

STUDY GUIDE

IN THE GUTTER AND
OTHER GOOD PLACES

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INTRODUCTION

The CFMDC's Seminal Works project examines five key works from our collection: *Moose Jaw (There's a Future in Our Past)* by Rick Hancox, *Hookers on Davie* by Janis Cole and Holly Dale, *In the Gutter and Other Good Places* by Cristine Richey, *The Inquiry Film* by Jesse Nishihata and *Winter Kept Us Warm* by David Sector. These films were chosen for their capacity to raise issues and questions relevant in a variety of educational settings and across disciplines in the humanities and social sciences.

The five works were made between 1965 and 1993, spanning almost three decades of film production in Canada, the oldest of which is 40 years old this year. Examining the films in 2005 will provide both an opportunity to see how history has changed our understanding and interpretation of the works themselves, as well as the opportunity to examine how we now understand the issues the films explore.

Four of these works are social issue documentaries dedicated to specific regional, community and cultural concerns and one is a dramatic feature which was the first-ever film produced in Canada that addresses gay sexuality. As a group of films, they all challenge previous cinematic theory and practice—formally, aesthetically and conceptually. They use filmic and narration devices unusual for their time: surveillance technology, first-person perspectives, personal memory, and multi-level excavation of subjects, as well as forbidden themes and contentious political history.

With this project, CFMDC inaugurates a process of rejuvenation for Canadian film and documentary. Given their cultural significance, we believe that these films will be engaging for educational audiences and will generate renewed interest and discourse. Our goal is to increase public exposure of what we feel are some of the most important works produced by Canadian media artists.

For discussion of the four documentaries, it will be useful to read these definitions of cinema vérité and “new documentary:”

Cinema vérité is a style of documentary filmmaking that emphasizes the showing and telling of the ‘truth.’ The cinema vérité approach is employed to present reality as it really is, enabling ‘objective’ observation. A cinema vérité movement emerged in the 1960s simultaneously in France, USA, England, and Canada with different philosophies to the practice emerging in each locale. The practice that emerged in North America is often referred to as direct cinema. Cinema vérité, as a method, gained significant repute since the making of Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin’s *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961).

(See: Callison, Candis. 2000. “Truth in Cinema: Comparing Direct Cinema and Cinema Verité.” www.web.mit.edu/candis/www/callison_truth_cinema.htm)

In his discussion on the evolution of Canadian documentary filmmaking, Peter Steven describes the period of the 1980s and 90s as one in which filmmakers departed from merely documenting the ‘observed’ truth to employing a hybrid form that married art and social-issue documentary. A significant and defining feature of the “**new documentary**” is the departure from ‘neutral’ observation and ‘balance’ of viewpoints.

FILMMAKER

Cristine Richey, 1993. 56 minutes. Colour. Sound.

FILM SYNOPSIS

In the Gutter and Other Good Places is the powerful account of three Calgary men, Colin, Jean, and Ron who survive by “dumpster-diving” – collecting bottles out of refuse containers for cash. The film is a detailed and compassionate look at the choices and circumstances which have shaped their lives.

Challenging the conventional assumptions many of us may have about street people and how they got there, the film reveals that one of the characters, Ron, has a Masters in engineering science and that he gave up both his family and career at Gulf Oil because of alcoholism. Colin, meanwhile, has access to a substantial inheritance and yet refuses to touch it, preferring to live on what he can collect from the dumpsters. Perhaps the film's most laudable feat is the trust with which the stories are told, bringing us closer to those who normally pass unseen.

FILM STUDIES

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss Richey's choice of subjects, such as: Who speaks? Who is absent as speaking subjects within the category of 'dumpster divers'? If you were to make a film like *In the Gutter and Other Good Places* today, who would you choose as subjects? Why?
2. Cristine Richey relies heavily on 'the image' and its manipulation to convey meta-narratives about the economics of waste, poverty, societal excess, addiction, and homelessness. Discuss some of the ways in which the filmmaker's point of view or attitudes towards the material are revealed – for example, through voiceover narration, through juxtaposition of images, through her choices of which of the men's experiences to foreground early on in the film, and/or through the use of sped-up and time lapsed imagery of urban spaces.
3. The film raises central questions about point of view; discuss the film's particular style and whether or not it can be characterized as fitting into the cinema vérité approach to filmmaking as well as the category of documentary film/video making referred to as the "new documentary."
4. What techniques are employed by the filmmaker to allow viewers to develop a sense of intimacy with the men?

