

FILM REVIEWS

David Cronenberg's

The Parasite Murders

A film by: David Cronenberg. **Screenplay:** Cronenberg. **Cinematography:** Robert Saad. **Music:** Ivan Reitman. **Sound:** Dan Goldberg. **Editing:** Patrick Dodd. **Performers:** Paul Hampton, Joe Silver, Lynn Lowry, Alan Migicovsky, Susan Petrie, Barbara Steele and Ronald Mlodzik. **Producer:** Ivan Reitman. **Produced in 1974 by Cinepix. Colour:** 35mm. **Running time:** 87 minutes. **Distribution in Canada:** Cinepix.

"Sex is the invention of a clever venereal disease."

Well, I really have bad taste. I liked it. I know you're going to say I'm campy and cliquey and queer, but I did like it in my own weird campy way. Because it goes so far, it's so funny-scary awful, so — all those dreams you wouldn't tell anybody, and I mean anybody, about, — all there in front of you, that you've got to be loose, oh yes, very loose indeed, to enjoy this film.

And after all people, what's there to be scared of? Is there really somebody out there who doesn't dream great big colourful eccentric mindboggling blush-making dreams? Once in a while anyway? Ask your favorite psychiatrist. And do you really want Marshall Delaney (I refer to his now famous piece in the back pages of *Saturday Night* entitled "You should know how bad this film is. After all, you paid for it") to tell you your creepo dreams are in bad taste?

I'm sure they are. I hardly ever have a tasteful dream, to be sure. And talking to David Cronenberg, the crazy truthful thing is, this film did come from that special nowhere place where all the wires cross in the back of the mind; from dreamland. True. He simply dreamt it up.

Interestingly, he had another dream while he was making it — a rather intriguing one in which an audience contracted a disease from a film. In the dream he saw this happening, and realized that those affected were feeling antagonistic to those as yet unaffected. The disease itself made people age exceedingly rapidly. Not horribly, just quickly. Listening to him my flesh



photo: Attila Dory

The Parasite Murders

began to crawl with the delightful anticipation of yet another creepy ghoully psycho-masochistic squirmy film from out of the back of Cronenberg's head.

So what is the movie about? Well, in a beautifully stated intro we find ourselves in an apartment complex complete unto itself. Called Starliner, it is advertised with all its facilities, as a world of its own, exclusive and separate. Just the kind of place I find frightening, and advertised, as real complexes like this are, with what seems to me the epitome of bad taste. But it takes all kinds.

All the privileged people living there are unaware that a strange, and I mean really *strange*, bug is loose in the building. Cronenberg calls it a 'bug' but in fact it looks like a cross between a slug, a leech and a particularly offensive penis. Don't read on if you're squeamish, because I'm about to tell you it is passed by mouth, as well as creeps, squeezes, slides, plops and oozes toward its various victims.

Now, from all the war films I've seen, and all the bloody bashes and bonks that TV and the action genre movies perpetrate on my frail interior, I have at last been purged. Because this film has blood in such gobs and slatherings, such dribbles, splashes and smears, that *finally*,

Peckinpah notwithstanding, I am freed of ever getting zapped by some smart-aleck's catsup bottle drama again. Or maybe, anyhow. If the effect wears off, I may need another dose, Dr. Cronenberg.

Ivan Reitman produced. No doubt the thought I had when I saw this film, that it would make a good double-bill with his *Cannibal Girls*, was in his mind before the film was ever finished, or maybe before it was even begun? Perhaps. But it might interest you to learn that when Cronenberg first showed him the script he didn't want anything to do with it because he found it so disgusting. And really, *Cannibal Girls*, buzzer-horror warning and manmeat stew and all, is like child's play compared to the depths of depravity *Parasites* discloses.

The narrative flow is reasonably clear, the photography by Robert Saad competent and straightforward, and the acting medium-good to really-ok, with Joe Silver as usual stealing the kudos. But the special effects! Joe Blasco came up for the love of the business from California, where he makes his living doing things like makeup for the Lawrence Welk show (talk about horror...) and he worked some wonders. To dumbfound other special effects men, he even has Alan Migicovsky,

while gazing with horror on the portion of his anatomy under which the breeding parasites are visibly squirming, *raise up* his body with a jerk in order to prove he wasn't using the old false-chest head-through-a-hole-in-the-bed gimmick. Keep it in mind when you see the film and it may just help you get by a bad part.

