

rec., mix. Joe Grimaldi, Dave Appleby, Dino Pigat mus. arrange. /conduct. Bobby Edwards theme sung by Dawn Aitken "Barnacle Rag" comp. by Ben Mink perform. by Johnathan Goldsmith, Ben Mink (courtesy of Passport Records) unit pub. Molly Thom stills John Phillips tech. advisor Kay Aoyama (fencing), Gerald C. Cupchik (psych.) sculpture by Kosso Eloul title design Paula Munck l.p. Sally Kellerman, Stephen Lack, John Huston, Lawrence Dane, John Peter Linton, Patrick Crean, Marty Galin, Joann McIntyre, Sheila Currie, Sandra Scott, Harry Kumano, Kunio Suyama, Hadley Kay, Mina E. Mina, Al Bernardo, Jim Coates, Wendy Creed, Ardon Bess, Maxwell Moffett, Robert Silverman, Tony Moffat-Lynch, James Kidney, Catherine Vaneri, Nick Nichols, Rummy Bishop, Martin Donlevy, Dan Bradley, Anne de Villiers p.c. Michael Grant Productions Ltd. (1979) col. 35mm running time 98 min.

Head On is not a nice movie. But being nice has been precisely the problem with so many Canadian films. Conservative in style and content, they may be respectable, but rarely are they exciting. **Head On** careens and careers all over the place, often to little effect, but no one can accuse it of being uninteresting.

It tells the story of a professor of abnormal psychology, Peter Hill (Stephen Lack), and a child therapist, Michelle Keys (Sally Kellerman), who meet when their almost identical Mercedes sports cars collide head on. Their unusual introduction leads to an affair characterized by a series of violent and sardonic fantasy games.

Sex and romance are popular film themes, but only infrequently are they examined with any originality or subtlety. Many contemporary "adult" films are largely insult comedies, with lots of hilarious yelling and screaming, scenes of people caught outdoors in their underwear, but without a glimpse of real emotion, or an understanding of why people do and don't love one another. One thinks of the banal shtick of **Willie and Phil**, the boring pretensions of **Heartbeat**, the brainlessness of **Nothing Personal**. **Head On** treads dangerously in this direction, but is saved from dumb oblivion by its inventiveness and unpredictability.

Early in the film, Lack hears a radio report of the landing on earth of intelligent aliens. If one interprets this as a clue — it must have been included in the script for a reason — it suggests that the world this couple inhabits is unreal, one in which anything can happen. (**Head On**'s advertising uses the phrase "expect the unexpected.") Seen in this light, their fantasy games can be understood as metaphors for the intangible games couples play daily.

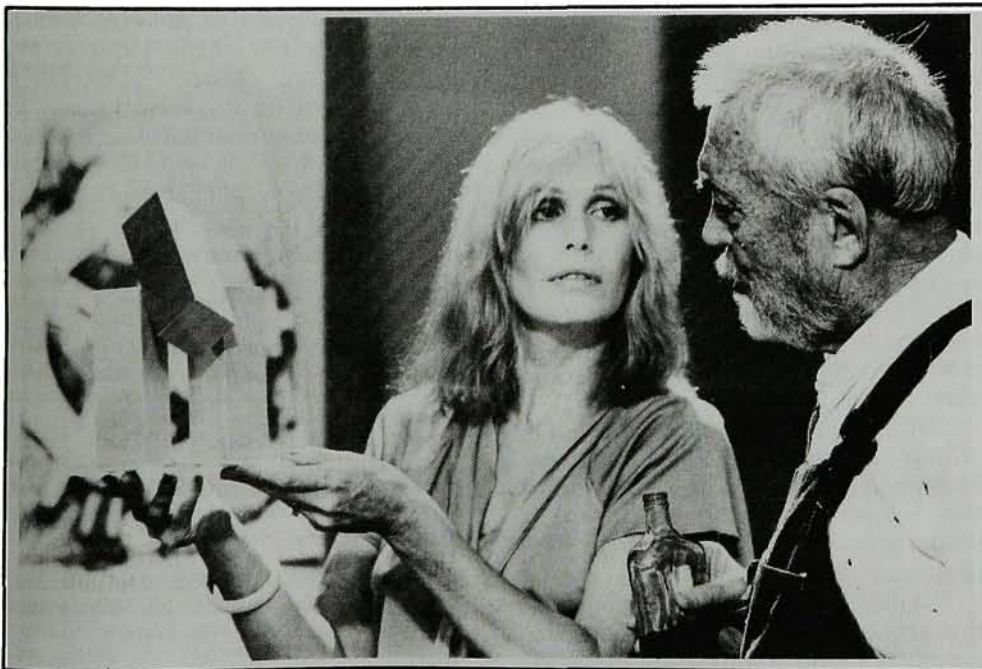
In one scene, for example, Kellerman arranges for Lack to be picked up by a chauffeur, driven to her husband's office after hours, and outfitted as her spouse. She then enters to "confess" her affair with Lack, an inspired way of simultaneously expressing both regret and joy at her infidelity.

Occasionally, however, the film lapses into sentimentality. By choosing a happy ending, the filmmakers missed the opportunity to maintain a consistent, if macabre, tone. In another scene, following their separation after a disastrously unsuccessful game, the protagonists meet again. As they stroll along the waterfront, Lack says, "We lost what we had light years ago." Although they both exchange sarcastic witticisms of the highest order, the scene doesn't quite ring true. In fact, their reunion seems to be less an outcome of the characters' desires than of the screenwriters' wish to continue the story.

The casting of the two principals is perfect. Kellerman, who is frequently restricted to roles in which she is required to only look sex-starved (her characters in **Foxes**, **Serial**, **Loving Couples** for example), brings the necessary warmth and intelligence to Michelle Keys. Stephen Lack lives up to his entertainingly eclectic performance in **The Rubber Gun**, and along with Donald Sutherland, may be the actor most capable of expressing a sophisticated and quick intelligence on screen. John Huston, as Lack's artist-father, is engaging, even if his character is irrelevant.

Head On was shot in and around Toronto, and is, surprisingly, actually set there. But the filmmakers have admirably avoided making this explicit. Instead, they have presented the city in glimpses, creating a "look" that is identifiably Toronto-esque, yet also quietly surreal in keeping with the script. In fact, **Head On**'s greatest virtue is its insistence on the viewer's participation, its refusal to spell everything out. It may be thanks to Brian DePalma, and films like **Sleuth**, that **Head On** is not easily classifiable — which is good.

Gerry Flahive



In Sally Kellerman's eyes, **Head On**'s John Huston is a first-rate sculptor.

CFMDC Short Film Selection

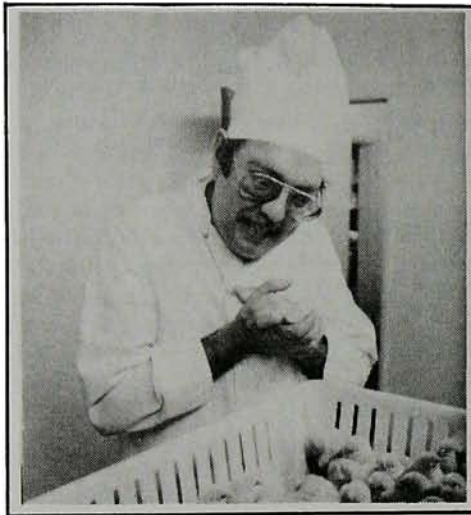
On Thursday, September 4 (opening night of the Festival of Festivals), the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre presented an intriguing selection of short 16 mm films at the Science Centre's Ontario Film Theatre. