

Lost in Canada - A Filmmaker's Journal

by Mark Wihak for *Splice Magazine*, circa 1995

Films rarely turn out the way the filmmaker expects them to. (*stories from*) *The Land of Cain* is no exception to this. The genesis of the film occurred during a visit to Montréal in the late summer of 1990 to attend the Montréal International Film Festival. The Meech Lake accord had collapsed some weeks before, and my visit to Montréal coincided with the events at Oka. Things were a bit tense.

The films at the festival couldn't hold my attention and I set off wandering through the streets of Montréal. After a wild scramble I ended up in the then-fenced-off area of the Expo 67 site. I was familiar with this place from the home movies my father had made while visiting in 1967. In the flickering light of the 8mm film the site was full of energy, crowds surging through the futuristic pavilions, Canada poised on its second century with optimism and vigour. Now the site was derelict, cracked, weed-strewn concrete, an abandoned amphitheatre scrawled with graffiti and broken glass. The crowds had vanished, Buckminster Fuller's geodesic dome now an empty skeleton.

This derelict site struck me as being an impossibly perfect metaphor for the state of Canada itself. The optimism of 1967 had vanished, the political landscape was splintering, the Canadian Army staring down civilians a few miles away. I returned to Regina to begin work on my film *The Ballad of Don Quinn*, but the images of Montréal never left my thoughts, and in 1992 with *The Ballad of Don Quinn* finished, I set out to explore those images and thoughts generated by that initial visit to Montréal.

Journal Entry 22/6/92 - Montréal

I don't know where this film is going. Things are different from 1990, no Oka, no Meech, perhaps later things will heat up but now? I saw the dome on Sunday, Fuller's dome, across the water, the grey water and grey sky and the dome was there. I think that part will work out, for the rest, where to end, what to include, what to exclude?

Journal Entry 7/10/92 - Montréal

So now I'm back, I live here and there's a referendum on. At the moment it looks like the No/Non side will win. After that, I don't know. The film is still so tentative, I'll shoot some footage of the referendum campaign, I need to tape some news broadcasts too, it's so frustrating having obstacles in the way of gathering all this fantastic stuff. I think I need more money, and the whole personal/family slant may be an entirely different film. Still, there's the

dome. I must get back to it before the snow flies and before they rebuild it.

Journal Entry 24/7/93 - Batoche

Can a film be stopped by mosquitoes? A pertinent question given the present circumstances. Trying to get a shot with nothing right. Overcast, absolutely calm, and wave after wave of mosquitoes.

Journal Entry 12/8/93 - near Grand Coulee, Saskatchewan

Despite some camera problems today has gone well. A beautiful day, sunny, low 20s. They had frost at Val Marie last night, and I could see my breath in Regina. Shots of the prairie today, the camera pointing out the passenger window, driving past fields of sunflowers, abandoned farms. Two wide shots today of a train creeping along the horizon. I wonder how they'll work. As always, I'm not sure where this is all going, but these shots today are very much part of my life out here, the countless hours I've spent exploring the landscape west of Regina, its grid of gravel and dirt roads, Grand Coulee, Pense, the abandoned houses and barns and churches. Change is here too, farms gone, old landmarks, the city creeping westward. The prairie relaxes me, like the ocean it has a hypnotic quality, its seeming monotony actually a network of millions of movements and textures and gradations of colour. This feels so natural out here, that warm sun, and the arc of the blue sky. A human is a presence in this landscape, small but vertical, a challenge to the horizon. I love it deeply, its sounds and wind and smells, the warmth of the sun on my forearm, the sliding clicks of the grasshoppers, the dry aroma of grass and rag weed, the purr of an airplane heading west a thousand feet up.

Journal Entry 16/8/93 - Regina

Once again, I am facing the dilemma of what to shoot, what to include and how to contact all these passing feelings, half formed notions. I realise I need more personal stuff, my family, friends, environment, and the prairies, how to tie them into what I'm doing. I shot at the Standing Buffalo Reserve, their Pow Wow. It was beautiful, huge cumulus clouds scraping over the bare hills, the fantastic costumes, the drummers in their circle of lawn chairs, the singing, it seems so otherworldly, and I could never locate its source. People would crowd round the drum circle, many clutching walkmans and blasters, recording. The dancers moved in a wide circle, some spinning and twisting, while others moved slowly, their feet stepping on the beat, visiting. I don't know about the footage, it's difficult territory, but finding my great-great uncle's grave on the plain above

the valley was thrilling. The horsetails moving in the breeze at the Thunderbird Drive-In as I waited in the mosquitoes for the sun to move past the clouds and talking with S. over burgers and fries, talking about cliches as the citronella pots smoked.

