

The visual poetry of Rick Hancox

BY BOB WILKIE

Considered one of Canada's leading film artists, Rick Hancox has had numerous one-man and group shows and has won awards both here and internationally. Born in Toronto, he began filmmaking while studying English at the University of Prince Edward Island and quickly won recognition, earning top awards in the Canadian Student Film Festival for three consecutive years. He was awarded a Canada Council Arts Bursary for graduate study at New York University's Institute for Film and Television and later studied at Ohio University on a Graduate Fellowship where he earned the degree of Master of Fine Arts in 1973. Since returning to Canada, Hancox has been teaching and making experimental films. Between 1973 and 1985 he taught at Sheridan College in Oakville, Ontario and currently teaches in the Communications Studies Department at Concordia University in Montreal.



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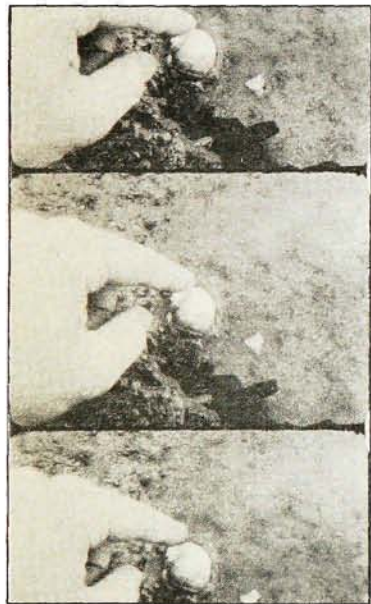
Last spring (April, 1987), in the bar car of an overnight train en route from Montreal to Toronto, I completed the third part of a four-and-a-half-hour interview with the experimental filmmaker, Rick Hancox. The train seemed a fitting place to begin discussing his 1977 autobiographical film, *Home For Christmas*. A major portion of this 'experimental-documentary' takes place on a train as well, only this time heading in the other direction from Toronto to

Montreal and beyond to the Maritimes. It takes place in December 1975 when Hancox and two other family members travelling with him returned to celebrate Christmas at his parents' home in Landfall, Prince Edward Island.

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Landfall itself was destined to become the subject and title of a later work, *LANDFALL* (1983) which, along with *Waterwork* (1982) and *Beach Events* (1984), belongs to a category referred to by Hancox as his "poetry films".

In these poetry films, as well as in *Home For Christmas* and several other earlier films, there is a strong evidence of place but not, as one might expect, a sense of belonging or of being connected to that place. What seems to displace this liaison in these films is a lament for something lost or forgotten — something that has to do with place, connection, belonging and personal identity. The loss is the result of a historical amnesia which is, according to Hancox, the product of "a society that emphasizes the present and devalues the past." This privileging of present over past is tied up with a technological imperative and with the "assumption... that we are progressing towards something better."



Frame enlargement from *Beach Events* (1984)

Historically, in Canada, technology has been used as a binding force in order to achieve "national unity." One of the most obvious examples of this is the railway. Besides linking the country physically and providing cheap, convenient transportation for generations of unemployed workers, from economically depressed regions (especially the Maritimes), the railway has itself employed hundreds of thousands of Canadians. The railway was central to the growth of entire communities and their economies. One of these communities was the Saskatchewan city of Moose Jaw.

Rick Hancox spent much of his childhood in Moose Jaw during the last years of its boom economy. His departure in the late '50s as a young adolescent was coincident with the winding down and eventual stagnation of this economy. More than 20 years later he returned

to Moose Jaw only to discover an empty and decaying railway station, abandoned industries, and a complacent downtown core where the spirit of "frontiership" once reigned. The motto now, in a town where, according to Hancox, nobody ever thought of the past, is "Moose Jaw: there's a future in our past." The discarded technologies of the past have been restored only to fill the museums that have become the hope of a future economy centred on tourism. It should come as no surprise then, that the title of the film that Rick Hancox is currently working on is, of course, *Moose Jaw*.

As Rick and I were finishing up our interview in that smoke-filled bar car, with several other red-eyed, late-night travellers present, we reflected on much of what was said and the enormous editing job that lay ahead. We were somewhat surprised, perhaps even pleased, with the fact that much of our conversation, as we clacked along on that deliberately slow overnight train toward T.O., focussed on the railway and the part it played in Rick's life, particularly in his films. We were both very tired and had all but exhausted our desire to speak the words that had become so familiar to us in the course of our conversations — experimental, autobiographical, personal, lament, loss, redemption, absence, Elder, presence, Snow, landscape, Wieland, nationalism, Kroker, postmodernism, Grant, technology — to repeat but a few. Several of the words would disappear, along with the passages they were embedded in, after the editing job was completed. One of the exchanges that was cut because it seemed trivial and irrelevant, occurred around the same time as our train rolled to a stop in the "middle of nowhere." It was made less out of curiosity than it was out of a sort of forced indifference that one experiences at the end of a project no matter how interesting it has been otherwise. It is worth repeating here only because it is less than trivial, and in fact it seems to embody much of what Rick Hancox concerns himself with in his filmmaking today.

Rick: Where are we... near Cornwall... or is it Iroquois?

Bob: Who knows...?

Rick: Iroquois... Iroquois... washed over by the St. Lawrence Seaway... Iroquois... do you remember Iroquois?

Bob: No... what about it?

Rick: There were three Canadian towns... wiped out by the Seaway... that's another Canadian technology, the St. Lawrence Seaway.

Bob: Really eh...? Wiped out...?

Rick: Yep... Iroquois... gone for good!

Cinema Canada: You began artistically as a poet. What led you to making films or working with film as your medium?

Rick Hancox: The kind of poetry I was interested in was quite visually specific: that is,

it was based on personal experiences, in which the surroundings figured quite strongly. If you look at the titles of the poems you realize they are street names and place names. I felt that I had sort of pushed that to the limit and I wanted to take it to the next logical step, which was to physically materialize some of this visual imagery — not only in words but also in photographs — and I wanted to enhance it with music and any other sensual means at my disposal. I began to realize that I was never going to be a particularly good poet... or a musician. I thought that this might be a way in which I could put together everything that I knew and evolve it into a totally different medium.

Cinema Canada: Was there any one particular artist who was close to you at the time you began to use film... perhaps another filmmaker or a photographer?

Rick Hancox: No. But my poetry and creative writing teachers at the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) were particularly good: John Smith, Frank Ledwell, Adrian Arsenault. I still keep in touch with these people almost 20 years later. It was they who introduced me to poets like William Carlos Williams and of course Wallace Stevens. There wasn't any particular film or filmmaker, who influenced me. I came to Montreal in the mid-'60s, halfway through one of my less successful university years, and wound up driving a cab, during which I had plenty of time to read and think to myself. It was a real transitional year. Anyway, I picked up a copy of Sheldon Renan's book *Introduction to the American Underground Film*. That was the first film book I read and I just couldn't believe how I hadn't heard of or seen that kind of cinema before.

Cinema Canada: What was he talking about in that book? Which filmmakers was he referring to and how was he describing their work?

