Canadian Avant-Garde Film in the 1990s

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

Graduate Programme in Film & Video
York University
North York, Ontario

October, 1996

NOTE

This is a special reprint of Gerald Saul's Master's thesis, which has been reformatted to reduce the page count. Except for the addition of this page, not a single word has been changed, added or omitted.

ABSTRACT

This is a thesis in two parts, the first being a critical analysis of Avant-garde film and filmmaking in Canada and the second being the production of an Avant-garde film which reflects the formal aspects I have discussed in the first part. I will focus on issues which concern filmmakers more than those of concern to critics.

The first part will be directed towards discussing Canadian Avant-garde film with an emphasis on short works being done in the 1990s. To approach these films I will be using categories designated by James Peterson in his book *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order*. His division of Avant-garde film into poetic, minimal and assemblage styles is of great assistance when attempting to plot the stylistic changes in direction of an individual's or of a community's film work.

I will be looking at the poetic style films of super-8 filmmaker John Porter as well as the recent trends towards diary films. Within the minimal film tradition I will be discussing the inventive nature of Mike Hoolboom's *White Museum* as well as the hand processing films of Carl Brown and the hands-on structural films of Gariné Torossian. These works prompt questions of spectator pleasure on which I will collect various viewpoints and attempt to draw some conclusions. Assemblage filmmaking encompasses found footage filmmaking such as work done by Arthur Lipsett, as well as collage style animation films such as those by Gerard Betts.

As filmmakers are influenced by many other factors than just other films and filmmakers, I will be looking at the role of various support groups as well as the problems of funding, distribution and exhibition these filmmakers face.

To discuss my own film *Doubt*, I will begin with an analysis of various cost-cutting approaches many experimental filmmakers use. My film itself will be a discussion of the various trends in the Avant-garde as it will consist of a mixture of the three major experimental film directions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the support and guidance I have received from my supervisor on this thesis, Barbara Evans. Her excitement over this project helped me overcome many obstacles. She would see silver where others might only see tin.

I would also like to give special thanks to John McCullough, whose insights and knowledge were pivotal in my research. Fortunately, John always had an open ear and an open mind whenever I darkened his doorway. I placed great value in his views and ideas.

Thanks also to Evan Cameron who kept me on track, His advice led me to many improvements on this thesis, making it into a work of which I can be proud.

I also wish to express my appreciation to other staff and faculty at York University who assisted me on this long winding path: to Lynne Wood, George Robinson and Grace Walker, battling the war on paperwork in the office, and Lee Paquette, Tim Richards, Krysta Cawley, and Melody Field whose devotion to keeping all the bits and pieces of the studio running must not go unnoticed and to Dave Roebuck, Jim Fisher and Antonin Lhotsky for whom I worked as a graduate assistant and a teaching assistant, allowing me to share many ideas and hone various skills.

I also wish to thank the Faculty of Graduate Studies, CUPE and the Research Cost Funds Committee for assistance for making funds available so that I could complete this program.

Special thanks also to the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre and its staff, Barbara Goslawski, Alan McNairn and Jeff Crawford. My research through this organization would have to be considered my greatest learning experience in this venture. Only through viewing parts of this tremendous collection of films did I really begin to understand and appreciate the strength and diversity of experimental filmmaking in Canada.

Thank you to Thomas Phinney who is responsible for the final layout of this document. Thanks also to Michael Maitland, Rebecca Sernasie, Kathleen Cummins and Lee Shane who contributed film clips for me to use in this project.

Of course, I would also like to thank my family for being supportive during these two years.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Margaret Bessai. Without Margaret, it is improbable that I would have returned to school to finish my undergraduate degree, and absolutely inconceivable that I would have entered a graduate program. She stayed by my side throughout this entire process, watching films with me, discussing them and arguing about them. To her, I dedicate this thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I will examine recent trends in Canadian Avant-garde[1] film. I will attempt to relate these trends to the increasing constraints of money on filmmakers and will discuss the process by which a number of these film artists have found ways to continue to thrive and work in Canada in the past decade despite serious financial limitations. I will also be looking at recent films and filmmakers, placing them within the historical context of the Canadian Avant-garde.

A crisis in the field of Avant-garde film arose in the mid to late eighties, ending the prominence of the minimalist/structuralist filmmaking style in Canada. For various interconnected reasons including programming, funding and audience, Avant-garde filmmaking changed its priorities away from issues of film form and towards the use of film as self-analysis.

It is my feeling that much of the late eighties crisis had an economic basis. Government funding to the arts was cut back. Availability of money decreased at the same time that the cost of creating films increased. This trend struck blows against the funding of the lengthy minimal/structural films, causing a diminishment of these works which had been so widely praised since the sixties. However, experimental filmmakers, including many new names, steadily make significant new works. They do so by embracing the limitations and problems (especially those of budget and of audience desire) heaped upon them. Desperation in finding ways to make and show experimental films has led to much inventiveness in production approaches and has altered the attitudes of filmmakers towards their audience. So while subversion of the mainstream methods of production remains strong, there has been an increase in the desire by filmmakers to bring pleasure to their audience through the use of humour and storytelling.

In discussing Canadian Avant-garde film, I will be using numerous methods and theories developed by and for American Avant-garde film. This is due to the close ties Canadian Avant-garde has had to its American counterpart. Many formal approaches to experimental films are similar between the two countries, but due to its larger population, more film and writing is produced in the USA. In some cases I will refer to well-known American Avant-garde films as examples because of the role of these works in the history of Avant-garde. Although cultural context and political realities create many differences between the two countries, nevertheless I will be citing numerous Americans as well as using categories and terminologies set out by American James Peterson in his book *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order*.[2] Peterson's grouping of Avant-garde films into "Poetic," "Minimal" and "Assemblage" categories and his discussions of spectatorship have been very useful in my approach to Canadian material.

I will be discussing only motion picture film (super-8, other 8mm formats, 16mm, and 35mm), within this paper. Although I do recognise video as a useful, creative and economical

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[1] I will be using the terms "avant-garde" and "experimental" interchangeably as generic terms referring to the type of work which is formally oppositional to the main stream models of filmmaking.

[2] Peterson, James, *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order: Understanding the American Avant-Garde Cinema*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994.

tool for the artist, the history and aesthetics of video art differ too significantly from film art to discuss within the limited scope of this thesis.

I have attempted to discuss filmmakers from all regions of Canada. However, due to my current access to films and filmmakers of this city, Toronto will receive more attention. While it appears that some areas of Canada have strong traditions in experimental film (Toronto, Vancouver, Regina, Winnipeg, Montreal) and others appear not to (Maritimes, Alberta), my ability to prove or to ascertain any rationale for this is again limited by my resources. It may just be a matter of distribution of experimental films from those areas. However, such events as the recent closure of Atlantic Independent Media, a film distribution co-op through which independent and experimental filmmakers had distributed their work in the maritimes (January, 1996), have made study of those few known works much more difficult. Many differences can be interpreted and discussed among filmmaking approaches in different regions of Canada. Differing trends in various areas of Canada may be traced to influential figures and to the presence or absence of institutionalized film education, mainstream film production and film co-operatives in each area. Such an analysis would require extensive research and travel in order to become familiar with each region, so is also beyond my scope at this time.

Availability of material to study has been a critical problem in developing my theories. Because the ability of filmmakers to afford multiple reproductions of their films is inhibited by rising costs at labs, many films are not in distribution so cannot be accessed for research. Furthermore, these economically challenged filmmakers do not get their films widely screened and so cannot attract much critical attention. Films made by some of these filmmakers might be known only in the filmmakers' local communities. Part of my discussion will include a look at the evolving means of exhibition with the renewed interest in experimental film as an entertainment form in cafés and clubs. Closely tied to this evolution is the movement of experimental film away from the elitist realm of the academic Avant-garde which was prominent in the seventies and early eighties.

Many of my statements and observations in this paper cannot be easily substantiated or footnoted as they are a culmination of information and opinions I have collected while working as an experimental filmmaker within a film co-op structure and with other similar filmmakers for the past twelve years. When possible, I will try to corroborate my observations with evidence from films or other writings.

Chapter 1.1

Spectatorship and Interpreting the Avant-garde

Discussions of viewing Avant-garde film have usually been based on auteur theories. Avant-garde films are often presented to audiences by the filmmaker or by someone familiar with that filmmaker and/or his/her work. Few theoreticians deal with how spectators could approach films in which the viewer has no prior knowledge of the film or filmmaker.

As a framework in which to discuss Avant-garde film in North America, I am relying on James Peterson's *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order*. Within this book, Peterson defines three generalized categories to help divide and discuss the American Avant-garde; the poetic, the minimal/structural, and the assemblage strains. Further to that, Peterson discusses ways in which spectators view Avant-garde film. His approach "is most directly guided by cognitive theories of perception, language and reasoning."[3] He theorizes that a spectator will go through a series of hypotheses to try to comprehend an unfamiliar film, starting by hypothesizing that the film will fall into the most familiar interpretive schemata. Peterson uses the term *schemata*: "a pattern, an orderly configuration into which experience is sorted so that it might be better managed."[4] If the film does not match this familiar schemata (such as the narrative or the instructional film does) then the spectator must apply increasingly looser and/or more difficult schemata, from the optimal pattern to a pattern which is considered "good enough," until a schemata is found which will "make some appraisal of the text's overall meaning."[5] Only after establishing coherence by finding the suitable schemata into which to fit the observed film, can the spectator begin to experience *pleasure*.

His cognitive approach leads Peterson to recognise and discuss the oft-ignored complaints of those spectators who do not find enjoyment but only confusion and frustration in Avant-garde film. Peterson speaks not just to the converted, but to the unconverted as well. He allows for the opinions of all spectators to be expressed. However, he recognizes that Avant-garde film, like any art form, requires that a person have a certain amount of familiarity before he or she can gain maximum pleasure and make an educated judgement about the relative success of an individual film.

I have adopted Peterson's three categories of Avant-garde and will be discussing numerous Canadian filmmakers whose work fits within each catagory. These categories will be a tool with which I will be able to examine the diverse Avant-garde works while keeping each film or artist in context with other filmmakers who share similar formal or political concerns. I have also adopted much of Peterson's approach to spectatorship not only in this paper but also in my own viewing of new films.

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[3] Peterson, James, *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order: Understanding the American Avant-Garde Cinema*, page 7.

[4] ibid, page 16.

[5] ibid, page 18.

Chapter 1.2

Poetic Films—Our History, Ourselves

The poetic strain of Avant-garde filmmaking encompasses a large range of approaches. The term "Film Poem," which stuck to many Avant-garde works for years, was introduced at the Cinema 16 symposium on "Poetry and the Film" in 1953,[6] and can still be a useful model today. Although most are not "poems" in the literary sense,[7] film poems are the result of a personal vision by artists wanting to use film to express, in often unconventional and always highly subjective ways, a view of the real or the imaginary world. They are often short and may or may not have narrative content. Early poetic works can be grouped into subsets such as Maya Deren's or Sidney Peterson's psychodramatic trance films, Marie Menken's landscape films and Stan Brakhage's highly personal world-view, "closed eye vision" document films.

These subsets have evolved and been embraced by highly diverse filmmakers. From the trance psychodramas of John Paizs and Guy Madden, to the films which mix personal and political concerns by Barbara Sternberg, Phil Hoffman and Richard Kerr, to the landscape films by Roy Cross and Chuck Gilhooly, the poetic style attracts more attention now than at any time since the mid-sixties.

A large problem facing these filmmakers today is financial cost. The common method for the poetic filmmaker is to shoot a sizeable amount of film and go through all the traditional phases of editing and post-production. Only the most accomplished filmmakers can count on getting the necessary grant money (of which the pool is shrinking while demand is growing) to create a large body of work of this sort. Without money, it is difficult to hone one's craft. Without having well practised skills, one is less likely to get money. This "Catch-22" should logically prevent anyone from making these types of films. However, there are filmmakers breaking into the field of experimental film every day. They do so by building up their body of work and their reputations without large amounts of money.

Poetic filmmaking often requires an exploration of the world around us, the capturing of images wherever they are found. The way the light will fall upon a landscape cannot be completely predicted. Just as with still photography, many images must be captured for each one used. To save money, a filmmaker must reduce the ratio of film shot to film used. The only ways to reduce this ratio is either for the filmmaker to have a low standard for what he or she will use, or to hone his or her skills to such a point that the filmmaker can get what he or she wants on the first or second try, so that skill meets the expectation of standards.

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[6] James, David E. *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties, Princeton University Press*, 1989, page 29.

[7] Numerous films are based upon literary poetry in two common ways. In *Waterworx* (1982) Rick Hancox superimposes lines from a Wallace Stevens poem onto the screen, and in Allyson Woodrooffe's *Through the Green Fuse* (1991) a poem by Petrarch is performed verbally on the soundtrack. For further discussion of film and poetry see *Words and Moving Images* edited by William Wees.

In films where actors are desired or necessary, the expense may also rise. If amateur actors are used, as they most often are in experimental films, it may be impossible to predict the quality of the performance. Professional actors will rarely appear without pay unless they feel a project will gain them beneficial exposure. With their small audiences, wide exposure cannot be guaranteed by an experimental filmmaker.[8] In fact, often the filmmaker will star in the film him/herself.

The early American Avant-garde works, for example Maya Deren's or Kenneth Anger's earliest films, were made as silent films and only later had sound added. Many filmmakers still work in the silent realm. For some filmmakers such as Roy Cross, whose film *Mirrored Homescape* (1991) was made up of step-printed[9] prairie vistas, the sound is only background to his essentially silent landscape film. Brakhage has long been a strong advocate of the silent film-as-an-art form. Some of the reasons for this are obvious. To all of these filmmakers, sound is an additional expense and the money it would cost could be spent on the next film. Also, on an aesthetic level, sound can take the upper hand and distract the spectator from the intricacies of the image. This can be observed while watching music videos. The pacing, background, colour and movement is readily apparent without the sound playing, while when the corresponding music is on, the images seem to have less resonance.[10] Also, especially with visual artists who are drawn to working in film, sound represents yet another hurdle of technology which must be crossed. Sound requires a technical expertise that is different from that of capturing the images. This makes sound films even more unapproachable for many novices and people inhibited by technology. Furthermore, many eventually realize that it is only Hollywood propaganda that makes us believe that all motion pictures must be accompanied by sound. Some say the "talkies" were only invented to sell more tickets.

I have observed a growing number of venues such as cafés (Digits in Regina, Daily Express in Toronto) which invite/allow experimental films to be shown in the evenings in their establishments. I will discuss this further later. Silent films are often preferable in such instances as they don't require the infrastructure of a sound system nor do they rely on silencing all of the patrons during their presentation.

The super-8 film format created for the consumer market for vacation and home movies was replaced in the home by the video camcorder in the 1980s, since video tape is less expensive and more accessible to the average consumer than motion picture film. Super-8 is now primarily the tool of the experimental filmmaker. The cost of super-8 cameras, editing equipment and projectors is also significantly less than their 16mm counterparts. Used super-8 cameras cost between $5 and $200 while in 16mm, a used, worn out camera will rarely sell for as little as $200. The cost of

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[8] In the sixties when experimental films were deemed fashionable, celebrities appeared in some films such as Dick Lester's *Running, Jumping and Standing Still Film* (1959) with Peter Sellers, and in various films by Andy Warhol and Yoko Ono.

[9] "Step-printing" is a process by which a film is slowed down by rephotography in post production.

[10] I have directed and edited music videos and have always insisted that the images have a rhythm and integrity of their own, even when played without music. By simply turning off the sound on your TV, you can observe that not many music video producers share this philosophy.

super-8 film stock with processing is only half that of shooting comparable time lengths of 16mm reversal film. Editing super-8 film is more difficult than 16mm due to the small size and the troublesome pre-cut splicing tape commonly used. Damaged super-8 film is almost impossible to repair. Many film festivals are not open to entry by super-8 films. However, the portability of the cameras and projectors make it a choice medium for some filmmakers such as Kika Thorne and Wrik Mead.

A rise in popularity of super-8 as an art form came in the late 1970's and has been renewed in the past five years. It has been taken up by many artists with equally many agendas. Karyn Kay wrote that in New York "super-8 was a response to the structuralist films which had dominated experimental filmmaking in the sixties and seventies, it proved a significant intervention."[11] Toronto experimental filmmaker and writer Michael Hoolboom summarizes the pros and cons of this medium: "Super-8 assures an accessibility of means, portability and economy of expression, but also demands that its distribution/exhibition lies outside the usual run of Avant-garde showplaces, instead often taking place in bars, backyards and lofts."[12] Even some filmmakers who traditionally use 16mm find advantages in super-8. Toronto filmmaker Phil Hoffman relates, "I've always used some Super 8 but the idea here was to have more freedom ... To get away from expenses, and to have filming be less cumbersome—I can have the small camera with me every day."[13]

John Porter is a Toronto-based super-8 filmmaker whose work spans the history of super-8 as an art form.[14] Many of his films are silent, most are very short, running the length of one fifty-foot roll of film (approximately three minutes). The films that John Porter has created over the past 20 years are amazingly focused in their approach to, and playful manipulation of, the images of the everyday. Primarily through time lapse cinematography, Porter transforms scenes or events from the mildly interesting (a parade, the RCMP musical ride) into a fascinating otherworldly vision. His tools and techniques are simple but the result is complex, just like a poet creating beautiful and clever passages with only single syllable words. Rarely relying on out-of-camera editing, his films can be pulled, fully formed, out of the liquid chemical sea of the film processor.

I feel Porter's films are analogous to poems, fleeting impressions of a moment or a place which defies the narrative. He achieves this without using words or text. His

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[11] Kay, Karyn. "New York Super-8 Film-Makers"; New York, Framework 18-23, page 27.

[12] Hoolboom, Michael. "Bodies and Desire: The Films of Kika Thorne"; Cantrills Filmnotes nos 71,72, Oct/93, page 59.

[13] Phil Hoffman, interviewed by Barbara Sternberg, "Philip Hoffman's Opening Series," Cantrills Filmnotes no 77/78, June 1995.

[14] Other 8mm film formats existed and were used by film artists such as Stan Brakhage before Porter. Super-8 is different from the older standard-8 because of its accessibility to novices; the film is purchased in a cartridge which needs only be inserted into a camera with the same ease as putting a video tape into a camcorder. The film cartridge is easily removed and can be dropped off for developing at the local drug store. The sprocket holes are smaller than older 8mm formats, which allows for a larger image size on the same width of film. Super-8 cameras are often equipped with automatic exposure setting features. Aesthetic differences, if any, stem from the fact that users may begin a film without requiring any instruction or training.

intention is not to create metaphors out of the objects whose images he captures. Often, a carnival ride is just a carnival ride and a man on a horse might just be parading. Porter's films seem to deny the political.[15] He places his camera in the most "objective" positions possible such as behind the crowd or on a rooftop. He views the city and the events within it as if they were elements of a landscape of which he is rarely a part. However, even if Porter's *intention* is not to be metaphoric or political, this does not mean that his films cannot be seen as such. I think this is because it is a mystery to even Porter himself what his images might convey until he has them back and has watched them. That the crowd fleeing the parade area at the end of *Santa Claus Parade* (1978) gives the impression they are akin to a swarm of insects must have been unpredictable to Porter, just as it was surprising to his audience.