Journal Entry 9/6/94 - Montréal

This sporadic correspondence resumes and once again I'm lost, wondering what this film is about, wondering where it's going. I've shown a loose version to S. B. and T. and T. called my bluff and pointed out the areas that I've always felt uncomfortable with. The Montréal section and the final political section feel tacked on, a different film or films, and I have to find a way to better integrate them, or abandon them completely and concentrate on that section of the film that deals with home, family and the Saskatchewan landscape. At the moment I will resist abandoning them, I will try and hold on to some of the initial ideas, but if I can't find space for them, I will have to confront the idea that the film I'm making is not at all the film I set out to make.

I need to integrate the trip section into the rest of the film; it shouldn't be a separate section but should build throughout so there is a connection between walking at Batoche and walking at the Plains of Abraham. The political stuff too should move in and out of the film, and not stand alone as it presently does, and the Montréal footage has to be reconsidered. I'm seduced by the beauty of some of the images and reluctant to let them go, but it is clear that the footage I shot in Montréal in June of 1992 was coming from a different position than I presently occupy. There's a naivete there, and a tourist, and an outsider and the images are all surface without understanding.

I dream of this film, shifting between points of geography and time, moving from naivete to a deeper understanding, shifting from concerns on a mundane, quotidian plane to the wider social and political, pushing forward in the journey from west to east, but circling back as well, a film that flows forward like a river, but that wheels too in eddies and backwashes. What do I want from this film?

Journal Entry 20/9/94 - Montréal

Things seem now to fall in place. I made a few adjustments that seem to have cleared a way. The adjustments were quite minor but I left with a feeling close to euphoria. This shouldn't be all that surprising. I've been working on this, albeit sporadically, for so long now. At this point I feel comfortable with the film. It still jumps around a lot, and I'm still not sure of how to address the issues of Quebec and the First Nations, but I'm not too worried. The film seems to flow now, in a way it didn't before, and though I still have a lot of work to do I've turned a corner and I think I can perhaps lock the picture

within a week and then seriously begin to work on the sound. I really have a lot of writing to do, something to equal the opening monologue in terms of suggesting a shifting vision, either into a new myth or the collapse of a myth and a movement towards a clearer view of a situation.

The driving section has to be thought on. I'm not satisfied with the present dialogue and performance, although I like the idea of this interruption in the film. In its present form it doesn't work though, and if I can't come up with some better writing I will have to scour for alternatives. R's suggestion of a collage of dialogue (minimal), radio excerpts and music is intriguing. The use of radio here would allow me to deal with some of the political stuff without the present scenes of flag waving that are none too subtle.

We've had the election here last week, the P.Q. as expected won, but with only 45% of the popular vote and the talk at the moment is of a delay in holding the referendum. I think there may be a bit too much smugness in the federalist camp, after all the federalist party won only 44% of the vote and I think a number of Quebecers are waiting, and perhaps willing, to be convinced. I find myself shifting opinions constantly, at times distressed about the possibility of Quebec

separating, at other times wishing they'd just get on with it and optimistic that this would finally be the spur English Canada needs to establish what it is, what it hopes to be. Still, I think this could be an upsetting year, interesting no doubt, but the economy will suffer and there'll be much flag waving and incendiary statements coming from all sides. I saw an interesting item on T.V. last night, a group of Innu protesting at a hearing on low level N.A.T.O. training flights. They were waving signs at a group of white Labradoreans and chanting "Go Home, Go Home!" and the white Labradoreans were responding "We are home!"

The film was completed in May, 1995. During its time of production, there had been a national referendum, a Canadian election, and a Quebec election. A Quebec referendum was anticipated for that fall. I had moved from Saskatchewan to Montréal, a month after the film's completion, I moved to Toronto.

When I compared the finished film with the outline I drew up to solicit support, I found it held a surface resemblance. It had managed to pursue much of what I initially sought, but in a form and with a substance that I had not anticipated. In seeking to make a film about a country in transition, I found myself with a film that was as much about my own period of transition. Between expectation and realisation, in these gaps lies the film that is *(stories from) The Land of Cain*.

