

# SUPER EIGHT

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MELBOURNE SUPER-8 FILM GROUP NO. 44, FEB 90

## LOOK

### FILMS AT THE LAST OPEN SCREENING

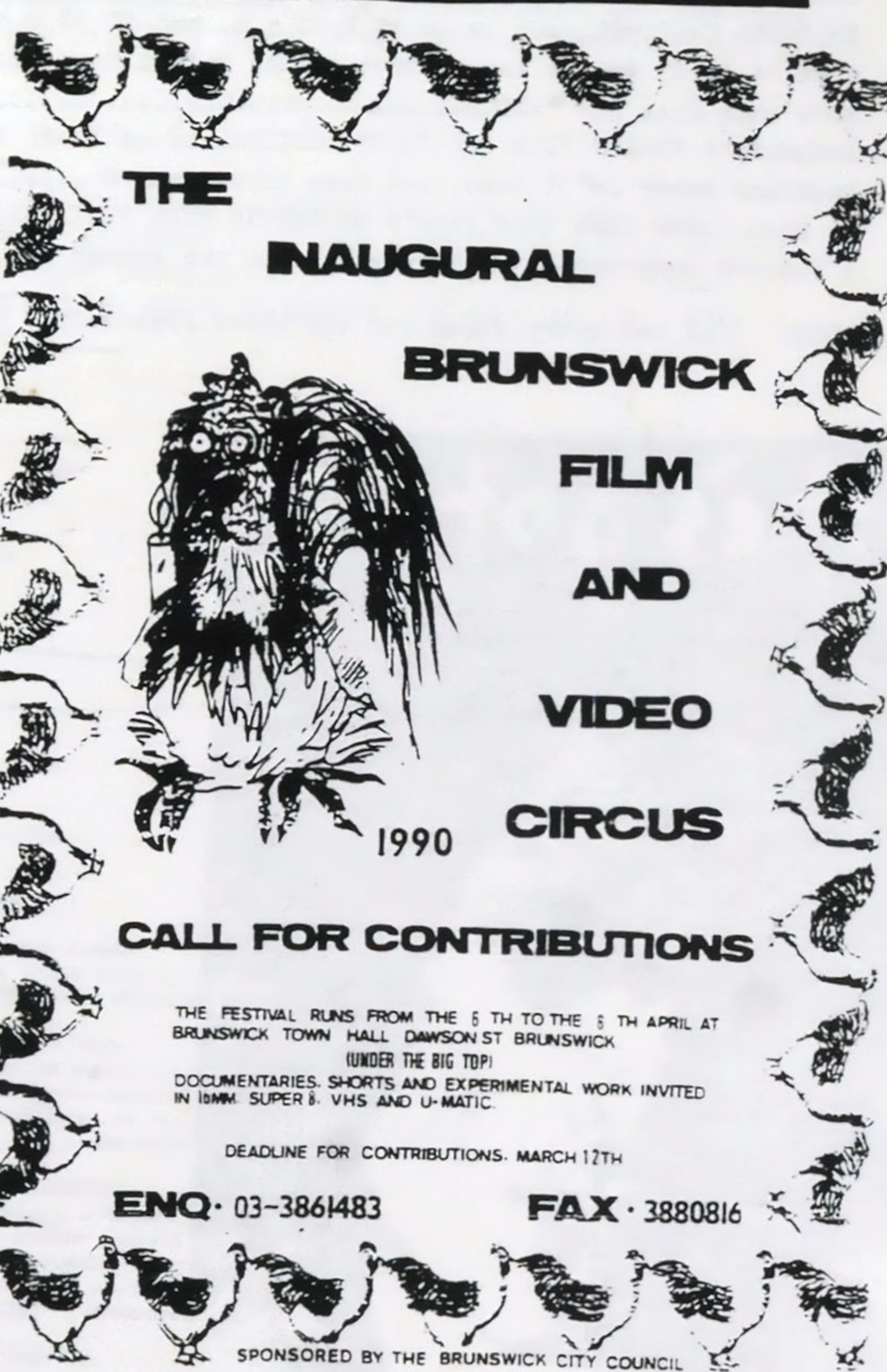
- ENTER FRAME, EXIT FRAME by Damien Grant
- THE GUITAR HERO by Laki Sideris
- ORIGINAL COPY by Mark C. Zenner
- HONEY by Bill Mousoulis
- RHYTHMS by John Jolley
- PANAROMICON by David Cox
- CHESS QUEST by Sandy Munro
- AUSTRALIAN BICENTENNIAL EXHIBITION by Ian Poppins

SARAH JOHNSON COMES BACK FROM OVERSEAS, AND THEN LEAVES AGAIN!

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

After four years dedicated service to the Melbourne Super-8 Film Group (i.e. since its inception), Sarah Johnson has decided to step off the committee. She feels she has given a lot of herself to the group (and she has), and that now she has to concentrate on the feature film she is hoping to produce soon. Good luck to her.

In the meantime, the committee has two new members, as voted in at the AGM in December. They are Nick Ostrovakis and Jennifer Pignataro.



**THE NAUGURAL BRUNSWICK FILM AND VIDEO CIRCUS 1990**

### CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

THE FESTIVAL RUNS FROM THE 6 TH TO THE 8 TH APRIL AT BRUNSWICK TOWN HALL DAWSON ST BRUNSWICK (UNDER THE BIG TOP)  
DOCUMENTARIES, SHORTS AND EXPERIMENTAL WORK INVITED IN 16MM, SUPER 8, VHS AND U-MATIC.

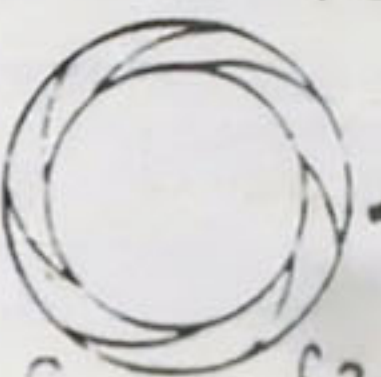
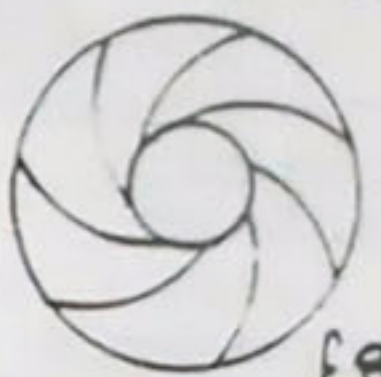
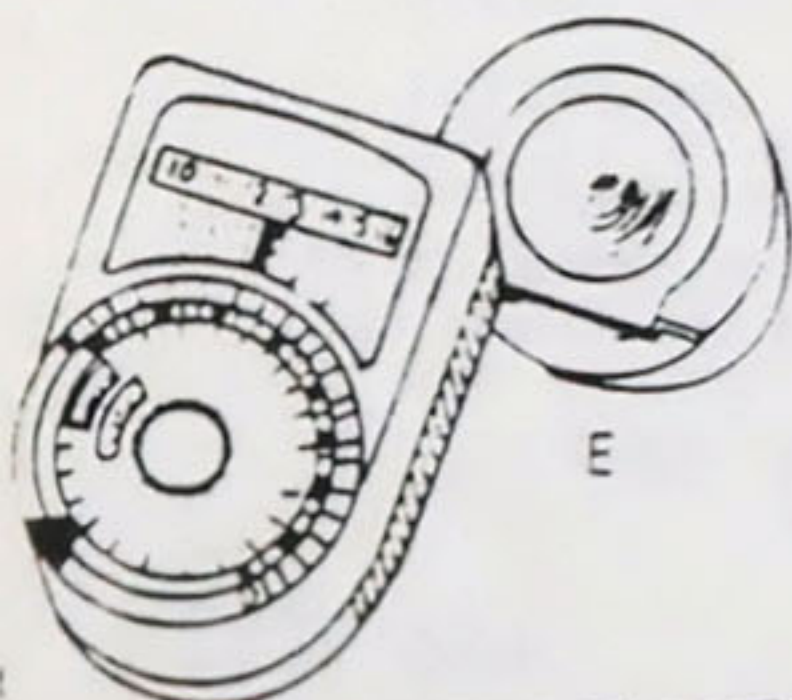
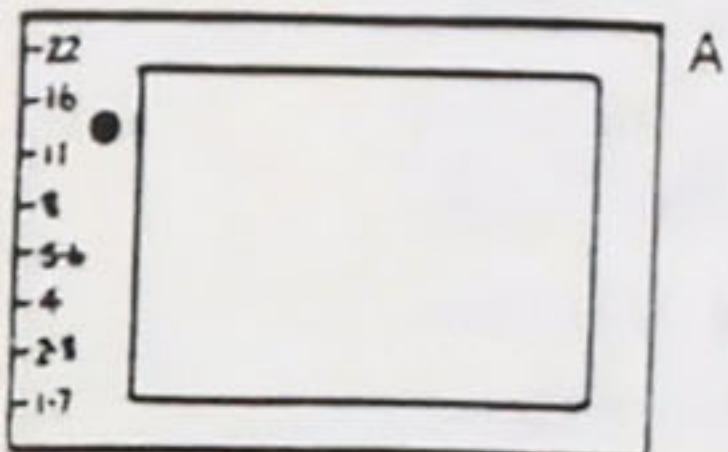
DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS, MARCH 12TH