But I'm not going to tell anymore about the bugs, or the people, or the amazing and ghastly things that happen. This is a film for drive-ins, for the young, for the brave, for the silly people who like movies that are in bad taste and don't care what Delaney thinks.

This is popcorn, not fruitcake, and no one ever said it was good for you. So go, but be warned, you may have quite a time.

Natalie Edwards

John Trent's

It Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time

A film by: John Trent. **Screenplay:** Claude Harz. **Cinematography:** Harry Makin. **Music:** William McCauley. **Sound:** Russ Heise. **Editing:** Tony Lower. **Performers:** Anthony Newley, Stefanie Powers, Isaac Hayes, Lloyd Bochner and Yvonne De Carlo. **Producer:** David Perlmutter. **Produced in 1975** by Quadrant Films Ltd. **Colour:** 35mm. **Running time:** 97 minutes. **Distribution in Canada:** Ambassador Films.

When you combine backing from David Perlmutter with Quadrant Productions and director John Trent it means a determined attempt is being made to make money with a movie. And the result in this case is a product that is aimed exclusively at the pocket, by way of the guffaw. A good laugh loosens people up; their laughter rings the bells of a thousand cash registers.

But what makes people laugh? It's always been hard to know in Canada. Is it the dirty snigger of the English low comedy, or the falling object joy of the perpetually naughty-child-teasing-Mom-ism of the States?

Winks and pokes, or crashes and chaos?

Or do we have a style all our own? Looking back over what could rather kindly be called the Canadian comedies of the recent past, we see that the embarrassed shudder with which we greet their memory is almost the best indication of their type. Embarrassment, mortification and mild dirt, mixed with meagre chaos, have in the end created a recipe that cannot fail (and has not so far) to produce a mediocre, rather mirthless comedy. **Another Smith for Paradise? The Rainbow Boys? Only God Knows? Even Why Rock the Boat?**, a rather unusually successful chuckle-headed film, finds the mockery of man of modest amusement only.

In **It Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time** a desperate attempt has been made to avoid the merriment of mutter and blush, and create hearty ho-ho's out of a lovely rich olde English mixture of bathroom, bowel and bawd, touched up with some noticeably American types and Canadian comment.

So we have Anthony Newley being relentlessly exuberant and as full of fun as a drunken monkey in a banana boat, giving his all in the buff, or daringly clothed in a handclasp; Lloyd Bochner mortified and terrified by skunks and bears; Moya Fenwick stupefied and ridiculed as a semi-permanently stoned society lady; Stefanie Powers ever-fresh and sexy and manipulative; Isaac Hayes, big and black and bucking a blonde babe (didja see *that!*); and finally Yvonne de Carlo foolish and determined, and more frantic than funny, as an absurd representative of the type of citizen that fights 'progress' when it involves moving her out of her comfortable house.

It's enough to make you cheer on the developers and join the reactionaries.

If you get the impression the film is shallow, superficial, and based on more clichés than there are mosquitos on a June night - you might be right.

But is it *funny*?

Well, that depends on the audience. And what makes the Canadian audience not only laugh, but *pay* to laugh, has yet to be discovered. We can eliminate high comedy, comedy of manners, and much of class comedy and really crude comedy. But for this adolescent mixture of high-jinks, obvious targets, various goings-on that might be considered by rather sedate people as zany or outrageous, a spot of flesh, a hint of sex, a suggestion



It Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time

of action, and a lot of general Poking of Fun, well—it remains to be seen.

Technically the film moves well enough, and though the editing is confined to the basic now-a-little-of-this and now-a-little-of-that technique, still it's reasonably brisk and the complicated plot fairly clear. And the cast handles their material professionally. It's also Canadian in the arithmetical sense that one Eng. and one Am. equal one Can.