Rick Hancox: He was talking about the American underground of the '60s and the whole new American filmmaking scene. Stan Brakhage. Maya Deren. Marie Menken. Willard Maas. I actually spent some time with the last two in New York and showed them one of my films. That would have been a couple of years later when I was really getting into the filmmaking. I met crazy people like Jack Smith. I remember reading about him, and then actually seeing one of his performances in N.Y.C. Renan's book doesn't get into any serious critical analysis or theory. It's really just a description of the films... which was enough for me at the time. I had never heard of these people before. To have the works so graphically described seemed to open up a whole new world of possibilities. I was just overjoyed to discover that there was such an art form around. I bought another book around the same time — a bunch of screenplays by Bergman — and it seemed that the underground film was so much more

colourful and interesting. So I just happened to take that route... and I think I was a bit of a rebel and the radical qualities of that stuff really appealed to me... and it was the '60s too... and that was a big influence... just being set up for such a thing by the culture I was immersed in. I was ready to receive it. I should really mention the name of one person who did influence me. It just so happened that the very next year, after having developed an interest in this sort of film, a visiting professor came to teach at UPEI for one year... and he happened to be teaching the only film course that's ever been given there. He also happened to be an underground filmmaker who had a lot of connections in N.Y.C. George Semsel was his name. It was an incredible course. He taught us film history, film production, film theory and he showed us lots of underground films. You had these P.E.I. kids, some of them right off the farm, looking at guys like Kenneth Anger. It was great! Anyway, after



Frame enlargement from *Beach Events* (1984)

that course George went back to the States, but I kept in touch with him. He was a big influence on me because he made what he called "personal" documentaries. You can call them autobiographical as well, but he really emphasized the personal in cinema. He still remains an influence. Ed Emschweller was also a big influence. His moving camera style I still use. In fact I met him in N.Y.C. and asked him how he did it. That was around '69 or '70 when I was going down to New York and eventually when I was in Graduate School at NYU in the fall of '71. I met a lot of these people I had read about. I also went to the screenings at the Whitney Museum of American Art, and there were several filmmakers there who really impressed me. Will Hindle. That's just one name that comes to mind. I'm trying to think of these influences in chronological sequence. At

that time I wasn't aware of any Canadian experimental filmmakers. The first one was Snow. Yeah. Snow and Wieland. The first time they received serious attention was around the end of the '60s. At first I didn't like Snow's films. At the first screening of *Wavelength*, I didn't like it. But the next time I saw it I was very impressed by it... I saw it again a few months later and that really made the difference... I was suddenly on his wave-length...

Cinema Canada: Did Joyce Wieland influence your work?

Rick Hancox: No, not directly. Joyce's films didn't influence me as much as her nationalism and her independence... her sort of brash nationalistic independence was inspiring. But I liked some of her films. I really don't know the extent to which they might have influenced me, but I liked some of them. *Solidarity* is one of my favourites.

But then I started to be influenced by some of my contemporaries, like Rimmer. I was never influenced by Elder's films. He wasn't on the scene until later. I was influenced more by his writing. And then I started to become influenced by my own students — Mike Hoolboom, Holly Dale, Janis Cole, Lorne Marin, Richard Kerr, Philip Hoffman and others.

Cinema Canada: Have you ever worked with a group or collective besides your students at Sheridan?

Rick Hancox: Yeah, I did. The Toronto Filmmakers' Co-op in the early '70s. I was very much a part of it. I was on the early executive of the TFC. There were plenty of good people there and we would show each other our work-in-progress, and in that way we influenced each other.

Cinema Canada: So they were like critiques... that sort of thing...?

Rick Hancox: Oh yeah! There were people like Raphael Bendahan, who's in Montreal now. He was on the executive then, along with Michael Snow. Keith Lock and Jim Anderson were active members of the TFC and I was very influenced by their work. There were several glorious years, when the offices of the TFC, *Cinema Canada*, and the Canadian Filmmakers' Distribution Centre were all sharing the same building on Jarvis St. You could go from one room to the other... you know... one minute you'd be with Canada's largest distributor of independent films, screening whatever was being sent in, or over at *Cinema Canada* where I might write an article about the Canadian Student Film Festival or about something else I was doing at the time.

Cinema Canada: What were your first concerns as a filmmaker? What were you trying to say in the early films like *Next To Me*, *Wild Sync* and *House Movie*? They are three very different films of course. Are they exemplary films or do they represent all the

Rick Hancox: A filmography

Rose 3 min. (1968)

Cab 16 6 min. (1969)

Tall Dark Stranger 15 min. (1970) Grand Prize and Best Scenario, Canadian Student Film Festival Best Foreign Film, Filmothek der Jugend, Oberhausen, West Germany

Rooftops 5 min. (1970)

I, a Dog 7 min. (1971) Best Documentary, Canadian Student Film Festival

Next to Me 5 min. (1971) Best Experimental Film, Canadian Student Film Festival

September 15 5 min. (1972)

House Movie 15 min. (1972) Outstanding Special Category Award, Baltimore Film Festival, 1973

Wild Sync 11 min. (1973) Ann Arbor Festival Award and Tour

Home for Christmas 50 min. (1977) Invited to Grierson Documentary Film Seminar, 1978

Zum Ditter 11 min. (1979)

Reunion in Dunville 15 min. (1981) Golden Sheaf Nomination, Yorkton International Film Festival

Waterworx (A Clear Day & No Memories) 6 min. (1982) 1st Prize, 8th San Francisco Poetry Film Festival, 1983 Canadian Independent Short Film Showcase, Academy of Canadian Cinema

LANDFALL 11 min. (1983)

Beach Events 8 1/2 min. (1984) 1st Prize, 3rd Experimental Film Coalition Festival, Chicago, 1986

Moose Jaw est. length 45 min. (in progress)

Sarnia est. length 10 min. (in progress)

Arden est. length 15 min. (in progress)

work you had done during that period? You made reference to other films, made earlier...

Rick Hancox: Well yeah... the other night Michael Dorland said that I had made seven films, but I have actually made 16 films. Around the time I made *Next To Me* I also made a couple of others... *Rooftops*, and *I A Dog*, which is a film about a Prince Edward Islander who's sort of just arrived in N.Y.C. ... and he spends a lot of his time just dodging dog dung. *Next To Me* is made up of shots I took in N.Y.C. while I was going to NYU. It was actually an NYU project. It was inspired by my personal relationship to N.Y.C. After that I went to Ohio University where I finished *Next To Me* and then I did *House Movie* the next year... and again it was about what was going on in my life at the time. The year after that, 1973, I finished *Wild Sync*, so they were really all autobiographical... except that I'm not in *Next To Me*. It actually took me a while before I realized that, in fact, it was a personal film. I couldn't edit it properly until I realized that.

Cinema Canada: But in *Wild Sync* there seems to be some concern with formal issues or an attempt to address the technology... you know, the out-of-sync clapping, the discussion of the sound and syncing up process etc... and that was of course right around the time when structural filmmaking was in its heyday.

Rick Hancox: I don't think I was aware of structuralism when I was doing this film... the film is a satire in a sense. It's a satire on those who were infatuated with the technology. I wanted to liberate myself from the technology. A lot of people were running around in graduate school thinking that the ultimate film was a lip-synch film... or using a lip-synch camera for

the simplest little exercise of 100 feet. So once I finally got access to the lip-synch equipment, I rejected all that stuff and just sent the whole thing up. So I think it was more an analysis or a critique of the apparatus than a structuralist or formalist film.

Hancox on experimental film theory

Cinema Canada: Okay, let's talk about 'experimental' or 'avant-garde' or 'alternative' filmmaking in general. How do you consider yourself in terms of these definitions?