ENQ · 03-3861483

FAX · 3880816

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from MARK LA ROSA



It's a shame that the '89 AGM sank into a discussion of the technicalities of camera equipment, frame blow up and the like. While this tech-head talk is good in that it informs people about the possibilities and limitations of particular pieces of equipment, it also has a negative effect of bolstering the myth of film-making as a tech-head only craft. With the help of automatic aperture and sound controls found on most Super-8 cameras, anyone can make a decent-looking film. So those of you who are thinking about making your first Super-8 film, don't be deterred by such alienating talk.



# NEWS OF THE WORLD

CLASS-Y

## ASSORTED NEWS

There is a Super-8 festival very shortly on at Mons, France.  
Deadline for entries is Feb. 20 .....

There will be a film (Super-8) component in 'FISHHOOKS', a  
performance illustrating life in St.Kilda. It is part of the  
St.Kilda festival, and is on at 9:00 p.m. and 10:30 p.m. nightly  
from 14 to 17 Feb at the Rotunda in the Catani Gardens. For  
more info ring 537 1980 .....

Adelaide's FRAMES FILM AND VIDEO FESTIVAL is on 14-21 September.  
Deadline entry is 15 June, and they take Super-8 .....

It also looks like this year's MELBOURNE FILM FESTIVAL will have  
a Super-8 component. Keep your ears to the ground .....

NOTE: Bill has entry forms for the above festivals. Talk to him.



You must  
learn,  
said the wise  
man.

Teach me, said  
the student.

No, you must learn.



# She's got it!



### MEDIA RELEASE

#### CALL FOR FILM AND VIDEO ART WORKS

Modern Image Makers Association (MIMA) extends an invitation to  
Australian artists working with film and/or video to submit works for  
inclusion in *EXPERIMENTA 1990*.

MIMA is an artist-based organisation, formed in 1986, which promotes  
and exhibits film and video art. Over the past few years, its exhibitions have  
included cinema screenings of experimental/avant garde films and videos as  
well as exhibitions of film/video performance and installation art in  
galleries.

*EXPERIMENTA* was first staged in 1988. It is a bi-annual event based in  
Melbourne involving the work of film/video artists Australia-wide.  
Activities included as part of *EXPERIMENTA* are cinema screenings, art  
gallery exhibitions, a seminar series and the publication of a substantial  
catalogue. There are also plans to stage a substantial tour of work from the  
exhibition in 1991.

If you have a film or video, or a performance or installation proposal  
that you would like to be considered for *EXPERIMENTA*, please contact MIMA  
for an exhibition application form. We will be happy to consider completed  
works, works in progress, or written proposals. MIMA intends to pay artist  
fees for all exhibited work and in some cases, to subsidise travel and  
accommodation for interstate artists.

The closing date for applications is March 31st 1990. Application  
forms are available by writing to:

Experimenta Manager  
Modern Image Makers Association (MIMA)  
GPO Box 2321V  
Melbourne 3001

Telephone enquiries can also be answered by ringing (03) 360 7692

MIMA is funded by the Australian Film Commission, Film Victoria and the  
Australia Council, the federal government's arts funding and advisory body.

*EXPERIMENTA* receives special additional project funding from  
the Victorian Ministry for the Arts.

650 7692



"It is only possible to comment on a film in reference to an adopted critical paradigm. Without this, it is impossible to defend a film from arbitrary criticism and impossible to justify a critique against an angry attack from a seething film-maker."

- Peter Schuller

"There are a lot of ways of talking; some people speak one language, some people speak another. I am simply sharing with other people my vision. Some people will accept it and some people will reject it. That's what happens to all of us, and that's all there is to it."

- Ed Emshwiller

"Every second is a discovery if you really try to understand things, you know? So what I try to do is to recreate the process of knowledge."

- Roberto Rossellini

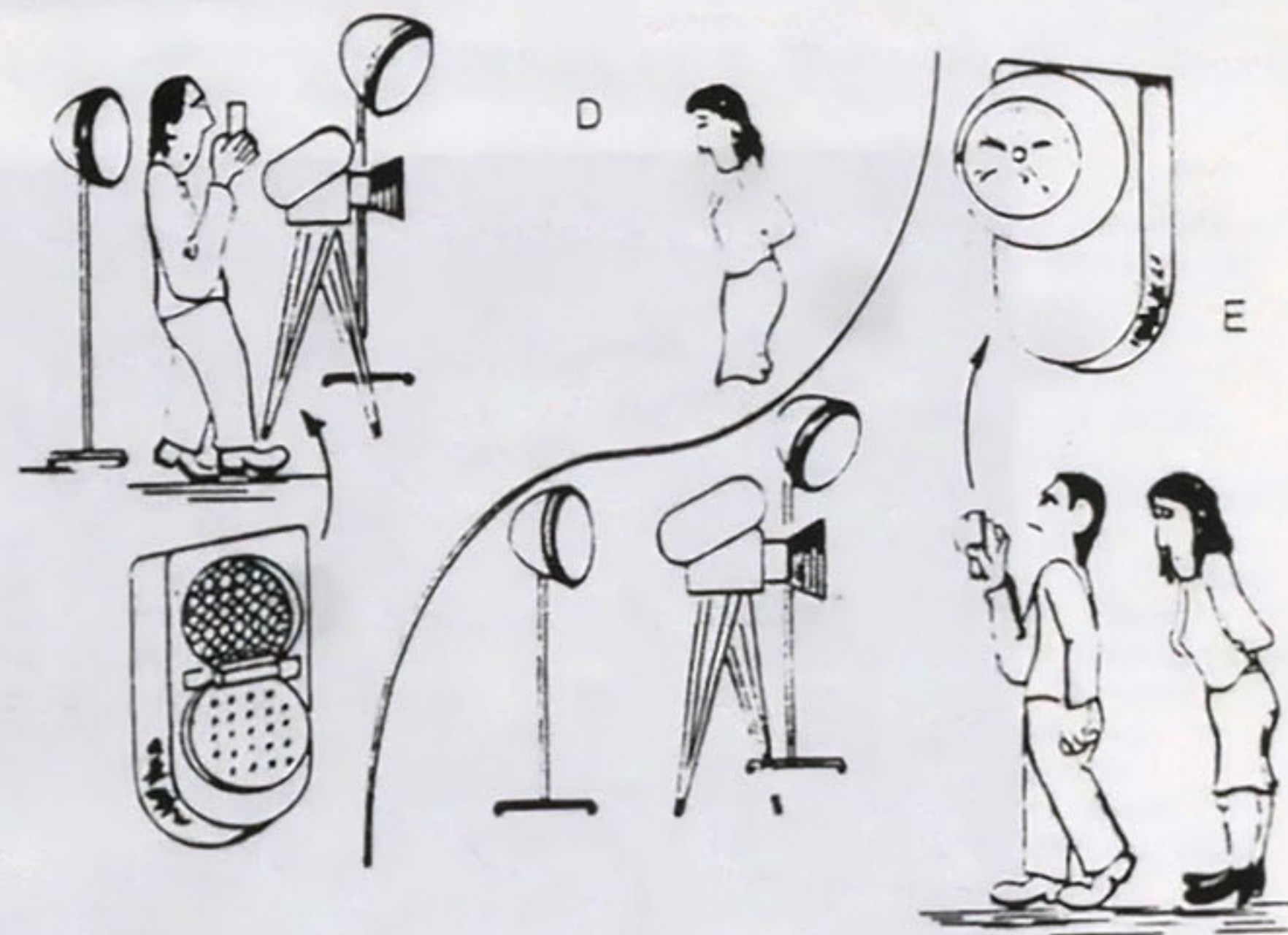
I have a dream ... of convergence. I dream of starting with and from nothing, and gaining the world. Rather than the reverse.