As a lover of history,[16] Porter roots his films heavily in documentary. Porter sets out to document various places or events (the RCMP musical ride, a university exam in a gymnasium, a drive-in movie, his mother painting a picture). Economically, this would be costly as it would entail using dozens of rolls of film. Instead of filming in real time, Porter explored another (far more engaging) way to capture these lengthy events by using a bit of simple arithmetic. Porter determined how long the entire event would take, then he divided that time into the number of frames in a roll of film. The result gave him the lap time between single frames in order to encapsulate the entire event on one roll of film using time lapse.[17]

Porter's rooftop vantage points lend an air of omnipotent superiority towards the subjects. His early films contain no characters, only people in places. One cannot see the people through the crowd for these films are not about people, they are about time and place.

While Porter's first films were dominated by his elevated, detached viewpoint he also began to turn the camera on himself as early as 1974 in *Cinefuge*, in which the camera is tied to a cord and swung around the filmmaker. Porter created motion instead of just observing it. He became the observed rather than the observer. This seemed to be based on the desire to guide the huge forces that he had previously only filmed. Porter moved his body to suit the camera. He was aware of the camera and saw no point in trying to be part of the public, part of the crowd. From this privileged standpoint, he allowed himself to become subservient to the random motions of the camera which he swung chaotically around himself.

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[15] Except in the case of *Pleading Art* (1989/1992) which is a film Porter made specifically to protest censorship in Ontario.

[16] In Porter's self-written program notes to the November 3, 1995 "Puberty Film Show" screening of *On the Street Where She Lived* at the Pleasure Dome in Toronto, he writes "I have long been interested in local history, including personal history. I have collected many visual documents on the subject, such as photos and maps. I produced several films and performances in the 1980s telling the histories of subjects of interest to me—the Funnel Experimental Film Centre in Toronto, and my family which has lived locally for six generations."

[17] He explained to me that the math became easy when he realized that a roll of super-8 film has as many frames in it as there are seconds in one hour (3600). Therefore, if he shoots one frame per second, the roll will last one hour. One frame every two seconds will allow a fifty-foot roll to last two hours, etcetera.

Having built stabilizing fins for a more aerodynamic camera, Porter created his first real "camera dance" with *Cinefuge #2* (1977) which shows Porter in the centre of the frame, making himself appear to be standing stationary by rotating his body with the inward-looking swinging camera. The background rushes by at unbelievable speeds creating an unearthly yet somehow meditative vision. Three years later in *Down on Me* (1980) the camera looked straight down, suspended by a cord and was raised and lowered by an assistant while Porter stood below looking up and rotating his own body to match the random rotations of the swinging camera. In the end, the image appears to have Porter standing stationary and the ground below him spinning rapidly.

Porter uses many make-shift contraptions to carry his camera so that it may gain unique, unsettling and thought provoking perspectives of his subjects. His subjects might be crowds of nameless people, land/cityscapes, or himself. Some of these approaches are reminiscent of Dziga Vertov's explorations in *A Man With A Movie Camera* (1929). Just as Vertov shot fast motion images of Soviet towns with a camera attached to moving streetcars, Porter's *Down On Me* (1980) has the camera attached to a fishing line and *Pass Over* (1980) uses a flexible rod to suspend the camera above and in front of the filmmaker so it can look down on the people six feet in front of him. In other films, Porter attaches the camera to boats, balloons and bicycles. However, I never get the sense that Porter intends his camera to capture the point of view of that bicycle or boat or balloon. Porter's camera remains a camera, unlike Chris Gallagher's in his film *Undivided Attention* (1987). In that film, Gallagher attaches the camera to a paint brush and a snow shovel so that the subjective viewpoint of that object could be captured.

What makes Porter's approach important is that he does not try to control more than is viable for him to influence either alone or with a single assistant. He does not try to choreograph thousands of people; it would be impractical for him to do so. His camera either observes the unchoreographed world or takes the filmmaker as its only subject. The only person Porter controls in his films is himself. He may predict how people he is filming will move, but he never directs them. It is this willingness to accept the unfolding of events which has allowed Porter's films to remain whimsical and surprising even after many years.

Super-8 films are often treated as inferior to 16mm films, even when both are experimental. However, especially when looking at Porter's films in terms of their documentary characteristics, his body of work fits easily into the model of the Avant-garde proposed by American film theorist Scott MacDonald in *Avant-Garde Film: Motion Studies*. In this book, MacDonald compares all Avant-garde films to primitive cinema via the works of either motion photographer Eadweard Muybridge or the Lumieré Brothers, French inventors of the movie camera.[18] Porter's stationary viewpoint in films such as *Santa Claus Parade* (1976), *Fashion Show* (1978) and *Square Dance* (1977) capture events in a way which compares to the Lumieré's "objective" style where the camera is set up to best capture the motion which will "demonstrate the breadth of

[18] MacDonald, Scott. *Avant-Garde Film: Motion Studies*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, especially pages 8-15.

capabilities they saw in the Cinematographe, to show off the new technology itself."[19] Porter's "camera dance" studies of motion with such films as *Firefly* (1980), *Cinefuge #2* (1977) or *Angelbaby* (1979) are reminiscent of Muybridge in the way the films centre their attention on a single individual moving around in the frame, drawing attention to how the subject moves in relation it its background.

Super-8 films and filmmakers are often labelled as "amateur." The American Heritage Dictionary defines "amateur" as:

1. One who engages in an activity or study as a pastime and not as a profession, or
2. One lacking expertise.

John Porter may be called an amateur under the first definition as he makes little profit from his films and supports himself primarily by jobs outside the film industry. However, I feel this makes him no more an amateur than Van Gogh. Porter does not lack experience and he takes his filmmaking as seriously as if he were paid to do it. He has unflinchingly maintained his aesthetic and has adamantly refused all temptations to cross over into the more lucrative commercial film industry in Toronto.

The larger the gauge of film a filmmaker uses (16mm, 35mm, etcetera) the more professional he or she is considered to be by the film industry. A filmmaker who has made a low budget feature film on 16mm would be described as moving "up to" 35mm on the following project. To experimental filmmakers, larger formats signify greater expense of production, both in materials and equipment costs. However, even among the Avant-garde, 16mm is treated with greater respect that super-8, which is thought of as a medium to practise or apprentice in before making "real" low-budget underground fringe films. Nevertheless, it is the feeling of filmmakers such as Porter that it is not the size that matters, but how one uses it. Technology does not make a film production good or bad. Interesting films are made by creative filmmakers, regardless of budget or film gauge. More money just gives you more film, not more ideas. Quantity does not equate with quality. From personal conversations I've had with Porter, I've found that his commitment to super-8 is his most important personal statement. By refusing to use larger gauges of film, he is refusing the hierarchical attitudes of the majority of filmmakers in Canada, commercial or otherwise. It is a matter of pride to Porter that he can accomplish and create works superior to many of those who might have called his approaches "amateur."

Many other poetic style filmmakers who have emerged in the nineties have also shared Porter's obsession with documentary, but have approached it in entirely different ways. There has been a proliferation of films in which the filmmaker has used extensive voice-over on the sound track to relate fragments of memory about his or her own past. There is usually only a single voice which describes events and feelings, spoken in a first person, singular viewpoint. We usually assume the voice to be that of the filmmaker. Although it is often impossible to tell if these films, in whole or in part, are fabricated or are based on actual events, they all relate a sense of sincerity akin to the reading of a personal diary. Due to the emphasis of personal expression within these films, I feel they also fit into the realm of the poetic style of filmmaking.

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[19] ibid, page 11.

Commonly, these diary films utilize landscape images, establishing an environment which the filmmaker feels will reflect the mood or content of the film. In Tracy German's films *...I Smiled Too* and *Inarya* (both 1994) the filmmaker ponders her sense of identity and self image, voiced over a backdrop of rural Ontario in which German has lived. The choice of location hints towards the answer to her dilemma, the place which defines her as a person just as she implies in her film *Inarya* by saying "as mammals, we all come from the environment."

In Kika Thorne's *Discovery of Canada* (1991-1996) Thorne's voice-over tells us her story about being in bed, in the dark, with a sleeping man of whom she is terrified. The images, reproduced from super-8, come close to re-enacting the events of the film, the nervous studying of the nude man on the bed. Through the limited viewpoint of the camera, the male body is turned into a foreboding landscape. To emphasize the diary nature of this film, Thorne presents the credits at the end written onto notebook pages and turned by hand for the camera.

Films such as *Nursing History* (1989) by Marian McMahon and *Domestic Sciences* (1993) by Lisa Fitzgibbons use reproductions of home movies beneath their diary soundtracks. Home movies contain images which are powerfully codified to the filmmakers who see their younger selves within them. Films which make use of home movies give the filmmaker two layers of highly personal memory-based material (image and words) with which to convey their sentiments and nostalgia about their personal or family history.

Many filmmakers, and in particular many female filmmakers, have recently been drawn to making films in the diary style. One influential filmmaker has been Ann Marie Fleming who has made nine films beginning with her diary film *Waving* in 1987. *Pioneers of X-Ray Technology* (1991) is Fleming's film about her grandfather which contains not only a traditional interview with him, but also significant portions of her own personal feelings and memories about him, told in voice-over. In *Pleasure Film (Ahmed's Story)* (1995) Fleming gives over the voice of the film to another woman who appears on screen and tells not her own story but a story told to her by Ahmed. By doing this, Fleming makes an ironic statement about storytelling and the suppression of the women's voices. Even with the filmmaker and the sole performer being female, it remains a man's story being told.

In *My Withered Tomato Friend* (1991), Sarah Abbott and Michelle Harrison combine optically printed found film clips with a diary soundtrack in which a woman relates her feelings about her newly-dyed hair and the anxiety of hiding her secrets. Although the narration tells of a fictitious situation,[20] the sentiments about shame, image and secrecy ring true to the viewer.

When Women Are Crazy (1991) by Newfoundland's Rosemary House is a diary staged in the landscape of a suburban backyard. This is a study of a limited space as is *All Flesh is Grass* (1988) by Susan Oxtoby. Oxtoby's quiet step printed study of the architecture and street life in a small neighbourhood of Toronto contains only the words "In memory of my mother." By limiting the physical environment in which

[20] I would not have known this had I not spoken to Sarah Abbott personally about the film.

their films are captured, space, be it vibrant or lacking, becomes a metaphor and these two films become explorations of the filmmakers' inner feelings.

Dandelions (1995) by Dawn Wilkerson gives us images of landscapes and of multi-racial women, accompanied by poetically phrased thoughts on "being Canadian." While this is not so much a diary film, it is a film which uses the same approaches as the diary films to make political statements. Similarly, Annastacia Dickerson uses the single voice, single viewpoint diary-style to express her political agenda with *Reasonably Barbie* (1994). In this film, the voice is of a woman, performing on stage, talking about the evils of the fashion industry. Midway through *Reasonably Barbie* the performer's voice is replaced by two voices and two images superimposed. We see a woman, presumably the filmmaker, studying her own nude body while her voice (in voice-over) tells us about her history of dieting since grade two. A second overlapping voice is of another woman who is talking about her own problems with bulimia.

Of course not all diary films are being made by women. Rick Hancox, who has been making films since 1970, has also been influential in the proliferation of the personal documentary and diary film. His most recent film, *Moose Jaw* (1992), is constructed from a combination of his own home movies and new footage, searching for his past in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. This is a personal documentary which also includes pieces of interviews with old friends, his parents, and some Moose Jaw residents. While seemingly a documentary on this small prairie city, *Moose Jaw* is more about the melancholy Hancox felt about the decline of the train, that great unifier of our nation. The towns and the trains are joined by history and together they slowly die.

Sweetblood (1993) by Steve Sanguedolce uses various voices in its soundtrack, placing the filmmaker's voice in subtitles. The subtitles discuss and reminisce about the history of his family and his memories of his own life. The film is linear, showing images of photos on a wall which relate to the stories he tells. The images begin with black and white photography, move on to colour photography and conclude with a single image from a home movie.

Mark Wihak's 1995 *(stories from) The Land of Caine* also uses home movies, original footage, and voice over narration to explore the discrepancies between the places and events he remembers from his past and what he believes he remembers based on having watched home movies of those places and events.

Many of these films are short, running under ten minutes. In almost every case, the soundtrack is recorded entirely in post production. Film was shot either outside or inside under available light. In such cases, no crew except the lone filmmaker was needed for production.

Diary films, as well as many other poetic style films such as Barbara Sternberg's *Beating* (1995), which consists of layers of voices about such topics as fear, nazis, patriarchy and slavery, or Chuck Gilhooly's *Steel Motion* (1993) which combines the sounds of the trains with the voices of the workers reminiscing about their years of labour, all rely heavily on sound. The soundtrack is crucial to the communication of ideas. These films use the human voice to tie together their often disparate parts. Some critics feel that this recent trend towards foregrounded speaking in/over experimental films endangers the future of this art form. For example, in discussing

the backlash against films which are '*art for art's sake*', Rose Lowder observes that "Underlying this trend is the idea that filmic art without words is art without 'content'."[21] However, I believe that the movement towards accessible content via spoken words is the result of widespread desperation by filmmakers desiring their films to be understood by a larger section of the public than that which watched experimental films in the 1980s.

Although very important in the USA during the forties and fifties, the psycho-dramatic trance film has had only a minor presence in the North American Avant-garde since then. These are films which "feature a single protagonist who attempts to negotiate a pre-linguistic surround, trying to find the join between themselves and the outside world."[22] In the 1980s, John Paisz (*Crime Wave* (1987)) and Guy Madden (*Tales From Gimli Hospital* (1988)) carried on the trance film tradition in Winnipeg. More recently, in *The Story of the Fish Girl* (1989), Stella Kyriakakis tells us the tale of a girl who is sucked down the drain of her tub, escaping her cruel mother, and becomes a fish. She is befriended by an alligator but seduced by the cool fish in black. The action follows one voiceless girl in this psychodrama acted out in a swimming pool with exotic costumes which are reminiscent of Kenneth Anger's work in San Francisco in the sixties.

The super-8 films of Wrik Mead[23] are also very closely related to the old trance film tradition. In *What Isabelle Wants*, *It Helped My Mind Relax*, *Gravity*, *Homebelly*, and *Closet Case* the protagonist is alone in a room, moving silently under the constant scrutiny of the unmoving camera. The struggle in each is connected to desire. For example, in *Closet Case* (1995) the protagonist is enclosed by all but the fourth wall and struggles his way out of a strait jacket, springing nude towards the camera as the four-minute film ends. Mead's films are allegorical dramas in which the filmmaker struggles with issues of gay sexuality.

Mike Hoolboom has also been producing a series of trance films (or as Toronto film critic Geoff Pevere describes them; "Fetish films about flesh"24), each following a single silent protagonist who reveals his or her deviant sexuality. The first of these films, *Shiteater* (1993), *Precious* (1994) and *Sorrow* (1996) are excessively graphic, challenging the limits of what many spectators may be willing to watch.

Artists working in the poetic film style, whether they are directing their camera at their surroundings, as with Porter, Cross and Gilhooly, or at themselves, as with Hoolboom, Fleming and Mead, are all finding ways to use film to express unique personal perspectives.

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[21] Lowder, Rose; "Another Level of Perception," *The Visual Aspect: Recent Canadian Experimental Films*; Archives du Film Experimental D'Avignon, France, 1991, page 68.

[22] Hoolboom, Mike, "Out of the Closet: The Films of Wrik Mead:, Cantrills Filmnotes nos 79/80, Nov/95, page 44.

[23] *What Isabelle Wants* (1987), *It Helped My Mind Relax* (1987), *Jesus Saves* (1988), *Gravity* (1991), *Haven* (1992), *Deviate* (1992), *Warm* (1992), *Homebelly* (1994), *Closet Case* (1995), *(ab)Normal* (16mm, 1995).

[24] Pevere, Geoff, "The Outer Limits: Mike Hoolboom's Films: The Agony of Arousal": *Image Film Festival 95*, Toronto, Northern Visions Independent Video and Film Association catalogue, 1995.

Chapter 1.3

Minimal Film and the Dilemma of Pleasure

P. Adams Sitney defines minimal/structural film in his book *Visionary Film*: "Structural film insists on its shape, and what content it has is minimal." Sitney further describes it as having the characteristics of "fixed camera position, the flicker effect, loop printing, and rephotography off the screen" and claims it to be "the sole meditation of the camera."[25] Ann Kathleen Banning refocuses the definition of structural film as

> those films which 1) investigate the physical properties of film as flat material, utilizing light, projection, printing procedures, illusion of movement etc., and 2) which emphasize the tensions amongst the physical materials, perceptual processes, and the pictorial realities film has traditionally represented.[26]

James Peterson points out a commonly expressed difficulty spectators have: "With the minimal strain, the problem is discovering relevance: how can one meaningfully relate such films to the concerns of the community that views them?."[27] It is my opinion that it is this concern which has led to a reduction in the popularity of the structural film form.

The history of the minimal strain of filmmaking can be more easily traced than the other two strains. It is considered to have begun in the mid-sixties with such films as American Andy Warhol's *Empire* (1963–4) and *Sleep* (1963) and especially Canadian Michael Snow's *Wavelength* (1967). The notable attribute of this direction of filmmaking is that the work foregrounds its form, the film medium, as the content. The films are highly reflexive. Viewers are led to become aware that they are watching a film during the course of a screening. This is meant to subvert the process of spectatorship so that the viewer will come to look at all film differently.

Michael Snow's films each emphasize a different film device. *Wavelength* (1967) explores the zoom; *Back and Forth (←→)* (1969), the pan; and *To Lavoisier, Who Died In The Reign of Terror* (1991 with Carl Brown), the film emulsion. Snow accomplishes this by taking one element of the medium and pushing it to its limit while simultaneously minimizing all other content so as not to distract the audience from his primary concern. In *Wavelength*, the camera zooms constantly (but for a few cuts during which the camera is moved forward) for the entire course of its 45-minute running time. Similarly, in *Back and Forth* (←→), Snow pans the camera back and forth across a room, forcing the audience to accept the limitations of the camera's viewpoint. With

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[25] Sitney, P. Adams. *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde, 1943-1978*; 2nd edition, Oxford University Press, 1979, page 369-370.

[26] Banning, Ann Kathleen. *Exceeding the Frame, Implications of Excess in Two Films By Joyce Wieland*; MFA thesis, York University, 1988, page 3.

[27] Peterson, James. *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order*, page 72.

Lavoisier, Snow supplied Carl Brown with film exposed with a series of seemingly meaningless events taking place around his house. Brown then used his experience with film chemistry to process and manipulate the emulsion of the film to demonstrate the range of possibilities of silver oxide on a transparent base, besides its ability to replicate images from reality.

