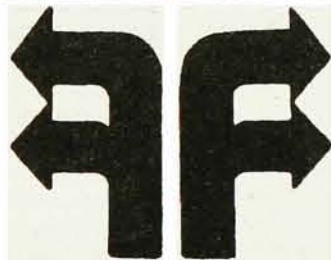
together too lightly in the film. Especially repellent is the scene where Sarah runs out to turn a trick so that she can buy some fancy clothes for Marie. Godard used prostitution as a metaphor for how we must all sell our souls and our bodies to survive in a modern society. Perhaps there is some of this idea here. If so, it is kept at such a trivial, comedic level that the metaphor becomes perverted and loses its tragic intonations.

It is true that Sarah is redeemed through her love and care of the young girl, as in *High Tide*, and I suppose that these films might signal a need in our so-

ciety. Maybe women have come to realize the emptiness of too much freedom. After the return to the mother in feminist theory, perhaps we'll get the return to the daughter. In any case, in both these films (as in *Anne Trister*), the men seem external to the main drama. In *Marie s'en-va-t-en-ville*, all the men we see (the brother, the pimp, the customers) are definitely the enemy. But again here, a potentially tragic subject is trivialized by a light-comedy approach. Perhaps one should see this film as feminist theory diluted for mass consumption. The film is partly funded by Radio-Canada and it will fit nicely into their schedule.

Mary Alemany-Galway •

MARIE S'EN VA-T-EN VILLE sc. Marquise Lepage with the collab. of François Bouvier, Pierre Foglia, Micheline Lanctot, Jacques Leduc d. Marquise Lepage consult. Meah Beaudry asst. d. René Pothier, Catherine Didelot cont. Marie La Haye d.o.p. Daniel Jobin asst. Michel La Veaux sd. Marcel Fraser art. d. François Séguin hair/make-up Micheline Trépanier ward Nicole Pelletier prod. man. Roselyne Laverdière lighting Alex Amyot grip Marc De Ernst ed. Yves Chaput sd. ed. Marcel Pothier m. Michel Rivard sup. p. Claude Cartier prod. man. Simone Leroux prod. asst. Marcel Simard, Danielle Charlebois exec. p. François Bouvier. A Productions du lundi matin production dist. Les Films J. A. Lapointe Inc. Int. Sales Films Transit Inc. colour 35 mm running time 80 min. l.p. Frédérique Collin, Geneviève Lenoir, Denis Levasseur, Robert Boivin, Geneviève Filion, Viviane Pacal, Louise Richer.



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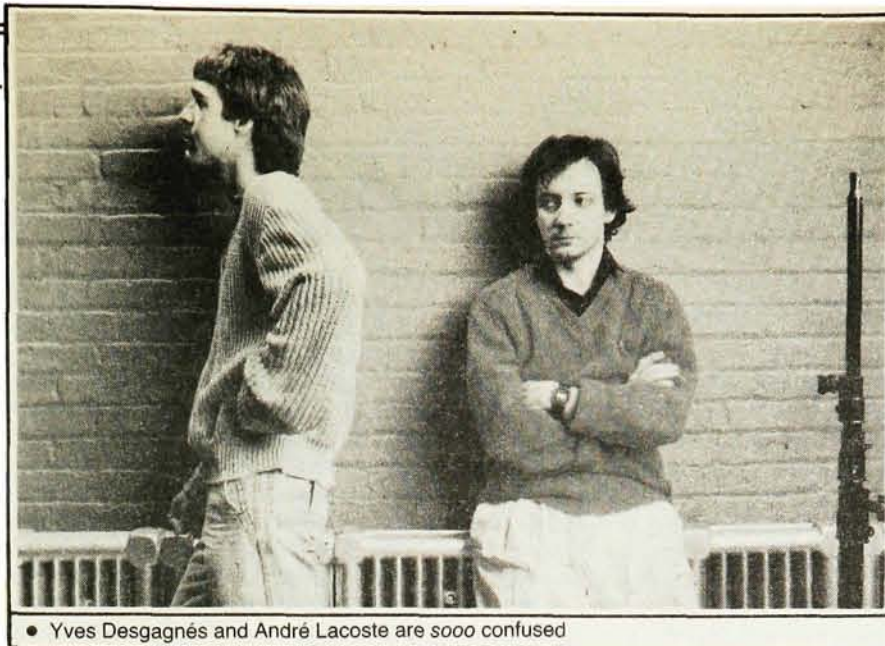
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Yves Dion's

L'Homme renversé



• Yves Desgagnés and André Lacoste are sooo confused

L'homme renversé (Man Upside-down) is a feature-length film which deals with the 'new man', i.e., one confronted with a world where his male prerogatives are no longer taken for granted. How does this 'new man' react to the changed situation? Has he himself really changed?