Let me explain.

What is anything? What is a book, a film, a word, a gesture, a decision? It is, ultimately, experiential, subjective, and singular. Yet there is always a tendency to objectify, to assume that it is the paradigm that comes first, with all action being secondary.

Sticking with cinema, we must acknowledge that not only is the making of a film a singular (subjective) experience, so is the reading of it. The problem with paradigms you see, is that they are reliant on a subjective perception of them. For example, the words "surreal comedy" invariably mean different things to different people. Paradigms are useful only as rough descriptive tools and/or starting points.

A film (or anything in life) is true and worthy only to the extent that it is felt to be (actual experience), not



thought to be (intellectual perception.) People usually have little strength of character, preferring to distrust and undermine individual experience in favor of generally accepted forms. And because these forms are individually perceived, you can imagine the mess!

But, despite my belief in pure subjectivity, I don't mean to advocate the

continued →



seemingly associated idea of ethical freedom (e.g. I believe in murder; that's fine. You don't believe in murder; that's also fine.) This article doesn't espouse any values - it looks at the process, the big picture. And, on the contrary, I believe subjectivity leads to ethical rigidity. It is logical that the only way we can know and understand others (humans) is by knowing ourselves (a human.) Subjectivity thus becomes, ultimately, objectivity. Remember, it is convergence (from the back door) that I'm interested in.

Socrates said he was wise because he knew nothing. That's how I feel. I love Rossellini because he says things like "I refuse to be a philosopher, I refuse to deliver messages. I am just a worker, no more than that. That is my moral position." I have the arrogance to say I have that kind of humility. In the dichotomy of discovery versus acceptance, I know which side I'm on.

So what has all this to do with Super-8? I'll tell you. People in their general thinking don't think much of it. It has its place, and that's

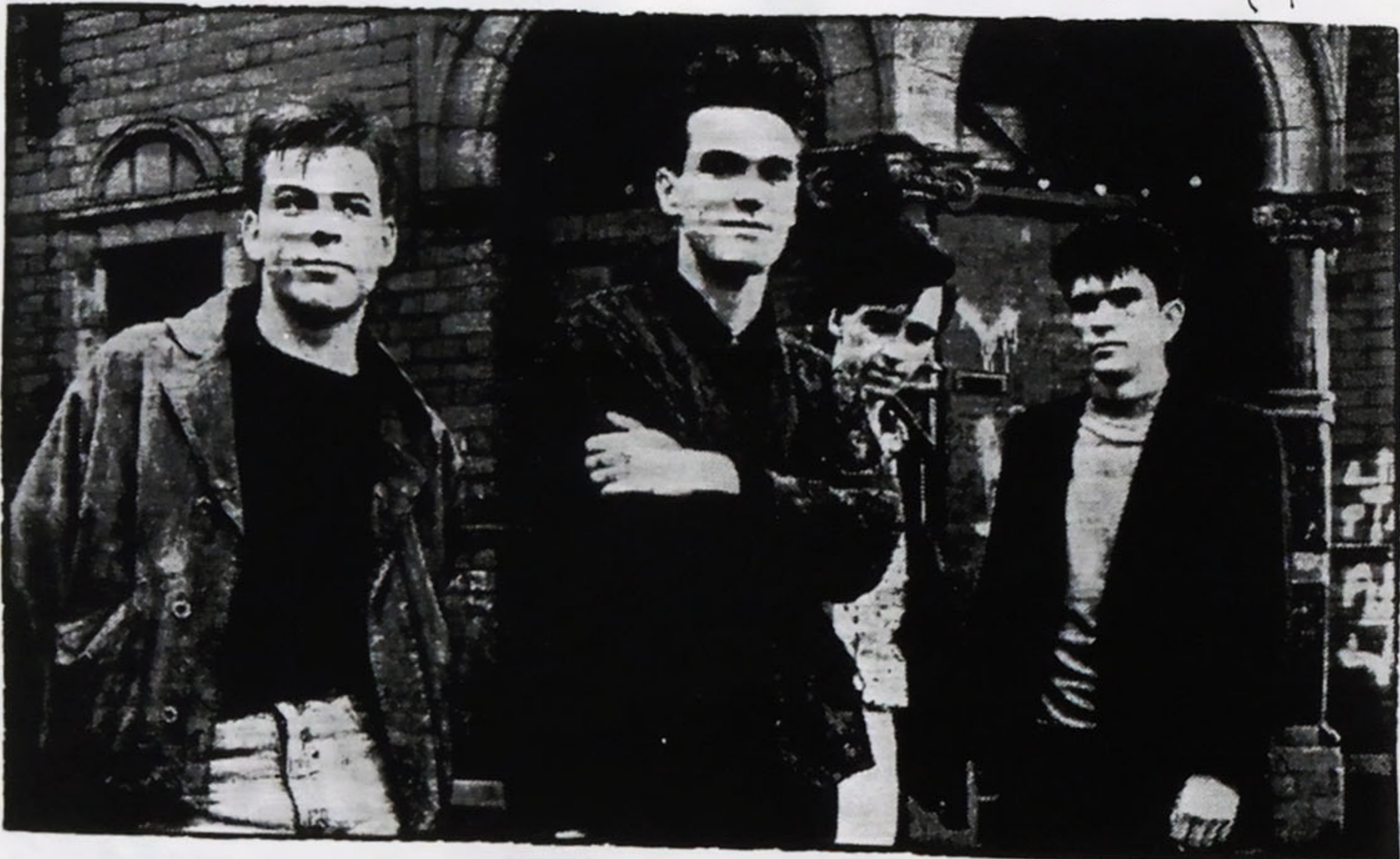
about it. Again, another myth. For Super-8 is real, as real as anything. For genuine film-makers, any medium is valid.

I am a film-maker. My last two films have been Between Us (16mm, \$70,000 budget) and Honey (Super-8, \$30 budget.) I know which film is considered more important by the majority of people. Other 16mm. film-makers don't touch Super-8 - they are filled with self-importance. The wrong kind. I, too, consider myself important, but I say it out loud, and I welcome anybody to question me.

So why am I raving about myself here? It's because I kind of know myself, I recognize a certain truth to what I do, and therefore would like to encourage this same thing in others (because there's a chance that it is common, simply because it is true.) I'm sick of hearing people say to me "Yeah, one day I'll make that film." Get off your arses you lily-livered sons of bitches! TRUST YOUR IDEAS.

As Public Enemy sing, "Show 'em what you got!" Otherwise you got nothing. ■

## A ST. VALENTINE'S DAY CELEBRATION (of a nation) :



"There is a light that never goes out"

And if a double-decker bus ' crashes into us  
To die on your side / such a heavenly way to die  
And if a ten-ton truck / kills the both of us  
To die on your side / the pleasure and the business is yours



# RECYCLING SANDY MUNRO, IN A FEW JUST WORDS

MARK C. ZENNER

1. This article takes issue with certain assumptions on which Richard Tuohy's double review on P.2 of the Dec. '89 Newsletter is based. These are declared at the head of the first review, of the European Super-8 Recycling, and are carried over into the second review where they are applied to Sandy Munro's *On Track*. They rest on the terms "true" and "documentation". Tuohy himself gives the principles in his first paragraph, which deserves quoting: -

RECYCLING - This is a true documentary, and as such, is difficult to pin down. It is a true documentary, because it simply documents. It presents to us a situation - a man, but the film itself says nothing to us about him - only he does that. A true documentary illustrates life, accurately, without bias or making conclusions. It must let us do that if it is to be truthful. And that's what this film does. Having said that I can now, in just a few words, try and tell you what the film made me feel.