Minimal films often tend to be longer than poetic films. Time is an important element in minimal films. Most minimal filmmakers feel that the audience needs to be provoked into examining the purpose and/or process of film. If nothing happens for a short period of time, a spectator will accept the lull without pondering its purpose. It is only when there is a "deprivation" of action for a long period of time that the audience will grow confused. Confusion leads to questioning which should lead the spectator to some greater understanding. Scott MacDonald defends the importance of this intended confusion by pointing out that the makers of the long films:

> assume an audience's willingness to experience forms of theoretical time and space that problematize conventional goal-orientation toward particular forms of entertainment and enlightenment. This destruction of the viewer's security as a viewer is intrinsically neither 'boring' nor 'pointless' ... So long as entertainment films and documentaries are 'easy,' that is, require no in-theatre discomfort and adjustment by filmgoers, media cannot begin to do more than reconfirm and solidify the psychological, social, and political structures we have already developed.[28]

However, as Peterson points out, the confusion these films convey can in some cases be interpreted simply as irrelevance and can discourage intellectual thought. If the audience members are unwilling to watch the film, it can have no effect on them.

The Avant-garde film scene of the late sixties through to the middle of the eighties was dominated by minimal/structural films. As I will argue, I believe that the recent decline both in the number of these films being made and the attention and respect given to them is the result, in part, of the recession and the consequent increase in competition for funding. In addition, minimal film has suffered due to the increasingly prevalent idea that the "politics" of film form are not as important as "politics" of identity, race and gender. These changes have made funding scarce and therefore production of many of these minimalist style films difficult.[29]

The field of minimalism/structuralism came to depend upon length to drive its point home via its prominent use of long takes, hypnotic flickers or intellectualized mathematical permutations. Throughout the seventies, minimal/structural films grew longer and longer. Most of Michael Snow's films run from 45 to 90 minutes with

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[28] MacDonald, Scott, "Avant-Garde at the Flaherty": University of Ohio, *Wide Angle* vol 17 no 1-4, 1996, page 264.

[29] Evidence for this must be inferred from the decline of minimal films in programs of experimental film as well as the decline in the discussion of it in articles. As early as 1981, a crisis was brewing in structural film. "The decline of the formal or 'structural' film in the 70s was signalled by increasing academicism, and a self-enclosed, self-referring purist aesthetic," writes Regina Cornwell in "Films by American Artists" program notes, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1981.

Rameau's Nephew [1974] running over four hours. Bruce Elder and Al Razutis both created works during the seventies and early eighties (Elder with *The Book of All the Dead* [1974-1992] at 40 hours and Razutis with *Amerika* [1972-1983] at 170 minutes) which where released in volumes but make up nigh-unmanageable final projects. Each volume, running anywhere between eight minutes and three hours, could be released separately with the intention of eventually running as part of the larger work. Razutis's work may be run as a long evening with an intermission while Elder's would have to be programmed over a series of days. Similar trends in the lengths of structural films were taking place in the USA at the same time. Notable exceptions from this trend were David Rimmer and Chris Gallagher whose films generally ran between ten and fifteen minutes. While Rimmer has maintained a steady stream of intriguing and inventive films since 1970, Gallagher's film pursuits ended with his one long film, the brilliant *Undivided Attention* (1987, 117 minutes).

Long films are generally more expensive to make than short films. Length is the standard measurement of cost in a film lab; film is processed and printed at so many cents per foot. Therefore, many minimal filmmakers are faced with unmanageably large expenses in making their films. Without support from government grants, many of these filmmakers lose the ability to create their works.

"Minimal" came to mean not only minimal content but was also perceived as minimal pleasure to many in the audience. These films were critically praised for their unwavering rejection of spectator expectations and of technical conventions. Although changing times in the seventies may be blamed for the disappearance of the large audiences which had turned up for these "underground film" screenings in the sixties, the above-mentioned minimalization of pleasure cannot be overlooked as an important cause. Scott MacDonald recently attempted to explain the negative reactions that an audience who is expecting a dramatic or documentary film will have towards minimal film: "When this expectation isn't met—when a film experience exceeds the implicit limits on the rate at which information 'must be' provided—audiences react with frustration and hostility."[30]

I do not mean to say that minimal films are completely devoid of pleasure. Often, especially in cases of "flicker films" such as those by American Paul Sharits, they contain minimum intellectualization and maximum pleasure. While watching a flicker film, a spectator is often lulled into hypnotic hallucinations caused by the rapid flickering between light and dark that the film produces.

Bruce Elder's circular arguments attempt to explain how the viewing of structural films such as Carl Brown's hand-processed works can be both pleasurable and not pleasurable.

> The surface events are also materially inconstant, dispersed in process and therefore beyond accommodation either by the reality or by the pleasure principle. Thus, they provoke another mental principle, the death instinct. ... The surface events appear on the side of pure pleasure, that is life, while the image's regime seems on the side of stasis, that is,

[30] MacDonald, Scott. "Avant-Garde at the Flaherty"; University of Ohio, *Wide Angle* vol 17 no 1-4, page 265.

death.[31]

Elder's argument is essentially that we gain initial pleasure from the familiar more so than from the aesthetic. Why else would we be attracted to looking at badly composed snap shots or home movies/videos of our families? If structural film devices such as scratched or damaged emulsion, constant swish pans, or multiple layers of superimposed images disturb the viewer's ability to see the familiar image of people or places, then the viewer feels that the technique is negative and synonymous with death, according to Elder's thesis. However, once the realization has been reached that the image beneath the technique is a piece of reality trapped and frozen in time, essentially dead, then the technique can be re-interpreted as life. Regardless of the chain of reasoning, once a spectator is able to watch these films for their purely filmic properties (the emulsion, the blur, the layers), he or she may then gain pleasure from the unpredictable and ever-changing beauty inherent in these properties.

Pleasure can also be found in minimal films, as in all Avant-garde films, in taking part in the act of rebellion which these films represent. "Alternative" culture of all sorts is attractive to people who are unsatisfied with what we call "mainstream" culture. A spectator can gain pleasure from attending a screening of a film which violates the status quo, as minimal film clearly does. However, this type of pleasure is short term. If a spectator does not find other pleasure in these works within a limited number of times attending these events, he/she will not continue to frequent such screenings.

By the 1980s, audiences which remained committed to the Avant-garde understood the assertions minimal filmmakers made that film form should foreground content. *Wavelength* (1967) had been taught in many film studies programs for a decade and young audiences and filmmakers had begun to perceive such films as old fashioned.[32] These new audiences desired different types of film to entertain them. Due to rising film costs and changes in audience support during the eighties, some minimal filmmakers began to shorten their films back to lengths more reminiscent of the pre-Snow times. Angelos Hatzitolios's six-minute film *Over/Under Cranked* (1990) is made up of four black and white shots, each fifty feet long, of the filmmaker hand cranking his camera while looking at himself in the mirror. Hatzitolios performed every task from shooting to negative conforming and sound mixing, up to the making of the optical sound track and answer print, the type of sound film which can be shown to an audience with standard projection equipment. The image in this film consists of Hatzitolios with his camera reflected in a mirror in four locations. By overriding the camera's motor and turning the camera by hand, he was able to

[31] Elder, Bruce. "Northern Exposures; Recent Canadian Experimental Film," program catalogue, CEPA Gallery, Buffalo, NY, 1994, page 4, writing about Carl Brown.

[32] When I was in a first year film production class (1983), our class was told that under no circumstances could we hand in an assignment that consisted solely of a long continuous zoom. I did not encounter *Wavelength* until at least a year later and even then we were told the most important thing about that film was that it hadn't been done before. Now that it had been done, we were not allowed to do it again, just as a sculpture student couldn't hang up a urinal and call it art like Marcel DuChamp did in 1917.

constantly alter the speed of the image so that reflected traffic, television sets and film projectors changed speed in the middle of shots. The nature of the hand cranking apparatus is that each revolution of the crank equals eight frames or one third of a second. Therefore, no matter how fast or slow the crank is turned, the filmed image of the filmmaker reflected in the centre of the frame will appear to turn the crank at a constant rate of three times per second. Although I feel that this film could have sustained my interest for much longer than its six minute running time, Hatzitolios does not agree. In his waning confidence in minimal film, he told me that he didn't feel he had the right to subject his audience to a structural film any longer than this one. It is not for lack of ideas or talent that Hatzitolios has not made a film in six years, it is more the result of his dwindling energy from filling every role on the film crew himself and his unwillingness to continue financing his films out of his own pocket.[33] There is a limit to how far any film budget can be reduced before the filmmaker can no longer make the film he or she wishes to make. In these cases, either the filmmaker must either change his or her approach or abandon the film.

As far as costs in a film lab go, it generally costs no less to print a one-hour minimal film than a one-hour dramatic film. However, the portion of the budget of a conventional drama that goes towards answer printing (where the first print with sound and colour/density corrections are made from the cut negatives) and release printing (those multiple duplications of the film which are distributed) is relatively small while the portion of the budget of an experimental film which goes towards the same printing processes is often high. To challenge this perceived injustice, then-structural filmmaker Michael Hoolboom came up with a clever idea and created his film *White Museum* (1986). For the most part, this film is not really a motion *picture* because (except for the brief silent piece of landscape spliced onto the end) it does not have any *pictures*. Just as *Wavelength* can be seen as an exploration of the zoom, *White Museum* is an exploration of the voice-over. The film consists of a white screen and a soundtrack. To those who understand the technical procedure of making a film, it is quickly evident that Hoolboom recorded this monologue and had an optical soundtrack made at the lab. At the time, this process would have cost about $0.25 per foot, a total of $300 for a thirty minute "finished" film. This is Hoolboom's last truly minimal film. As I hope to argue, the deviations *White Museum* makes from the minimal film norms would mark a transition point in minimal filmmaking in Canada.

Hoolboom began making films in the minimal tradition in the early eighties. In *Self Portrait with Pipe and Bandaged Ear* (1981) he presented black and white pixelated images of such things as street signs. Significant portions of the film were made up of black frames and white frames cut between the other images. There was no movement or flow in this two minute film. In the same year he made the ten minute film *Now Yours* (1981) which refused to begin. The count down, traditionally ending at "2," becomes a count up, from zero to fifty nine. This component of the film medium, the countdown, is usually hidden from the audience's view by the projectionist as it is meant only as a projection aid. As the audience watches these numbers, they think

[33] In my opinion, it is also a result of his relocation from Regina to Toronto where he became just another filmmaker amongst an immense community of filmmakers.

more about the projectionist and the venue in which they sit than about [lack of] content. This in not a new idea. American Bruce Conner used repeated academy leader countdowns in his 1958 film *Bruce Conner, a Movie*. Even so, Hoolboom persevered in creating variations of many tried and true radical conventions in his other early films.

The rest of *Now Yours* is made up of rephotographed film and video images, many bleached and painted on. Over these images, Hoolboom's voice tells us about his intention to show us eleven films "so brutal that they haven't been released for years." However, he frustrates our expectations by showing none of these films. Instead he concludes with an Ontario travel film. By doing this, Hoolboom draws further attention to the fact that we are watching a film, that the form is the content. His awareness of Sitney's definition of structural film is obvious as Hoolboom plays with each defined characteristic. He even anticipates arguments about the relevance of his film by answering that challenge in his soundtrack, "I can wait longer than you. If you had anything to say, would you be on film?."

In discussing Hoolboom's early film history, Geoff Pevere writes, ."..his work is going towards Méliès, no rules, just magic world."[34] Michael Hoolboom cites his own mother as commenting about his first film that "this is a film for other filmmakers."[35] What Mrs. Hoolboom's statement reflects is a common feeling that this type of minimal/structural filmmaking is elitist and of interest only to people who are educated in the making and interpreting of these films. Hoolboom would remember these words as he evolved his style to meet the audience midway between the obscure and the accessible.

In 1986, Hoolboom took the knowledge he'd learned and skills he'd developed about the materials of film and created *White Museum*. On the one hand, it is a minimal film which openly displays and discusses its own form, a straightforward minimal/structural film. However, it can also be interpreted as Hoolboom's transition away from structuralism towards poetic films. His later films are filled with anecdotes (*Mexico*, 1992), psycho-dramatic events (*Precious*, 1994) and even scripted narratives played out with actors (*Kanada*, 1993). The transition Hoolboom underwent hinged on his realization of the importance of storytelling to him and to his viewers.

One of the first stories Hoolboom tells in *White Museum* is about film. It tells us of Hoolboom's long-time interest in the materials and processes of film. He says that his favourite time at a movie is "when the projectionist is a little hung over so he runs all of the head leader on the screen so you see the white at the beginning and the countdown. It's at that moment that the film is completely pure for me because it's exactly what I want to see." This leads us to re-read his film from five years earlier, *Now Yours* and the countdown he revealed to us there. In this new light, *Now Yours* is a nostalgic look at childhood and his days in movie theatres. By giving us the tools to re-interpret his past work as subjective, Hoolboom ensures that he will not return to those forms again. If he were to make a new film with a countdown leader within it,

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[34] Pevere, Geoff. "The Outer Limits: Mike Hoolboom's Films: The Agony of Arousal"; *Image Film Festival 95* catalogue, Toronto, page 23-25.

[35] Hoolboom, Mike. "Watching Death At Work: My Life In Film," Cantrills Filmnotes nos 69/70, March 1993, Australia, page 35.

we would no longer interpret it as a structural look at the film form but as a poetic yearning for the past.

The key element of *White Museum* is its clear disregard for motion picture conventions. There is no picture so there is no motion. This occurs, as Hoolboom claims within the text of the soundtrack, because he could not afford to put a picture with the film. Although he tells us he simply couldn't afford to put images on the film, a more keen understanding of the materials is needed than he implies. The making of the optical sound track, like the one from *White Museum*, is usually performed by the lab as a step towards performing the much more expensive tasks involved in printing a finished film. Sound, usually from a magnetic tape, is played into a machine, vibrating a sensitive metal plate through which light passes creating photographic markings along the edge of an otherwise blank film. The film which is used for this is black and white optical film stock which is the least expensive 16mm film stock sold by Kodak. These markings, closely akin to the bumps in the groove of a phonograph record, can be retranslated into sound by the projector. As neither Kodak nor the laboratories assume that anyone would use just the optical sound film as a finished film to be released, the charge for this service is not excessive.

While one might expect that the voice without picture would be akin to listening to a record playing, Hoolboom does not allow his audience that familiar comfort. He continuously reminds them about the screen and the act of looking. He makes them look at nothing but gives them something to think about: "There is no need to make things when everything exists already." "Television is not meant to be watched. That's why I don't get along with my parents. They look instead of listen." "Hearing comes before seeing." "If it is true that a picture is worth a thousand words, then why does it have to be a saying?" It is this pondering about the absence which has always been the minimal film's strength.

However, even though the audience is told that there is no image, the promise of one forthcoming (by both Hoolboom in his narration and in the years of conditioning a movie spectator has undergone in those theatre seats) glues everyone's eyes to the screen. The anticipation of the image, when the dark theatre deprives us of any other, is overwhelming. When I saw this film with a large audience in May, 1995, with great effort I turned away from the screen and looked around at the others sitting there. I could see them all clearly illuminated by the reflection from the bright screen. They were all staring intently towards it. Even when the house lights were turned on in the middle of the film, as the voice on the soundtrack requested the projectionist to do, the audience was hesitant to look away from the blank screen. The theatre has created a virtual temple which the audience would not allow their wandering eyes or loose tongues to desecrate. It is quite apparent that the sound, played without the projected light, would not have captivated the audience in the same way. Hoolboom is aware of the power of the projector, citing 1960s Canadian painter and filmmaker Keewatin Dewdney in program notes a few years later: "The projector, not the camera, is the filmmaker's true medium... The very use of the camera as a filmmaking tool has imposed the assumption of continuity on film."[36]

[36] Hoolboom, Mike. "Cinema of Death," program notes, Toronto, date unknown.

After *White Museum*, Hoolboom employed an increasing number of narrative story elements in his films, without necessarily relying upon all narrative film conventions. He would use the voice and the image to explore the world he saw around him instead of the limited world he saw only in the film editing room. *White Museum* is the transition point. In form, this film is purely structural. In content, it is both modern in its discussion of itself (self-referential) and lyrical in its wordplay and anecdotes.

Based upon screenings I have attended and new listings at the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre in Toronto, there are not as many minimal/structural style films being made in Canada as there used to be. A particularly notable exception is Carl Brown. Brown processes his own film. While doing so, he manipulates the film with chemical and temperature alterations. The resulting images are filled with dazzling colours and wildly erratic shapes which flow over the filmed images beneath. His film *Brownsnow* (1994) is notably different from the 1970s tradition of minimal films in that it contains significant content with an easily definable meaning. This film is a documentary on Michael Snow, with whom he had collaborated in the past. The images, sometimes clear, sometimes clouded beneath the structure, are of Snow and pieces of Snow's sculptures. Moreover, the soundtrack is made up mainly of didactic discussions of Snow by Snow and by others including notable film theorists Bruce Elder and Regina Cornwell. Although the cost of Brown's films is reduced by his self-reliance for processing, his lengthy works (such as *Brownsnow* (1994), 129 minutes; *Air Cries* (1993), 120 minutes; *Re:Entry* (1990), 87 minutes) have all had to rely on arts grants to be made.

Gariné Torossian is a filmmaker who has recently been working with the formal aspects of film but has embraced what Hoolboom refers to as "cinema povera," cinema of poverty. To avoid the initial need for optical printing or specialized lab work, Torossian manipulates her film by hand. By taping super-8 film in strips or single frames onto her 16mm film,[37] she creates a peculiar strobing effect. The viewer can almost recognise the image inside the attached super-8, but because of the difference in registration between the two gauges, the image jumps around and is not steady enough to watch as a movie. To further frustrate traditional spectator viewing, she sometimes lays more than one super-8 image onto the 16mm strip at once. As a result, her works are seen first as film, as pieces of plastic with sprocket holes and frame lines. In her earliest project, *Visions* (1992), the super-8 film seems to be of Torossian's own making. It appears to contain images of a dancer and a man with a gun, but the relationship of those two people is unclear and may not exist at all. The 16mm film she uses as the base appears to be found footage, seemingly unrelated to the super-8 images. Meaning is minimalized but not absent. Torossian gives us a few obscure words, scratched into the surface of the film one frame at a time, which read; "I offer

[37] According to Torossian, the medium she used to affix the two gauges of film together was cheap clear adhesive tape which she purchased three rolls for one dollar. Danny Scavuzzo, working in Regina completely independently of Torossian, found a more expensive but very effective method of joining super-8 frames to 16mm frames in his film *End of the Century* (1996). Glue meant for artificial finger nails remains soft until the two celluloid surfaces meet, at which point they join immediately and permanently.

you a cold shower for the mind. Men must have dreams but they should never be asleep."