I kept a sporadic journal over the course of the two and a half years I worked on (*stories from*) *The Land of Cain* and a recurring entry is “I don’t know where this film is going”. I was interested in making a film that reflected an important historical epoch in Canada, and I was interested in exploring the documentary form, but I had no clear notion as to the direction the film would take.

I had greatly admired some of the films that had explored new territory in the documentary form, films such as Phil Hoffman’s *Passing Through (Torn Formations)*, Richard Kerr’s *The Last Days of Contrition*, David Rimmer’s *Black Cat, White Cat*, Rick Hancox’s *Moose Jaw*. These films had, in different fashions, opened up new ways of combining the subjective voice with an examination of a wider public subject, the “fusing of personal autobiography and history into a public project”¹. The films did not posit answers or summation, but were open-ended, suggestive and contemplative.

They eschewed the authoritative voice of the classic documentary practised by the National Film Board and other media institutions. They challenged the notions of objectivity, of completeness, providing instead an uncertain position, shifting and subjective that admitted the possibility of doubt or error or omission. These films questioned the stance of cinematic reality, their images were documents from the observed world, but they were in essence fictions that pointed to the artificiality of all documentary constructions.

I began the film without a central thesis. I was not, in the classic sense of the documentary, attempting to develop an argument. I had no idea what my conclusion would be, or if indeed there would be or could be one.

I felt convinced that Canada itself was in serious trouble. The collapse of the Meech Lake accord was accompanied by a great deal of anger and the public debate about Quebec’s relationship with the rest of the country grew increasingly bitter. In a similar fashion the Oka crisis brought out in the open a long-ignored aspect of failure in the Canadian state, its relationship with the First Nations. The benign, peaceful Canada I had grown up in was changing, or perhaps more accurately, was now emerging from beneath the weight of propaganda, and I was troubled by its angry, often racist rhetoric.

¹ Arthur Kroker in *Richard Hancox*, edited by Catherine Jonasson, pg. 45.

I knew the film would begin at Batoche in central Saskatchewan. I knew the film would end on the Plains of Abraham at Quebec. These two places represented alternative histories, for the French and the Native peoples, alternatives to the present arrangements of the Canadian state. I knew the film would document a road trip between these two sites. I knew the film would feature a soundtrack collage inspired by Glenn Gould's radio documentary *The Idea of North*, a number of voices talking about an as-yet-undefined sense of Canada. Beyond these certainties, (*stories from*) *The Land of Cain* was a film in search of a form.

The initial period of production was in the summer of 1992 when I travelled to Montréal for a two-week exploration. Already the landscape, political and geographical was shifting from my first impressions of the city in 1990. The Expo 67 site was being developed, my central metaphor of 1990 changing. I prowled around the city with a Bolex camera, overwhelmed by the visual luxuriousness of the city, trying to find a thread that I could spin into a film.

I paid a great deal of attention to graffiti, seeking in the urbanscape a found text that would provide a commentary for my explorations. In my naivete I read a great deal into some of the graffiti. "Love Moi" was not after all a commentary on the dual nature of Canada but the title of a film using a street-level approach to marketing.

I explored the Expo 67 site, disappointed at its renovation, but exhilarated to find myself in the geodesic dome, still a skeleton surrounded by chain link fencing. I attended the parades for the Fête National and Canada Day. I photographed a great number of flags.

I returned to Regina with a few thousand feet of film and many more questions. The footage, at times, was heartening, but it was disconnected and scattered and I had no idea how any of it could work its way into a film, had no idea where the film itself was going.

I moved to Montréal that fall to attempt to make some headway with the film. Progress was stalled by my own inability to find a direction in the footage I had shot that summer. Apart from shooting a few hundred feet of film during the Charlottetown Referendum in the fall of 1992, the film lay dormant into the spring of 1993.

My first year in Montréal brought on a period of examination about my origins in Saskatchewan. I found myself constantly comparing Saskatchewan with Montreal, looking for cultural and geographical similarities amidst all the clear differences. When I resumed work on the film, it was back in Saskatchewan.

I returned to Saskatchewan in the summer of 1993, attempting to trace my own understanding of that place. I felt that this was a necessary re-starting point for the film. If I was to make a film about Canada, I had to do it from my point of origin, the place in which I grew to know Canada.

I was drawn out onto the plains, searching in that space for my film. The first shot I took was on an empty stretch of road thirty kilometres south of Regina. The land stretched out like a billiard table, the road running on towards the horizon shimmering in the heat, and I turned on the camera and started walking.