2. I will ignore the poor grammar ("try and tell you") to concentrate on the salient points. Three times the phrase "true documentary" is hammered out, in the 1st., 2nd. and 4th. sentences, and each time in a manner that contradicts its previous value. A "true documentary" is, all at once, difficult ("to pin down"), simple ("because it simply documents"), and an illustration (it "illustrates life"). We find ourselves at a junction of definitions, where the simple presentation of "a situation - a man" becomes an illustration of "life" which contains the "situation" so presented, while this simple presentation is at the same time a "difficult" one - why? One might even guess it: no document, still less an illustration, "presents" us with anything; it represents, or it doesn't exist. No presence ever needed a document to confirm or duplicate it, and all documents implicitly relate to something no longer present, to an absence presupposed in documenting. The "difficulty" of pinning down our document's presentation seems to have been the absence of anything to pin.

3. This "pinning down", however, is in accord with an historicist prejudice that attaches itself to anything that functions as a document, representamen, or specimen of something absent in an absolute sense - like the "past" - and therefore all the more to be valued, preserved, and "pinned down" in a more than merely metaphorical sense.

4. Why this over-valuation of "authenticity", of anything that authenticates at the expense of the "representativity" in the authentication? Here we touch on the very heart of the documentary prejudice, and all that is believed in and believed about records in general. The elements in them that prove are esteemed more highly than those which went into the making and fixing of that proof - precisely those elements by which we recognize a record as a record.

5. "Their authenticity can be proven", we say. But what here is proven? That a piece of the past is a piece of the past, that the past existed, it is verified; not now, but that it existed is all that the authentication-function of records contains. This is not to be confused with records of representation, e.g. portraits, etchings, city plans, etc., for these merely occasion or "conduct" the document for investigation, some of whose tools it supplies without becoming its subject. "This existed. Existence exists! Our conclusions, i.e. we, are vindicated!" Thus reality is reassured about itself. Authentication, vindication, reassurance - that is what the proven "document" and its scholarly concerns in all cases amounts to.

6. Accordingly, a so-called documentary film would be a record that at the same time represents: the combination of authenticative and representative functions is a frequent occurrence in all documentary forms, as this classical viewpoint has it. Very well, but we must bear in mind that it is only the authenticity of the document that defines it as a document: not what it represents, not even its form; and this entails that the proof-function draws upon the forms, that it lives at the expense of the forms of "documentivity", that it be present in and stronger than the style imposed by the recording: the proof, not the form, of proof-forms sets their style.

7. Now, how does one prove a document of any kind? One compares it with another, already-authenticated document. Certainly not to the long-vanished "reality" it supposedly stands for. But in that case, how was that other document authenticated? Why, also by that means ... and so on, comparing broadly contemporaneous documents. But how is specifically their authenticity proved? Which was the document first used as a basis for comparison? And what has become of its proof? If just this proof can no longer be guaranteed, doesn't at least the possibility arise that it was merely the first in a long chain of errors, that here error authenticates itself, sets, and gardens? That we are in a universe of errors circulating among themselves, in a measuring of earlier and later mistakes by each other? Self-contained, as are all thoroughgoing forms and good little atoms ...?

8. Not that I am propounding such an absurd thesis: I propound nothing. But whoever begins to reflect on some widely cherished notions of realizing, certifying, stamping, and even pinning down the authentic must soon learn to approach these with far more caution than has hitherto been the case. For how many "ologies" would not be endangered by such a reflection! - Archaeology, anthropology, etymology, not to mention certain branches of psychology, and even genealogy! And I speak of self-reflection, as seems apt for self-contained systems of the sort outlined above.

9. But this circularity is not without its relevance when applied to the documentary forms assumed by film, assumed by Richard Tuohy and others to be "present" in the assumptions of film. For in the immediate viewing of a documentary the authenticity would have to be supposed to have dictated its form; the "proof" element is to be regarded as somehow immanent to the film as a whole, whose form is authentic because - it is authentic. The form is its own proof because the proof is its own form. To call this a tautology would be putting it too politely. But what else are we to infer, unless we adopt a "comparison" method - of films to other films which have "documented" the same topic or milieu? Which means, of course, resigning oneself to the "representation" element, and to the ultimate impossibility of ever reaching an absolute basis for determining the authenticity of one representational style over another. In other words, one is left with just so many instances: with styles, precisely - or in the language of the alert Tuohy, "illustration".

10. Representation, our awakened suspicions say, is not proved but moulded and styled. That is, the forms of authenticity are simulable: the "documentary style", following a matricated pattern, is one genre among others. But before attempting to substantiate this claim, let us see what Richard Tuohy makes of the "represented" element in his "true documentary"; and further, what his criteria are for determining its authenticity - its "truth".

11. What is documented, according to the quoted paragraph? A "situation", which immediately turns into a "man". This might be taken to mean that the situation has made the man what he is, as he is. But no, the man is the subject of this inverted sentence-structure, and it requires nothing more than a typographical dash to identify him, not with, but as a situation. As written, the man is defined as a situation, of which he then becomes - no other conclusion is possible - the cipher or representative; one might even say he was



reduced to it, insofar as the minus-key was the source of Tuohy's dash. But since that is clearly not the inference to be drawn from Recycling, we are obliged to repudiate the identity of "man" and "situation", and to regret the improvident use of such shorthand marks - especially as Tuohy goes on to admit that "the film itself" never tries to editorialize or narrate the man into an accord with its own or any other system of interpreting, leaving any such testimony to him. And this merely consists of letting himself be filmed in a situation, out of it, then back in it again - which has nothing to do with being the situation. (For all the traditional Marxism of the "cipher" standpoint, Euro-Marxists have long since renounced the condescension of speaking for the people.) Being the Situation: the prejudice of parole-officers and social-workers, of Criminals and Aristocrats.

12. But note also the economical beauty of the phrase "the film itself", which neatly capsules the vaporous, hence ungovernable assumption that "man/situation" have in principle an existence separate from and beyond the film that is our only means of knowing of their existence: the famous "slice-of-life" prejudice. One wonders what would have to be deduced about this "beyond". Perhaps it should be obvious from such a circular mode of reasoning - given that we necessarily infer from "the film itself". But we do not need to infer! - Richard Tuohy has been thorough enough to tell us, in his final paragraph on Recycling: "It hasn't ended - there is no escape for him. Another day starts. This is a truly beautiful film..." Indeed: not merely beautiful but truly so, to have no escape from a cyclical, senseless and hopeless life on a garbage-dump; and almost as beautiful is the circle that closes the system of reasoning by which this conclusion was arrived at, and from which, once we are in it, there is likewise no escape - not merely but truly beautiful, as befits a true document. (I trust I haven't omitted anything with "cyclical", "senseless", and "hopeless"...?)

13. But what about Tuohy's criteria for the truth of this beautiful document? The noble aesthete and lover of veritable beauty has not neglected to inform us. Once more we find it in the first paragraph: "A true documentary illustrates life, accurately, without bias or making conclusions. It must let us do that if it is to be truthful." And that, Tuohy asserts, is "what this film does." That is, it illustrates not lives, not a life, but "life". Life - in the abstract, in general. That is what a true documentary does - but accurately, mind! No bias, no "making conclusions". (How does one "make" a conclusion about a concept already at its terminal, most generalized, universal point?) Bias, in terms of this abstract, universal "life", would be a leaning towards certain aspects of it, certain lives and certain details of those lives at the expense of others. This would be a disgrace, an affront to "truth"! It wouldn't be a true documentary - and indeed, the persistence of this phrase in Tuohy's text almost obliges us to suspect the existence of false documentaries. And we wouldn't be wrong, either.

14. But Recycling is full of this bias, these details, this narrow-minded focusing on an individual life. It is therefore not a true documentary in Tuohy's terms?...But he asserts that it is. How come? Because it is we who are "making conclusions", because "It must let us do that". We have put all that bias, all those details there - not the film! We subjectively endow them with truth - because they are true for us! We are the ones who saw only shit and garbage where there was really beauty - shame on us! And Tuohy, loyal to his assertion of truth's subjectivity, goes on to tell us "in just a few words" - not in "a just few words" - what the film "made me feel". The criterion of illustrating life without bias vaporizes into the audience-subjectivism of multiple perspectives and multiple biases. But then, who ever heard of an "illustration" without perspective-bias?