Torossian's second film, *Girl From Moush* (1993) offers slightly more content, but in doing so forces the spectator to choose which aspect of the film to pay attention to. The 16mm images consist of views of an Armenian temple, rephotographed off a television set. By gluing individual super-8 frames, rather than entire strips, in the middle of the 16mm frames, the formal attributes of the film did not veil the content to as great a degree as in *Visions*. Given this balance between form and content, the spectator is torn between interpreting this film as a poetic look at a mystical far off land or as a structural film about what a poor substitute the film frame and the television set are for our need for spirituality. With her third film, *Drowning in Flames* (1994), Torossian increases her manipulations of film form with denser layers of film glued onto film and the addition of substantial scratching and hand tinting. Here, her subject matter is artwork of the past, the old masters, the presence of which weighs heavily on any artist striving to make new art.

Although minimal/structural film is often described as film about film, it is also testing the limits of spectators. It is my opinion that the spectators are just as much a source of amusement for the filmmaker as the films may be to the spectators. To an artist like Michael Snow who has never had a passion for watching movies,[38] the audience is less likely to be held in high regard. Hoolboom seems to have a greater love for the cinema and he shares that passion with his spectators. Hoolboom reminisces about his early inspirations into the Avant-garde, and ironically about *Wavelength*: "I began to think of ways to give the theatre back to its audience. Constructing a film that would meet its public half way." This type of attitude of filmmaker to spectator has been an important factor in the recent evolution of the minimal film style.

While spectators may find pleasure in minimal films, this pleasure comes only from repeated exposure to minimal film. The immediate satisfaction gained when viewing films with overt content is seductive to many novice Avant-garde spectators and the result is a decreased audience for these minimal/structural films. Combined with increased difficulty in funding, this has caused a decline of minimal filmmaking in Canada.

[38] MacDonald, Scott. *Avant-Garde Film: Motion Studies*. On page 28 MacDonald writes "Michael Snow has never been an avid moviegoer. He has always been more intrigued with music, painting, sculpture, and photography."

Chapter 1.4

Assemblage Filmmaking: Recycling Our Past

James Peterson describes a category of filmmaking called assemblage which encompasses two distinctively different styles: 1) films made up of pieces of found/borrowed/appropriated film footage and 2) animated films made up of cut out pieces of images found/borrowed/appropriated from printed or published material such as magazine advertisements. Both of these styles rely on the spectator to recognise the images presented and bring the codified meanings of those images together, interpreting the combination as a new creation.

When two pieces of film from different sources are edited together, the spectator must attempt to make sense of them, just as was demonstrated by Eisenstein with his films and discussed with his montage theory. An image of an arrogant diplomat followed by the image of a strutting rooster creates a metaphor, imbuing the person with the attributes of the bird. Most spectators would already be familiar with common component images such as those from scenes in archetypal Hollywood movies or pieces of documentary footage from war, nature or politics. The metaphor created from the shots from these disparate sources could have a comical, satirical or surrealistic effect. The meaning of each metaphor may be based not only on montage theory but may also be a concatenation built up with the extra meanings each codified "found" image brings with it. For example, if you take the rooster metaphor above but replace the rooster with the Warner Brother's cartoon rooster, Foghorn Leghorn, the attributes given to the diplomat would include those attributes we already know as associated with the cartoon.

Often these films make controversial statements under the guise of humour. As Yann Beauvais points out: "The use of found images, found footage, is to avoid a certain emotion [sic] dimension which is almost always present in images produced or shot by the filmmaker."[39] This layer of emotional protection can allow a filmmaker to make clever and provocative statements which he/she may not have the confidence to say in other ways. However, emotional distancing can also become a convenient barrier behind which a filmmaker may hide.

While any one inter-shot connection within one of these films might be easily interpreted (a shot of a man looking at a woman followed by a tower or other phallic shape rising is clearly a sexual metaphor), the next pair of shots might convey an entirely different message, as might the next one after that. A film may be commenting on sex, then war, then modern life, then media, then pollution and then sex again. The direction in which these films lead can be unpredictable and the overall meaning of the film not easily interpreted. Often such collage films are described only by their mood or a recurring theme they hold.

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[39] Beauvais, Yann. "Lost and Found," translated by Miles McKane, *Found Footage Film*, ed. Cecilia Hausheer, Christoph Settele; VIPER/syklop verlag, Zurich, Switzerland, 1992, page 19.

Canadian filmmakers have a history of making powerful found footage films. One might interpret this as being the result of our long time role as spectators (of American films) rather than filmmakers. Many documentaries in Canada, especially during the years around world war two, were made up of found images from diverse sources. However, in the Canadian Avant-garde, the use of found footage in filmmaking did not become prominent until 1961.

Arthur Lipsett was a collage filmmaker who made a series of films through the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) during the sixties. His first film, *Very Nice, Very Nice* (1961), was created while he was working as an animation assistant at the NFB. Lipsett made this film outside of his normal duties. According to Lois Siegel, a filmmaker who had been working on a film about Lipsett at the time of his death, the film cost about $500.[40] Lipsett made *Very Nice, Very Nice* without the official authorization and definitely without the understanding of his superiors. Mark Slade, a colleague and friend of Lipsett's, described the relationship Lipsett had with the NFB: "It happened almost in spite of the National Film Board, not because of the National Film Board."[41] For these reasons, I consider it legitimate to discuss *Very Nice, Very Nice* with other "independent" films. Lipsett's first film was a breakthrough that would change his life. With an Academy Award nomination, it opened the floodgate for this collage style of filmmaking for him, for other filmmakers, and even for the North American media. Fast cut montages made up of stock footage began appearing in many television shows. Lipsett became a director on staff at the NFB and had his projects funded and distributed for the rest of the decade.

Very Nice, Very Nice is a difficult film to describe. My initial notes on the film describe it as "cut fast with non-sync sound, many stills, fun film with some jazz, about politics and the meaning of life." It is difficult to write about this film because on the one hand it is very simple: it is a collection of shots and photos cut together to create thought-provoking juxtapositions. On the other hand, the film has a flow that is very provocative and leads the spectator to believe that Lipsett is revealing important truths with these shots.

Following on the heels of Lipsett and American Bruce Conner, other filmmakers in the sixties also started picking through old films to reclaim them as their own. Initially in collaboration with Joyce Wieland but later on her own, Betty Ferguson assembled montages of classic Hollywood images, tied together by a central motif in her comical films *Barbara's Blindness* (1965), *Telephone Film* (1972), *Airplane Film* (1973), and *Kisses* (1976). These films have all been spliced together from fragments of 16mm release prints of dramatic or documentary films. While doing so, Ferguson has left the optical soundtracks in place so that the films are shown with their original sound. By approaching the process in this way, the filmmaker does not rely

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[40] Siegel, Lois. "A Clown Outside the Circus," *Cinema Canada*, Oct 1986, page 10. However, Gary Evans cites the cost at $8,326 in his book *In the National Interest: a Chronicle of the National Film Board of Canada from 1849 to 1989*, University of Toronto Press, 1991, page 79. I cannot account for the discrepancy between these costs although it seems likely that the official NFB budget includes additional printing or administrative costs.

[41] Mark Slade quoted by McKie, Paul. "Tragic figure's ground-breaking movies get salute," *Winnipeg Free Press*, Nov 14, 1987, page 20.

on cameras, labs or sound recorders until it is time to distribute the film. In fact, the film could be considered "finished" without ever taking on the additional expense of laboratory reproductions. Ferguson prided herself on this approach. In her 1978 artist statement she says: "*Kisses* is my example of film making as a cottage industry, put together in the same way a quilt is constructed (patchwork imagery), the embroidery is handpainting and tinting." However, there are two technical problems with the approach Ferguson took for her soundtracks. During the first 26 frames (just over one second) after every cut, the sound will not match the picture due to the displacement of the optical sound area from its corresponding picture. Also, at almost every cut there is a popping noise in the sound due to the splice. These factors are only correctable by conducting a sound mix, which Ferguson did not do. Ferguson had all of her release prints done in black and white. During the seventies when she was working, this would have meant a large financial saving, although this is no longer so. With the decreased use of black and white film since the seventies, the cost of working in one over the other has become negligible. Ferguson would hand colour select pieces of each release print. Therefore, every print would be unique. Although this process is time consuming, it is reminiscent of the common practice of artists hand colouring editions of paper prints from etchings.

More recently, collage films such as those made by Lipsett and Ferguson have become less common. Video artists such as Steve Reinke have used old film images on video (such as his 1995 release of *How To Build An Igloo* in which Reinke talks over an edited-down version of this 1940s NFB documentary short). Many of the filmmakers who do work with found footage have been using these images as the basis for optically printed films. One such artist is Francois Miron.

Miron uses the optical printer to intensify the colours of existing footage, creating fantastic psychedelic worlds out of images of the past. The colours flow like oil on water. His films are strewn with references to drugs and insanity as in *The Square Root of Negative Three* (1991): "How many times have you taken acid? ... About a hundred, and look at me, I'm as sane as you are." *The Evil Surprise* (1994) revolves around a science show about the brain. A science teacher lifts the top of a skull from a dummy to reveal the workings beneath. The images Miron uses are drawn from old science documentaries and tv commercials, generally mundane pieces of our past turned into an "anti-zen hypnotic panic film." His sense of humour is strong as he leads us into his world filled with non-sequiturs, focusing our attention on the authoritarian figures (science teachers and advertisement spokespeople) whom we have listened to for years. Miron shares his whimsy with his audience, just as Lipsett and Ferguson did in the past.

Ever since Lipsett and Ferguson demonstrated this way of exploring ourselves (by subverting the images of the media with which we identify) via the use of this simple and nigh costless approach, many film teachers have assigned students to do similar films. Although some may teach assemblage filmmaking as a way of seriously exploring editing possibilities, many teachers assign these exercises as mere training assignments for students to learn the rudimentary acts of splicing and handling 16mm materials. As a pay-off at the end of the editing session, the class gets to laugh heartily at the results screened. By introducing assemblage filmmaking in this context but rarely returning to it (instead of submerging the students into conven-

tions of dramatic film), student filmmakers are led to believe that this type of assemblage work is only a meaningless, amateurish amusement.

The strength of assemblage found footage films lies in *irony* as the audience discovers the images and finds humour or insights in them. So although they may be inexpensive to make and amusing to watch, audiences believe the credit for the humour lies mainly in the original source or in themselves for discovering it. Therefore, the filmmaker is often perceived as deserving less credit than one who captured all his or her own images.

Only after three decades has there come a renewed interest in collage filmmaking. Found film can be seen frequently on television as parts of music videos, commercials and as picture "bites" bridging other entertainment "bites" together. The ease with which even an unimaginative person can make a found footage film endangers this form of filmmaking through overuse and trivialization. In 1970, in a review of a retrospective of Lipsett's complete body of work, consisting of only six films, an Ottawa journalist wrote:

> I found the films boring. The stream of consciousness-montage technique of Lipsett's work is now quite familiar to film buffs. It is seen, finely honed, in TV commercials.[42]

While this journalist was media aware enough to see that Lipsett was one of many filmmakers working in an increasingly cliché assemblage style, he was not savvy enough to recognise the skill with which Lipsett exercised his talent. Only with extensive viewing of such Avant-garde works can a critic begin to establish critical criteria by which these films may be judged. Lipsett's use of rhythm, the surprises he delivers and the way his flow of image and sound engages the viewer must not be overlooked.

Because of the recognizability of the animation form, combined with the use of found, pre-codified images, spectators feel instantly familiar with works of collage animation. This recognition frees the spectator to enjoy the film even if the meaning of the film cannot be immediately comprehended. In these films, a filmmaker moves, via animation, images cut out from sources such as magazines or art reproductions. In Gerard Betts's *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1990), the animator created a humorous scenario in which a large man, constructed from cut-out pieces of male images from magazines, is pushing a seemingly heavy "Life" logo from a *Life Magazine* cover, up a mountain. One does not need to recognise the allusion (spelled out in the title) to Greek mythology to understand the irony and the humour of the film. The film compares the impossibility of the titan Sisyphus pushing the huge rock up a mountain, over and over again, to the upward mobility of life, the acquiring of the perfect body image and all the other impossibilities with which people in western society are barraged, in the magazine culture from which this animated film draws. The production of this film required nothing beyond a simple animation set up (camera, animation motor, animation stand, lights and film), a stack of magazines and a pair of scissors. In fact, some of the most clever sequences in the film, such as those in which

[42] Gaffney, Paul. "Six Lipsett Films Get Tedium Rating," *Ottawa Journal*, October 23, 1970.

the eyes of many faces (representing "us," the spectators) watch "life" fall past, required only minimal time and labour to animate. Betts's film *Mouthpiece* (1992) consists of lips cut out from images of female models in magazines, animated against a black background to lip sync the song *Just a Gigolo*. This film may not have the same density of pre-codified images as *Sisyphus*, but Betts's sense of irony in using this song alongside the fragmented portions of bodies from the fashion industry is quite strong. Again, Betts makes his point quickly and with humour, allowing his film to be immediately accessible to all spectators, while still retaining a level of complexity in technique (there were a lot of lips and they were placed with highly skilled precision) which would impress most Avant-garde and animation aficionados.

Assemblage filmmaking has two distinct advantages. First, by using pre-codified images, it can be used to make very powerful statements. Second, by not originating any of its own material, it is very economical. However, the appearance of ease is misleading. This style of filmmaking requires a great deal of skill to control all of the images, both with its form in regards to timing and screen direction, and with its content as each image pulls the meaning of a sequence in a different direction.

Chapter 1.5

Money and Budget Constraints

Porter, Hoolboom and Lipsett each made powerful and mature films which very likely would not have been improved upon had they had large budgets. Lipsett did not need to shoot his own footage for *Very Nice, Very Nice* to demonstrate the power inherent in the codified images we are bombarded with every day. Had Hoolboom been able to afford images to fill the white screen in *White Museum*, the audience would not have listened so intently to his words and discovered the truth and whimsy within them. If Porter had been given the opportunity to "move up" to 16mm or to hire a crew to set up extra lights on his scenes of Toronto life, his films would not have documented the dance of the everyday with any more precision or beauty than with super-8. Porter knows this about his own work and would not even have made such an attempt. Given additional resources, he would have made more small films rather than spending more on one film. These artists have all relied upon their talent, not their pocketbook, to make their art.

While it is unclear if there is a definable aesthetic of poverty-level filmmaking, inventiveness remains a key attribute necessary for these filmmakers to accomplish their goals. When you've got nothing, you've got nothing to lose. Inventiveness can often come from that sort of desperation, the driving need to find ways to communicate while simultaneously being unconcerned with what conventions might be broken along the way.

Cities like Toronto and Vancouver are perceived as hotbeds of film production and therefore attractive for filmmakers to live and work in. Most jobs in the film "industry" do not require a *filmmaker* to perform them. In fact, subjects involving electricity, carpentry, painting, sewing, make-up, driving, typing, photocopying, lifting, cooking and pouring coffee are not taught in most film schools. Only a few of the people working in the film industry ever significantly shape the outcome of a film. Even fewer might shape the film in any revolutionary way to break expected commercial norms.

To a film artist, the presence of a strong film industry in a city is not necessarily attractive to him or her. As the "Grandfather"[43] of American Avant-garde film, Stan Brakhage, speaking at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto on November 6, 1995 said:

> There's no more relationship between the movies and the possibilities of film as an art than there is between wallpaper and painting.

Most Avant-garde filmmakers understand the differences between movies and film-as-art, even if they cannot articulate them. Spectators who attempt to judge Avant-garde film by commercial, industry standards often find the work unaccommodating and blame the filmmaker and even the funding agencies who supported the

[43] As Brakhage jokingly called himself at this event.

filmmaker. Attempts to make Avant-garde films more accommodating cause friction within the film art community. The question of whether Avant-garde film should be made for its already established audience, or if it should change in an attempt to invite novice newcomers into the fold, is not easily answered. The first step to approaching Avant-garde film is to understand that it is a separate medium from commercial films seen at mainstream theatres or on television. If spectators do not accept this, the experimental works will remain unapproachable.

Chapter 1.6

Funders and Support Groups

Film artists in Canada are eligible to apply to numerous granting organizations for funding for their projects. Most prominent are the Canada Council and the various provincial arts councils, for example the Saskatchewan Arts Board and the Ontario Arts Council. These organizations are government funded but are run at arm's length from the government. They fund artists and art organizations, using juries from the arts communities to judge the applications. However, with the deficit and recession in the 1990s, these funders have become subject to budget freezes and even cuts. As a result, with production costs rising and available money dropping, fewer filmmakers will be supported by grants. Filmmakers who continue to apply to these funders must expect to face the inevitability of rejection and must make the decision whether to continue with a project or give up on it.

Film co-ops exist in every province, offering strong support to their members. Each co-op has developed its own strengths. The Winnipeg Film Group has not only supported many film productions (notably the works of John Paisz and Guy Madden) but has also had success in distributing its members' films. The Saskatchewan Filmpool has traditionally deferred all equipment costs on its members' projects, as well as providing full production funding for some of them. LIFT in Toronto has a very large membership, offering strong possibilities for networking.

The history of the film co-operative in Canada is almost as old as the Canadian film Avant-garde. These co-ops offer not only a sharing of resources but more importantly also provide a sharing of services and ideas. They are places where people with varying degrees of experience can meet and help each other. Films shown by members can be discussed and learned from. Not all experimental filmmakers work in collaboration with others, but it is likely that all can benefit from the insights of others from time to time. These co-ops are the backbone of independent filmmaking across the country, especially outside of the major centres. Although never flawless, the co-ops remain the most receptive entry points a novice filmmaker will find to emerge into the creative field of filmmaking. [See appendix A for list of Canadian film production co-ops.]

There seems to be a dichotomy between filmmakers who claim to be "independent" and those who do not. In the USA, "independent" filmmakers are independent of the big studios in Hollywood. In Canada "independent" means a filmmaker who is not on staff with the established film organizations, namely the NFB, the CBC and other television networks. Virtually all experimental filmmakers in Canada are "independent" filmmakers. Lipsett and McLaren, during their days at the National Film Board, are the only notable exceptions. In fact, the majority of the Canadian film industry, those people who make theatrical movies, television shows, advertisements and client driven films, is made up of "independent" filmmakers. Regardless, the term "independent" is used as a type of shield to protect and unify these filmmakers. It gives them a name and therefore empowers them.

In the USA, the term "independent" is often seen as synonymous with experimental filmmaking, as Scott MacDonald reflects:

> Without the popular cinema, there would be no independent cinema; without 'the industry', there would be nothing for independents to be independent of (and even this 'independence' is qualified by the fact that the apparatus for making independent cinema is a result of technological and economic trickle-down from 'Industry' filmmaking).[44]

Similarly in Canada, many experimental filmmakers rely upon the "industry" for equipment and services. Ironically, most of these "independent" experimental filmmakers are dependant upon the government for grants or upon film co-operatives and other film-related organizations which are also funded by government grants.

