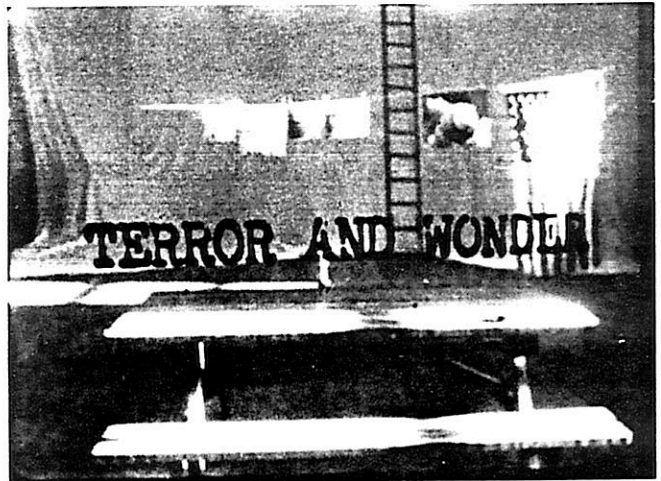


CONTRITION Richard Kerr extends and ennobles this tradition in a powerful representation of a culture on the brink of self - annihilation.

FROM
"HIDDEN CINEMA"
by MARTIN RUMSBY
© Saskatchewan Filmprod
1989



Frame Enlargement from THE LAST DAYS OF CONTRITION.

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The second programme in this series features films by the self-styled 'depressionist' filmmakers Gerald Saul and Brian Stockton, GER FILM and I CAN'T GO HOME by Gerald Saul and WHEAT SOUP, a collaboration between Saul and Stockton.



Frame Enlargement from GER FILM.

GER FILM and I CAN'T GO HOME are a couple of short playful animated films. Both are very informal. GER FILM is a film about its own making - the processes of its creation are revealed when we see the animators

hands in shot, placing images onto the animation table and commenting on the filmmaking process. Saul denies any autobiographical intent in the making of GER FILM telling that us that it is a film which resulted from his simply playing around with images and moving them around.

These two short films provide a good introduction to the main feature, Saul and Stockton's ambitious 'freeform depressionist drama' WHEAT SOUP - the first Saskatchewan produced feature length film.

WHEAT SOUP brings together a lot of the themes we have been discussing in this essay. The opening section THE AGORAPHOBIC, for example, presents a light-hearted look at nature, cabin fever, dependence on media, and the television 'window onto the world'. THE AGORAPHOBIC also introduces the motif of the anvil, which recurs throughout WHEAT SOUP, as a symbol of the apocalyptic "Great Flattening".

At the beginning of THE GREAT FLATTENING we see scenes, wide angle shots from a moving car, of Beverly Hills. These mute shots are accompanied by the sound of an anvil being struck, a foreboding of imminent disaster.

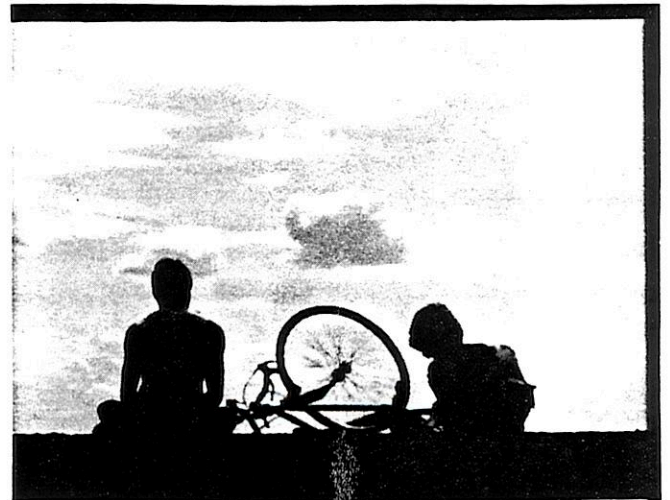
THE AGORAPHOBIC and THE GREAT FLATTENING segments set the stage for the post-apocalyptic quest of the last surviving wheat farmer, Sam, as he sets out, Farmer's Almanac in hand, to meet the people who buy his wheat.

WHEAT SOUP is set in the late Twenty-first Century, over a hundred years after 'The Great Flattening'. The prairie landscape is used as symbol of the (nuclear) wasteland. In their approach to the film Saul and Stockton have attempted to create a slow paced, prairie rhythmical flow in preference to following the conventions of narrative structure and timing practised by commercial filmmakers.

Journeying through the prairie landscape Sam encounters a variety of eccentrics, communes with a female God, befriends a wheat poacher and has an ambiguous relationship with a woman followed by a vision of 'The Great Flattening' which causes him to return to his farm with the reformed wheat poacher.

WHEAT SOUP presents a post-apocalyptic world of great simplicity and eccentricity. Wheat is the sole means of substance and basis for exchange, The Farmer's Almanac has replaced the Bible as the founding document of the new society, the anvil has replaced the cross as the Holy Symbol and God rejects religion.

WHEAT SOUP poses a lot more problems than it cares to solve, namely how will any of us survive the madness of technological society? Saul and Stockton seem to posit apathy and idleness as the correct response to our current moral and social crisis.



Frame Enlargement from WHEAT SOUP.