Rick Hancox: Well, I have to resort to radical techniques in my films. I'm sure there are people who use more radical techniques than mine. There are some people like Michael Snow who are uncomfortable with the term "experimental film" because it implies a kind of lack of knowledge on the part of the filmmaker. In other words, if there is an experiment, then they will not be sure of the results. There is a sense of incompleteness. Snow doesn't like the term but he lives with it because it seems to be the most common and convenient term to describe it.

Cinema Canada: You spoke the other night about the issues you dealt with as being so complex that you had to...

Rick Hancox: The issues of time and memory and landscape that interest me are so full of contradiction and are so intertwined... rich with different layers... that to represent them in a few minutes you must resort to the techniques that are best suited. Those techniques don't exist in the dominant cinema. The lexicon of film technique is woefully inadequate to deal with

such themes in a few short minutes. It's like writing poetry and being forced to do nothing but iambic pentameter. You have to invent your own way of doing it... your own language that is specific to whatever you happen to be dealing with. And if you look at my films they are not all the same... at least on a formalistic, superficial level. Unlike the structuralist films, the point is not to make some sort of ironic statement about the apparatus itself. Like some of Sharit's films or George Landow's films which deal with the material stuff. That's not interesting to me.

Cinema Canada: Even though there is a certain political dimension, albeit minimal, to the structuralist or minimalist art project, whereby the focussing on the materials and the processes reveals or functions deconstructively and thereby debunks some of the myths around representation.

Rick Hancox: It's basically Brechtian in concept. But it is one thing, while communicating your content, to also make the viewer aware of how they are being manipulated, and it is quite another to have nothing to communicate except the form itself, where the form itself replaces the content, and all that is communicated is plastic material... it's pretty empty really. Who cares about the cinematic apparatus in and of itself?

Cinema Canada: Your films deal with formal issues to some extent and they point to philosophical and existential concerns, but do you feel the political has some place in relation to your films?

Rick Hancox: They use form. They exploit form. They don't use it as an end. I don't go around broadcasting the fact that I'm a political filmmaker and that you had better listen! I am influenced by the things that go on around me and I want to share those things and to come to terms with them. I am certainly aware that my films fit into a political fabric, and that I am a political being. I'm aware of what influences me as an individual and I respond to that. I don't pretend to represent everyone else. I mean let's go back to this thing about what interests people... I think about how some of my students feel that by reducing the characters to stereotypes — i.e. the average student — they will appeal to a greater audience. You can say the same thing about the scenery or the background. If they make the interiors like the inside of any office building, for example, it will be accessible to most people. You know someone comes along and says, I can't relate to this fishing village in Newfoundland, therefore I'm not interested in the film, but if you show me an office building in St. John's, then I can relate to it. But what interests people is other people — real people! — with their particular distorted memories, their particular childhoods, the places they came from. I think we communicate on that level, as one individual to another. Other people influence me and I want to communicate with them, but I can only do it as myself — as an individual who has had these particular

experiences. I don't pretend that it is anything else. Now I think that my work is getting more political. If you look at the Moose Jaw film for instance. I started that project quite a while ago but the political dimension wasn't a comprehensible factor until Arthur Kroker (author, *Technology — The Canadian Mind*) rode on to the scene, or I rode on to his scene. In the last two years, since I moved to Montreal, I have met several other people as well who are certainly influencing me on that level... and it's all going back into the Moose Jaw film.

Cinema Canada: How are your films autobiographical?

Rick Hancox: The early films are direct autobiography, in which I am in the films. They are diaristic. The more recent ones are much more indirectly autobiographical. What's in them now, perhaps, is an arm or a shadow.

Cinema Canada: Except for the fact that they are about places which are very familiar to you. LANDFALL and Beach Events being made close to your parents' home in P. E. I. and Waterworx being made at the bottom of the street where your father grew up.

Rick Hancox: It goes back to what I was writing poetry about — things that were a part of my experience. In any case, the personal is inevitable in art.

Cinema Canada: There seems to be a pivotal film in your oeuvre that acts as a point of departure stylistically and perhaps even as a catalyst for your later autobiographical, personal or philosophical concerns. The film I am referring to is Reunion in Dunnville. The reason I bring this film up is because I was both surprised and pleased to see it within your works. It surprised me as an experimental film, because of its documentary nature and it pleased me because it relates to some of the things you deal with in your later films and to some extent even some of the things you explore in House Movie were there. There is a sense of absence or loss or lament that we see in both the main theme of the film, which is the rekindling of old bonds by the WWII fliers, and then there is the depiction of the old buildings, decaying and empty, which also suggests a lament or a loss for that which has gone on before, the past. Do you think of it as an experimental film?

Rick Hancox: I think it's experimental documentary. It was burning issue with me. I approached the veterans and said that I really wanted to make this film. I thought when I made it that it was a pretty straight documentary but upon screening it for the Canadian Independent Filmmakers' Distribution Centre, which handles a lot of independent, but conventional-looking documentary films, they thought it was off the wall — that nobody would understand it. You know, the camera was jiggling around, funny shots of thousands of turkeys and strange music thrown in here and there. They dismissed it. In a way I was shocked at first — a bit hurt. It was



Rick Hancox (second from left) during student days at UPEI along with Barry Burley, Kent Martin and Niall Burnett

my only attempt at doing something conventional, something that could be sold perhaps. They were saying, basically, go away kid, this is a personal film. But soon afterwards I saw those comments as flattering and realized that it really was a personal film. And I think I would say it is my favourite of all my films. It's the one I secretly love the most. It means an awful lot to me because of the memories around the shootings and the subsequent screenings for the veterans and the people who were involved with it. It acts as a catalyst, if you like, that triggers a lot of pleasant and significant memories for me. It means something to those people in a personal way, beyond entertainment... and that's very gratifying for me.

Cinema Canada: Could you focus a little more on this sense of absence or loss or lament in your films? Is seems evident in the poetry films but it is there in House Movie and Reunion in Dunnville as well.

Rick Hancox: And in the ones I'm working on now as well. It's such an important issue for me, I just don't know where to begin. I think I distrust the present considerably. I feel very strongly about this because I disagree with that philosophy, especially from the '60s, and I'm thinking about Alan Watt's book *This Is It*, that says, this is all we have, the present moment. Forget everything else that went on before! Or that's coming up! Get rid of all the anxiety! Don't think of the future! Live for the present! I distrust this completely. We live in a society that emphasises the present and devalues the past. Our vision is contrary to what life really is,

because in reality, our experience of the present is a predication of the past. This is more than just a theory with me, this is the way I live. I find it disturbing how things pass into oblivion so quickly.

Cinema Canada: What do you mean?

Rick Hancox: Relegated to the precincts of the past. If one speaks of the past at all, it must be represented as nostalgia. The past is okay as long as it is accompanied by cute silent movie music. It is rarely said that what we did in the past, may have been, on occasion better than what happens today. We have this assumption in the West that we are progressing towards something better. It overlooks the positive achievements of the past.