In Michael Hoolboom's history of the Canadian Avant-garde,[45] he discusses Canada's tradition of documentary filmmaking, but does not mention the NFB or any of its filmmakers. In fact, his history begins with Michael Snow and Joyce Wieland in 1967, at which point Lipsett and McLaren were nearing the end of their careers. The reason for Hoolboom's omission of the NFB is not immediately clear. The National Film Board of Canada is rarely discussed in terms of experimental film, even though they have been one of the largest producers of such work over the past four decades. Experimental filmmakers usually wear many hats. The same experimental filmmakers who must seek out their own money to produce their films are often the same people who organize screenings, write program notes and publish articles. It is easy to see how "independent" experimental filmmakers would resent the perceived advantages of having the security of budget, salary, benefits, office, and respect that a "non-independent" experimental filmmaker like Lipsett or McLaren would enjoy. Not only that, but NFB films are traditionally distributed free or at nominal charge to the user, so NFB filmmakers gain much greater exposure while simultaneously taking potential money via rentals out of the pockets of the independents. This resentment would translate into a history of omission of the NFB from critical discourse of experimental film. So although films made by Lipsett were watched and respected by many experimental filmmakers, it may have been perceived that he already had a strong enough support mechanism in place so did not need to be written about or programmed along with those filmmakers outside the NFB.

However, even though the NFB does not attract open praise from experimental filmmakers, it plays an important role by funding a significant number of independent films, including many experimental works, each year via its arms-length PAFPS[46] program. This program once offered laboratory services to filmmakers. With the recent closure of the NFB lab, filmmakers may receive cash to pay for services at local labs. The PAFPS program, once one of the saving graces of the NFB (in the eyes of

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[44] MacDonald, Scott. "Visiting Filmmakers: Why Bother?," *Journal of Film and Video*, 46.4, Winter, 1995.

[45] Hoolboom, Michael. "A History of the Canadian Avant-garde in Film"; *The Visual Aspect: Recent Canadian Experimental Films*, France, 1991.

[46] Program to Assist Filmmakers in the Private Sector or PAFPS was discontinued in 1996 and is being replaced by FAP, the Filmmaker Assistance Program, which will grant money instead of services to independent filmmakers.

experimental filmmakers) is now at a crisis point with an uncertain future. If this program ends, many more filmmakers who have little or no resources to make films, will either have to stop, or find alternative methods of production.

Film schools vary greatly. Some, especially in cities that have an established film community, often find themselves in the role of groomers of crews, training fresh young kids to become cogs in the machine called the film and television industry. One can see a greater number of experimental films coming from University of Regina students than from York, Ryerson or University of British Columbia students. In Regina, students are not as concerned about putting together a slick demo-reel to propel them into the industry as there is no significant industry to enter into. In these tough economic times with rising costs of tuition and cuts to programs, students want to learn how to be marketable filmmakers (if a market exists) rather than how to be an impoverished anarchistic experimental filmmakers.

Film co-ops remain the only infrastructure on which experimental filmmakers can rely that have not been dealt serious blows in this decade. Perhaps it is because these co-ops have always maintained the standpoint of making the most of what they have on hand, that they have survived. They run on the energy of their members. They promote imaginative use of resources to maximize the usefulness of those resources for their members. They network with each other through such organizations as the Independent Film and Video Alliance (IFVA) to allow filmmakers to have at least some idea of what his or her peers across the country are doing.[47] Gathered together in these groups, filmmakers support each other when the system either cannot or will not.

[47] IFVA is also at a crisis point since the Canada Council announced that it is cutting all funding to lobby groups, including IFVA.

Chapter 1.7

At the End of the Long Dark Tunnel: Exhibition & Distribution

It must be assumed that anyone who makes a film, wants to show that film to an audience. However, the process of getting a film exhibited and distributed can be more difficult for a filmmaker than making the film in the first place.

The two highest profile distributors of Avant-garde film in Canada are the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre (CFMDC) in Toronto and the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre West (CFMDCW) in Vancouver. They will place any of their members' films into their catalogue with only the payment of an annual membership fee and the cost of a print. It is the easiest way for a filmmaker to have his or her work in distribution. These centres do what they can for the films, but cannot offer any guarantees. Furthermore, if a filmmaker is working only with original materials or cannot afford to make extra prints of films, the process of distributing through these centres can be a significant sacrifice. If the distribution centre is given the only print, then the filmmaker would not be able to exhibit the work him or herself if or when opportunities arose.

While many film festivals offer an experimental film category, there are few exclusively Avant-garde film festivals. One unique festival is the $100 Film Festival. This festival was formed by James Morison in 1991 through the Calgary Society of Independent Filmmakers Co-operative (CSIF). The initial purpose of the festival was to promote local production by offering an unintimidating arena in which one might make and show super-8 films. The only requirement to enter was that the filmmaker could not have spent more than one hundred dollars on film and processing. This way, more people might afford to make films and enter. Those people may also feel more willing to show their films, understanding the context in which they will be shown. According to Morison, the festival has "never had any filmmaker complain about having to work under that budget constraint." The festival was, and still is, non-competitive. It has maintained Morison's pledge to try to show every film submitted. The success of this festival, as indicated by the rapid and massive growth in entries and audience over just three years, demonstrates that there is a strong interest in film made "just for the fun of it."[48]

While the $100 Film Festival is not specifically a festival for experimental film, many short super-8 films do tend to be experimental in nature. Similarly, the Image Film Festival and Toronto Film Festival in Toronto and the Yorkton Short Film and Video Festival all attract many, but not exclusively, experimental films. There are no exclusively experimental film festivals in Canada.

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[48] Information on the $100 Film Festival is drawn from personal correspondence I received from James Morison, January, 1996.

With the volume of films produced each year and the limited resources of agencies such as the CFMDC or the festivals, the onus for promotion of a film falls on the filmmaker him/herself. While gaining entry into film festivals brings some legitimacy to an experimental film, exposure remains limited to the established festival crowd. By showing these films only to audiences who have already rejected aspects of established film practices and who expect an alternative view, the filmmaker fails to realize one key mandate of Avant-garde film. Theorist William Wees calls "the ethical as well as aesthetic impetus" of the Avant-garde,

> the subversion of conventional film practices and its concerted efforts to re-orient the cinematic apparatus—away from realistic representation and the reassuring redundancies of narrative forms.[49]

Only by going outside of what have become the normal Avant-garde film venues (museums, festivals, art galleries, universities, film co-ops), where the spectators' expectations are already prepared for an Avant-garde experience, and taking the films instead into an everyday setting such as a café, might Wees's mandate of subversion be exercised. Only then will the filmmaker be able to subvert the expectations of his/her audience. Only then will the spectators be able to satisfy their desire for subversion by attending such subversive events.

More proactive moves towards finding public screening venues need to be made in order to create an audience for new works. Some filmmakers have approached alternative venues to hold screenings in the more general public sphere. Screenings of this sort may be as diverse as the films themselves. Two examples I have attended recently were screenings of the works of John Porter, arranged by John Porter, at the Daily Express Café in Toronto in April, 1995 and Saskatchewan Filmpool members' works in progress, curated by Jason Neilson at Digit's Café in Regina in July, 1995. Both were successful in attracting an audience, even though neither were well advertised, attracting only the regular patrons of those establishments.

At The Daily Express, John Porter exhibited a number of his silent films with very little introduction or commentary. Patrons could choose to watch or not watch, talk or not talk, without disturbing or being disturbed by the program. As the sound of a film and the sound of the patrons are likely to be in conflict, a silent show seemed preferable in this type of environment. Furthermore, sound films require more technical support so might be more difficult to show at some establishments. If sound is to be used then the patrons must cooperate and all must become spectators. The incentive for the proprietor to invite filmmakers into their cafés is that the filmmaker would be expected to publicise the event with posters or by word of mouth.

In the case of the above Regina screening, the event took place in the parking lot outside the café. An industrial noise band played accompaniment to the silent films (and even over one film by Richard Kerr which did have sound). Because of the size of the open air space, the audience could still talk and move around without distracting from the improvisational instrumentations. Spectators could pay attention to just

[49] Wees, William. "The Camera, the Eye and the Visual Aspect of Canadian Avant-garde Film," *The Visual Aspect: Recent Canadian Experimental Films*; (France, 1991), p18.

the film, just the music, or both. However, the time and organization required to book the band and films, set up the sound system, the portable screen and arrange things with the venue took considerable effort by the curator. For a lone curator, such events are difficult to repeat in an ongoing fashion. Perhaps by working together with band promoters or rave organizers, piggy-backing on their performances as a back up feature similar to early film exhibitions at vaudeville shows, more films might be exhibited in this way.

As it is difficult to draw a high paying crowd to an experimental film screening, filmmakers are rarely paid for their café screenings. The filmmakers often show their work solely for the exposure.

Most filmmakers strive to insure that their films will survive the ravages of time by creating duplicates and video dubs and safely storing the originals. However, some experimental filmmakers accept that his or her films will probably never screen more than a couple of times before being lost from the world when Atlas shrugs[50]. On that assumption, films can be treated as disposable commodities, used until they are too damaged to screen further, then discarded. This rejection of accepted preservation practices is a denial of not only the mainstream cinema but the established art world as well.

As minimal films are often praised academically for their emphasis on intellectualization over pleasure, the transition away from these films and towards films such as the poetic style diary films seems to be guided by public, rather than critical, sentiment. The drive towards greater word count, and therefore greater perceived relevance, makes many of the films more accessible to audiences by seeming more like television.

As demonstrated by many film co-ops and especially in the case of the Pleasure Dome or the now defunct Funnel in Toronto, there are many people who are strong supporters of the Avant-garde and who will put significant time and effort into organizing screenings of works that are not their own. While film societies, with their mandate of showing European "art films" are rapidly becoming relics of the past, experimental film "societies" and art galleries still have a strong role to play.

What is the future of experimental film in Canada? Few are as optimistic as was Gene Youngblood in *Expanded Cinema* with his idyllic future in which visionary filmmakers are universally appreciated. Rose Lowder defines a dichotomy which is tragic although more realistic:

> The social pressure seems to push filmmakers towards two possibilities: either they join the commodity market by producing suitable audiovisual productions or they remain on the fringe of the art market which does not willingly accept the user unfriendly perishable foods which independently made films are thought to be.[51]

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[50] I've heard it said that every fifty years, the mythical Greek titan Atlas shrugs, shaking the world which sits on his shoulders. At that time half of everything, in this case the art which has been created, falls off into the abyss. Without Atlas shrugging, we would be drowned in what we have made.

[51] Lowder, Rose. "Another Level of Perception," *The Visual Aspect*, France, page 67.

This would not seem such a problem except that the "fringe" artists are frequently compared to their marketable counterparts in ways which belittle the impoverished cousins, giving praise only for financial success. Even Stan Brakhage, for years an unwavering supporter of the Avant-garde, seems to have changed his mind about the potential for experimental film to make change:

> In the sixties they said it was underground but it wasn't, now nobody says anything and it really is. It isn't affecting anybody; even the advertising agencies aren't renting their films to steal from them.... the art of film is truly moving into a realm of its own, happily free from commercial usages.[52]

At the risk of being overly general, I contend that experimental filmmakers are imaginative people who constantly strive to create, no matter who tells them it is a waste of time. In fact, they have proven again and again to spring ahead, and not back, in the face of adversity.

[52] Ganguly, Suranjan; "All That is Light; Brakhage at 60," *Sight and Sound*, London, Oct 1993.

Chapter 2.1

How to Make an Experimental Film

In this chapter I will discuss methods of experimental film production. In regards to each procedure, I will discuss approaches a filmmaker may wish or need to use which can be accomplished using limited resources. My thesis film production, *Doubt*, to be discussed in the next chapter, has been made using many of these production methods under considerable financial limitations.

It is rare to hear a discussion of film production without it coinciding with a discussion of money. Hollywood's obsession with touting the budgets of their multi-million dollar films has been the norm for years, and Hollywood is not alone. Canada has also become infected. *The Financial Post* proudly and regularly tells the nation about how Toronto's film business is growing.[53] Even in small cities like Regina the two issues are always mentioned in combination, not only by the press but by film associations and lobby groups. Government support is all too often given to film organizations under the argument that film production results in economic spillover into the rest of the community. Only a relatively small amount of money is earmarked for filmmaking as a solely artistic or cultural enterprise. Although mainstream film producers often admit that gigantic budgets do not ensure the success of a picture, their spending continues to increase.

I believe that creativity, not money, is the most essential ingredient in making any film. However, that is not to say that the presence or absence of adequate funding does not affect a film production. Money affects the type of resources and tools a filmmaker may be able to use, and this will have a direct relationship on the approach a filmmaker will take in his or her self-expression.

Avant-garde filmmakers tend to approach the budget of their films ways different from their commercial counterparts. As there is less and less money for the arts and more and more money for the industry, the dichotomy between these two groups grows increasingly apparent. Experimental filmmakers must always try to put all their available resources, not only cash but other assets, into the making of their films. Stan Brakhage recently lamented the dilemma of the Avant-garde filmmaker working in our inflationary times:

> The costs are so enormous, which has become just a catastrophe for those who are working with film independently or individually ... [it] has been devastating on the whole possibility of there being an art of film.[54]

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[53] Examples such as "Ontario reaps $500M from film, TV makers" by Gord McLaughlin on December 30, 1995 are common.

[54] Stan Brakhage speaking at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Nov. 6, 1995, transcribed from my own recording.

Brakhage's respect has consistently been strongly biased towards filmmakers who distance themselves from the financially lucrative film industry but instead finance their own films. If self-financing is the only alternative to conforming to industry expectations, then only the rich would have a voice. However, desperate and uninhibited (with nothing to lose), low budget experimental filmmakers still manage to make films and to get them seen. Film is a powerful tool and the greater a filmmaker's knowledge of its workings, the greater the ability to wield its power. Much is possible with only an idea and some pocket change. Perhaps we don't have to live on industrial bread alone.

To begin the discussion of my own approach to my thesis film, *Doubt*, I must first analyze the techniques and tools available to me under the (financial) limitations I am faced with. When a single person is as responsible for as many aspects of a production as most experimental filmmakers are, then the filmmaker's knowledge of and proficiency with his or her tools and materials has a direct effect on the content and approach to the film he or she makes. That is, technical proficiency has a direct influence on the aesthetic of the work. The cost is always an issue to me when I make a film. Reduction of a film's cost can be achieved through common sense and through proficiency with materials, tools and procedures. I wish to preface the analysis of my own work with a discussion of the technical ways in which any filmmaker may reduce costs of a film and the effects that those reductions may have on that film.

In all film production, the ways of reducing costs are similar. They only vary to the degree each factor is reduced. A film's cost can be divided between equipment, materials, labour and services. I must point out that on a dramatic film, the costs of labour far outweigh the cost of materials, equipment and services. However, on Avant-garde films, these ratios are reversed. Avant-garde filmmakers rarely earn a salary from their films, nor do most of the people working with and for the filmmaker. The film industry, as with the steel industry or the textile industry, employs (and pays) many people to perform its labour. By assuming that living expenses for the filmmaker are to be acquired from other sources, the filmmaker's time is regarded as having no cost.

Material costs consist of props, film stock and other materials which would need to be acquired to make a film (such as editing supplies, audio tape and leader).

There are obvious ways to get around buying props, such as shooting on pre-existing locations, and writing scenarios which only require props and costumes which you already have or can acquire cheaply or free of charge,

Film stock is not as easily bartered for as props and costumes. Sometimes film co-ops or other non-profit organizations can acquire film stock from Fuji or Agfa[55] for half price or even free. Unfortunately, this is usually only possible for special projects such as film for workshops or community service, therefore not an approach an individual can easily negotiate. Some discounts are offered to students (especially by Kodak) or to people buying large quantities of film, but otherwise one must pay the list price for raw film stock.

[55] Unfortunately, Agfa has recently cancelled production of motion picture film in North America.

Large film production companies often like to shoot entire projects with the same film batch because there can be some variation between film made at the plant on different days. This means that unused film at the end of a project, including "short ends" or "re-cans," may be considered of no value for future projects by that company. Sometimes, especially if/when such a company believes an individual filmmaker to be a "good cause" for any of a variety of economic or political reasons, the production company may donate partially used rolls of film or even whole rolls of unused film to a filmmaker who approaches them. However, these agreements can only be negotiated where there is an ongoing, significant amount of film production as is the case in Toronto, Vancouver or Montreal. Filmmakers in smaller centres are unlikely to benefit from these industry by-products.

Therefore, a filmmaker facing the costs at list prices, must economize on the use of film stock. First and foremost, a filmmaker can attempt to shoot as little film as possible. The conventions of coverage of a dramatic scene from a variety of vantage points and multiple takes of each shot ("one more for safety") must be seriously rethought. Animation, when carefully planned, is often shot at a one-to-one ratio so there is no wastage. Many poetic style films are not pre-planned and are made up of a large assortment of shots, captured over a period of time. I've known filmmakers working in this way who determine at the beginning of a project how much film they can afford to purchase and develop. When that film is used up, they declare principal photography to be complete.

After the film has been developed, the filmmaker must do his or her best to make use of all the film shot. Creativity, re-writing and sound can be relied upon to help integrate a "flubbed" shot into the film without seeming to make concessions. Shots that cannot be fit into the current film project can be saved and written into a future film.

Sometimes the film can be shot in order and edited in camera, so that no cutting is needed. *Eat* (1963) by American Andy Warhol or *Catfood* (1968) by Joyce Wieland are two such examples. While Wieland edited in camera, Warhol simply did not stop rolling until the camera roll was completed. These two examples both consist of a series of 100 foot long camera rolls without cuts, strung together end to end. Only the most basic editing equipment would be needed to accomplish this, and the time involved would be minimal (perhaps one hour). Therefore, editing equipment and supply costs would be minimized.

Footage that ends up being significantly too dark or too light, out of focus or generally just unusable can still be made use of by scratching, painting, or bleaching it. If the volume of unusable material is very large, it can always be utilized in other plastic arts such as being glued to paintings or sculptures.[56] I believe that if a filmmaker vigilantly maintains that all materials are of value, and keeps on the lookout for ways to put those materials to creative use, he or she will be less likely to waste them.

Working with found film, that is acquiring pieces of other people's films and cutting them together as your own, similar to how Dada artist Marcel DuChamp "made"

[56] For example, I created a piece I called "Celluloid Rooster" which was a collage of film frames glued to a clear plastic base to be displayed backlit. This piece was sold in an auction of members work at Regina's Neutral Ground Art Gallery in 1995.

his Ready-mades, is perhaps the least expensive form of film "making." Just as Duchamp placed a bottle rack which he had bought in a bazaar or a bicycle wheel mounted on a kitchen stool into a gallery and called it his new work, filmmakers present audiences with old films, in whole or in part, in a new context. If an artist were to cut together films with a pre-existing optical sound track, the resulting film could be projected with its original accompanying sound at no extra cost.

There are drawbacks to found footage film. Copyright is difficult to acquire and expensive so is ignored by most of these film artists, under the assumption that not only will the first owners of the materials not take action against them, but that the filmmakers have a right, or even a duty, to salvage these old elements and transform them into new art. William Wees writes, ."..collage is widely regarded as the most revolutionary formal development in 20th century art."[57] Collage is the natural by-product of the age of reproduction. Nevertheless, issues of copyright make it risky to sell found footage films commercially. A second drawback is that all film is fragile and can be scratched, torn and broken. Found footage filmmakers who wish to show the work repeatedly or sell or rent it, must strike a costly internegative, a film negative that is made from a positive image, so that multiple release prints can be made.

