

the essential "truth" of the matter? The film itself gave the viewer precious little freedom at that level.

A good reportorial essay, say, or a good teaching situation, or a good "straight" documentary, can, by the very formats which they employ, do a fine job of honest, objective exploration of a question, issue, situation, making the nuances, revealing the sources, admitting where fact yields to conjecture, and so on. But can a drama, growing out of this fascinating mix of fact and fiction, respect the viewer, allowing him or her to decide, at least up to a point? The form used in **The Tar Sands** implicitly claims that it is re-creating the *truth*. That is the assumption shared by the storyteller and his audience. And that audience's emotions were being manipulated by events and people without any built-in guideline as to where reality began and ended.

The moral problem remains: where is the media responsibility towards the viewer in all of this?

On the other hand — and here one owns up to espousing contradictory positions — one wants to cheer, to congratulate the CBC and Thomas and Pearson for their courage and integrity. It is difficult to think of any other country in the world, capitalistic or socialistic or whatever that would permit a national network to air a drama so critical of the *real* Power Centre of that society. True, television has at times played a major role in reshaping mass thinking. One need but mention the U.S. and Vietnam, or Watergate. But almost always, TV is the dominant-system reinforcer. And particularly in the field of drama, it serves as a sort of kept lady of entertainment, whose job it is to lull the masses, preventing them from questioning the essential status quo. Above all it must not be critical of the wielders of *real* power.

The Tar Sands is a startling exception. It is a salutary call to consciousness, and, ultimately, to conscience. This drama really does dare to identify the people and the issues: there is no escape. And it asks the question that TV rarely asks: how long can we tolerate the amassing of power, and the abuse that goes with it, by groups such as Syncrude? The stakes could not be higher, and the CBC, however hesitantly, has dared to take the gamble.

Ruberg

d: Alar Kivilo, **ph:** Kivilo, **ed:** Kivilo, **m:** Sibelius (text and sound, Ao Loo), **p:** Harri Kivilo, **p. asst.:** Mark Teose, Lembitu Ristsoo, Valve Kivilo, **p.c.:** Alar Kivilo Production Company, **col.:** 16mm, **narr.:** Ao Loo, Eva Varangu, Vello Salo, **running time:** 28 minutes.

It's difficult enough to be a good person, harder yet to show one in his life time, and hardest of all to make his worthy acts and excellent intentions seem interesting to film audiences who are continually excited by all the various and fascinating aspects of evil.

Alar Kivilo and his father Harri have been wise, therefore, in showing us some of their fellow Estonian, Ruberg's, life, to begin their 28 minute documentary with some intriguing shots of the man as an artist, making his highly original leather paintings.

These, however, follow a prologue in which we have an inkling of the character of both Ruberg and the film, as Alar's sensitive lensing shows us a small figure of a man approaching slowly through a pastoral scene of peace and loveliness, while underneath, the strains of Sibelius add to the holy reverential feeling, and a respectful voice intones the words of an Iroquois prayer concerning love and respect for the harmonies and balance of nature.

Between this beginning, and the final shots, in which we see Ruberg skiing off into the distance while a poetic prayer to "make me wise" is spoken, we are shown various scenes of Ruberg's work and interests.

First, the leather painting. Here, in a section that could easily stand alone, the bird sounds, forest sights, rustic life, and devotion to nature create an atmosphere at one with the artist, as he rubs blues and yellows into softened leather stretched over stone. "Every rock has its own face," in Ruberg's words, "God has filled them with meaning; beauty is



Marc Gervais

Ruberg with Estonian Children

FILM REVIEWS

holy." And, as the work progresses from what appears a hopeless mess to a deeply grooved, almost living reconstruction, or rather creation, of a rooted, branched and vibrant tree, we listen with openness to the simple unsophisticated beliefs of Ruberg as he speaks of the greater artistic value resulting from the simpler and more primitive handling of the work, or of the "late afternoon sun, which blesses my work", or of the responsibility of the artist for the feelings he arouses in his viewers.

But now the film progresses to Ruberg's other talent, and it is here while we observe him teaching marksmanship (for patience, discipline, self control); or helping blind children feel his paintings (he used to teach the handicapped); or instructing incredibly beautiful nursery school children (Estonian-blond cherubs, all); or demon-fire-lit at night, leading young Estonians into an exciting lesson about their country's mythology and ethnic rites; or finally, in a wintry-white fur-treed loveliness, working with water-colors on an easel made of propped-up skis, trying to capture the crystal patterns of frost, the sometimes overpowering Sibelius, and the unrelenting goodness and dedication of all his acts, begin to take their toll.

Is a sense of humor the work of the devil? Where is the man with whom we erring, stumbling humans can connect? We long for a tiny accident, a joke, a trivial moment, or a hint of unstructured passion to alleviate the organized, productive, methodical worthiness of it all; something to connect us with the humanness of the man, instead of just impressing us with his humanity.

Nevertheless, it is a commendable first film, and since both father and son Kivilo are well aware that perhaps it is a little overwritten, the strains of Finlandia a mite overpowering, and the goodness perhaps just a touch too unrelieved, the prospects for their next films are very good indeed.

They would like to capture the flavor of the life of other minority groups in this vast mosaic nation. Learning from this first experience in which, with a tiny budget (\$7000), and the donated services of Estonian friends, they have produced a professional, marketable and sincere film, they should in fact be perfectly equipped to do so.

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