My parents seem to have the opposite opinion of me. We never sit around in my family and talk about the old days or anecdotes about family experiences. My parents want to be regarded as with it, contemporary people. Any mention of the past seems to imply that you are living in the past. But I think it is the opposite, of course. I think that not ignoring these vital memories, whether they are good or bad, is less pathological, more healthy, than trying to obliterate it all. The films are an attempt to revitalize the past. In fact I once looked up our family motto in the General Armoury, and discovered the Hancox motto was 'redeem time'! I looked it up in the process of making my Moose Jaw film. Redeem time... I think that's what I'm doing in my films. You can compare it to the film theory of Siegfried Kracauer — his notion of film as the

redemption of physical reality. In our society, says Kracauer, we have become disassociated from reality. And he thought that the reason film worked so well in redeeming that reality was because it is so realistic-looking, more than any other art form. Of course he didn't seem to grasp how much film itself is part of the simulacra. I don't think that film redeems physical reality but I do believe it redeems time. It allows us to realize that all time does not evaporate — that it still exists at the very least on these projected images...

Cinema Canada: Even though it isn't real time... it's a represented time... or if you like, a simulation of time... an appropriation of time...

Rick Hancox: Well our memory isn't real time either and our memories become increasingly filled with edited moving images. The style and pulse of a culture is recorded in its products and the films of the '40s, '50s, and '60s are a very good analog of those times. That is at least as important as the redemption of physical reality, which is in any case impossible. One can redeem time though. I think it is a manifestation of the ontological, the forming of the image in cinema, the latent image, which is so different than the instantaneous image in video for example. Film is unavoidably committed to the past because the image cannot be seen as soon as it is recorded. It is no accident that it takes the ontological form that it does. Humans invented it. It's very similar to the way the computer apparatus functions. It is a good analog of the human memory system.

Cinema Canada: *Aren't you splitting philosophical and technological hairs when you say that film is a more precise or truthful representation or redeemer of the past than video is? Even though video can be played back instantly and film must go through a developing and fixing process, don't the two redeem time, your sense of time, which in any case is just a representation of certain events?*

Rick Hancox: Well that's looking at them as if the maker had no influence on the product. When one makes a video one knows one is working with an instantaneous medium, which is partly why one uses video. I have young students who want to get into film classes as opposed to television courses because they simply feel more comfortable with the apparatus of film. And they know... they understand clearly the differences between them. I wish that writers and critics, during their training, could get their hands on the technology — even in a token way — then they would understand the differences between them. Even when films make it on to television one can easily distinguish between a film-originated and a video-originated product. I think it's more than a superficial quality. It comes through in the very content and meaning of the work because the practitioners were influenced by the medium they were working with. One is simply not a replacement for the other.

Cinema Canada: *Over the past year or so you have begun to concern yourself more closely with the theoretical and philosophical implications of your films. Why now? What was the motivation?*

Rick Hancox: It didn't just start in the last year or so. It really began in the late '70s. It has just intensified over the years, especially since I moved to Montreal a few years ago. It started because I felt that my films had reached a dead-end in terms of the directly autobiographical cinema. It became unsatisfactory for me. So language seemed to me a way of better engaging the left hemisphere of the brain. I went back to poetry which I had abandoned when I got into film, when I became sort of a visual purist. I began reading Wallace Stevens again and his essay "The Necessary Angel", where he discusses the balance one must strike between reason and the imagination. For him only poetry could do this, so for him poetry was the ultimate philosophy.

Cinema Canada: *You mentioned Arthur Kroker a couple of times; how has he and his reading of technology and of Canadian thinkers such as George Grant, Marshall McLuhan and Harold Innis influenced you?*

Rick Hancox: Kroker made me more conscious of what I was doing... what I had already stumbled onto several years before in the Moose Jaw footage. He also could relate to it. We both come from small towns outside the dominant centres of Toronto and Montreal. As far as his discussion of Canadian writers... well... it's

Grant who I can relate to the most. I had read parts of his *Time As History* before I met Arthur. I don't know what to say about Grant except to mention that the passage from *Technology and Empire* where he says we must listen "for the intimations of deprivation" because

"Any intimations of authentic deprivation are precious, because they are the ways through which intimations of good, unthinkable in public terms, may yet appear to us. The affirmation stands; how can we think of deprivation unless the good which we lack is somehow remembered? To reverse the platitude, we are never more sure that air is good for animals than when we are gasping for breath."

I began to think about the underlying philosophical and theoretical dimensions of my films more seriously when I began to see my thoughts mirrored in some of these thinkers like Grant and Kroker himself. Kroker is one of the few scholars who really respects artists as equally capable of articulating meaning. So many artists get left in the critical dustbin as writers distance themselves from the art object

further with each successive discourse. This has happened so much in film theory, with theorists attempting to make films — and they are pedantic nightmares. It's as if I had tried to start to write theory. Let's work together instead of trying to stamp the other party out!

The landscape sensibility

Cinema Canada: *What does the 'landscape' mean to you and what do you see it as signifying in the Canadian context?*

Rick Hancox: I became interested in landscape on a conscious analytical level when, after having programmed a series of recent Canadian experimental films for the Film Studies Association Conference at Laval University in the spring of '86, Tom Waugh of Concordia University asked me to speak to his class on the subject of 'landscape' sensibility in Canadian experimental film. He pointed out that this was the theme around which I seemed to be selecting many of the films. So, given this invitation, I had several months with the idea and I realized that I couldn't really begin to deal with landscape in

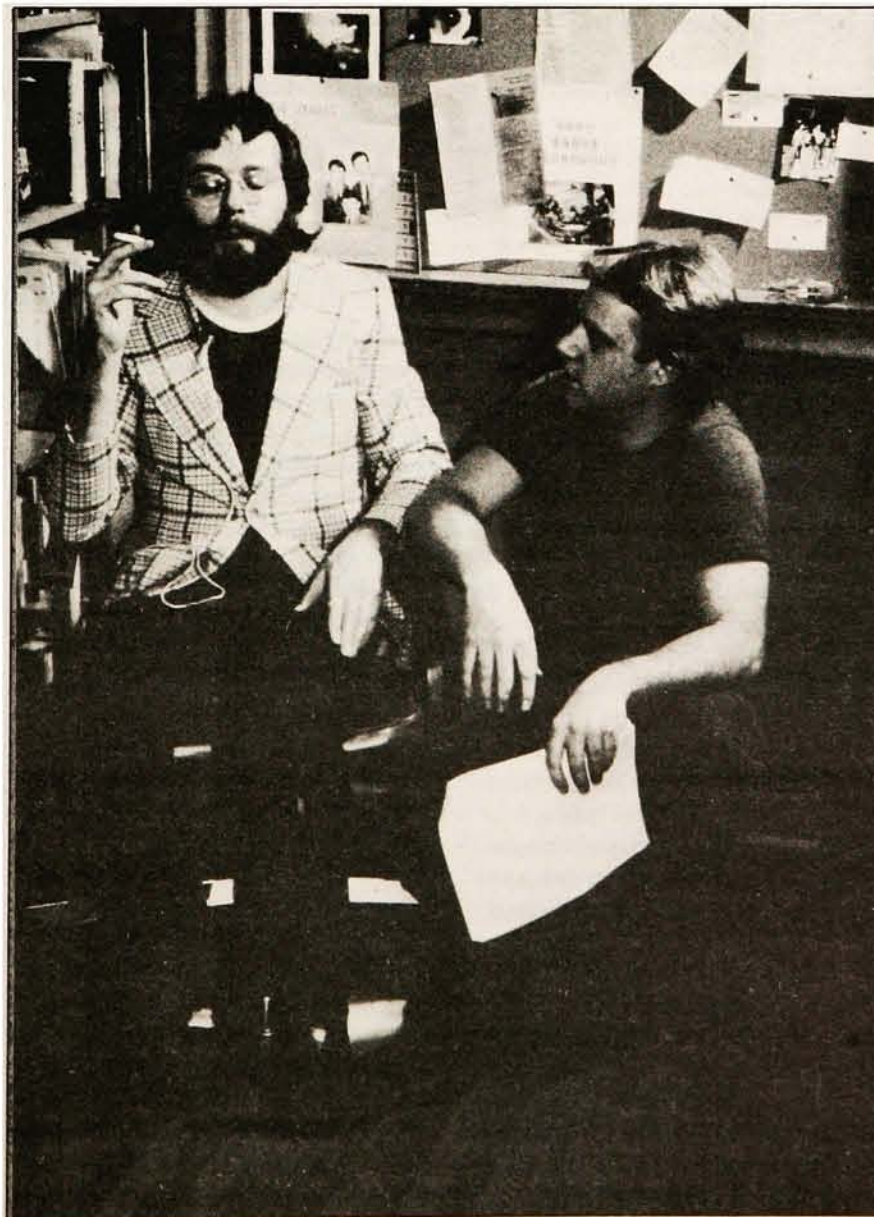
Canadian experimental film until I dealt with landscape in general in Canadian art and literature. And then I read a review by Michael Dorland last fall on the *Festival of Festivals* where he referred to Gaile MacGregor's book *The Wacousta Syndrome: Explorations in the Canadian Landscape*. It was incredible how well I could relate to much of what she was saying. She makes a clear distinction between the Canadian and American approaches to the land as evidenced in the art and literature of these two countries. Now I'm not going to summarize her whole thesis, but I began thinking of my work and the work of some of my colleagues and contemporaries in these terms. I also took a look at Bruce Elder's thesis of the photographic image in Canadian Experimental cinema again. It struck me that this (landscape) was a very dominant theme in our national experimental film.

