

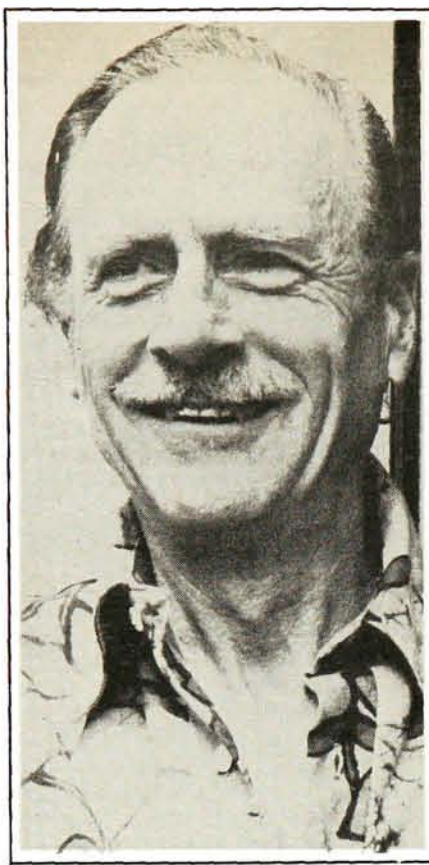
them to the original texts. For viewers already somewhat familiar with McLuhanism, the archival talk-show sequences may resonate at other levels: reminding them of, for example, the sheer extent to which this "media guru" was courted by television itself. For either type of viewer, there are moments of delight here: the famous extract from *Annie Hall* in which Woody Allen puts down a pompous communications teacher (loudly pontificating behind Woody in a movie line-up) by producing McLuhan himself to give the final word; or late-night talk-show host Tom Snyder trying to grapple with McLuhan and McLuhanism.

It is interesting to consider this TV production in terms of the "media guru's" own *esthétique* for TV, some of which is revealed in the program itself. At one point, for example, McLuhan – being interviewed on a TV talk-show the day after the first 1976 U.S. presidential debate – succinctly points out that "Chatting casually without a script is what works on TV, not debate." Unfortunately, his words have been somewhat ignored for this production. This is especially true of writer/narrator Tom Wolfe's presence on screen. He is so obviously reading the cue cards for his delivery that any sense of spontaneity and full engagement is eliminated. Even Wolfe's potentially lovely anecdote about taking McLuhan to a strip-joint finally comes across as rehearsed and stilted.

This is not the case with other interviewees, who are allowed to reminisce or "chat" about McLuhan. Mrs. Marshall McLuhan, Pierre Trudeau, Father John Kelly, Jonathan Miller, Norman Mailer, David Garth, Richard Salant, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., brother Morris McLuhan and son Michael McLuhan all provide interesting glimpses of the "monomaniac." Somehow Mailer is the most engaging, and surprisingly so. Surely he is far more "hot" than any of the others in his speaking style. By contrast, Trudeau is "cool" to the point of suspected cryogenics. (One wonders, too, at Trudeau's admission that it took a personal explanation from McLuhan to make him understand the impact of inflation on daily life: that "each person was diminished.")

The most fascinating aspect of *Marshall McLuhan – The Man And His Message* is the personal glimpses of his home life that Stephanie McLuhan interweaves throughout. Wisely drawing upon candid remarks by family members, as well as home-movies and intimate knowledge, she allows for a far more personal (and therefore, far more intriguing) portrait to emerge.

The result, however, is oddly disturbing. McLuhan's media persona ("monomaniacal" guru of the electronic age) seems, it is hinted here, to equally summarize "the family man" as well. His widow talks of his "jillion ideas" constantly coming at her in their daily life, to the point where "I'd consciously turn off." His son, Michael, talks of being raised on McLuhanisms all his life and tells a revealing anecdote of his father's intellectual stubbornness to the point where "I gave up." A fascinating film clip, excerpted from footage of a daughter's wedding, contains McLuhan – in the dressing-room with his daughter before the ceremony – pontificating about some intellectual idea on the subject of "fatherhood". His daughter, clearly disappointed, ignored and upstaged despite her lovely gown and the occasion, finally turns away from him, back to the mirror. McLuhan, however,



● McLuhan: fascinating but tragic figure

drones on, seemingly oblivious to the emotional context of his chosen stage.

In this production, then, Stephanie McLuhan has taken some definite personal risks – using subtle ironies to quietly (but also, lovingly) suggest that life with father had its down-side. The importance of this program arises from just this personal touch. If we are alert at all to its nuances, we must then slightly reconsider McLuhanism itself. The portrait that emerges here is of an intellectually driven man, somewhat detached from family and friends.

This helps explain (for me, at least) a contradiction present in his work. Late in *Marshall McLuhan – The Man And His Message*, McLuhan tells an interviewer: "Anything I talk about is usually something I am resolutely against!" Arguably, this tone never emerged in his writing, except, possibly, towards the end of his career. Instead, the predominant impression is of someone excited and enthusiastic (even wholly optimistic) about the electronic media age. In the many talk-show excerpts here, there is certainly little sense of a man "resolutely against" what he so clearly saw happening in our times. Perhaps, had he included his emotions in his analysis, the result would have been far different.

As it is, McLuhan emerges as a fascinating, but tragic figure – understood in his lifetime largely by the very people who would use his insights to further what he was "resolutely against." It is no secret that McLuhan was courted – and won over – by the Madison Avenue advertising/political consulting expertise that has so altered our lives over the past 20 years.