15. To Tuohy's bold and ingenious hint that false documentaries exist, I can only reply with some more or less well-known examples:- There was the "Washington Post" photojournalist, female and black, who in 1977 rigged up sets, actors, and biographies for a simulated slumland photostory in grainy Tri-X - and lost, after winning, the Pulitzer Prize. (She couldn't supply birth-certificates, addresses, and welfare-status cards, without which the affidavits were worthless.) There was Ken Loach, who used a cinema-verite style of handheld camera and direct sound for his television dramas of the '60s - and took in almost a third of Great Britain with Cathy Come Home in 1966, at least until the final credits.

(Some are still being taken in. By what twist of memory does the English critic Colin McCabe continue to describe Cathy as a "documentary film" in his recent book, "Tracking the Signifier"? It is a poor "tracker" who hasn't yet recognized the "signifier" of verite as one style among others, subsumable under names as diverse as Pennebaker and Loach, Godard and Cassavettes, etc.) And there was, of course, the great ancestor of all these tricksters, Orson Welles: simulator of the radio news-bulletin and the cinema news-reel (called "newsreel" by James Joyce) in, respectively, War of the Worlds (1938) and Citizen Kane (1940).

16. But when have media and the genres within them not been simulated, borrowed, or lampooned by each other? The so-called generic styles have always been an artist's playground, from Chaplin's Lime-light to Monty Python, from the Marx Bros. to video-clips, Duchamp to David Lynch. In this respect the post-mods. have nothing new to tell us. Joyce's Ulysses is a treasure-chest of just such simulacra, using literary styles from the heroic accents of Homer to girls' romance-weeklies, sober Berkeleyan analyses to the riotous jingoism of "Boys Own". Indeed, to drive the point home more thoroughly, Tuohy has given us, in his article's prose, his own pastiche of the Gerty McDowell episode in Ulysses - the "truly beautiful" style of the lovelorn-girls rag. But one would have no inkling of this if one read as the Joyceless and Wellesless have always read.

17. The style, then, the style is all. The lenses, the framing, the movements and the montage, are all: rich materials for plundering and playing with a rich field. And in this dense interface of continuous reconstructing, restructuring, and relaying, destined to a darkness where necessity crosses fate and unnumbered signlines converge, we will not find even one element that in and of itself, finally and absolutely, persuades us of the authenticity of the killings and couplings, the gesticulations and strained expressions, "the laughter and the tears" (to quote Norman Bates). Not the "live" oumps on the soundtrack; not the shaking-palsy of the camera: each is as duplicable, hence duplicitous, hence for dupes, as the other; and all that a strongly marked "genre" style can be today is a sign of recognition that integrates us into a film's scheme of emotional/informational reference - a sign with an arrow indicating the standpoint to adopt in order to see its scale of facts and affects in the intended perspective (which, as goes without saying, we are free to ignore and to exceed). In rare cases it can be a unit in a new, not necessarily higher, synthesis - of films and iconoclastic "epochs", of the genre and cultural styles; a stimulus to new explorations; whose value, however, depends precisely on their rarity: whatever is common cannot be new, and in all cases is cheap.

18. On the other hand, any scene in any genre-product could be taken as a "documentary" on how it was directed, how the filmic elements were coordinated, the choices and techniques of the cinematographer, the methods of the actor, etc. - or even as the authentic, live-action, documentary record of how Sc. 17 - Tk. 9 was played. In that case everything's a documentary, or nothing is. But with that we've already crossed the threshold of absurdity in respect to "truth", as commonly understood. A lie and its authentic record finally collapse into each other: each defines the other, divesting both of any meaning.

19. It does us little good, therefore, to see an application of this common, traditional, diffuse, and badly-focused perspective on "documenting" to Sandy Munro's live-action, all-in-camera films; an application in which, among other things, we hear of the "elements documented", "the honesty in her documentation", and something said to be "opposed to editing and restructuring". A more cautious, perhaps more suspicious attitude would first seek out the points at which the 1:1 filmmaker does exercise control over the action and does interpose herself between footage and audience. That this happens during and not after the shooting might only be the least of it. In fact, four points of interposition can almost immediately be distinguished:-

1. The choice of what to film and when: both before and during the filming.
2. Composition: determining where the visual field is to be sliced off; and as a corollary, what is to be given the height and width of a unity, a belonging-together. In this category falls the choice of lens-settings, movements, zooming, etc. One sets the spectators' sense of setting, space, quality, in the inclusion/exclusion parameters of the frame - the base that determines the extent of the eyebeam's purview.



3. The sequentiality of what is filmed: determining the order of succession in the "record", to remain fixed and unalterable through all subsequent viewings - editing in the camera.

4. The length of each successive filmed piece, and the overall length of their completed sequention - the film. A determination of rhythm by button-on/button-off, which is closely allied to Pt. 1: the what/when paradigm.

20. That gives us, during shooting, the choice of what to include, how much of it to include, its sequence, and its rhythm. We can add: the choice and quality of color, or black-and-white. All this pertains to the image alone, and doesn't take into account changes in quality wrought by the use of sound: this is deliberate inasmuch as Sandy Munro's work, mostly silent, is discussed. In this work of several non-random elements, we must acknowledge one crucial one: her decision to allow technical mishaps, chance defects in the recording, to play their dice-game with the "completed" work. As soon as this decision - which commands respect - is recognized, her 1:1 films become structurally and necessarily open to the possibility of unlimited interpretations, all swirling around the empty centre graphematically delineated by the "fixed and unalterable". (I hope the entitlement of these words to their quotation-marks is becoming clearer.) Enunciate any one of them, however, and it is bound to sound far-fetched.

21. Thus, the interest in Sandy Munro's last film, Chess Quest, is not its alleged "documentation", but the way its defective optical quality - in bright sunlight, a depth-of-field approximating to the distance-setting of a chess-set held at arm's-length - can be made to signify the myopic outlook of a man whose scale of distance is confined within the boundaries of his chessboard; whose sense of the world is limited to a conceptual space, parallel to but independent of space-as-lived, detached and carried about like a screen on which the furthest distance is between two squares separated in any direction by six others: a screen against the world, and whose look is our own when we view Chess Quest. Far-fetched, eh? Sceptical, eh?...Two points, in reply: (1) it is much harder to find and convincingly substantiate the good points of a film than to harp redundantly on defects obvious to everybody; and (2) it is precisely the chance, non-deliberate qualities of unscripted, camera-cut films that, as aforesaid, structurally and necessarily arise as their "good" or "bad" points, and which should be stressed in any such evaluative accounting - as long as we remember that the filmmaker cannot be blamed for the content of the material but only for its inclusion during filming. But what legitimacy can this sort of evaluation have, once we see that illimitable interpretability is traced into the very foundations and possibility of the 1:1 film - indeed conditions it, given that it applies just as much to the filmmaker vis-a-vis her material as to us vis-a-vis her film? Chance disposes of the filming to just the degree that we, the interpreters, dispose of the result - which does not, but can be made to, signify anything.

22. To say "camera-cut" is not to say "non-cut"; nor to indicate any incapacity or refusal of "editing and restructuring". It cannot be, since every individual viewing is already a restructuring: spatio/temporal, intellectual/affective. What the film-maker hasn't done the viewers in any case will, each one differently in the case of the 1:1 film, where things are not labelled, spelled-out, channelled and routed. That a reviewer of Tuohy's calibre has missed this I can only explain to myself in one way: as a spectator he is his own blind-spot, spectation as such being denied him.

23. Necessity thrown to the jaws of chance; a film confronting its own fatality: that's what's at stake in the gamble of the 1:1 film - a closely-networked field of possible relay-channels which it makes visible and which we fill in according to interpretive possibilities traced in our own consciousness, each one different, each forming an overlay-moire with a work that already differs in and from itself. For make no mistake: the viewing of a 1:1 film is a positive activity, not a passive receptivity. We give it what meaning it has, and whether or not this coincides with the film-maker's is, structurally speaking, a matter of indifference. That is: of absolute difference.