Cinema Canada: *What about this connection between the landscape and the photographic image?*

Rick Hancox: When I first read Elder's thesis I thought, superficially, he meant that we simply use the photograph in Canadian films. The typical example is *City of Gold* by Colin Low. In fact, I believe what Elder meant was that we make reference to the nature of the photographic image in the way we deal with landscape. Now he doesn't deal directly with the landscape so much in his own thesis, but he does mention it as a kind of threatening force. He also notes two ways of perceiving. The first being the perception of nature being out there... the external or everything external to us. The second of course, is the internal perception, the mental perception. There is such a division between those two when faced, let's say, with the northern frontier, with its harsh and foreboding climate, that any vehicle that could draw those two together would be a very important medium. And that's exactly what the photograph does, because it is at once both a product of the mind and a product of reality. It's where the mental and the physical coincide, where you have something that's physically present in the photographic print and yet it's also absent in that it is also just a representation. So this absence must be compensated for in the mind... in the imagination. And the photograph, for Elder, becomes a way of mediating Canadian nature. And he believes that our experimental films make the most profound use of the ontological nature of the photograph.

Cinema Canada: *Do you mean this coincidence of presence and absence...?*

Rick Hancox: You see, it's not so much that I was influenced directly by this stuff in the making of films like *Waterworx* and *Landfall*, which were already good examples of this presence and absence, it's just that it was encouraging to read writers like Elder and MacGregor referring to others who were doing



Rick Hancox and Alan MacKay on the set of *Zum Ditter* (1979)

the same thing. It gave me a sense of belonging within a cultural context — that I am working within a milieu where I am, in fact, not isolated — and isolation is so easily felt when working in experimental film because there is so little recognition. That's how I got started on the landscape and it has reached a point now where I am teaching a course at UPEI called "Art, Technology and the Landscape". The technology part of that comes from Kroker's influence after he introduced me to such writers as William Leiss, George Grant and others. This is what sparked the new interest in the landscape. After all we're not talking about the Group of Seven vision here. What's interesting now 60 or 70 years after the Group of Seven is that the effects of technology are becoming more apparent. So we are looking at a new kind of landscape... a post-industrial landscape. It's sort of what's left over after the initial optimism of the Futurists who idolized technology among other things. So let's take a look at that technological idealism after it has aged 60 or 70 years and after all we have been through under its increasing domination. For instance in the Group of Seven days you had nature on the one hand which was largely untamed and awesome, and on the other hand you had the promise of technology which was somehow comforting and reassuring, but I think now, 70 years later, we have a very different outlook on technology.

Cinema Canada: With reference to the Group of Seven's empty, foreboding landscapes and the absence of technology I would like you to reflect and comment on Snow's *La Région centrale* where there is also an absolute absence of technology, accepting the fact that the film is made with highly advanced technological equipment, but only in comparison with the sort of technology that the Group of Seven used to represent the landscape. In other words, it's not the means of representation here but what is being represented. Snow's landscape is even starker than the Group of Seven's... nothing but a few lichens, a lake and some rock and dirt.

Rick Hancox: I think a more interesting comparison would be between the Group of Seven's landscapes and the Canadian landscapes of the American artist Milton Avery. My interpretation of them was that Avery was always looking down on these little fishing villages on the Gaspé. Now that is partly because I think he was in awe and perhaps even afraid of the sea, so he stood a considerable distance from it. But also the high angle in filmmaking is always considered to be the dominating one... that renders the subject submissive. So one could say that here is an American artist coming up and literally looking down on the locals from his perch on high where he is safe and where he has an omniscient view... and he is a quite comfortable with it. Now compare that to Snow's film and you could almost say that he could have sent out a scouting party out into the landscape... his \$20,000

tripod ran by itself. I mean Gaile MacGregor in *The Wacousta Syndrome* talks about our view from the "fort" and our position of safety from behind the pallsades... and at best if our artists go forth we do so along our rail lines and our roads. In Snow's case he 'sent out' his 'robot' to do it for him. Now in my film *LANDFALL* do something that looks similar except that I do it myself with the camera away from my eye, attached to my hand, swirling around in slow motion. You see shadows of myself on the beach and I actually freeze those frames to emphasize the fact that there is a human being there shooting this stuff. Now I think this is a vastly different way of looking at the landscape than the Group of Seven — both in *La Région centrale* and in my own *LANDFALL*. So we're looking at various representations here — different eras looking at the landscape, different nationalities, different technologies. It's complicated. But I do know that there is a vast difference between the American approach to the landscape, which deals with a western frontier, and the Canadian approach, which deals with a northern frontier, and our dependency on technology to conquer it... not so much to conquer it... because that's an American approach...

Cinema Canada: To integrate the landscape maybe...?

Rick Hancox: To mediate it.

Cinema Canada: Mediation implies a sort of contractual state, an agreement. Is that what you mean, an agreement between the artist and the landscape...?