It was only months later, back in Montréal, that the significance of that shot occurred to me. It linked up with a childhood dream of walking out into the landscape that lay a few blocks beyond our house in Regina and carrying on, across the plains, through the forest, and out onto the tundra, of walking out into Canada. It proved a useful starting point for picking up the trail of the film.

That summer I travelled about Saskatchewan, on the southern plains near Regina, in the badlands near the U.S. border, at Batoche during the annual Métis reunion. I encountered a landscape that constantly hovers on the edge of cliché, the flat fields of shifting wheat, the orange grain elevators, the setting suns, the overwhelming sky, struggling to resist post-modern ironies, searching through the weight of post card and picture book images for my own attachments.

The summer concluded at a family reunion. More than fifty of my siblings, uncles, aunts and cousins gathered at a lake near which my mother's family homesteaded in the late nineteenth century. It was a period of reflection on the steps that had brought my family into Canada and how in the hundred or so years we had connected to it.

I began to see the film in terms of a rock tossed in calm water, rippling rings spreading out from the point of entry. These various rings, my family, my home in Saskatchewan, my home in Montréal, were all linked to the initial entry, and each person living in this country had similar rings, shifting associations and connections, the individual linked through history and geography to a wider sense of things, to a nation.

That fall I made the road trip from Batoche to the Plains of Abraham with my filmmaker friend Brett Bell. It was the classic Canadian road trip in reverse, moving from the open space of the prairie into the dense rock claustrophobia of the Canadian Shield, paralleling the rivers that opened up the country, the Saskatchewan, the Red, the Ottawa, the St. Lawrence.

Again, I had no firm idea about what to shoot. The shape of the film was tenuous and shifting, and I would grab images not knowing if they had a place in this film, but looking for themes: water, walking, highway travel, road trip motels. There were the usual, unexpected moments of peculiar significance; finding ourselves in Sudbury driving beside Laurie Kerr, the wife of the Regina-based filmmaker Richard Kerr, a motel in North Bay with an extensive collection of Expo 67 photos on the wall, Oka graffiti spray painted on a rock face near the Mattawa.

It was impossible to travel through this landscape without being aware of the attention paid to it by generations of Canadian artists. The weight of representation lay heavy over it, from the Group of Seven through *La Region Centrale*. This landscape has been a constant in Canadian art making, a confrontation, an examination of the land that functions as the central metaphor in the Canadian imagination.

I was searching for a way of articulating its presence in my imagination, that "encounter, primal in the life of the Canadian sensibility, between human consciousness and the stark and alien Canadian landscape"² and I must confess, was unable to. The Shield resisted me, endless miles of rock and forest and water and I was not able to come to terms with it. I documented the route along the Trans-Canada, but was unable to move beyond the surface representation towards the metaphor, and it is perhaps this failure that best represents my encounter with that landscape.

When I sat down in the fall of 1993 and looked at my material, I found it fell into five general categories: footage of Saskatchewan, from my family reunion, from the road trip, political material (flags, election signs, re-photographed television news and election coverage), and the original footage from Montréal shot in 1992. I had an opening shot on the south Saskatchewan river below Batoche and a closing shot, on the St. Lawrence below Quebec, and a number of ideas as to how to connect them.

In editing I approached the five categories of footage as individual chapters, and apart from a little experimentation, worked on each chapter as a separate entity. The road trip footage served as a linking device between the other segments, an ongoing linear progression that pulled the film along. Of this footage, one series of shots proved particularly useful. The camera was mounted in the back of the car pointing past me and Brett and out the windshield. We used

² Bart Testa, *Machine in the Garden in Spirit in the Landscape*, pg. 61.

this shot throughout the trip and it provided a documentation of each stage of the journey.

The shot was inspired by a similar one in Chris Gallagher's film *Undivided Attention*. Gallagher had a reoccurring shot of a couple in an open sports car driving through a range of land and urbanscapes, jump cutting forward in great leaps of time and distance. While Gallagher's shot certainly documented an event, it functioned primarily as a metaphorical journey of observation. I was interested in using the shot primarily as a document of a specific trip.

This distinction is perhaps crucial to my approach with this film. The film was certainly going to be subjective, and limited by its subjectivity, but I was interested in making a film that engaged a specific cultural, historical, and political moment in Canada. The two poles this film would always fluctuate between were the hermetic, subjective personal documentary and the public issues orientated documentary. I felt strongly that the situation Canada was encountering needed to be addressed by this film, but at the same time I felt it was impossible to make a film that adequately responded to the complexities of these issues. It was becoming a film about the impossibility of framing Canada.