In 1994, Michael Hoolboom reproduced Madonna's "Justify My Love" music video in its entirety. His only change was to add an extra line of text which ran along the bottom of the frame telling even more lustful tales than those told by rock and roll's self-appointed sex goddess. Not only did Hoolboom not gain any copyright clearance on this material, but he received many rentals from the States where MTV had banned the video.

After eight years of making found footage films, New York filmmaker Abigail Child recently had to begin paying for her footage. 16mm prints of films, once routinely used in theatres or television, used to be very common and were often thrown away after use. Now they are finding their way into the marketplace.

A film artist can also draw and paint directly onto the film itself, either on clear leader or footage with images on it. National Film Board legend Norman McLaren and American Stan Brakhage are both well known for their films made in this way. Most often, works of this sort would best be categorized under Peterson's poetic style of Avant-garde film. While it could be argued that the spectator is looking at the surface of the film, and therefore the films fall into the structural category, many viewers, myself included, feel they are watching an emotive play of colours, more akin to music. The dreamy, emotional and comical effects of these films compel me to regard them as poetic.

Clear leader can be purchased or can be quickly created by using regular household bleach to remove the emulsion from found film. Markers, ink, paint or glue can be used to put images onto the film. Scratching into dark areas of film with a sharp tool can also yield interesting results. Either black leader or found film can be used as the base for this work. However, even more so than with the found film projects described above, this work is subject to damage, so reproduction in the form of an

[57] Wees, William. "Found Footage and Questions of Representation"; *Found Footage Film*, Switzerland, (ed. Hausheer, Cecillia), 1992.

internegative must be made if its long term survival is desired. Some video transfer facilities will even be hesitant to run such works through their projector (or especially their flying spot scanner film to video transfer device) so a filmmaker may find venues limited if reproductions are not made.

To scratch on film, I created my own tool by simply imbedding a fresh sewing needle into the end of a wooden stick (in fact, it was a chop stick). By wrapping tape and an elastic band around the end next to the protruding needle, the tool becomes easy to hold and control. This tool allowed me to create consistent results without my hand becoming sore or cramped as it might have done using a less controllable tool.

Equipment costs are often reduced by using low-end equipment which the filmmaker can either purchase (especially super-8 which can sometimes be found at yard sales or junk stores for under $20) or rent or borrow from film co-operatives or other artist-friendly people or institutions. Cameraless work such as scratch or drawn/painted animation or found footage filmmaking also reduces equipment costs although editing and projection equipment are still necessary.

One cameraless technique which creates an image which is photographic in nature is that of photograms or Rayograms. The best known applications of this were the works of the American filmmakers Man Ray, with *Retour A La Raison* (1923), and Stan Brakhage with *Mothlight* (1963) and *Garden of Earthly Delights* (1981). These films are difficult to describe as they do not contain steady images but instead consist of flashes of forms, with each frame being completely different from the previous one. Some images will be easily perceived due to the contrast and familiarity of shape such as thumb tacks in Man Ray's film. The less distinct moth wings or flower petals in Brakhage's films are perceived as textures rather than specific forms. Photograms are inexpensive yet difficult to produce. This painstaking process requires that the filmmaker work in a dark room and lay objects on top of unexposed film. The film is then exposed to light, imprinting the shadows of the objects on the film. Even though it is a well-known approach (in fact Brakhage describes how to do it in detail in his book *The Moving Picture Giving and Taking Book* (Film Culture, 1966) and again in *Brakhage Scrapbook* (1982), films of this type are not abundant. Part of the problem lies in the gauge of the film most often used. Experimental filmmakers most often have access to, and therefore most often use, 8mm and 16mm gauges. Due to the difficulty of working with small objects in the dark, the buckling of the film and the forces of gravity, very little control can be had with these smaller film gauges. Man Ray worked with 35mm film, which is not as accessible for independent filmmakers due to the unavailability of equipment. Most film co-operatives do not have editing or projection equipment for this large format, and materials cost more than double the price for the same duration of film.

Another popular means of manipulating images is to use an optical printer. Some individual filmmakers and numerous film co-operatives have purchased or built these devices which can be used to reproduce film one frame at a time. Images can be step printed, sped up, slowed down, reversed, superimposed, reduced, enlarged and/or masked off. Colour and exposure can be altered. Many of David Rimmer's films, such as *Surfacing on the Thames* (1969), *Variations on a Cellophane Wrapper* (1970), and *Tiger* (1994) are products of extensive optical printing. *Surfacing* is essentially a short piece of film which Rimmer step printed so that it would take seven minutes to watch the

few seconds of original action. *Variations* is one of the best-known optically printed films. Rimmer distorted the same three-second piece of film over and over again, in dozens of ways. The film becomes hypnotic to watch due to its repetition of motion, flickering of colours and alternation between positive and negative. *Tiger* has Rimmer combining a variety of film images onto different parts of the frame, leading your eye around and around, like a tiger trapped in a cage.

While there are commercial optical printing services available, their rates are inhibitive to most experimental filmmakers. Those filmmakers who have access to an optical printer without having to pay large hourly rates can potentially make complex, layered films. Sometimes the cost of these films can be reduced by being produced without cuts on a single roll of film. Akin to animation, the greatest expense in optical printing is the filmmaker's time. Both forms are the artificial creation of motion through frame-by-frame cinematography.

One may sometimes observe the resourcefulness of a filmmaker by the way he or she might use anything that is available for free, from a camera or a studio to a dolly or a car brace, from an exotic location to an interesting face. Spyro Egarhos's wide screen film *1980 Volare* (1987) was inspired and constructed around the chance event that put an anamorphic projector lens into the filmmaker's hands. He constructed an elaborate mechanism to suspend the anamorphic lens in front of the camera lens. Egarhos produced this film primarily to prove he could do it. The result was a beautiful, and somewhat amusing, wide screen film featuring time lapse images of the filmmaker's car.

The necessary services which often amount to a sizable portion of an independent filmmaker's budget include labour, laboratory film processing, negative conforming (or cutting when the negative of a film is carefully cut to conform to the editing done on the workprint) and sound mixing.

When seeking to reduce production costs, the easiest course of action for most experimental filmmakers is not to pay anybody who works on, or appears in, their films. They use friends, relatives, pets, or inanimate objects as cast and crew. The drawbacks of not paying a crew are that the filmmaker may not be able to make strong demands on the crew's time, and cannot always count on their loyalty to the project for the duration of a lengthy production. However, film students and film co-operative members are often very skilled and willing to work to gain further experience or just for the joy of making movies.

With actors, loyalty is not always as great a problem because theatre students or other non- or semi-professionals are often interested in appearing on the screen for professional reasons of their own. However, once shooting has begun with one particular actor, the low budget filmmaker can rarely afford the additional film costs of recasting and re-shooting if that actor does not prove to be the best choice for the role. American filmmaker George Kuchar gives some humorous advice to filmmakers in such situations.

> As for acting, well, if they stink just have the person stand around in a stylized pose. ... if they really are awful, there can always be a sudden plot twist featuring a hit-and-run accident, a freak bolt of lightning, a

carelessly flung banana peel.[58]

A low budget filmmaker must be careful about treating his or her grand vision as too precious. Every film runs into problems during production, so a film must be allowed to change and evolve during its creation. The less a filmmaker will bend, the more the film is likely to cost and the less probable it is that it will ever make it to the screen at all.

When looking to avoid costs from professional film labs, a number of ideas must be considered. Answer printing and release printing are quite expensive and are billed by the foot. All things being equal, a ten-minute film will cost twice as much as a five-minute film. The trend by the minimal movement in the 1970s was to make films very long. Under the weight of economic necessity, this trend has collapsed.

For those who wish to avoid the need for chemical processes at film labs, there are a few obvious approaches. First, a filmmaker can avoid loading a camera and still make films with found film or drawn or scratch animation as described above. One can also film images in the traditional ways, with a camera, and then process the film oneself. There are small tanks that can be used to process about 50 feet of 16mm black and white film with some consistency. Hand processing within bathtubs or buckets is a popular means as well. Gary Popovich and Carl Brown, both of Toronto, are both well known for the hand processing of film. While Brown conducts alterations in his chemistry to create unusual effects, Popovich is better known for his cheap and dirty processing.

In the 1970s, there was an abundance of small cine processors in every city with a television station. These were needed to process reversal film for newscasts. In the early 1980s, this procedure was replaced by the more cost-effective electronic news gathering done with video cameras. Therefore many of these cine-processors were sold or destroyed. It is still possible that an artist might gain access to one of these discarded machines. For example, LIFT (Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto film co-operative) has acquired a modest sized film processor which volunteers are currently researching the viability of operating. However, most of these machines have been sitting in disrepair for many years and would take considerable work to restore. Because of the volume of chemistry needed, these machines are also expensive to use. Such a venture would be of benefit to a filmmaker only if he or she (or they) were to be shooting a large amount of film. Coming across a film processing machine and having the knowledge to run it and the space to put it is not a possible option for most filmmakers. Therefore, unless one is happy with the non-standard results produced by processing black and white film in one's bathtub, film must be processed at a professional lab.

Negative cutting is usually done by a professional neg cutter. However, this task can be accomplished by the filmmaker. The process is often intimidating to people as it requires establishing a dust free environment and that the person doing the job be organized and precise. Traditionally the job is done with a hot cement splicer, a tool no longer common outside of labs and neg cutting. A common guillotine tape splicer

[58] Kuchar, George "Tips on Directing," *Wide Angle*, Ohio University, vol 14, nos 3&4, 1994, page 13.

can be used if a hot splicer is not available. However, if tape is used, the invisibility of the splices which is guaranteed by A/B roll editing is negated.

Depending upon the equipment available to a filmmaker, it is often cheaper to record sound than it is to shoot film. A filmmaker may be able to make an interesting sound track which can convey the desired message at a very low cost. Even if a sound mix is not affordable, a cleverly edited sound track could be assembled on a single track so as to avoid any mixing. However, it should be kept in mind that it is most often less expensive to make a silent film than a sound film, that is assuming the sound film has images along with it (not everyone wants to remake *White Museum*). A silent film has nothing to rely upon except its own images so all the more care needs to be taken with its visual construction.

There are musicians and other sound technicians, producers or artists, who may wish to collaborate on the soundtrack of a film project. In this way, very complex, professional soundtracks might be created at no expense to the filmmaker. Sometimes a track of sound can be created by the filmmaker that does not require an expensive sound mix. In either of these cases, the process of marrying the sound to the film via an optical sound track (where an optical soundtrack is made and the image of it is exposed onto the edge of release prints of the film) will still cost money (about $150 per ten minutes).

Norman McLaren drew sound tracks with ink onto the edge of the film. This creates, with practice, a series of buzzes, bumps and clicks. However, as with drawn-on film animation or found film described above, the sound track would be in its original state and would have to undergo a reproduction stage if more than a few screenings were desired.

Looking in general at the three strains of Avant-garde filmmaking[59] in terms of budget costs, assemblage is the least costly because found footage is often free. Animation and optical printing are often produced at a near one-to-one ratio. Being the shortest on average, animation and optical printing require fewer lab costs and, because much of the editing is usually done in camera, require only a minimal amount of conforming by a neg cutter. Minimal films also often do not require negative cutting but have a tradition of being longer than other types of experimental films so may have greater lab expenditures. Poetic films can be long or short. They often, but not always, require the largest shooting ratio as well as the highest number of cuts in the film.

By hiring professional performers, crews and/or set and costume designers, an experimental film can cost as much as any mainstream film. The Canada Council traditionally has favoured experimental film in its funding. However, even the largest Canada Council grants ($60,000) do not compare to the low-budget mainstream films which find funding through broadcasters, Telefilm and provincial film development corporations. Due to the limited possibilities of any experimental film earning more than a minimal profit, larger funding sources are unattainable.

Keeping all of this information in mind, I set out to make my film, which from the start I had entitled *Doubt*.

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[59] Poetic, minimal/structural and assemblage, as defined by James Peterson in *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order*.

Chapter 2.2

How and Why I Made the Film *Doubt*

I suppose I've just never been very comfortable asking for things. I have always attempted to make do with what I have or what is offered to me. This is even more so when I am making my films. As a result, and without realizing it, I have committed myself to the exploration of low budget filmmaking techniques. With this thesis, I have attempted to focus all I have learned about experimental filmmaking practices, aesthetics and history into one film.

I began thinking about the film *Doubt* after living in Toronto for a couple of months. My first visualizations of it were on formal levels. I imagined the look of the hand processed, black and white material which would lead the spectator through a series of escapades from a sparse rural setting to the chaos of urban life. However, as my research progressed during the summer of 1995, I decided to encompass the three distinct strains (as defined by Peterson) into my film in equal parts. The film became a pastiche of film styles which I intended would both stand on its own as well as demonstrate the range of filmmaking approaches I've been discussing in this thesis.

The original story followed one character, a slime mold which was born out of the debris of the city and grew to overwhelm that city. However, that vision changed the longer I lived in Toronto. The city began to seem alive and I wanted to use it as the subject of the film rather than the setting.

The story evolved into a three-part tale in which the world as we know it, a world made up of crowds of people, huge buildings, chaos and scientific tampering, comes into being. The first part features a young man who represents the creator. He awakens to find himself in a world which is interesting to him, but also very lonely. It is a world without rules, a world of dreams. He decides to change it, so he creates a shovel and begins to transform his surroundings. This part is shot in a variety of styles, all associated with poetic style filmmaking.

The second part of the film represents the process of transformation of a new world. Images of a city are shrouded and fleeting. This section is done using a variety of minimal/structural film devices, particularly rephotography and hand processing. Narration which accompanies this scene begins as a self-referential discussion of itself, further emphasizing its own form. This narration evolves into a personal documentary as the speaker remembers nostalgically his first encounter with organized art in grade school.

The third part of the film represents the world which was created: chaotic and farcical. This section of the film is made in the assemblage style of filmmaking; primarily using found footage. I also shot some collage animation, created from images reproduced from nineteenth-century etchings. To lend unity to the film, portions of this third part are intercut into the SMPTE countdown leader before part one. This early placement of found footage, framed within clips of the trance characters flickering third eye, represent the creator character's dream or premonition of the world of the future, rather than the future's existence as portrayed in part three.

I feel that the element of dance is very important to my filmmaking. Although I am not a dancer, nor have I studied dance in any way, I like to treat my camerawork and my editing with a flow and rhythm which could be identified as dance-like. I enjoy improvising within predetermined parameters. I like to set the stage and then let the moment unfold. I throw myself into the moment and move with and within it. If I enjoy the act of improvisation, then it is my belief that my audience should also enjoy it. In the case of part one of this film, I often discussed the basic idea of a shot with my performer and then we just did the scene, each of us improvising our own art.

Enjoyment is very important to me. Film has always been about pleasure. It seems logical to me that someone has to gain pleasure from a film. The fewer the people who enjoy watching a film (because the pool of spectators is small) then the greater the importance that at least the filmmaker gain pleasure from the experience. In this regard, even without having anyone watch the film, I believe *Doubt* to be very successful. Whether the film has been running through the camera or between my fingers, I have loved this film. I have not brought hardship onto others in the film's creation. On this project, I have worked only with people who share the celebration of creating art with me.

The first section of the film *Doubt* was the most pre-planned. By the beginning of September, 1995, I had decided that I wanted to shoot a single dancer within the wooded area on the south-east edge of York campus. I had shot some super-8 film there the previous year and felt that the location had much more to offer than I had taken advantage of then. I advertised for a dancer and chose Robert Moore, a young man from Edmonton, 5'11" with experience in ballet and Russian dance. He answered my advertisement which announced that I was "Casting Doubt" and we hit it off right away.

Although I stated previously that, to keep budgets down, one should attempt not to pay performers but instead get friends, relatives or other movie star wannabes to be in the film for free, I also feel that it is a sign of respect to pay a person for working in their chosen field. As I intended to have only one performer in my film, I chose to pay him a token amount for his day. There is also the legal factor which I have not previously worried about, that a gift is not contractually binding. If a person gives you something as a gift, (and that could include the right to use a person's image in a film), that person can reconsider this decision later and rescind the favour. A release form with an exchange of money written into it is a preferred way to bind a performance agreement. This I did with Rob Moore.

The shoot took place shortly before Halloween, taking only one afternoon to film. The morning was cold and cloudy so I put off beginning until noon. While the sun did come out from behind the clouds once or twice, the cloud cover was generally thick, making exposure difficult. From necessity, I undercranked a number of shots, shooting fewer frames per second and thus allowing a longer exposure time for each frame. The performer, once I'd made him aware of the undercranking procedure, simply slowed down his movements by the appropriate amount to maintain the illusion of regular speed in the final film.

I used York University equipment exclusively. I believe that any artist should always try to make the best of what is at hand. For cameras I used both a CP16 and a

Bolex. Both of these cameras are suitable for hand held shooting. The Bolex is more versatile for many of the effects which I performed in the film but, since it can shoot only twenty-four-second takes, was unable to produce the longer takes I also desired. The CP16 allowed me to shoot longer takes and also had the advantage of holding a 400-foot roll of film. The Bolex will hold only 100 feet of film, so time-consuming roll changes would have to occur if I used it extensively. Therefore, the bulk of the action was shot with the CP16 and the effects shots were captured with the Bolex. Although I chose both cameras for their hand held capability, I also intended to use the tripod, which was the only other piece of York equipment I brought to the location. In anticipation of low angle shots, I constructed what I will call a "low hat," which is simply a piece of two-inch by six-inch by twelve-inch wood with a bolt of appropriate threading drilled through it to screw into a camera. This allowed me to set the camera directly down on the ground without any need for a tripod, a tripod head, or a high hat (a hat-shaped mount which allows the tripod head and camera to be mounted six inches from the ground). Although lacking in versatility, this wooden mount is virtually costless and can be easily carried, kept in the trunk of a car and be modified into a book shelf in the off season. As I do not own a hand held light meter, I calculate exposures based on the readings in my still camera (a fifteen-year-old Canon AE1 which I bought used for less than the cost of a used Seconic light meter). I can quickly translate the readings from the still camera to choose an accurate exposure with the film camera. This way, I was also able to remind myself to take production stills regularly while shooting.

My crew consisted of myself as director and cinematographer and Margaret Bessai as every other role. She took production stills, assisted with the props, carried gear, and generally assisted in dozens of other essential ways.

All acts of creation start with a dream. The short clips of found footage and collage animation intercut between the SMPTE countdown are glimpses of the world which comes into being later in the film. The soundtrack during these clips is made up of two elements, the first being the sound of waves rolling up on the shore, the sea being the source of life. The second soundtrack element is a male voice discussing issues regarding children and their development. The words set up the scenario as being about the beginning of life, while the SMPTE countdown reminds the spectator that the film has not yet begun.