24. The source of the "truth" neurosis - that's what it is in a critic - is not hard to locate: the director's "intentions". The director is posited as the agent of an activity: the search for "information",

the exposition or "the truth." The film is the vehicle of the search, and everything in it the work of an agent, the result of an intention - "truth" included: the well-known "auteur" theory, which finds in documentary films a camouflaged form. (We can suspect the presence of auteurism wherever a documentary receives lavish praise and prizes; at any rate, it is not "the truth" that is receiving them: what prizes can there be for the fact that something is as it is, or happened when and where it happened?) But has it ever been otherwise, even in day-to-day speech? Aren't we doing the same thing when we say "the wind's blowing hard", "the rain's really pissing down", or "lightning is flashing"? Aren't we making wind, rain and lightning the agencies of effects called "blowing", "pouring", "flashing"? As if there were some underlying cause or subject that was able to blow softly or not at all if it so chose! As if pouring and the flash were choices or deeds! Only the fact that in declarative terms such statements are formally "correct" and make grammatical sense could have blinded us to the patent idiocy of seeing all things as intended, all actions as activities standing in the same relation to their "actors" as verbs to their subjects - until finally, what we see is obliged already to be in conformity with the grammar of declaring it! And the very mechanisms of uttering our thoughts have seduced them into these dark alleyways! ... At any rate, it is not in search of "truth" that we will venture into them.

25. Terminal absurdity, Night of Reason - that the grammatical units of framing our statements precede the psychic framing of a luminous and distinct image of phenomenal units in "consciousness" - the very image to be stated! Terminal, terminal! - For it cannot be otherwise! Consciousness is precisely a matter of "distinctness" - a tracing-around of things by differences; a stratifying not only within, but between the senses; a net of more or less systematic divisions thrown over intuited experience: for only this enables us to be aware of what is lived-through, of what we live: aware of being-aware, which is the very definition of consciousness. But here the need for phenomenal deciphering, for an "image", for consciousness, reveals itself: it is a network of communication, of coarsened, recognizable and repeatable units to be relayed in transposed, and not merely transposed, form. The relay, in effect, is not of but between these system-networks, these "consciousnesses", each of which may comprise any number of possible codes: from the verbal to the iconic the dramatic, the aural, etc. But if they communicate they were communicable, already possible, i.e. the very substance and primal tracing of consciousness as such, into each and every psyche - which is why it is between these that any meaningful communication can only arise. Between and in the face of these others, consciousness occurs, and occurs as the performance of an act: it is a function of language, not the reverse. It requires an audience, between whom and itself it acts, performs. Between: i.e., nowhere in particular. (For what part of our waking-hours are we fully conscious? For when we have to be. And when do we have to be? -) And consequently, there are degrees and intensities of consciousness - let's say, an infinitesimal grading-up and grading-down, brightening and dimming in a very conditional and dependent manner, at the whim of our chance collisions with the world and the differentiating resolution-screen with which we are required to "frame" its units, to finer or coarser degrees, in our transposed declarations of it. Whether this is a screen of phonemes or film-frames, a transposition to statements or shot-sequences, makes no difference - for the difference has already been made. Structurally pre-scribed in consciousness, the possibility of the relay is in precession of its contents.

26. And Truth - the authenticated and documented, confirmed and substantiated; that which is? Consciousness is nowhere near strong enough to hold this water, even if its contours do adapt to any and every vessel that happens along. Consciousness called into question as something conditioned, at the mercy and whim of every chance encounter with a "need-to-know" and "mean-to-say", brings with it a question-mark for the "director's intentions" as well, since these cannot be separated from consciousness determined as function, as goal-oriented. Consciousness and intentionality are conceptually and in fact never thought apart from each other: they are one, both orientations, with the common presupposition of an other, a spacing, and a goal towards which they are directed along a transference - a path or channel on which intentions as such define and shape themselves, orient themselves. Without this transferential passage to a goal, intentionality could not exist



even as a bare definition: intentions without means is an empty word. Likewise consciousness without difference. Or orientation without spacing; will without resistances and obstacles, opposing forces and overcomings. And this constitutive divisiveness at the heart of distinct "things" doesn't in the least preclude their capacity to function as a decipherable code, as signs with meanings, even in the absolute absence of their authors' "intentions" - for this autonomy is precisely what makes a sign a sign, over and above the confirming presence of its agent; what makes the words of a man dead for 370 years readable, indefinable, and inexhaustible; and what makes the signature appended to them more than merely indexical. Do we need the presence of Griffith, Chaplin or Ford to make sense of their works? Has the lack of an authenticating intention behind the documentary style of Loach's films made them meaningless? Has the absence of a documentary style among Hitchcock's films made them inauthentic? Purely stylistic and rhetorical questions. I admit, since the act of asking them is also their answer. Acted, performed questions ... mere effect, mere "literature": but with the sense of sliding out from under "truth" the only two grounds in this argument where it could stake out a force: "consciousness", "intentions".

27. Slippery logs! Slippery logs! - Dragging in their wake a worm of light called "truth", continually forming and re-forming itself into a question-mark. Not a negation, since such operations have a way of turning back on themselves: if "nothing is true" then this statement, to be true, would have to be false, thereby negating itself absolutely; but, to be false, would not have to be true, absolutely or even provisionally - for "truth" and "falseness" are not opposites, and neither is determinable on a scale of position/negation, affirmation/denial, or any other polarities. In a world without absolutes, truth has no absolute or relative opposite - since all that relativity can say here is that opposites are where you find them: it drops out of the picture completely where any question or opposites or absolutes is concerned. And neither does truth have, in the strict sense, any value, since it is incapable of being meaningfully opposed or countered as a force in a differential economy. It can continue to have an ethical value, a place in a table of goods, i.e. a value we have put there. It is therefore not a question of negating out of revaluing truth; and ditto for authors, intentions, authenticity and honesty: these things have not suddenly disappeared, as we know, and pointing it out suffices to indicate just how complex the problem really is. We cannot deny or "know" them; but we can understand a certain light they cast - and this we can know, affirm or deny to any lengths. Perhaps it is fundamental to knowing just how much is at our disposal, how much power we capacitate - and to re-directing it. Truth was never a useless fiction: how could we do without it? On what obstacles could our capacities vent themselves, over what resistances and limits could our achievements and triumphs, our "greater" and our "more", celebrate their victory and bring to term the great seduction of a fulfilled potency, an attained maximum, an eternity-overcome, however fictitious - if not for this ultimate, unattainable and unknowable seduction called "truth"? Isn't it only thanks to the obstacle-course it sets us, exposing before us the tantalizing prize of an ever-receding horizon-line, that we ever come to recognize our capacities?

28. The space opened up to our eyes by the artificial erection of barriers; the posing of limits as a stimulus and orientation to a goal which concentrates and intensifies the powers directed at it: their activation across this eye-opening space, this artists' playground, stimulated by its very foreclosure - that is the sense and image of what has sucked and seduced this discourse-on-a-discourse forward and through each impasse, each turn in the argument, each coil and loop-hole traced with the insertion-space of the next link in the chain, the new cycle of the relay-structure, so exemplarily mirrored in the title of the very film that enabled this mobile structure to carry on in such a strange way: "Recycling". For what is at issue here is not only to qualify the entitlement of this wasteland-film to the relay-barriers of its own medium - from the written treatment or a scenario to the written treatment by reviewers, and all the stages in between - but more fundamentally, a structure of divergence that is bound to intervene in the most rigidly adhered-to "intentions" when these pass through multiple intermediary states, each one already reinterpreted

by the next in new terms, each already having pressed the preceding one into its own service, and each successive point-of-view in the process foreshortening and in other ways distorting the others, not all of which have even a necessary connection, e.g. advertising-budget and shooting-script, choice of actors and choice of venue, etc. I repeat: to qualify, not criticize.