My first thought on looking at this film was that a woman should never have been sent to review it. I felt like a voyeur looking through a peephole into the boys' locker room. Indeed there is something voyeuristic about a film that starts up as a documentary and ends up as a fiction. At least this was my first impression of the structure of the film. And I think that generally the first part does come across as a documentary.

We meet two actors and one actress who are taking part in a filmed workshop on the subject of sexuality. This part is done in a *cinéma-verité* style and even includes interviews with the participants conducted by the director. Since the director is played by Yves Dion who is the director of the film we assume that this is 'reality'. But there are several filmic codes at play here and if we watch carefully, right from the start of the film, the 'reality' of the documentary footage is put into question.

The first shot of the film is of a tape-recorder and the sound man. This establishes the filmic apparatus, a device often used in *cinéma-verité* to remind the audience that this is 'reality' and it includes the presence of the film crew. It is a shot which signals that we are in the documentary mode. The next few shots are of a man parking a car. In terms of cinematic codes they are much too structured (separate shots taken from different angles, car coming up to the camera and stopping) to belong to the *cinéma-verité*, catching-life-on-the-move, mode. On the sound track we hear the voice of the driver. This is another *cinéma-verité* impossibility since we are apparently listening to his thoughts. He's arriving at the studio where the workshops are to take place, and catching a glimpse of the other actor, he muses on how sure the other was of himself when they were young.

Inside the studio we see the two actors, who were apparently childhood friends, meet. They are Guy (the driver) and Daniel and are joined by Claudine. Guy is an actor in TV commercials, Daniel acts in experimental theatre and Claudine is there as a representative of the women's movement. In an interview, Yves Dion asks her for her reaction to being asked to take part in a workshop on the masculine condition. "Amused at first," she replies. Indeed her attitude throughout

the film remains semi-amused, semi-frustrated by these men who are trying to play the game of self-disclosure which was such a big part of the consciousness-raising groups in the women's movement.

But these three do not just sit around and talk. Being actors they try to use improvisation techniques in small skits which deal with masculine roles. However there are problems. Guy is the first one to show his reluctance. "Je veux pas apporter mes bibittes," he says. And Claudine replies, "That is the masculine condition." This, it seems to me, is the thesis of the film. For Yves Dion the masculine condition seems mostly to be an inability to communicate one's intimate problems. Perhaps, even an inability to acknowledge them. Even Daniel, who is the more extrovert of the two actors, says that his goal in life is to never have to talk again, to never be obliged to define himself. He points out that the male is always playing the role of the super-hero, like James Bond, equal to any situation.

The fact that we are never sure what is scripted and what is not becomes an excellent device to keep the audience questioning the truth of these statements. For myself, as a woman, the film was doubly mysterious since the condition was other than my own. I finally had to drag a male friend to see it with me and tell me if this was really the way it was. He thought that it was true that males seldom talk between themselves about intimate matters. Apparently it leaves one open to questions about one's virility.

At this point the film began to make more sense to me. In the workshops there are a couple of improvisations the actors undertake which seem significant. One is concerned with father figures, the other with sexual harassment. The father figures are just as unable to communicate as their sons, retrenched as they are in their authoritative masculine roles. With these models before them it is easy to see why the sons have problems. The improv on sexual harassment is even more interesting in that Guy is completely unable to deal with it or to go on acting in it. It is this scene which triggers the change from the documentary mode to the fiction mode.

We leave the workshop space and go out with Guy and Daniel on a ride to their old neighbourhood. The camera becomes an invisible witness, whose point-of-view is that of the narrator/director. Over dinner, Daniel tells Guy that, when they were young, he had witnessed Guy being sexually harassed in the corner grocery store. Why did he deny it? Guy

replies that he was already being taunted with the label of homosexual by the gang of boys to which they belonged and asks Daniel why he never defended him? Daniel answers that he couldn't do anything about it. This triggers Guy's anger at Daniel's superiority in any situation. The competitiveness which is perhaps at the core of every male relationship surfaces here, and is underscored in the film by a little vignette seen from Guy's point-of-view. Three teenagers come out of the alley next to the restaurant, two boys and a girl. They seem very chummy until the girl starts to playfully hit one of the boys. They run off together and end up making out while the other boy wistfully looks on.