I wanted the narrative to begin with flash frames associated with the head of a roll. These red streaks are the result of light hitting the film while the camera is open and being loaded. Brakhage used these flashes at the beginning of his mythotropic *Dog Star Man* (1961-64) to denote the creation of his universe. I use it for the same reason. Just as Prometheus triggered the beginning of Greek society by giving its people fire, my universe begins with illumination from the projector bulb. First there was SMPTE countdown leader, and then there was light. To make a comment on the universe of the motion picture being ever preceded by the countdown leader (the first frame is never really the beginning) I shot as my first image the number "2." It was the same number "2" of which I had previously shot a positive/negative strobing image. I brought one of these "2's" to the location and filmed it with the CP16 as my first shot. I then quickly opened the door of the body of the CP16 camera and allowed approximately one foot of footage to be light damaged. I knew that not all of the image

would be destroyed, that part of it would still remain. Next I filmed my performer in his first position—lying on the ground, asleep with only darkness behind him. After a few-second-long shot with the camera firmly mounted to my wooden "low hat," I stopped filming. While Margaret quickly removed the length of black cloth from behind my sleeping subject, I opened the camera door once again, partially exposing another section of film. I then continued filming so that his background would be transformed to that of the woods.

Immediately following the waking of the trance character, I filmed the shot in which the audience sees him rise up from the ground and walk out of shot. However, to emphasise the dream-like element historically coded into trance film, I filmed the sequence backwards. Instead of rising and walking forward, I had the performer walk backwards through the woods and then lie down into the beginning position. So as not to bring additional optical printing expenses upon myself in post production (York University does not have an optical printer of any kind so I would have had to rent one commercially) I instead filmed the shot with the camera positioned upside down. It is then a simple act to turn the piece of film around so that it will run backwards instead of forwards. By using double-perforated film, the image could retain the same left/right screen directions and the emulsion of the negative would remain consistent with the rest of the film. The only drawback is in the workprinting. As laboratories no longer use double perforated workprint, the cutting copy of the shot is left/right reversed and the emulsion is on the wrong side. This affects nothing critical in the post-production of the film and will be corrected in the negative conforming. Such backwards cinematography can be seen in many films such as Sidney Peterson's *The Cage* (1947), Hans Richter's *Ghosts Before Breakfast* (1927) or Wrik Mead's *Gravity* (1991). More recently, the reversal or alteration of the linearity of time in a film is often controlled by an optical printer, reproducing the images frame by frame to suit the filmmaker. Examples of this latter procedure include numerous works by David Rimmer, such as *Tiger* (1994) or Francois Miron's *The Evil Surprise* (1994).

A large section of the dramatic action was carefully planned and storyboarded ahead of time. The character's approach to the window, peering through it, seeing himself and the subsequent repeating of the action, is in direct reference to Maya Deren's *Meshes in the Afternoon* (1942). The window was purchased from a supplier of used building supplies a week before shooting. While seeking out this prop, the film was further altered by improvisational shopping. Happy Harry's Used Salvage had a number of ceramic hands (rubber glove molds) for which we negotiated a price under ten dollars. As a result, instead of picking a flower as Deren did in *Meshes*, my character picks a hand. I felt, as soon as I saw these gleaming objects, that they would be perfect surrealist objects to represent my hand in his world, that moment of decision when the character appears to have free will but in fact is being guided by a force beyond him.

I alternated between using the CP16 and the Bolex, choosing the Bolex for its ability to take single frames, to start and stop quickly, and to allow film to be rewound inside the camera.

By disengaging the motor and inserting a small rewind crank, a Bolex camera can be easily rewound so that a second image can be superimposed on top of the first. I did this to signify the escalating fragmentation of the trance figure, following his watch-

ing of himself. With the Bolex locked down to a tripod, I filmed the performer dancing within a large open area of the woods three times, rewinding between each. The result was three ghostly dancers, all moving in the same frame. By using the dense trees as a backdrop, any alterations in registration which may have resulted from the camera moving between shots were rendered invisible.

The Bolex is an attractive camera to animators as it is designed to accommodate controlled single frame exposures. I used the pixelation style of animating as part of the vision the trance figure has at the peak of his maddened state after tearing out his own eyes. I shot single frames while hand holding the camera, moving it along the forest floor to simulate the character's urge to search and explore. The forest floor is covered with leaves due to the season. I chose to wait until fall to shoot so that the world would be in this magical stage of transformation and symbolic decline.

While battery-powered cameras tend to pick up speed or come to a stop at a slow rate, over three to six frames, a spring-wound camera like the Bolex will tend to abruptly start and stop without leaving those three to six improperly exposed flash frames. I used this feature to construct some scenes edited in-camera. This was especially useful in my attempt to simulate the three to four frame shots Brakhage utilizes in his highly reflexive sequences. This I did to follow the action of my performer as he acquires a shovel (I have the shovel appear in his hands from nowhere in mid shot—conjured from the air) and as he begins to dig a hole. The result is more akin to a rapid slide show than a moving image as the figure seemingly strobes his way through the directed actions. By constructing the scene this way, I hoped to accentuate the manic urgency of the character towards his goal. The segment is linear yet disjointed, simulating the reliving of a memory. Many filmmakers use the in-camera editing abilities of spring-wound 16mm cameras. Spyro Egarhos's film *Four Shots* (1988) consisted of four beautifully composed colour images, each revolving around a single theme. The shots were made in sequence and as no sound was added, the work print was also the release print. On super-8, this approach is even more desirable due to the difficulty in editing this small gauge of film. Most super-8 filmmakers edit as much of their film in-camera as possible.

The only costume I supplied to the performer was a white lab coat. This was one of the only visible signifiers which defines his character: he is male and he is a doctor or a scientist. Although it may not be apparent until the third part of the film, the trance character, alone in nature, sets in motion the creation of the world as we live in it today. Even with the foreshadowing dream clips in the opening leader, the spectator is never told if the character knows what processes are being set into motion. While the character may be interpreted as being a god, the fallen angel, the male ego, a European coloniser, the human species or progress, he is certainly not just a man. The contrast of this person in a clean white lab coat against the backdrop of the untamed forest codifies him as a symbolic or mythical figure. With this interpretation, the film falls under the sub-genre of mythopoeic film,[60] a poetic style film which takes as its framework or subject matter, a myth or legend.

Props also remained minimal; there were only four. The spade was borrowed at no cost. The black cloth used in the first scene was fortuitously located at an affordable

[60] Sitney, P.Adams. *Visionary Film*, page 173.

price at the used building supply company where I acquired the window. The window would be lodged into the branches of a tree for the trance character to look through. A window is one of the simplest devices to represent looking. Although we as spectators can assume that the character can always *see*, it is not until he peers through something, in this case a window, that we can understand that he is *looking*. This is a traditional dramatic convention often subverted in many early Avant-garde films. By twisting the logic in editing, an audience which is well versed in the traditions of dramatic film structure is led to believe that the character is looking at himself through the window.

The action which we, and the character, see through the window is the act of the character picking up the ceramic hand. I intended this object to be a symbol of the mechanization of "man's" labour. The hand is an important human attribute. It is shown to be growing out of the ground like a plant, just as humankind sprang from the earth. However, the hand is clearly artificial and may be more akin to the inhuman, heartless robots created by men in such films as *Metropolis* (1926). It is at once a symbol of humankind and of inhuman mechanization.

This action of picking up the hand is repeated three times, each time performed and filmed in a progressively looser, more expressive style. The performer makes larger, more exaggerated gestures as the takes progress. Similarly, the camera remains static in the first version, pans and tilts from the tripod on the second take, and is removed from the tripod and hand held in the last take. I maintained the illusion of dramatic action by regularly cutting back to the trance character looking through the glass.

By repeating the action three times, I introduce the fragmentation of the trance character. He has been divided into three separate non-corporeal parts, as seen in the superimposing scenes described above.

Nature, in the form of the trees, is at first a curiosity to the trance character as he looks at branches which lie on the forest floor. After his waking, the tree becomes a tool, another vantage point from which to look. It is a living thing and the man is driven to rise above it, to be upwardly mobile. However, the spade with its machine carved wooden handle appears in his hands as an easier tool. He uses this tool to begin the excavation of the woods, of the Eve-less garden, to construct what he will construct.

I shot scenes to re-enact, on a basic formal level, the scratching out of one's own eyes as Brakhage did in his early film *Reflections on Black* (1955). For presentation purposes, I have carefully scratched the emulsion from the eye area of the character's image on the workprint for this scene. I will eventually go into the negative and do the same to it. However, I will do this with the awareness that the resulting positive image will have blackness in the eyes rather than white. In fact, the negative scratches will go through all layers of the emulsion including the orange masking layer. I anticipate that this will cause this image area of the release prints to overexpose and thus show the eyes to be seemingly bleeding blackness. If the result is not satisfying, it will be too late to correct the negative so I will have to go into each release print and scratch the black eyes out so they become white again. As I do not expect to strike more than a handful of prints, this will not be difficult.

Using a loupe and a needle point scratching tool of my own design, I carefully scratched the exact area of the character's eyes. Often I scratched areas beyond the eyes to create streams of beams flowing from/into his eyes, signifying the collecting of imagery by the subject. After a few seconds of these shots, I cut in highly subjective images to represent his dreams or "closed eye vision" (as Brakhage would call it). The first of these images I used was a piece of pixelation I shot where the camera seemingly zooms across the forest floor at extremely high speeds. The second of these images was a piece of film I created with the procedure Man Ray pioneered and named "Rayograms" but I prefer to call photograms. I collected up a large bag full of leaves of various colours which had fallen from the trees (as this was late October). With a small flashlight, I took the leaves into a dark room (which happened to be my bathroom with a towel against the bottom of the door) and laid them on top of the yet unexposed film. I then shone the flashlight on the film so that the shadows of the leaves would be imprinted onto the film. The film was a colour negative stock, just as was the film I shot for the rest of that scene. I had it processed and workprinted. A small portion of it is used for this scene.

I shot only one take for each scheduled shot, with one exception. When the performer was picking up the ceramic hand, he moved out of his framing in a very awkward way and I insisted on a second take. I did use a piece of that failed take to create a jump cut in the scene, emphasising the disturbances in time and motion.

Based on the edge codes I logged in post production, I exposed 407 feet of film for this scene. The length of the cut scene is 250 feet. This gives me a shooting ratio of 8:5. The remainder of the footage has been put aside for my use in future films.

I edited the footage without sound, following the storyboards quite closely. Only the improvised segment of tree climbing required editing without a blueprint. I feel that cutting film images without sound allows the creation of a visual rhythm; if a film has a satisfying pacing and flow when it is silent, then the sound which is added can all be directed towards flavouring the film, spicing it up with additional amusement and/or information, instead of being needed to create a rhythm where one did not exist.

The soundtrack for part one is entirely constructed from pre-recorded sound effects. Copyright-free recordings of sound for use in films are common. Many of these recordings are very artificial sounding, and these are the ones I sought out. I wished to construct a very unnatural sounding world to counterpoint the natural surroundings in which the action takes place. The sound effects are in sync with the action, that is to say that when the character performs an action that should be accompanied by a sound, then a sound effect is there. However, the effect is rarely the appropriate effect. In doing this, I am emphasising the idea that the world in which the character is interacting is an artificial creation. This will foreshadow the character's role as a creator of the next stage of the world.

The second part of *Doubt* has been created in a minimal/structural film style. The images upon which it is based were shot on two separate occasions in late fall, 1995, in downtown Toronto on black and white film. These images contain no actors but are primarily composed of buildings and street scenes. In keeping with a long-standing Saskatchewan tradition, I shot most of the film from my car. It was my intention to hand process all of the film for this section.

The story element I am conveying in this part is minimal. The creator had begun a process by digging into the ground, removing its surface, at the end of part one. Now that process is in full swing. Surfaces are being stripped away to create/reveal the new world underneath it. That this new world, seemingly full of life, is beneath the surface rather than above it, implies that it is a hidden world, a world of the dead.

I purchased a batch (minimum order of 2400 feet) of high contrast black and white optical soundtrack film stock. The estimated ASA rating of this stock is nine. I chose to use this filmstock for two reasons. First, it is the cheapest film stock that Kodak sells (6.9 cents per foot). Secondly, it was suggested to me by Gary Popovich that this high contrast sound stock delivers more consistent results from hand processing than camera stocks do.

It became my intention to teach myself the intricacies of hand processing. I have begun doing this, but I expect to continue to learn new tricks and variations for years to come. While I do possess instructions from Popovich with which I could purchase and mix up my own chemistry, thus saving money, I used only the chemistry sold prepackaged in photography stores. While I embrace the idea of saving some money on these purchases, I was uncertain of the health risks involved in Popovich's formula. I had been conducting my processing in my own bathroom, which was the only room in my residence which contained drainage as well as a light tight environment. However, as that bathroom had poor air circulation, I chose to spend the extra money on the commercial chemistry which I was already familiar with.

The first roll of film I shot for this scene was not the optical film stock but was a seventy-foot short-end roll of Kodak Plus-X negative film. I purchased some black plastic buckets with lids in which to mix the chemistry and develop the film. Even though I intended to work in the dark, the black buckets would ensure that any light accidentally entering the room would not harm the film. Due to some miscalculations regarding time and temperature, I overdeveloped this batch of film. The result was film which was almost entirely black. Only for a few seconds did some vague shapes emerge. Otherwise the film appeared to be a complete failure.

Based on this failure, I chose to have my next batch of film, this time the optical stock, processed at the lab. This is the only footage in this section of the film which I used a commercial lab to develop.

The film of the Toronto city streets became the source material which I went on to reproduce. I copied the film by projecting it onto a small makeshift rear screen and filming it off of that surface. The copy would then be hand processed and copied again, resulting in highly degraded images due to generation loss.

During this stage of work, I also decided to make something out of the overdeveloped film I'd shot earlier. Black leader which can be purchased is made out of black plastic so cannot be scratched through. Film with thick black emulsion, such as what I had inadvertently created, was perfect for scratch animation. Laying out the film on my light table, I toiled many hours creating a variety of shapes, one transforming quickly into the next, on this piece of film.

After scratching on about twenty five feet of the film, I decided to apply some bleach to it. My previous experience with household bleach and film had been with colour film. When I applied a small amount of diluted bleach to colour film, the emulsion was quickly stripped off. However, I discovered that black and white

emulsion is more resilient than colour. Even when applying undiluted bleach with a cotton swab, only a portion of the emulsion was removed. To my surprise, I could see the original exposed image perfectly clearly where I had applied bleach. I continued this bleaching procedure, a few frames at a time, over the course of two days. I felt like an archaeologist, peeling away the surface, layer by layer, to reveal the fragile treasures beneath.

The scratched images which made up the beginning of the bleached roll remain a part of this section. I rephotographed this roll of film along with the other footage.

Inspired by *Visions* (1992) by Gariné Torossian, I glued super-8 film frames to parts of the 16mm film. These black and white super-8 images are from outtakes of my film *Crave* which I made at York in 1994. I used acrylic heavy gel medium to affix the two films together. This gel medium dries quickly and the results are flexible and transparent.

The soundtrack of this minimal/structural section of the film consists of two primary tracks. The first track contains only the sound of a movie projector running. The second track begins in silence. Footsteps begin as a person walks across a floor and stops. There are some clicking noises as the buttons of a telephone answering machine are pushed. We then hear a number of fragments of messages, each one cut off by the person playing the tape as he (I) fast forwards from one message to the next. Finally, one whole message is heard, a woman saying simply "Hi. It's me. Can you call me back?." We hear the quick dialling of a phone and then one side of a telephone conversation. It is my voice, calling back the woman on the machine. I say that I have been watching a film, and I go on to give a synopsis of what has transpired thus far [see appendix B].

By discussing the film on its own soundtrack, I am able to draw further attention to the formal aspects of the film. As I point out that the images are not as important as the grain and the mutilations in the emulsion, the spectators are drawn to look at the emulsion. Furthermore, my playing of the role of the uncertain spectator who is making guesses about what the film is about will free the real spectators from depending on the privileged viewpoint of the author and instead allow them to develop their own interpretations of the film.

Images of the sea recur throughout *Doubt*. While at the beginning of part two the shoreline represents the source of life, at the end of part three, it refers to the beach where refuse of our society comes to rest. Like beachcombing, I have kept my eyes open for years, picking up bits and pieces of footage from other films that for one reason or another have interested me. Many of them are represented in this assemblage style section of *Doubt*.

A large part of this section is taken up by found footage. Some of the images I've included are from films by people I know who have given me permission to use the clip. Other images are from more distant or obscure sources.

Due to the fact that I do not know the title or maker of all of the clips I am using, having collected them over a lengthy period of time, it will not be possible to credit all of the sources. Traditionally, found footage filmmakers have made little or no effort to credit the original users of their images. The research and expenditure it would require to reference and purchase all of the elements would put this style of filmmak-

ing out of the range of the experimental filmmaker. I do not believe it to be morally wrong to bring new life to old images.

I have also created some new material for this section. Using old 19th-century books, I have photocopied and cut out over five hundred images and used them in some short pieces of collage style animation. I shot one minute of animation, using a Bolex, a simple animation motor, and a makeshift stand in my own residence. Most of the images were of people. I wanted to draw further attention to the madness of the crowds inherent in these large cities we've built.

There are a number of small stories which I tell in part three. The section begins with an establishment of the environment, the modern world of horizontal and vertical lines. The transition between parts two and three takes place in shots of buildings. Part two shows shattered buildings, fragmented and only partially intact. In part three the buildings are new and full of life. Crowds of people fill the streets. However, under the politician's constant gaze, cheerleading majorettes are transformed into grim soldiers.

The next segment deals with traffic. People in western society are dependent upon cars. With a few shots, I make fun of the car culture by showing a car driving on two wheels and a police officer directing a hodgepodge of vehicles through city streets. When a car, seemingly directed by the police officer, crashes, it is the law officer and the authority he represents which is shown to be misguided.

Terrified by the chaos, a man is shown running frantically in the next segment, intercut with equally terrified pigs being ushered to their slaughter. Other panicked men include a boy in a cowboy hat, a chuckwagon driver and an animated merman. Only when holding the hand of a woman does the man finally calm down. Sexual metaphors fly as a man is then shown to be undressing. The image is intercut with a gazing woman, a rocket and go-go dancers. The dancers are rapidly intercut with a machine and begin to seem like machines themselves. Finally as a turn-of-the-century train enters the station, we see a bored crowd watching the film. This awareness of the audience brings us back to issues of spectatorship as the entire film ends.

The soundtrack is made up of advice to teenagers about their role in the future of their society. Taken from a 1960s educational recording on sex education, I have underplayed the discussions of sex and the biology of reproduction to instead use pieces in which the authoritative male narrator delivers highly moralizing advice about marriage and responsibility. Listening with 1990s "politically correct" ears, these lectures are ripe with campy humour. I further edited the narration to create peculiar gender crossing statements and logical discrepancies. In this way, the film became a critique of 1960s gender attitudes. However, this was not the primary reason for using this recording in the film. The soundtrack was added primarily to construct new meanings between the disparate visual components.