Rick Hancox: It's like Elder says, how can consciousness know nature if they are so different, if there is such a duality. As he says the early settlers brought this dualistic philosophy in that there are mental things and physical things, and they are so separate that they cannot know each other. How can consciousness know nature? A medium like photography can allow that to happen because, in it, consciousness and nature are together. It is both the product of nature — as Bazin says a photograph is "a veritable impression of light... a phenomenon of nature" — but also it is a product of the mind, because it is a subjective view. And cinema is an even more profound aspect of that because it takes it one step further... it takes this notion of photographic presence and absence further because it is now projected on the screen as an illusion. That is what I mean by mediation, not so much an agreement but a vehicle through which one thing... one element... can know the other. Now I don't know if nature knows consciousness that way, but we can certainly know nature... we can deal with it... we can discover our own relation to it; and then we can turn around and present that relationship to others. It is a vital way for us to "survive" just as the technology of rail transportation was a way for

the nation to survive. According to Maurice Charland in his essay "Technological Nationalism" it is the way we continue to survive, as a nation, through the rhetoric the technology itself generates. We are a nation founded on technology and we depend on it to survive as a state. And I keep thinking here on another figure who deals with the railroad — Charland opens up his article with a quote from one of his songs — Gordon Lightfoot. The quote is, "There was a time in this fair land When the railroad did not run."

But there is another one that keeps coming to mind from his railroad trilogy, and it goes, "Long before the white man and long before the wheel.

When the cold dark forest was too silent to be real."

It wasn't real until we represented it. We couldn't represent it until the technology or the technique to represent it came along. That is the technique of the Group of Seven, the technology of the railroad that allowed us to get there, and more recently the technology of the National Film Board, which is technology that Maurice doesn't mention, but it's there and it happened in all the church basements across Canada. It's more than just any technology... it's not just an accident that it's photographic technology that is the most profound, because its very nature can somehow deal with the contradictions that are so much a part of our sense of being a nation.

Experimental film and Canadian identity

Cinema Canada: How do you deal with the fact that as a serious filmmaker who has won international awards and recognition for his work, you have had very little or no critical attention in Canada?

Rick Hancox: Well, maybe part of it is my own fault. I really haven't pushed or promoted my work. It's impossible to make a living at it so I don't go around putting together glossy brochures or firing off resumés everywhere, trying to hit people over the head with it. I'm not involved in the kind of publicity campaign that the Funnel was once involved in, for example. The Funnel realized that if you were going to succeed with experimental film in Canada, you would have to promote it aggressively. The danger with trumping up a lot of publicity and rhetoric, of course, is that you have to follow through, sooner or later, with good work. I didn't really have the time for that sort of campaign and I preferred to actually make the films. If you make good films, eventually they will generate the interest. I would rather have it that way; otherwise I wouldn't have an accurate barometer of how I was being received.

Cinema Canada: Now that there is an increased interest in your films, wouldn't you like to take the opportunity to get out and push them more?

Rick Hancox: No. I still need the time to make

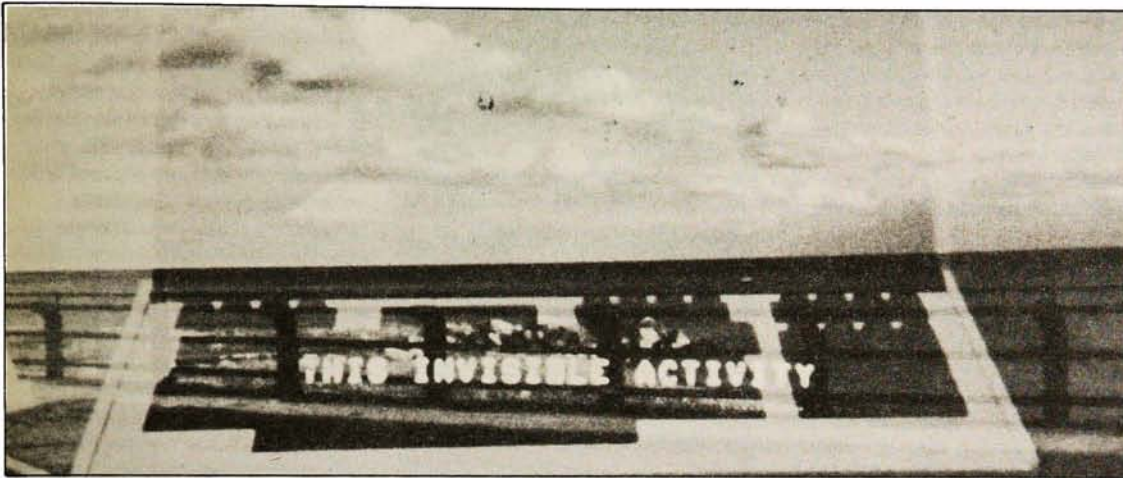
them. That stuff takes too much time away from my production.

Cinema Canada: So the emphasis is on production.
Rick Hancox: Absolutely. I have about... maybe one or two shows a month, both here in Montreal and in different parts of Canada, and in the States sometimes. But I have never contacted anybody and asked for a show. They've always heard of me and that's flattering. I would like to keep it that way. I don't want to get caught up in the promotion. It's hard enough to figure out how to make the films and that's my greatest joy, just making them. And of course, getting them seen by somebody! But they don't have to be seen by thousands of people. And to get some... not a lot... but some critical feedback, because I put it right back into my work. I need it to keep going.

Cinema Canada: And you feel that you can sustain yourself on the response you receive during the presentations of the work, where you are present, for instance in film classes and screenings in alternative spaces here in Montreal and other parts of the country?
Rick Hancox: Yeah... well I love that. It's really enjoyable.

Cinema Canada: Perhaps this lack of recognition is simply due to the fact that experimental film is seen as marginal and, as Bruce Elder has said, Canada is preoccupied with building an indigenous feature-film industry, through which the resulting 'popular culture' will establish, somehow, our Canadian identity? Do you think that contributes to not being recognized? Is there only room for a few experimental filmmakers to become recognized in Canada and perhaps internationally?

Rick Hancox: That may be part of it. I think that's a good reading of the situation. The dominant culture... the dominant cinema has the greatest effect on the greatest number of people and that's why in our Department of Communications Studies here at Concordia, more often than not, we are studying popular culture, and the communication of popular culture, because it has the most serious impact... Perhaps that's as it should be. I mean if you're writing for a newspaper or magazine, you've got a readership and you've got to write about what they're interested in. But what is more interesting is not so much the difference between writing about commercial cinema and experimental film, as the difference between the writing about Canadian experimental film and that of every other Canadian art form. There is a big discrepancy there and there shouldn't be. There is much more writing about painting, sculpture and music than there is about film. That's perhaps because it is a relatively new medium. Also, unlike painting, it doesn't excite a lot of financial interests. Experimental films can't be sold for thousands of dollars. People can look at a painting in a museum or a gallery, but where are you going to look at an



Frame enlargement from *Waterworx (A Clear Day and No Memories)* (1982)

experimental film? Even video art has trouble and people have VCRs. But set up a 16mm film projector in your home? Even in art galleries the screenings only last one night. Now you see it, now you don't! Everything is packed up and let's get on with the next thing. Whereas other art exhibitions are hanging on the walls for weeks or months.

Cinema Canada: Funding for experimental film in Canada has been scarce and what little has been forthcoming has been perceived as being guided by a mild form of nepotism in the case of the National Film Board and the Canada Council. Do you agree with that characterization? And how do you fund your films?

Rick Hancox: Are you talking about the Canada Council now...?

Cinema Canada: Well yes, I just read an article by Matthew Fraser in the *Globe and Mail* that accuses the Canada Council of funding the more well-known and established artists while the struggling unknown artists find it very difficult to get money from the Arts Councils.