Additional Question

5. How is sound – voice over, music – used in the film to guide the viewer's emotional responses? Think about what strikes you most about the filmmaker's juxtaposition of images.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Nichols, Bill. *Ideology and the Image*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1981.

Sturken, M., and L. Cartwright. *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2000).

**SOCIAL WORK
SOCIOLOGY****QUESTIONS**

6. How does the filmmaker attempt to humanize the subjects? Do you think she achieved her goal?
7. What do you believe are our social responsibilities as a society toward individuals who suffer from mental illness and/or alcoholism? In what ways does this film address or not address your sense of these social responsibilities?
8. Colin strongly states, “Welfare, I have never applied for welfare and I don’t intend to apply because I do not like the process of applying. I am belittling myself in applying.” We are also told that Jean Leduc “won’t take any abuse. Once when welfare cut him off, he stormed into the offices of the provincial Ombudsman and his checks started coming again.” Discuss the ways in which an individual’s range of choices is constrained when they become users of the social welfare system.

Additional Question

9. How do the men in the film resist the stereotypes imposed upon them by institutions such as social services?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Carniol, Ben. *Case Critical: Social Services and Social Justice in Canada*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005.

Condon, Sean. “The binner boom.” *The Vancouver Courier*, (April 5, 2005).
www.vancourier.com/issues05/051205/news/051205nn1.html

Swanson, Jean. *Poor Bashing: The Politics of Exclusion*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002.

Swift, J., Davies, J. M., Clarke, R. G., and Czerny, M. S. *Getting Started on Social Analysis in Canada*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 1997.

**ENVIRONMENTAL/
URBAN STUDIES****QUESTIONS**

10. North American garbage dumps are reaching their capacities. How does the film fit into current debates about the disposal of garbage generated in urban locations?
11. Images of the garbage truck, depot, and the dump are recurrent throughout in the film. How has the film positioned the men in relation to the waste industry in Canada?
12. Throughout the film Colin comments on the excess of North American culture and its consumption patterns, discuss the ways in which consumerism and consumer culture enables and supports the waste industry.

Additional Question

13. The environmental and social implications of waste disposal sites and waste disposal site selection have become controversial and high profile. Discuss alternate approaches and strategies to environmental sustainability that focus on lowering consumption and waste production.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (Environmental Studies)

Baird, Vanessa. "Trash inside the heap." *New Internationalist Magazine* 295 (October 1997).

www.newint.org/issue295/keynote.html

Moreno-Sanchez, R., Maldona, J. H., and Sheldon, I. "The role of informal waste pickers in a dynamic model of solid waste disposal and recycling in developing countries." 2004.

www.agric.uwa.edu.au/ARE/AARES/rest2004/Moreno,Maldonado&Sheldon.pdf

Tammemagi, Hans. *The Waste Crisis: Land Fills, Incinerators and the Search for a Sustainable Future*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

FURTHER VIEWING

The Gleaners and I. Agnes Varda, 2000. 82:00. France. Distributed by Zeitgeist Films.

Fat of the Land. Nicole Cousino, 1994. 55:00. USA. Distributed by CFMDC.

Hot Potato. Kay T. Dodge, 1990. 11:00. USA. Distributed by Bullfrog Films.

Cold Streets. Gary Lee and Alex Vismeg, 2004. 30:00. Canada.
Distributed by Video Pool.

FILM CREDITS

Producer: Cristine Richey

Director: Cristine Richey

Editor: Jack Morbin

Sound Design: Steve Munro

Narration: Cristine Richey

Shot on Location: Calgary, Alberta

Film's Funders: The Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council, Telefilm Canada, The Canadian Film and Video Fund, National Film Board (PAFPS), ACCESS Network, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Calgary Regional Arts Foundation

BIOGRAPHY

Cristine Richey was born in Kingston, Ontario, Canada and began her professional career as a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) television reporter.

In 1990, she gave up the security of her job to produce her first film, *In the Gutter and Other Good Places*, which premiered at the 1993 Toronto International Film Festival. The widely acclaimed film won many awards, including the 1994 Genie Award for Best Canadian Documentary, Hot Docs Awards for Best Independent Doc, Best Cinematography, Best Musical Sound Score and Best Sound Design, and the 1995 Joan Chalmers Award.

TOPS&bottoms – Sex, Power and Sadomasochism, her first feature length film, premiered at the 1999 Toronto International Film Festival and was nominated for a Genie for Best Canadian Documentary.

STUDY GUIDE CREDITS

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www.oise.utoronto.ca/depts/tps/Boler/index.html

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