The shape of the film started to emerge from the accumulated footage. The road footage became a transition between the chapters that moved back and forward in time. The original Montréal footage, shot in 1992 demanded to be dealt with as a separate chapter. It was clearly the work of an outsider, someone looking for landmarks in unfamiliar terrain.

The Saskatchewan footage was primarily landscape images. Although I have always lived in a city, my connection to Saskatchewan is essentially connected to the open prairie, and I started to see this familiar landscape with fresh eyes as I grew accustomed to the rolling streets of Montréal.

As a child I had always felt I lived in the wrong place. Reading childhood fantasy stories set in dense forests or on lush hillsides, I looked around my own world for confirmation and found none in the flat brown and yellow grasses and towering blue skies. Now as I sat in my apartment in the Mile End of Montreal, I found myself looking to the sky for reassurance and finding it when it most resembled that of Saskatchewan. The prairie landscape did not trouble me, as the landscape of the Canadian Shield had. It was my base, the template against which I measured the world.

The footage from the family reunion had a distinct amateur³ bent and reminded me of the home movies my father had made from the late fifties through to the early seventies. They were primarily acts of documentation, proof that he had encountered Disneyland or Expo 67, but a strong aesthetic ran right through them. The limits of the medium, three minutes of footage per roll, forced my father to be selective, to look for highlights and patterns and I started to see this in my own footage, a spontaneous response to a moment, an attempt at recovery.

This realisation led me back to my father's films, and I sought to incorporate aspects of them into my film. We had made a trip from Saskatchewan to the Maritimes in 1963, six kids loaded into a station wagon with two adults. Now I found myself looking at this footage, comparing my reactions to Ottawa with that of my father thirty years earlier, a family reunion in 1973 against my footage from 1993, my father's footage of Expo 67 with my footage of the same site twenty-five years later. They were another layer of documentation, of social history, of travel, of exploration.⁴

The film had started to take on much more than I originally anticipated. The effect of leaving the prairies, my life in Montréal, my shifting impressions on what Canada was and was becoming all started to find their way into the film. I felt the one missing aspect was my present life in Montréal, and I returned to the streets of the city with a camera, now tracing out aspects I had come to know and to a greater degree understand, seeking to balance my initial naive footage with footage that came from an approaching understanding.

The picture editing occurred over the period of a year. The film was continually changing to accommodate political or personal developments, new footage was being shot to pull aspects together, numerous blind paths were pursued and backtracked from. The rhythms grew out of the shots, the juxtapositions motivated by colours and movements and thematic links, associations developing that had not been anticipated during shooting.

³ amateur (Fr< L amare, to love). It was only after moving to Quebec that I understood the origin of this word, and I use it very much in the sense of "to love" as much as "one who is somewhat unskilful". *Webster's New World Dictionary*.

⁴ Incorporation of home movies has been a source of investigation for a number of filmmakers, although my familiarity with this area is limited largely to the work of Phil Hoffman. This seems to me to be a limited generational pursuit, as the home movie was most widely employed from the fifties to the late seventies. With the advent of home video recorders, I imagine there will be a period of examination on these documents of domestic life, but the use of home video is far different from that of the 8mm and Super 8mm films. Home video is not as selective, "tape is cheap" and selections about what to include and what to exclude are not as decisive as the more exacting film medium.

I cut the picture without sound, but the soundtrack was the one area where I had a clear sense of direction. I wanted to create a polyphonic discussion around an idea, much as Glenn Gould had done in his radio documentary *The Idea of North*. I wanted the voices of a number of people to intermingle, overlap, fade up and down, their stories building a collage of impressions and personal histories that I hoped would offer a sense of the complexity of a country.

With the picture by and large cut I set about collecting my stories. My initial intent was to collect the stories as I collected the images, but as the film grew to reflect a more subjective experience than I originally intended, I felt the voices speaking had to reflect this. I eventually would only record the stories of people I had some personal connection to, family, friends and colleagues. I supplemented their subjective stories with excerpts from the media, radio and television stories that would provide a wider political context for the personal stories to work within.

The audio recordings proved very difficult. I was looking for a sense of what living in Canada meant to a number of people, but I was reluctant to ask specific questions, or engage in detailed discussions around the idea of Canada. I felt that any stories experienced within Canada were stories of Canada, that the life of a country, any country, was made up of all the stories contained within it, but this is tenuous ground on which to build.