Rick Hancox: My view is that the Canada Council is doing a very good job with what meagre funds it has. The problem is the way are awarded. On jury after jury you have many worthy people asking for money and the Council has only a fraction of what they are asking for. So what do you do, chop the number of people who get the money in half or give them half of what they are asking for? The Ontario Arts Council has a separate jury for experimental films and have funded a lot of people. They have been very good. I received one grant from them and one from the Canada Council. But the main problem is that compared to the amount of money goddamn Telefilm Canada has, the Canada Council's funds are minimal. I mean, what are we quibbling about? Let's not quibble about individual artists who deserve the money... let's get a bigger piece of the pie! I think the figure for the cost of building one mile

of the 401 highway exceeded the entire budget of the Ontario Arts Council.

Cinema Canada: Yes, so again, with Telefilm Canada, we go back to what Elder was referring to – this obsession with developing an indigenous feature film industry which would apparently, in some perverse manner, offer us our Canadian identity. It has an enormous budget and it funds mostly American productions being made here in order to take advantage of the tax breaks, the lower value of the dollar, and Telefilm Canada. So in fact this idea of an indigenous culture is being undermined by fugitive American film capital.

Rick Hancox: There isn't a realization here yet, like in Australia and Britain, that in order to have a successful cinema, commercially, we should proceed with exactly the opposite strategy; that is we should make films about ourselves, about our locales... about what we know best. A lot of the commercial films that I can think of went out of their way to hide the fact that they were filmed in Canada. But I do think that the Canadian identity has been carved out in the independent film scene since the 1960s. Our experimental film, our documentary film, even our short fiction. And what happens to all these films? There is nowhere to show them. But that doesn't mean that they shouldn't be looked at and taken seriously. Because right in our backyards, right under our noses we might have the cinema that we need! I'm teaching a course in independent Canadian cinema next year as a matter of fact, that will deal with many of these issues.

Cinema Canada: And what about you? How do you fund your films?

Rick Hancox: First of all my films are very short so they don't cost very much. I've made longer films and the films I'm working on now are longer so I'm going to have to get some grants in order to finish them. But the recent series of films, the poetry films, didn't cost very much. I

do most of the work myself. I didn't have any high shooting ratios. I didn't have to rent any equipment because Sheridan College was a willing participant. The institutions where I have taught have been very kind in lending me cameras and editing facilities. And I have had students volunteer to work on my films because they enjoy it. Some of my own money goes into them of course.

Cinema Canada: So apart from the two grants that you mentioned earlier, you haven't received any government funding.

Rick Hancox: And haven't asked for it either. Part of that is because I haven't known how to ask for it. And that's because of the flaw in the system. When you work the way that I do, which is what Elder calls the empirical style of filmmaking, you don't really know how something is going to turn out. You don't have a neat little script all preconceived that you can hand a jury. I don't have anything. I just start shooting. And when all you have is a bunch of footage, the only thing you can apply for is a completion grant. That means you submit work in progress and everybody knows that's like committing suicide. It doesn't look at all like what it's going to look like in the end. I just don't know where I'm going with my films until they are finished and sometimes after they are finished. When I get a chance to show them to people and get some feedback, that's when I begin to understand fully what I have created.

Recent works and postmodernism

Cinema Canada: Home For Christmas like Reunion in Dunnville – although they themselves are very different from each other – is very different than your later films, the poetry films. These later films are the ones that you are more known for and they are the ones that you show exclusively now, with a few exceptions, yet there is an autobiographical dimension in Home For Christmas as there is in the poetry films. But it is much more evident, more demonstrati-

ve in Home For Christmas... it is a sort of serious and at the same time lighthearted autobiographical-experimental-documentary film. And you begin to explore, in that film, some of the issues that you bring to fruition in the poetry films... like absence and lament... you know... you were living in Toronto... you were going back to the Maritimes to see your absent family... your departure on the train or bus at the end of the film is, of course, a lamentable event. They were visual references as well, to your later works, although they may have been unintended at the time... like the sign with the place name Landfall on it... and the obvious references to landscape in the outdoor shots and the pan shots of the landscape and seascape paintings on the walls of your parents' house. Another interesting point I would like to bring up here is that the shooting and production of your films often stretches over very long periods of time and some films like Beach Events, which was shot in 1974 before Home For Christmas and not finished until 1984, don't get finished until 10 years after they're begun. Beach Events was finished six years after Home For Christmas, which itself was shot in 1975 and not finished until 1978. So there seems to be plenty of overlap and coincidence that is somehow not evident in the films. I mean Home For Christmas and Beach Events are two immensely different films. And why don't you show Home For Christmas anymore; why are you emphasizing the later works so much?

Rick Hancox: With Home For Christmas I had the idea of a final product in mind when I shot it. But with Beach Events and LANDFALL well they were just physical... intuitive responses to the landscape. They were nothing but a bunch of pretty shots in the beginning. It took me a long time before I could pull them into something other than that – into finished works. But the similarities between them is the attention to detail. What I'm trying to do, perhaps in all my films, through the notion of photographic detail – which is why I tend more towards the photographic arts, because, of course, they render detail more profoundly than any other medium – but what I'm trying to do through this attention to detail is to share the experience more closely with the viewer. A good example is that shot of the graffiti on the bus seat in Home For Christmas. Through these details I feel I can share the experience more directly with the viewer and I think that is, perhaps, a common characteristic with all of the films. What happened with the poetry films is that after I had gone through the process of making Home For Christmas, I had pushed that kind of sensual, detailed, direct autobiographical cinema as far as I could take it... and I wanted to go beyond that! So the footage for Beach Events and LANDFALL was still sitting around throughout the shooting of Home For Christmas and afterwards as well... but then I shot Waterworx and in order to finish that film, which was also just a bunch of pretty pictures, I started playing around with a few things and that's when I rediscovered the importance of language and of poetry. This is

what I was really doing before I got into film and it was what really catapulted me into working with film as a way to extend my poetry interests. Now here was poetry, back again, serving to extend and improve upon my visual productions. I had actually rediscovered Wallace Stevens who was a major influence on me when I was doing poetry... and again, Stevens' idea of the balance between reason and imagination was something I tried to achieve in *Waterworx*, with the lush imagery being the imagination and the overlaid poetry appealing to the reason. In fact I even used a Stevens poem in that film. Once I had finished that, I began to apply a similar process to the footage of *LANDFALL* and *Beach Events* which I had shot years before. I found a D.G. Jones poem and used it in *LANDFALL* and, not finding anything suitable for *Beach Events*, I finally wrote something myself. So the works I'm doing now, the Moose Jaw film and another one called *Arden*, are all going to utilize language. In these three poetry films I use a voiceover or captions superimposed on the image. In all three language fulfills a graphic function as well as representing reason, in the Stevens sense. In *Waterworx*, for instance, the words on the screen are superimposed over the imagery and are literally interfering with the background, which the viewer is seeing for the second time around. Some people ask me why I did that because they got the sense of the film when they saw the images the first time... so they ask why did I lay those words over the screen and ruin their chance to enjoy those images again? My response is that is exactly what memory does. It's the same thing. It gets in the way. We have to always recall something through the paraphernalia of experience.