Actually some may recall the days when Lloyd Bochner was frequently seen on CBC TV, and there may even be those who know that Yvonne de Carlo has some original claim to Canada, having once been born here, but generally one is not aware of a lot of Canadian talent in the film until one examines the roles of the policemen and garbagemen more closely. Is this a subtle comment on Canadian content do you suppose?

At any rate it is hard to think of the film as a Canadian Comedy, even if one knew what one was talking about. Despite a number of Canadian references, some Toronto take-offs, and some scenery that could well be Canadian, the general flavour of the film is so mixed between mid-Atlantic and borderline north American, that all it does successfully is fall between this and that, being neither goose nor gander, but rather more like a mating between Mary Tyler Moore and the Carry On gang.

And if this causes our fellow nationals from Newfoundland to Vancouver Island to hold their sides and groan for a break from the merciless joy of hilarity, we may be sorry we

ever discovered what it is that makes Canadians laugh.

Natalie Edwards

The Man Who Skied Down Everest

Screenplay: Judith Crawley based on the diary of Yuichiro Miura. **Cinematography:** Mitsuji Kanau. **Music:** Lawrence Crosley. Director and editor of sound effects: Bruce Nyznik. **Editing:** Bob Cooper and Millie Moore. **Performers:** Members of the Japanese Everest Skiing Expedition, 1970. **Producer:** F.R. Crawley. **Produced in 1975 by** Crawley Films Limited in collaboration with Ishihara International Productions (Tokyo). **Colour:** 35mm. **Running time:** 88 minutes. **Distribution in Canada:** Crawley Films.

Crawley Films is following the success of its documentary feature **Janis** with **The Man Who Skied Down Everest**. The new film, less than ninety minutes long, was given a prestigious Toronto opening in September at the University, the largest cinema in the country. Although this film probably has a more limited appeal than the previous Crawley movie on the raunchy blues singer, it will be interesting to observe how this Japanese-made, Canadian-produced film fares in North America, for it's an odd little picture which builds slowly to a climax that does not serve to justify the whole enterprise and which leaves one skeptical.

Yuichiro Miura is an ace Japanese skier who has set world speed records and the film is a record of his 1970 trek through the imposing Himalayas to an icy wall 26,000 feet high, just below the summit of Mt. Everest. Needless to say, that slope is the highest ski run in the world and Miura has the distinction of taking on a patch of ice that had never been skied before and will certainly remain untouched for a very long time to come.

Miura, the Japanese crew and four-hundred natives, set off from the Nepalese capital for Everest, winding through the rocky mountain passes. The narration in the film, written by Judith Crawley and based upon the lengthy diary Miura kept on his adventure, chronicles his feelings and thoughts and it is all beautifully but

improbably spoken by Douglas Rain. The skier is described as a poet and philosopher as well as an athlete and the film is over-burdened with his musings and self-revelations.

The expedition snakes toward Everest. The going is slow and treacherous, there's a huge, menacing ice fall that must be traversed and it takes the team 40 days to move three miles. Miura reflects on the Sherpas, whose labours make the venture possible. "I wonder what will be the future of these tribesmen who have

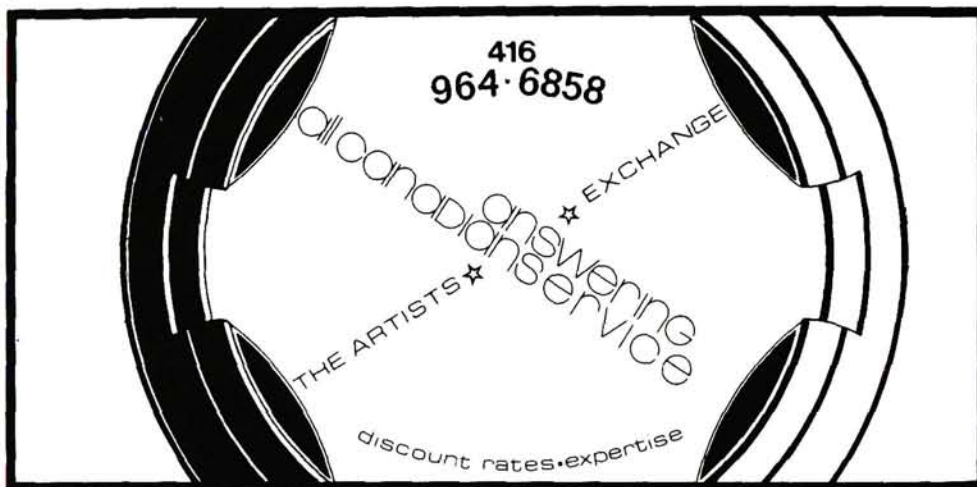
lived here for centuries," he says, "almost independent of the rest of the world. I hope their land will remain unspoiled by the ways of life we call progress." The Japanese show the Sherpas videotapes of Bonanza.