In the recordings sessions I would ask people to talk about landscapes that meant something to them, about road trips, about impressions of Montréal. I asked them questions about Batoche and the Plains of Abraham, about Expo 67 and the coming Referendum.

The responses were as varied as the story tellers, who came from a variety of backgrounds and places and experiences. I felt on a tight rope at times, attempting to steer the discussion towards what I felt the film needed, but reluctant to circumscribe the range of remembrance. I found myself at times asking people to carry a burden they were understandably reluctant to take on, confronted by James Clifford's assertion that "the personal does not yield to the general without loss".⁵

⁵ James Clifford in *On Ethnographic Allegory*, from *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, pg. 104. A specific instance of this was when I was recording the stories of a friend, like me, a third generation Canadian, but of Japanese rather than Ukrainian/Irish descent. I was aware of specific instances when she had been questioned about her Canadian identity because of her Asian background and I very much wanted her to recount these moments. She was well aware of my intent, and refused to allow me to tape these stories. I was seeking to reflect a wider perspective on

Sound editing was largely a matter of cutting the sound to fit the images. The first stage involved selecting “highlights” from the audio recordings, sections that were evocative and focused and had a relationship to the images, even though this relationship was most often tenuous. This involved losing a great deal of terribly interesting material that was either too long or not related closely enough to the rest of the stories.

I was forced to confront my own role as the filmmaker. I had had notions of stepping away from the material, of leaving gaps for alternative interpretations to flow in, of de-centring the film but sound editing disabused me of these notions. I had clearly guided the range of discussion and I was now clearly pulling out fragments of often extended conversations in order to fit the needs of my film. I was aware of the dangers of using these recordings out of context or providing juxtapositions that were not the intentions of the storytellers. I was left with the responsibility of the filmmaker, the base upon which all films are made and ultimately judged.

I still sought to clear space for interpretation within the film, to leave gaps for the audience to insert their own reading. In approaching my own voice-over, I was reluctant to provide a stable, consistent voice. An aspect of this reluctance was my desire to avoid the sense of the controlling voice-over that is a feature of the traditional documentary, a voice-over that closes off interpretations and alternatives. Another aspect of my reluctance stemmed from what I felt to be the impossible task of adequately framing all the disparate aspects that had entered the film.

In my recording sessions with the storytellers, I was struck by the lack of awareness about the events at Batoche and the Plains of Abraham. As the film chronicled a journey between these two sites, I felt it was important that their significance was noted, but I was reluctant to deliver explicit information about these sites. I ultimately came to the decision to allow for the possibility that the audience might not be aware of the significance of these sites. If I was interested in opening up space for multiple interpretations (and I was) I had to accept that audiences would bring many things to a viewing of the film and one of these things might well be ignorance about certain historical events. That too was a reflection of our national condition.

Canadian experiences than I personally could offer, but my friend did not want her personal experience to stand for a wider situation on race. Her suspicions about my intentions were well founded.

There were periods of intense analysis throughout the production. In using and editing others' stories, I was clearly placed in a position of power that had to adequately respond to the intentions of the story tellers. In attempting to reflect the diversity within Canada I was forced to consider issues of appropriation of others' stories, issues and histories. I found myself at times attempting to reflect diversity but instead pigeon-holing people or peoples, placing a burden of representation upon them that no individual can be asked to bear.⁶

I was forced to confront my own sources of privilege, as a filmmaker, as a white, male English-speaking Canadian. I came up against my own limits as an interpreter. Seeking to speak of a country, I found I could only adequately speak of my own relationship to it.

I also found myself attempting to make a film in academia, a world of constant analysis and evaluation, where every step forward creatively was accompanied by a thorough review of strategies and a flood of (for me) new theoretical concepts. I felt the need to work through this information and to consider my own approaches in light of it. At times, this caused me to back away from material I perhaps might not have in another environment.

⁶ I wanted the film to address issues of concern to First Nations people. In trying to do so I found myself at a Pow Wow in Saskatchewan photographing the dancers in their traditional costumes. When I looked at this footage months later, I was disturbed by this superficial, surface treatment and my representation of Native peoples in this highly ritualised activity. Ultimately the First Nations people were represented in the film by an absence, graffiti on the highways, George Erasmus's disembodied voice on the radio.