29. It is to ask, for instance, what made Richard Tuohy take from one arm of the divided response to his own wasteland film, Pink Desert, an epithet which he then passes on to Recycling: "beautiful". What about the relay of this "beautiful", which viewers find in his cubic glass and grappaper-steel, his graceful slow track? Why is industrial ugliness beautiful? But, across much wider registers of time, it is to ask what forced Tuohy to repeat, from one "desert" to another and at a distance of 25 years, the identical divergence and self-division found in Antonioni's The Red Desert: the very same fissure of intentions to means, of meanings-given to meanings-received. For the "industrial wasteland" of Ravenna evokes, in its mutant grey fruit, its plague-ridden smog and mist, and in the vividly expressionist colors of science and orgies, nothing so much as the surreal beauties of Max Ernst and Rene Magritte (in his stone-textured visitors). This is the most beautiful industrial desert the cinema has given us! Just as La Notte was its most beautiful emotional desert. Strange? Or necessary?

30. But what do we expect? Something that merely adequated to itself - particularly an entire landscape or district - would not even be perceived as a "something", a something-distinct! The cinema, the documentarist and his camera, the artist and his grey paint, are always additions: means and channels irreducible to whatever travels along them. What mediates, mutates. Given this necessity there is no good reason not to go the whole hog, and to pig-out on aesthetics! It is not Tuohy but his audience who should be criticized in this case. What did they expect ...? Andy Warhol and Empire? But even this empty, "minimalist" gaze requires the irreducible apparatus of exhibition - darkness - to mediate it. And lacking that, our own sweet consciousness, our own value-permeated senses, which is the first mediation of all. The relay and the interpreter are here to stay. And just look at the light they shed, all about them ...!

31. I know of no-one better to conclude with than the epigraphist to whom I would wish every foregoing word to be dedicated: -

"It is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that the world is justified." -  
- Friedrich Nietzsche: "The Birth of Tragedy"  
Basel, Switzerland: 1872.



The following article was submitted for the newsletter. It is an article on a 16mm. film - BETWEEN US, directed by Bill Mousoulis. It's not Super-8, but we are publishing the article anyway. (Eds).

An interpretation of  
Bill Mousoulis'

# Between Us

Australia, 1989, 36 minutes, 16mm.



"Between Us" is a simple, unpretentious film about relationships, motivation, and self-esteem.

What impressed me most about it was how such an un-dramatic film moved me to feel for its characters. There are very few moments of passion in this film. The characters are not complicated. The images are not sophisticated. The conflicts are not deep... yet the final result is satisfying.

Because the passion is taken out of this drama, much of its power rests with its narrative.

When I thought back on the film I found myself always asking "What happened next?" and never "How did it happen?" or "What did it look like?". It was something, however, that I never once asked myself while I was watching the film. During the screening I was rarely anxious or impatient for the narrative to develop... because it was always moving and developing. It is, I believe, a masterly narrative, constructed with an enviable economy of style that always pleases and surprises. I think it is a lesson for all film-makers to learn: to always get to the guts of the story, and make everything significant. The film-maker then remains in control, as Bill Mousoulis always does, pulling the audience along rather than the audience pushing the film along. In this narrative there is no time for the audience to consider variations or wish for other possibilities to the line of the script. Often, I was pleasantly alarmed by the film's scene changes, the brevity of the dialogue, and the cool matter of fact performances of the actors.

Between Us is also a very realistic film. In its rhythm, its pace, and its low-key relationships, one gets the feeling that this is a 'slice of life'. The flow of the narrative is barely disturbed by any elements which run counter to it. The artist's prerogative to re-arrange, apart from select, aspects of life is not practiced here lest the document or history is lost. The mood of the film was that of a social documentary, rather than a drama; a fact rather than a comment.

As I said earlier, the strength of this film lies in its narrative... and it was from the narrative that I derived its meaning and much of the enjoyment.

The pre-title sequence in the laundry wastes no time in establishing a relationship: that between a man, (Rick, a washing-machine repair man) and a machine. It is a simple, un-complicated relationship which sets up a focus for the future relationships in the film. Those relationships are based on support and on 'healing', whereby the main characters' drive and self-esteem is nurtured by the other partner in the 'relationship'. In this first scene Rick is shown repairing a washing machine. The scene is brief, jumping time (though plainly sequential), and the feeling is of accomplishment. Throughout the film the relationships that operate on this level, that of patient/healer, are the least complicated and the most successful.

This brief, successful scene over, the title appears, indicating that the film is examining the nature of such relationships.

It is interesting that in the first scene after the title, there is a 'call for help' (ostensibly to repair a washing machine) and that it is answered by Rick's father rather than by Rick himself. Rick is hardly ever home: his father always is. Rick's business would not survive without his father. His relationship to Rick is therefore one of support, as is Rick's relationship to his clients. It is also very much a professional arrangement, there being very little of the father/son in it. So is Rick's relationship to his clients; supportive, but also very professional. In fact, it is like a doctor's (patient/healer) in which the ethic is not allow a personal involvement with the client. This is a critical ingredient in the development of the film's narrative.

The next two scenes introduce Terry and his girlfriend, Loretta. Terry, unlike Rick, is uncertain about his future in his job. Therefore, he is depressed. Loretta, also unlike Rick, has no job and feels trapped in her flat. She cannot deal with Terry's depression. The breakdown in their relationship is exemplified by the failure of their washing machine. Neither can deal with it. The solution is to "Get someone to fix it." Terry's response is a rejection of Loretta's call for help. It encapsulates all the denials and rejections that occur on a personal level in the film. It seems that whenever someone calls out for help on a personal level he or she is rejected. However, a call for help on a professional



level receives immediate and successful service.

The breakdown in Loretta's and Terry's relationship is caused by the fact that both are, so to speak, "patients". Both are in need of help. Neither is in a position to give that help. The help does arrive, however, in the form of Rick. When he arrives (in his white doctor's coat) to announce "You've got a sick washing-machine." he does not care for Loretta. He remains ambivalent towards her throughout their relationship, but provides very clear, positive, successful support. Eventhough Rick notices Loretta's depression the first time, he remains removed and on a professional level, indicating that he needs to "...come back with a part."

At this point, there is a cut-away to 'the band' arriving at the airport. I found this cut disconcerting. It is not clear who the characters are at that point, (nor indeed for some time later) and exactly where they are. It breaks the narrative unnecessarily, and it's significance escapes me.

In typically economic fashion, however, we are soon back in Loretta's flat. Just as economically, Rick is soon putting his tools away. It is another 'successful' visit. When Loretta offers coffee, however, Rick removes his dustcoat before accepting to deal with Loretta on a personal level. Loretta confesses her depression. Without his dustcoat, his professional armour, Rick is vulnerable. He offers advice. As a person, however, he is a failure. The advice is glib: to approach the CES. "There are plenty of good jobs out there."

In the next scene, however, he wears an armour of a different sort; a camera. As we discover later, the camera is the medium with which he deals with his friends. He takes pictures of "people he knows". The camera is not only a protection, a safety barrier (like his dustcoat), but also the means by which he can get closer to them... an excuse. Through the camera he can get closer to Loretta when he sees her in the mall. Protected, he can become more supportive, more encouraging, and more successful on a personal level.

In this new role, as a doctor of a different sort, a healer of souls, he transcends his own being for that moment. He becomes a successful person. When they look in the window of the Building Society, he is able to appraise her need, be positive, and suggest that she could "get a job in there if (she) really wanted to." He has for that moment crossed the barriers to his own inadequacy. For a brief "transcendental" moment he is what he wants to be, although he is not aware of it... nor does he accept it. In an alarmingly beautiful scene which follows, he waits for Loretta in a coffee lounge and a stranger asks him if he is the singer in a band called "The Lazy Susans". At this stage he can only deny himself as he denies the claim. When Loretta returns, however, she announces she has gained an interview for a job. This is really his own success as a person. Ironically, he is unaware of his own healing power. His self esteem is low. It is akin to his attitude to his own photography; that is, his attitude to dealing with people. He sees it as "just a hobby". That is, not real; not like a job. This is his failing as a person.

At this very significant point in their relationship Loretta labels him as "good luck", and for the first time asks for his help as a friend; to come back the next day and support her during the interview. It is

a loud and clear message to him regarding his powers as a human being. He almost accepts without thinking, then checks himself, ensuring his professional commitments don't clash. Therefore, he is still giving his job precedence over his humanity. In a final act which confirms his view of their relationship, he barter's his help for an image of her: he takes a photo. In a way it is an admission to himself that they are friends, but in another way, and still very much an indication of his value of friendship, it is a very professional exchange; tit for tat.