A sudden cave-in on the ice fall claims the lives of six Sherpas. The bodies are hauled down to camp and the party stands around them. Some want to turn back but the Japanese insist on continuing. "Six lives lost," Miura says, "in order to achieve a great thing."

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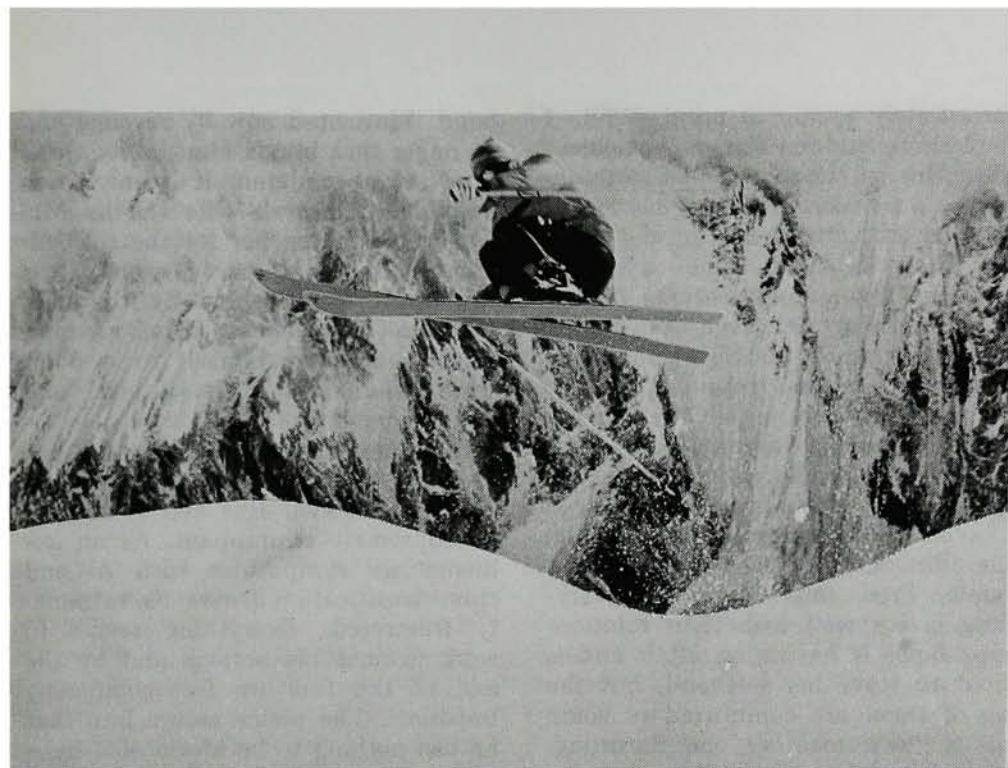
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The Man Who Skied Down Everest

He skis the lower slopes, getting in tune, and the film has some exhilarating shots of him leaping over the steep inclines. Furiously he works out, the air is very thin and dulls the mind and body and Miura fights to keep his strength. The run is eight-thousand feet down, often at 45 degrees and at the bottom is a vast, unexplored crevasse called the bergschrund, and if Miura can't stop before reaching it he'll perish. On the brink of taking off he confesses to feeling like Icarus, flying into the sun, and now understands "the pride of the samurai, challenging something huge." Looming overhead is the wind-whipped summit of Everest. Miura begins his historic run, with a parachute flaring out behind him, and within seconds he's skiing at 100 miles per hour, like a dive-bombing kamakaze pilot. He skis for six-thousand feet then collapses and slides, the skis spinning in the air, the crevasse getting closer. A snow bank breaks his fall and Miura is rescued 200 feet above the bergschrund. The whole operation took less than two minutes.