*Marshall McLuhan – The Man And His Message* is being telecast as part of a new CBC-TV series of Thursday night "specials." It is well worth watching.

Joyce Nelson ●

**MARSHALL McLUHAN – THE MAN AND HIS MESSAGE** d./p. Stephanie McLuhan sc./narr. Tom Wolfe cam. Randall Platt mus. Michael Montez running time: 55 min., colour video, 1984. p.c. McLuhan Productions, in association with CBC-TV, Toronto.

## Camera Canada

Three short films this month, including two seen at Toronto's Festival of Festival in September.

### TRASH TO TREASURE

The prosaic garbage truck is centre screen, there's a drum beat or two, and then into the titles. An interesting opening to a look at Ana Teresa Novaes, a talented and energetic artist who arrived in Canada, looked around, and decided to teach kids an "alternative language through puppets." Combining her worry about technology and "what is left behind" with her considerable creative talents, she hit upon a kids' workshop utilizing "usable garbage."

Ana Teresa Novaes has found a way to link children and seniors with the huge amounts of trash discarded by today's society. She says, quite rightly, that old people are the best collectors – they keep everything – and she encourages them to collect for her and her kids.

From plastic bottles, egg cartons, paper tubes – almost everything cuttable and bendable – she motivates the children in her workshop to use the emotions inside them. They invent weirdly unique puppets, cutting, glueing and experimenting, and talking about creating with "stuff" that isn't new. Novaes shows them how to bring life to the puppets with movement and dialogue in their own words. The kids admit to being scared at first, but progress rapidly to enjoyment and showmanship, and stage entertainments for local audiences including the seniors who gather the discarded material for them.

Ana Teresa Novaes has a vivid and delightful personality that shines out of the screen, and the kids are fun too. However, the film is rather awkwardly put together, with a plethora of information and effects scrambled together – a collage of family photographs recollecting the artist's Brazilian background; travel-

ling matte; old people collecting; the workshop in operation; the puppet performance – but hey! let's not come down too hard on Steven Deme. He's obviously talented and in love with his chosen craft, so one looks forward to more of his films.

d./cam. Steven Deme p./ed. Helen Henshaw orig. mus. Michel Therrien p.c. Compass Films, 48 Selwood Ave., Toronto M4E 1B2 (416) 694-6449. 16mm., col. running time: 25 mins. (video format also available).

### REVOLUTION

An animated piece involving first of all, a triangle lazily revolving, and then joined by another shape. And that's all it is really, lots of shapes having a good time. Rough round the edges, a sort of *naïf* film, but curiously hypnotic and restful. As the miscellaneous shapes metamorphose, and spin and turn in space, it could be interpreted as being about making decisions, choosing the right paths or, again, anything the viewer wished to inject into or impose upon it. Of course, what is anathema to some is paradise to others...

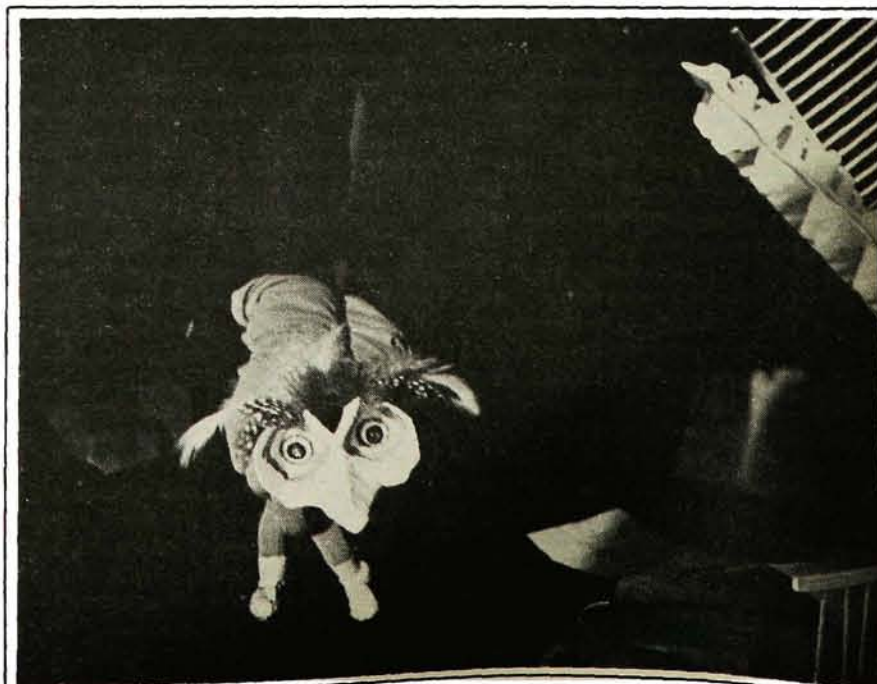
A film by Daniel Sokolowski, 1984, 16mm., col. running time: 10 mins. Availability: (613) 728-9850.

### LAS ARADAS

In many ways, this is a non-film. The eye feasts on peaceful visuals of trickling streams, rivulets of water over rocks, a mountain path – but the female voice-over is recounting in graphic detail the 1980 Sumpil River slaughter, when an entire village was massacred by San Salvadorean soldiers. A deeply disturbing emotional experience, considerably heightened by the simple structure of the film.

A film by Janice Lundman, 1984, 16mm., col. running time: 8 mins. Dist.: Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre, 299 Queen St. W., Toronto M5V 1Z9 (416) 593-1808.

Pat Thompson ●



● Movie with legs: puppeteer Teresa Novaes' fingers do the walking