"Now do something for me." he says to her.

Following a brief scene where he prints the photo of her, we are again back in the mall; this time for the job interview. It is another simple cutback which picks up the thread of the story without any fuss or elaboration. Here, they introduce themselves for the first time, and he hands her the photo which she only glances at briefly and then puts away. It is as though she cannot face herself. Like Rick she suffers from low self-esteem. That is why they do not introduce themselves to each other earlier. Now, however, their relationship is at a high point. Rick's support is beginning to give Loretta a confidence in herself and her own humanity.



It is significant, therefore, that Rick warns Loretta to be herself during the interview. It is advice which he follows, for when another stranger asks him about his identity he claims to be the singer in "The Lazy Susans". He has now fully transcended his his own personality. He is what he wants to be...at least in his mind. It is a very strong moment in the film, and one in which Rick is at his most positive about himself. Yet, ironically, it also the most unrealistic moment as well.

When Loretta emerges she announces that she has the job. She also at her strongest. Strangely, however, she is also emotional. There is a dark side to her success. It is that now she has to become the "healer". She has to use her new-found strength to heal her own boyfriend, Terry. This is the irony of the film's message about relationships. The positive force that has been created out of Loretta and Rick's relationship is now used where it is most needed; that is, Loretta and Terry's relationship. It is a strange and unnerving moment. Out of the most positive, high point in their relationship develops ... nothing. It is a total come down, a hopeless feeling of despair.

This feeling is reinforced with a short scene where two members of the band question the value of their own job as they look out on Melbourne's wintry weather: "Two gigs... is it worth it?"

(continued →)



No sooner have they celebrated Loretta's new job, then Loretta begins to reject Rick. "You'd better go, my boyfriend will be here soon." Having just opened himself up as an individual and a human being, and at his most vulnerable, Rick is now out in the cold. Without support, his self-esteem dis-appears fast. As one would expect his energies go back into his job, but with a slight difference. There is now a more human side to him. In one case, he does not take money from a housewife for some simple advice. In another case he takes abuse from two small kids, momentarily taking the pressure off their world-weary grandmother. It is a more humane Rick, relating more to people than machines, although clearly his self-image is suffering.

Back in the coffee lounge, the scene of his greatest triumph, he pays for his coffee. It is a cold, professional exchange... a barter. Once more he is devoid of humanity, although recognizing that he needs it.

Again, he searches for humanity and friendship where he found it last... in the mall. Again, he does so behind the safety of his camera. This time, however, when he is con-fronted by the couple from the band, he is face to face with his soul. His job is now questioned and he has to admit: "It's what I do best." It is his own recognition of his failure as a person. Now, he is the patient. Open and vulnerable, now he needs an "injection" of soul; an inspiration, a motivation. Again, he takes their photo, beginning a new relationship.

Loretta now rejects him outright. She rings to tell him. It is a cold, professional call; like cancelling an appointment. Rick's reaction is just as cold. He has never recognized his need for her, nor her need for him.

What follows beautifully from this rejection is the most passionate scene in the film. Terry and Loretta are in bed. Terry insists he will protect and look after her... she says nothing, just looking away. He is, in fact, expressing his need for her, sucking her power and her strength. It is a horrifying, strangely parasitic scene. It seems where passion does exist in human affairs it is hopelessly one-sided and pathetic. Although Loretta may now be a success in her new job, as Rick still is, she is still imprisoned into a passionless (on her part) commitment. In human affairs both Loretta and Rick are doomed, because they both value, and seek salvation in, their work rather than in their personal lives.

Now, Rick begins a stage where he replaces the value he places in his own work with that of someone else. Namely, it is Monica's job as a singer with the band. Rick follows the band's rehearsals and performances, idolizing Monica as an embodiment of his own soul. She is what he would like to be; creative. As his obsession grows, he resolves to lay off his own work to follow the band, but when it is suggested that he follow the band back to Sydney and continue taking photos he hesitates. This is because his frustration is on a personal level, but he won't admit it to himself. Before he met Monica, he had not allowed his frustration to surface. Now, he won't allow it to take control of him. Interestingly, it is only after he sees Loretta again

briefly in the mall, being a success in her job, that he is prompted to approach Monica on a personal level. His mistake is that, subconsciously, he he is still motivated by his wish to bare his soul in his job; that being his image of success as a person.

In the scene with Monica at the beach this issue comes to a head. Talking about old times Rick envies Monica's job, saying that it is what she had always wanted to do. Even though Monica reminds him that "It's just a job." Rick feels it is more "creative" than fixing washing machines. When she reminds him about his photography he refuses to accept that it's creative, saying: "I only take pictures of what's in front of me." She retorts by saying that she "only writes songs about what's in front of (her)." and that even then it's still a fantasy because she still has to work to live. Monica is therefore able to separate her "work" from her fantasy... Rick cannot. He wants to believe that it is possible to deal with human desire in the same way as he deals with his job. He wants to believe that this is possible, and that Monica has achieved this. He cannot see Monica's job or her life for what it is. He wants to make something more of it: to "idolize" the experience. Thus, he puts Monica on a pedestal, and by doing so, distances himself from her. Having done so, and only then, he tries to kiss her. By doing so, he has parodied his professional life in his personal life. He has created a "patient/healer" relationship. Monica, however cannot operate this way on a personal level. Monica therefore rejects him outright.

Having now consciously failed on a personal level, his self esteem is at it's lowest. He cannot now be positive about his job or his 'hobby'. He cannot face answering another business call, nor can he face pursuing his photography in Sydney.

In the coffee shop, nobody notices him. He is barely alive.

A salvation of sorts does come however in the shape of another band in the pub. A song is dedicated to him by a guitarist in the band. In the first scene in the pub this guitarist had noticed his depression in much the same way as he had noticed Loretta's depression in her flat. The band now prescribes their medication for Rick's soul, in the same way that he had helped Loretta in the first part of the film. The band "does their job". It is, necessarily, a professional relationship. Rick's appreciation, however, is obvious. It does work. Rick's soul seems to be "repaired" as simply as a washing machine. It is not surprising that Rick would respond in this way, however. It is indeed the way that Rick has re-  
sponded to and dealt with people throughout the film. He prescribes, and is given, medication for a sick soul. Although I feel that the use of the song is rather didactic, it makes it clear that Rick's need is to feel and stay alive; to be inspired, moved, or motivated.

It is a somewhat cynical message given Rick's nature. There is, however, an element of optimism in this ending, and that is the support provided by the band. By this stage one feels that if Rick cannot "stay alive" by his own doing, at least there will always be someone on a "professional" level to help him out.

Raffi Ghazarian Dec 1989.

→ BETWEEN US can be seen this year, probably at film festivals.





## FOR SALE:

Miller 80mm bowl tripod suitable for most 16mm. cameras.  
Price negotiable.

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Ring Doreen on 830 5256  
or 830 1725

## NEXT MEETING..

Tuesday, February 13, 1990  
Glasshouse Meeting Room, RMIT,  
Swanston St. City

At 7:30 p.m. -

The Australian Film Commission has approved funding for the Super-8 Group to the extent of \$10,000, which is roughly half of what we asked for. It is not enough to allow us to set up an office.

At this time we will have a general discussion on how we should use this money. In particular there will be about \$2,000 which really won't be needed for general costs. What should we do with it? A special project of some kind? Suggestions are most welcome.

At 8:30 p.m. -

Open Screening. BYO film!

To be guaranteed that your film will be screened, ring Bill on 419 6562, and tell him about it. Otherwise just rock up.

At 10:30 p.m. -

After the screening, come along to Stalactites (corner Russell and Lonsdale Streets) with Bill and talk about film projects till dawn!

The 1990 Yearbook/Magazine will be prepared shortly. Write an article, draw a picture, compose a poem - and submit it.

Remember that the Super-8 Group has equipment for borrowing and/or hire - cameras, a projector, editing stuff. Ring Bill.

**EDITORS** NICK OSTROVSKIS  
BILL MOUSOULIS

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