While there is a degree of excitement in the film, it all builds to a finale that amounts to a resounding zero. The mission took months of preparation, \$700,000, six lives, all to allow one man the thrill of skiing down an inaccessible slope for a couple of minutes. It remains to be seen whether this self-indulgent adventure film will find an audience as the skiing season nears.

David McCaughna

Jan Kadar's

Lies My Father Told Me

A film by: Jan Kadar. **Screenplay:** Ted Allan. **Cinematography:** Paul van der Linden. **Music:** Sol Kaplan. **Sound:** Henri Blondeau. **Editing:** Edward Beyer and Richard Marks. **Performers:** Yossi Yadin, Len Birman, Marilyn Lightstone, Jeffrey Lynas. **Producers:** Anthony Bedrich and Harry Gulkin. **Produced in 1972-1975 by** Pentimento and Pentacle VIII Productions. **Colour:** 35 mm. **Running time:** 104 minutes. **Distribution in Canada:** Astral Films.

St-Urbain St., Montreal, take two. This time, the story is about a young boy and his grandfather, a rag collector. It's the father who wants to make it rich, to get out of the ghetto, and it's once again the streets and lanes of the old Jewish neighborhood which make the film work. It's the right time for nostalgia.

It's difficult to write about the film without being aware of the years, the money, and the patience, which have gone into making it. The producers have ordered retakes years after the original shoot and have been on the verge of releasing it only to withdraw it and start reworking again. The beginning and the end, the role of the father, the entire musical score have all been rewritten in an effort to make

Lies My Father Told Me the best possible film. That the final version will not be acclaimed as Canada's best motion picture is no reflection on the energies and devotion of the people involved in its production.

Ted Allan's screenplay is simple. Little David accompanies his grandfather on his rounds every Sunday, and the two of them with horse and wagon collect rags, clothes and bottles, ending up with lunch on Mount Royal. Grandfather talks about himself and life, and David learns to love and to trust. Going out with Grandfather is the pivot of David's week, and caring for Ferdela, the horse, is what enables David to get from Sunday to Sunday.

David's father, a "Duddy Kravitz" who can't make it, is increasingly jealous of his father-in-law's influence over the boy. Being a harsh and unloving man, he tries to win David by disrupting the boy's relationship with his grandfather. He talks to the boy but the boy can't understand; his father tells lies. David's mother is protective but ineffectual, and no one can console David once Grandfather is gone.

It's a bitter-sweet story and there are many comic touches, most of them provided by the secondary characters whose apartments surround the courtyard housing the stable. Especially well played are Edna (Carole Lazare), the neighborhood prostitute, Mr. Baumgarten (Ted Allan himself), and little Cleo (Cleo Paskal) who is all of four years old and who runs away with her two scenes.

The principal actors are competent and Marilyn Lightstone is refreshing and gay in her role as Mother. Missing is the psychological depth, the sort of gut feeling which hits home and tells an audience that what they are seeing is all true and not just play-acting.

Academy Award winning Jan Kadar is too important a director to have been responsible for the film.

There is a curious disproportion. **Lies** does not seem as powerful as director Jan Kadar's other films. It is still too long, too slow. The actors are too neat and clean, the colours too bright. And Grandfather is too big. Yossi Yadin who plays the role is tall and strong, a real hero of a man. I couldn't help thinking of that small, frail East European Jew who probably was Ted Allan's grandfather. A smaller man might have communicated the spirituality which was intended; Yadin's physical size seems a barrier to emotional depth. Like the film it-



Lies My Father Told Me

self, the audience is asked to take it on faith, to accept the appearance of feeling.

Yet given these limitations, the film works. Women were in tears at the end, and that's good boxoffice; the maudlin theme song is effective. And this is the sort of film which one is happy to claim as "Canadian". A well produced, thoughtful work with themes which are universal and which will hopefully find a sufficient audience to pay back the faith of the producers.