Cinema Canada: When you refer to graphics *LANDFALL* comes to mind immediately. Here you have very strong or filmic graphics with the superimpositions and double exposures, and at the same time you have superimposed the poetry over this already complicated imagery... and it appears to me to be your most playful, if not outrageous use of language with phrases appearing on different parts of the screen... coming in from one side and disappearing through a vanishing point perspective... even phrases entering from the bottom of the screen, upside down, and exiting at the top. What did you have in mind when you were doing these things?

Rick Hancox: Well the imagery was spinning around and perhaps I thought the words should too. But it also has to do with the meaning of the poem, "There are No Limits". I thought there were limits, but in fact there were not only no limits to the emotions Doug Jones was feeling when he wrote the poem, but there are also no limits to the way that language can be used and represented in a film. Why not have it upside down? In fact, when you're talking about gravity in the same poem, it becomes an open invitation to play around with the vertical orientation of the words. It's reminiscent of

concrete poetry. I just think if one is going to use language in that way – if you're going to use words on the screen – you are naturally forced to consider things like where they are going to appear, their movement, their disappearance, and just as important, I think, the font or typescript you are going to use. Maybe it's also the heritage of Snow and the playfulness in his work.

Cinema Canada: The phenomenon of post modernism has been a preoccupation with many modern-day thinkers. Some of them see postmodernism as encompassing, not just the conditions and productions of art, but all forms of social interaction – both real and abstract – communications, medicine, fashion, sports, economics, labour, etc. Indeed, as Arthur Kroker, after Baudrillard, has said, we have entered into an age of "hypermodernity" or "ultramodernism" where technology seems to be a dominating force in everyday life. First of all, do you respond to this line of thinking and secondly, what significance does this technological permeation of our lives have for you... or... how do you deal with it in your work?

Rick Hancox: The term postmodernism and the continuing quest to define it don't really have a lot of influence on me. As far as I can understand it really means all things to all people. It's whatever you want it to be. The thing I like about the way Kroker uses the term is that he uses it to pick out certain artists, periods or works of art from modern history which represent postmodernism... even if it is somebody like de Chirico, the Italian surrealist painter, or the American painter Edward Hopper, who were both, for Kroker, probably more postmodern than many who followed them. I think that's a more sensible way of dealing with postmodernism. It seems to be art for which the optimism of modernity has worn off. It is what's left over after the optimism for technology – which was so prevalent during the early part of the century – has aged and turned into apprehension and mistrust. The best thing about the term postmodern is that, unlike modernism, it is not a close-ended term; it is not reductive. Because it can mean all things to all people, it is actually something that can be quite useful. Ironically, modernism, which had the veneer of being so free, so open, so new, had, in fact, very narrow limits. Postmodernism has encouraged and reawakened a whole new interest in art in the attempts to go beyond the limits of modernism, which seemed to have a sort of complicity with technology. We still have a lot of modernists left over. They are neo-futurists. They are the people who talk about the micro-chip and how everything is going to be reduced into digital memory somehow. Film and video, for example, will all merge into one sort of "heaven" of digitalized information that we can supposedly control at will. The term that's used so often in computer graphics is the "virtual" camera. I spent some

time at Sheridan College studying computer graphics, interactive media and other new technologies, because that was one of the big thrusts of that institution whose motto was "One step ahead". We all got swept up in the computer revolution of the early '80s, but no one ever questioned this new technology. There was this feeling that – in fact it was more than just a feeling, it was a policy – if you didn't jump on this new technology bandwagon you would be left behind in the dust. Either you would be a "techno-peasant" or someone who was in "control". That is an example of how new technology doesn't provide us with the opportunity for a more democratic society. While giving the impression of freedom, liberty and choice, it is actually more restricting, oppressive and in fact limits those choices. The only choice that it offers is consumer choice. And it's like I said before, film is shrinking in its commercial marketability, but it is becoming more significant as an art form. It has become, like Arthur Kroker pointed out, a residual art form, like painting after the advent of photography. It is in a privileged position to comment on the advancement of technology. It can step outside of it now, mechanical technologies are important precisely because they are residual – because they are on the fringe. I think that experimental film is facing its biggest challenge in the face of the new electronic technology.

Cinema Canada: So you see postmodernism as a liberating force with its tendency to lift things from various historical periods, collapsing them into this sort of "hyper" pluralism, to use a Krokerism...?

Rick Hancox: Well, I think it is. But it depends on what side of the postmodern fence you are on. If you are a scholar, a critic, or an artist it means you are no longer shackled to the narrow terms which define what can or cannot be art. But if you are a member of the postmodern consumer society and do not have the privilege of knowing how to make use of artistic expression, and do not have the tools at your command or don't have the education, then postmodern – a term for which you probably have no use if indeed you have even heard of it – would apply simply to a condition of advanced capitalism, which isn't actually a lot of fun for people who are really sucked into it...

Cinema Canada: You're now working on a project about Moose Jaw, a place where you spent a great deal of time as a child, and more recently a place you have been returning to quite frequently. How far along is that project?

Rick Hancox: Moose Jaw. I'm very excited about this project. I have been working on it for several years now. I've done a lot of shooting... I've done a lot of research too. I spent a lot of time there growing up in the '50s. Most of the footage has been shot within the last few years. But the thing about Moose Jaw is that it is not just any

childhood town. First of all I grew up there in the post-war optimism of the '50s when Moose Jaw was still a part of the western frontier. The West was a place where people didn't think very much about the past, mainly because there was so much hope for economic development and opportunity. The West was really opening up and Moose Jaw was still a frontier town. Unfortunately, Regina was built too close to Moose Jaw and it eventually became the capital. So towards the end of the '50s you have Moose Jaw losing out to Regina in terms of population. The population of Moose Jaw has not grown since the end of the '50s. Then the railway began its decline as a passenger carrier, losing out to the airlines and eventually the Moose Jaw operation was moved to Winnipeg. Several other industries closed down after that. So the technologies that had given Moose Jaw its drive pulled out. The beginning of its decline happened to coincide with my departure. I left Moose Jaw at the end of the '50s at the age of 13. When I go back there to shoot film now it is very sad. In a town where nobody ever thought of the past, the motto now – for a downtown revitalization project is "Moose Jaw. There's a future in our past." This to me is a very sad testament. It shows that the frontier has really ended when you have reached this wall and you are forced to look back and start exploiting the past through various museums in a sort of feeble attempt to attract the tourist dollar. Museums are everywhere. The only hope for new economic development seems to lie in "freezing" all the old technologies by restoring them to a pristine condition – that they never had anyway – and then charging tourists to look at it. What really hurts is that this is where my childhood took place. So I go back to this place and it is like being in a weird dream. I only know one person there now – an artist. As a matter of fact, everyone else I knew has left.

So I am going to try and make a film which turns around a dialectic of personal memory and feeling and with the universal, public record of history in newspapers, town documents and brochures, etc. I will read many of these over the images. But mixed in with all of this... lost in all of this... somewhere is me... and the memories of place that once seemed really quite exciting. It's a genuine feeling of loss to go and see one's own past in a museum. It's very hard for me to talk about it, except whereas to say a lot of film move around in space and maintain one time, Moose Jaw will be the opposite. I will be examining the various strata of time in one location and then blending different times together in a sort of temporal collage. It's just a way of thinking of the structure of the film, I suppose. So the sound from one era will be with the picture from another one. Sort of mining through the depths of the various strata of time with my own history thrown in there as another element of the... dialectic if you like. It's a sort of personal quest. ●