The questions that come to mind are: is there such a lack in the documentary mode that the filmmaker has switched to fiction? Or, is the whole film a fiction from beginning to end? The questions have wide implications for documentary filmmaking in Canada at the moment and have much to do with the decline of *cinéma-verité*. Documentary filmmakers in the past thought they could capture the truth of a situation by simply letting it happen in front of camera, or even by making it happen. Present-day documentary filmmakers seem to find it more honest to create fictions based on real-life situations. The basic conflict in the film, between the director and his actors, is thus symptomatic not only of the male condition but also of the failings of *cinéma-verité*. A situation is set-up by the filmmaker where his actors are supposed to reveal their inner lives but find themselves unable to do so. I have always wondered how much of the truth about themselves people really told in interviews. Who wants to disclose their private selves in front of a camera, anyway? Perhaps only a very exhibitionist personality like Shirley Clarke's Jason. Documentary filmmakers seem to have realized these limits and thus the birth of the docudrama.

But is this such a new form? It seems to me very close to Italian neo-realism in concept if not in execution. Perhaps this is because the docudramas are mostly based on the emotional experiences of the characters and unlike neo-realism do not tie up these experiences in any direct way to the physical, social and political environments in which they are lived. This, in my opinion, gives a closed, studio feel to the docu-dramas which is claustrophobic and limiting. For instance, Guy and Daniel seem to be typical Québécois (to the point of being stereotypical) and yet, though they discuss their youth and take a walk through their old neighbour-

hood, we never really see the forces that have shaped them. The role of the Catholic Church in Québécois society, for instance, is never mentioned. I suppose that the director is trying to address a universal 'masculine condition' but it seems to me that the particular can make the general more interesting.

Perhaps this lack is also felt by the filmmaker for he makes a further jump from the fictional to the symbolic mode. Without any preparation, he cuts to a scene which seems to have no relation to the rest of the film, since none of the characters we've previously encountered appear in it. It is a rather strange scene. The camera is focused on the back of a truck which moves through a small town or a suburban setting. On the truck sits a man, naked except for a loincloth, facing the camera, with his hands chained to the side of the truck. He is covered in white flour. Several other men, who are also on the truck, keep putting raw eggs and other noxious substances on his body. He makes no protest. As the truck drives along we see reaction shots of people watching from the side of the road. This is quite a long scene but there is never any explanation given for it. It seems to be a ceremony which is sometimes still seen in Quebec, a rite of passage for the about-to-be-married male. I presume it is meant as some sort of symbol for the masculine condition. The man certainly seems to be trying to prove that he can take it like a 'man'.

The last scene of the film also seems to have some sort of symbolic import. Guy is left alone in the studio, rejected by his woman, tortured by his insecurities and, in a very theatrical scene, he ends up huddled on the floor in front of a curtain which covers one of the walls. Guiltily, Daniel, who had abandoned him, comes back only to be punched out as Guy lashes out in his pain. Finally they both end up sitting on the floor, side by side, huddled and miserable, in front of the curtain; freeze framed-end of film. The film closes with this apparent dead-end, symbolic perhaps of the two characters' pain and frustration at not being able to transcend their condition.

Mary Alemany-Galway •

L'HOMME RENVERSÉ d. Yves Dion sc. Yves Dion, René Gingras d.o.p. Pierre Letarte add. cam./key grip Kevin O'Connell sd. Alain Corneau, Richard Besse asst. cam. Séraphin Bouchard, Michèle Paulin a.d. Pierre Houle loc. man. Norbert Dufour mach./elec. Marc Paulin loc. res. Michel Dandavino ed. Yves Dion asst. ed. Monique Gervais grip m. Fernand Bernard m. mix Louis Hone sd. ed. Marie-Claude Gagné asst. sd. ed. Lynda Peers sdx Vital Millette mix Hans Peter Strobl, Adrian F. Croll titles concept Elizabeth Melançon titles Louise Overy admin Monique Létourneau, Nicole Charlebois prod sec. Louise Sutton, Joanne Pelletier p. Suzanne Dussault, Roger Frappier, Michel Gauthier thanks to Jean Dansereau, Reynald Robinson, Jacques Girard, Michel Brais, Guillermo de Andrea, Marc Chabot, Hélène Doyle, Gaetan Martel and special thanks to Michel Gauthier l.p. André Lacoste, Yves Desgagnés, Johanne Seymour, Yves Dion, Guillaume Bourque, Geoffroy St-Hilaire, Brigitte Singher, Paul Haddad, Colin O'Meara, Sylvie Drapeau, François Cormier, Christine Séguin, Maximilien Melançon, Dion (Maximilian), Isabelle Vincent, Anne-Marie Desbiens, Ginette Chevalier. A National Film Board of production coul. 35mm running time 97 min.