Connie Tadros

Brian Damude's

Sudden Fury

A film by Brian Damude. **Screenplay:** Brian Damude. **Cinematography:** James B. Kelly. **Music:** Matthew McCauley. **Sound:** Douglas Ganton. **Editing:** David G. Nicholson. **Performers:** Dominic Hogan, Gay Rowan, Dan Hennessey, Hollis McLaren, David Yorston, Eric Clavering, Sean McCann. **Producer:** Ben Caza. **Produced in 1974 by** Films Can. Productions. **Colour:** 16mm. **Running time:** 95 minutes. **Distribution in Canada:** Ambassador Films.

The Canadian Film Development Corp. low-budget programme has allowed a number of highly interesting films to be made; **The Hard Part Begins, Montreal Main and Bar salon**

immediately spring to mind. While I don't think **Sudden Fury** is as achieved a film as these three, it certainly merits attention and analysis. It is far more of a formula film or a genre film than we have come to expect from the low-budget features, which more often than not have been highly personal statements. Not that Brian Damude's film isn't personal, it's just that it exists more within the conventional commercial framework.

Sudden Fury has a very simple plot and as many probably have not seen it a short summary is worthwhile. The film revolves around a married couple, Fred and Janet, but everything is not well with their relationship. Janet is having an affair and is about to leave her husband, but the two of them are committed to going out of town together one Saturday. Fred, meanwhile, has plans that involve Janet. He wants to build a country hotel cum resort and he needs some of Janet's money as a loan to buy the land. Janet wants no part of it, and in the quarrel that ensues in the car she reveals her infidelity. Fred drives the car off the road in a fit of rage and leaves a seriously injured Janet to die beside this little-travelled country road. A car passes by and its driver, Al, gets out and helps Janet. He has to contend, however, with Fred, who is doing everything possible to obstruct this interloper. Through a series of incidents, three people are eventually left dead, and Al, who only stopped to help, is being accused of the murders, while it looks as if Fred will get off scot-free.

Dealing as it does with one man's madness, and the hideous forces that it can release, **Sudden Fury** bears an uncanny resemblance to John Trent's **Sunday In the Country**. Both films deal with one man attempting to impose his will on a situation and a group of people. Their megalomania is treated in a different way; Adam's in **Sunday** is more fascist than mad, but the forces that they release are just as destructive and violent. Damude's film raises questions concerning justice and its applications, as does Trent's. Al's increasing involvement in the action of the film undergoes significant changes. At first he stops out of humanitarian concern - there has been an accident and he wants to find out who's been hurt. When he discovers an abandoned and badly injured woman he is enraged at the person who has left her. When she dies he vows to kill the hus-

band. Motivated now by revenge and an anger that blinds him, he too turns into a semi-madman. It is only when he kills a farmer's wife (Hollis McLaren) mistaking her for the real villain that the full impact of what he has turned into strikes him. By a gradual process of involvement Al has gradually de-humanised himself to a point where moral attributes of good and evil become blurred.

Sudden Fury is played out on one level as a simple morality play of good versus evil. But evil is seen to be supremely triumphant. As an audience we sympathize with Al and this identification leaves us extremely frustrated. Everything seems to work against his actions and by the end of the film we feel completely impotent. The police assure him that he has nothing to be afraid of if he is telling the truth, but their quizzical incomprehension of what has occurred does nothing to change our secret belief that this is in fact false.

Even more disturbing is the sense I get from **Sudden Fury** (and also from **Sunday In the Country**) that normal people are not equipped to deal with certain violent or uncompromising situations. The farm couple of **Sudden Fury** are continually shown at one step removed from what is going on. They instinctively reach out towards Fred when he appears on their doorstep, bloodied and with his tale of the car crash. They mindlessly accept his interpretation of the accident and treat Al like the real killer. When they gradually realize the truth, it is too late, and both their deaths highlight their inability to deal successfully with what is going on. The tragic thing is whether they could have done anything differently! Even Al is treated in a similar way. By taking up a gun, he confronts violence with violence. Aware of what he is dealing with he is still naive enough to believe that alone he can defeat it.