Not every spectator will draw the same story or see the same meanings in this section. Due to the nature of assemblage works, with images and sounds taken out of context and combined, multiple meanings can be interpreted from any of the shots, scenes, cuts or sound/picture combinations. I wish some of the connections to remain somewhat obscure.

> Obscurity in the meaning is not a virtue in itself: but there have always been poets and artists who have used obscurity to great effect, and the teasing gap between a viewer's first incomprehension and final understanding provides an arena for profound aesthetic pleasure.[61]

Each edit in the found footage was performed after much consideration. Many of the shots moved many times during the course of editing. Some were removed completely, even though they were shots which I liked very much and wanted to include. Each shot-to-shot relationship had a reason. For a shot-by-shot summary of this section of the film, see appendix C.

I entitled the film *Doubt* because of the uncertainty I have had at different stages of this process. In the beginning, my doubt was whether or not I made a wise decision in coming into the graduate program. Later doubts ranged from questioning my role as an artist, as a Canadian and even as a human being. I doubted the value of art in a world filled with poverty and war. Doubt is the most difficult barrier I regularly face. In my film, the character in the first part is given the knowledge that he is a part of something, that he has a role to play. He does not know if he should be active or inactive, a performer or a spectator. Only after blinding himself could he focus on his task. Blind persistence seems to be the only solution I can find to combating my doubt. Although I am not quick to admit such things, it has also been suggested that there may have been some *faith*, the opposite of *doubt*, which allowed me to overcome some of the difficulties I encountered in this venture.

The expenditures so far on the film *Doubt* have been under $700, not including numerous materials I gained free or brought into this film from previous projects. Post-production expenses will need to include an internegative for parts two and three as there exists no negative for those sections. I will be performing the sound mix and negative conforming myself, (see appendix E).

[61] Neat, Timothy. *Part Seen, Part Imagined*, citing Paul Valery, Canongate Press, Great Britain, 1994, page 21.

Appendix A

List of film production co-operatives in Canada

Atlantic Filmmakers' Co-op
P.O. Box 2043, Stn. M, Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3J 2Z1

Calgary Society of Independent Filmmakers (CSIF)
P.O. Box 30089, Stn. B, Calgary, Alberta, T2M 4N7

Cineworks
1131 Howe St. Ste 300, Vancouver, British Columbia, V6Z 2L7

Film and Video Art Society of Alberta (FAVA)
9722—102 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, T5K OX4

Independent Filmmakers' Co-op of Ottawa
2 Daly Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 6E2

Island Media Arts Co-op
P.O. Box 2726, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, C1A 8C3

Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto (LIFT)
37 Hanna Street, #301, Toronto, Ontario, M6K 1W8

Main Film
4067, boul. St Laurent #303, Montreal, Quebec, H2W 1Y7

New Brunswick Filmmakers' Co-op
P.O. Box 1537, Stn. A, Fredericton, New Brunswick, E3B 4Y1

Newfoundland Independent Filmmakers' Co-op (NIFCO)
40 Kings Road, St. John's, Newfoundland, A1C 3P5

Saskatchewan Filmpool Co-op
1100 Broad Street, Regina, Saskatchewan, S4N 1X8

Winnipeg Film Group
304—100 Arthur Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3B 1H3

Appendix B

Transcript of narration over minimal section of *Doubt*

[George Bessai, Margaret Bessai's brother]
I came to a really fast solution...
[Fumiko Kiyooka, filmmaker]
Hi, this is a message for Gerald Saul. It's Fumiko Kiy...
[Joanne McDonald, friend in Regina]
I guess I missed you which is too bad. Umm, big news...
[June Madeley, friend in Hamilton]
Hey, it's June, just calling for an update...
[Sean Taylor, nephew and Lori Taylor, Sister]
Hi. Apple. Yeah.
[Lynne Wood, York University Film Department]
But I just wanted you to know some very big news which will make you a very happy camper...
[John Porter, filmmaker]
Hi Gerald, it's John Porter at 1:44...
[Margaret Bessai]
Hi. It's me. Can you call me back.
[Gerald Saul]
Hi, its me. [pause] Not much, just watching this film. [pause].

Oh, its not really easy to explain. Umm, well, it started off with this guy asleep in the dark but suddenly he was asleep in the woods and he gets up and starts wandering around, like he's in some kind of dream or like he's never seen a tree or anything at all. So he pisses around for a couple minutes and he finds this hand, not a real hand, like from a mannequin or a robot or something. So then he finds this window.

No, it was just a window in a frame lodged into a tree, so he looks into it and he sees himself doing the same stuff he was doing just a moment before. It's like the window was trying to tell him something, it just keeps popping back up and haunting him, and so does that hand. Everything is just a fragment, like the hand is not a whole person and the window is not a whole house. It's like his world is only half built. I get this feeling that he has to make some big decision but there's no one to tell him what that decision is or what he should decide. He gets all confused and he's trying to make this decision so then you can see a few of him all at once all in the frame at the same time. He's just dancing around, I guess some kind of split personality thing, avoiding that decision. Well, he becomes one person again but he is still too confused so he scratches his own eyes out.

No, not all gory, he ends up with all these little lines on his face that have been added later and he goes all nuts seeing visions and things. There's this tree and he climbs it, sort of as if he needed to see more and more and he would do anything just to see more. I guess the film has a lot to do with how he is trying to see things but also that he's all alone so all he can see are variations of the same trees and things all the

time. The film starts getting really fast and he suddenly has this shovel and he starts digging a hole. Well then it starts getting a lot harder to explain.

Well, what's on now is this black and white stuff and sometimes I can see bits of images like buildings and things but it looks like its really old or something because the image is all eaten away and all these blotches and graininess get in the way of the picture. I was trying to see the streets and figure out where they were 'cause sometimes they were a bit familiar but as soon as I start to see what's going on, it goes all nuts again. The images I could see, I seem to see them over and over, like I was peering into a world of the past where nothing changes, its just dead and maybe you need a shovel to dig it up or bury it or I don't know what.

Yeah, it *was* really frustrating. But then I just decided to sit back and watch to see what would happen. I figured if they were going to make it so impossible for me to follow the story, maybe I wasn't supposed to be following the story. So this film is going on and I found myself just watching the blotches and the grain and the scratches and dirt. I got thinking about the film and how it is really just this strip of bendy plastic with these pictures on it. The pictures are just stuck on somehow but you could scratch them off or put more stuff on and still watch it. Remember when we were in kindergarten and you do crayon drawings and then you take paint and you smush it all over and it didn't matter if it was a picture of anything or not but it was just so much fun to do it and to look at it as it changes all the time? You can rub at the paint and find some more drawing or you can just leave the paint on because it's just as important and you can't even tell which is more important, the crayon or the paint but you're only in kindergarten so it doesn't worry you much. That's a bit of what this is about, about being a kid and making something that you are really proud of and showing it to everyone. "Look, look, I made a bunch of blotches and they are the best blotches I've ever done!."

In grade one they made us draw a picture of our house and our family. It was as if those blotches weren't good enough anymore. Whoever drew the best picture of their family with everyone smiling and holding hands got to clean out the paint jars in the sink at the back of the room. I got to do that once and I remember that when you pour the paint out onto the bottom of the sink it makes this huge pool of pure colour. Then you pour another jar out on top of that one and for a moment they don't mix and you feel like you're seeing something magic and only you get to see it that way at that time and you want to yell out, "Come here and look at the blotches I've made!" but you don't because you know the teacher would just take the job away from you and give it to someone else. So you just enjoy the paint all alone and then wash it all down the drain and its over.

Yeah, it was. Well, I'm going to watch the rest of this. Talk to you later.

Appendix C

Shot by shot summary of the found footage film in *Doubt*

One frame which reads "Picture Start" indicates that SMPTE leader is beginning. However, instead of the numbers, there appears a montage of modern buildings intercut with monkey cages. The formal connection of line and shape holds this first series together, although commentary on the similarity of our skyscrapers with monkey cages is implied. Initially silent, the sound of ocean surf rises.

The number "8" appears for one second followed by an extremely quick image of an eye, then the ocean, then the eye again. The narrator speaks during each of the assemblage sequences throughout the countdown as well as in section three of this film. For details on this recording and for a transcript of his words see appendix D. All of the sound fragments during the countdown refer to birth and the early stages of life.

The eye which appears here after the "8" recurs as one of the first images in part one. At that point the spectator should draw the conclusion that these assemblage pieces are being seen by the trance character's third eye, his dreaming mind. The ocean is also a reoccurring image, primarily as a representation of birth and beginning.

The number "7" in the countdown is followed by the image of a tree falling. Toilet paper moving along a conveyer belt shows us the end product of this environmental reaping. The conveyer belt is then intercut with marching soldiers, creating an association between the military, lifeless machines and disposable products of capitalism. A tower falls as an anti-empirical warning, all that rises also falls.

The "6" is followed by a crane swinging a car around, joined like an umbilical cord which is being discussed in the soundtrack. A car then crashes into a body of water, associating water and birth to technology and destruction.

"5" draws together a verbal description of a doctor slapping a newborn baby with images of a man filming two (collage animated) people boxing. Violence is introduced to us at an early age, as a means of survival (to allow our lungs to function) as well as entertainment (as with the man and his camera).

The last assemblage fragment before the main body of the film begins consists of a group of men with large blueprints (or perhaps battle-plans). They point and seem to direct a canon to be loaded onto a train. This series of shots continues the escalation of violence from tree cutting to car crashing to boxing to war. This is the end of the dream.

The assemblage style material continues after the minimal section of *Doubt*. The last shot of part two is a black and white, half torn down building. Part three begins with a colour shot of a new modern building. A montage of large buildings is followed by a huge crowd of people. This mass of bodies covers the road, leaving no room for cars even though parking signs are clearly evident. These shots establish the setting

of this world, that of an overcrowded yet technologically advanced society. The next number of sequences all make comments on the shortcomings of this society.

A shot of Brian Mulroney is intercut with collage animation of a tower of politician's heads forming. Powerful men climbing on the backs of others to reach the top eventually spell their own disaster as the tower falls.

A majorette's legs are intercut with those of marching soldiers'. This blurs the gap between violence and innocence.

A police officer directs traffic. After a car on two wheels heads towards the Arc de Triomphe, the officer waves an ox cart through then a speeding car which crashes into a barrier. A man, completely calm, pulls one hand free from his armload of sticks to point directions to someone unseen off-screen. A frenzy of speed begins as the film cuts between a running man, a racing chuckwagon, a running boy, and rampaging pigs. The intensity and purposefulness of the running implies that these people and animals are aware of a terrible wrong. There is fear and that fear can only be in the chaos that is the world.

With collage animation I constructed a man in a suit with the tail of a fish. This figure is both sexual as well as modern, the man who is a perfect pairing of an animal and a bureaucrat. This animation is followed by a couple holding hands and walking past some pillars. The column connects the next few shots in a formal way while thematically they are all tied by sex. The camera tilts down a rocket. A man, filling the frame in a similar position to the rocket, takes off his shirt. The camera pans across a Concorde jet while a woman stares intensely at an off-screen subject, whom we assume to be the man. The narration discusses the mild discomfort which may be overlooked because it is so wonderful to feel like a lady. Although the original "discomfort" in the narration was not referring to *sex*, put in the context of the phallic rocket and jet, that conclusion is unavoidable.

Amidst the interplay of the woman gazing at the man undressing, a shot of a bare-chested Christ being crucified appears. Since looking at a crucifix is normally not seen as sexual, this derails the power of the woman's gaze, putting her into the subservient role of worshipper.

The man's legs then become the legs of a go-go dancer. At a New York party, many dance. As the frame is blacked by someone's jacket, a mostly black, staged scene of café appears. As Chris Gallagher as the waiter exits, Marsha Herle cranes her neck to see what is happening off screen. What she sees is the go-go dancers. A quick shot of a machine is cut within the middle of these dancers' routine. Both the machine and the dancers seem to be situated in an open area, disconnected from their surroundings. The dancers begin to seem more and more mechanical as the sequence progresses.

An audience sits watching an event in a theatre. An old fashioned train steams its way into the station. The audience is unmoved and looking bored.

An animated image of a man frantically working at a desk while being surrounded by fish represents the way a person will dedicate all of their time to working while ignoring the unexpected pleasures which surround all of us. Not so for the man in the following shot who sits in his tub while another man helps him bath. The fish are our ancestors, we all come from the water, from the sea.

The closing of the vault ends the discussion of work and sex and technology, or does it? As the image returns to the stark but perfect rhythm of the waves upon the shore, a sudden flash of bikini-clad beach-goers appears. A final title card reads simply "fin."

Appendix D

Transcript of edited narration over assemblage style section of film *Doubt*

From "Sex education for children ages 9 to 14 and up" and "Sex education for young adults 10 to 16 years" (flip sides of the same vinyl recording), produced by the Family Guidance Bureau, Ottawa, Ontario, date unknown.

Gaps in the logic and flaws in the grammar in this section are due to my collaging of the narrators words in mid-sentence and is part of the humour and style of the scene.

Prelude

After "8" on countdown:

We will first review

After "7" on countdown:

When you were first born, your head was the largest part of your tiny body. Your skull basically has three bones which were not fully attached before birth. This means that they were probably squeezed together during birth.

After "6" on countdown:

had a cord attached to your body before you were born.

After "5" on countdown:

He holds the baby upside down and pats him to make him cry.

After "4" on countdown:

The baby sleeps most of the time and wakes only when he is hungry or uncomfortable. His only food will be milk and other fluids fed to him.

Part three

We will first review this wonder of nature and love. Because the father and mother love each other, and will be anxiously looking forward to the uphill stage in life which is often referred to as the age of adulthood. This is usually considered to be the time in life when you are stepping out of childhood and beginning to see adulthood within reach and yet realizing that it is not quite within your grasp. You may be experiencing many changes, both physically and mentally. Generally, it is the stage in life when there is an increase in curiosity, a change in personality and character and a complete switch in interests with a constant urge to come out on top, a winner, and you will. Boys and girls may decide to marry his mother when he grows up. This will vary and

some of your friends may surge ahead within three to five days. It is believed best to avoid chills and excessive exercise and to get at least a normal amount of sleep and rest. You too will first want to learn how to support a wife and family which look like little tadpoles with long swishy tails. At about eight years old, he will have dropped this idea. However, the delightful feeling of having become a lady will usually be so rewarding that the faint discomforts will often go almost unnoticed. The tail then falls off as it is no longer needed. If this does happen to you, have your parent consult the family doctor. Of course the society in which we live teaches us that a great deal more will be expected of you after you have completed your education and learned how to be a wife. A beard will have started and you will begin to feel more masculine and grown up which will enable you to attain a suitable job and meet the commitments to your wife and family. This will perhaps explain why some of your friends in the same age group have suddenly wandered from your group and found new interests. It is wise not to scream and shout too loudly, it may be accompanied by a delightful sensation. It is normal and there is no need to worry when it happens to you, when suddenly it snaps. You will also want a wife with a great deal of love and respect for you. A wife who will be a capable and dependable mother for your children, and she may dream of having some physical contact with a prince charming in her sleep. And this is how both you and I were born.

Appendix E

Budget for film production *Doubt*

Production:

high con stock from Kodak	$ 152.33
process colour negative	208.57
animation processing	57.50
chemicals	18.00
buckets to process film in	18.38
black and white; 200' process as reversal	41.40
edit supplies	25.00
props; window, hand, cloth,	20.00
audio tape	12.00
performer/dancer	50.00
TOTAL PRODUCTION COSTS	$ 602.68

Post production (projected, based on 800 foot length):

mag stock to mix onto	$ 60.00
black leader for neg cut	30.00
optical sound track	280.00
internegative (of 1/2 of film)	450.00
answer print	680.00
transfer to video	150.00
TOTAL PROJECTED POST-PRODUCTION COSTS	$1650.00
TOTAL	*$ 2252.68*

The colour film stock and 16mm magnetic tape was donated from other projects.

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Canadian Pacific, 10 min, 1974
Tiger, 5 min, 1995
Ripper, Velcrow
Don't Ever Leave Me Alone, 3 min, 1994
Sanguedolce, Steve
Everlast, 2 min, 1981
Sang Song, 2 min, 1991
Sweetblood, 13 min, 1993
Saul, Gerald
Crave, 5 min, 1994
Scavuzzo, Danny
End of the Century, 10 min, 1996
Schlaht, Robin
The People in Black, 9 min, 1992
Sons and Daughters, 27 min, 1994
Sepp, Peter
History of Law part 3, 1 min, 1992
Where Were We, 2 min, 1993-95
Serin, Guy
Just Words, 4 min, 1996
Sharits, Paul
T.O.U.C.H.I.N.G., 12 min, 1968
Smith, Harry
Early Abstractions, 24 min, 1941-57
Heaven and Earth Magic, 66 min, 1957-62
Smollich, Manfred
Instinct, 3.5 min, 1994
Snow, Michael
Wavelength, 45 min, 1967
Standard Time, 8 min, 1967
Back and Forth (←→), 50 min, 1969
Rameau's Nephew, 4.5 hours, 1974
SO IS THIS, 43 min, 1982
Seated Figures, 42 min, 1988
To Lavoisier; Who Died in Reign of Terror, 53 min, 1991

Steiner, Edie
Places to Stay, 20 min, 1991
Sternberg, Barbara
Opus 40, 15 min, 1979
At Present, 18 min, 1990
Beating, 64 min, 1995
Thorne, Kika
Discovery of Canada, 7 min, 1991-96
Division, 3 min, 1995
Spank, 3 min, 1995
Torossian, Gariné
Visions, 4 min, 1992
Girl From Moush, 6 min, 1993
Drowning in Flames, 22 min, 1994
Van Alstyna, Greg
Without, 6.5 min, 1991
Van Ingan, Sami
Hammu, 10 min, 1991
Vertov, Dzigi
Man with a Movie Camera, 65 min, 1928
Warhol, Andy
Sleep, 6 hours, 1963
Empire, 8 hours, 1963-64
Eat, 39 min, 1963
Vinyl, 64 min, 1967
Watt, Andrew
Soleils Couchants, 7 min, 1990
Ferry, 9 min, 1991
Wieland, Joyce
Patriotism I and II, 7 minutes 1964
Peggy's Blue Skylight, 11 min, 1965
Water Sark, 14 min, 1966
Handtinting, 5.5 min, 1967
1933, 4 min, 1967
Sailboat, 3 min, 1967
Cat Food, 13 min, 1967-68
Reason Over Passion, 50 min, 1968-69
Birds at Sunrise, 10 min, 1972
Rat Life and Diet in North America, 14 min, 1973
Solidarity, 11 min, 1973
Wihak, Mark
(stories from the) Land of Caine, 25 min, 1995
Wilkerson, Dawn
Dandelions, 6 min, 1995
Wilson, Julie
Upon Walking, 4 min, 1995
Woodrooffe, Allyson
Through the Green Fuse, 8 min, 1991