The other thing I would like to comment on is the role that the farm couple play in the film. They have small roles in comparison to the major characters but this in itself is significant. Theirs is the only 'normal' relationship portrayed in the film. The fact that they are so peripheral, and that they are brutally destroyed says an enormous amount about this film's view of people's relationships.

I started out by saying that **Sudden Fury** was somewhat of a formula film. It is very much an action film and it becomes more and more so throughout

its length, as the visual passages begin to replace dialogue. One of its weaknesses however is its occasional wordiness. One of the signs of a true master is sensing when an image can be used to replace dialogue, or when dialogue is superfluous to the visuals. Damude has yet to learn this. I only have to think of the opening fifteen minutes or so of Melville's *Le samourai*, where the image communicates everything. The scene that offends and jars me most is when Al stumbles across the crash and finds Janet badly injured still inside the car. Here most obviously the spoken word is used to communicate certain information (the fact that she has been abandoned by her husband), the pace of the film slows, and the tension of the scene is allowed to dissipate. But there is a raw sense of cinema about *Sudden Fury*, so even with its lapses it manages to convey its ideas strongly though crudely.

Piers Handling

David Rothberg's

My Friend Vince

A film by: David Rothberg. **Cinematography:** Howard Alk. **Sound:** Peter Rowe. **Performers:** David Rothberg, Vince, Howard Alk. **Producer:** David Rothberg. **Produced in 1975. Running time:** 40 minutes.

David Rothberg, a young Toronto filmmaker, has made a film which reopens the old question of the honesty and involvement of the filmmaker with his subject, and which answers at least one old question for me, to wit:

What does it look like when during the course of his movie the filmmaker does reveal his own involvement and question his own motivation concerning choice of subject and approach in his work?

In the first portion of this forty minute film Rothberg interrogates Vince, a small time con artist and exploiter of human gullibility whose varied activities range from stealing from stores to conning acquaintances, women and even friends. The more we watch Vince talk of himself and his reasons for what he does, and of his relationships and how they matter to him (intercut with excerpted comments from these friends), the more we see him expose

himself as a poor pathetic bastard with minimal appeal.

But when the film suddenly changes tone, a new layer of truths is revealed. "On Sunday we got drunk," the narrative voice of the filmmaker, David Rothberg, confesses, and with that the suddenly swerving camera, the dedicatedly out-of-focus long close-ups and various inept shots of flashing mike and dipping frame keep us amused as we watch the filmmaker shift from an interviewer to an interviewee and Vince change roles and begin to question him. In fact this jagged camera work, the disconcerting appearance of out-of-focus faces and visible mikes give us also the extra awareness of the presence of the crew and of the actual creation of the film, intensifying the sense of veracity.

A rotund hirsute fellow scrunched in a corner asks a lot of pertinent and uncomfortable questions of Rothberg. This man is Howard Alk, himself a filmmaker of perception and reputation, and his questions are good. For a while one wonders uncomfortably if the film is going to degenerate into a collegiate bull-session on truth-in-art etcetera, but after a laggy spot where the audience squirms as much from boredom as the discomfiture of these almost unanswerable questions, the film picks up again.

Under interrogation Rothberg is as vulnerable as Vince, and we begin to see that anyone suffers from this inspection. Rothberg appears however to enjoy this public self-examination, and attempts to discover in front of us just what his real motives were, and understand who is exploiting whom and why. His explanation of his changed attitude toward Vince activates the film again, and keeps the investigation in a crooked lively present tense. Finally, confounded and tired, attacked by Alk and questioned by Vince himself, Rothberg withdraws saying "I've nothing more to say". "That's showbiz," responds Vince, bringing the film to an appropriate ironic close.

Technically adequate, rather overlong but basically full of interesting material, the film undoubtedly is an excellent prod for leading students and groups into worthwhile discussions of motives and integrity in film, of the use and misuse of documentary style, and perhaps of the hidden values in some of these investigations.

"I know now I'm not going to call the film *My Friend Vince*," says Rothberg, and the audience, aware of the title, chuckles happily.

Natalie Edwards

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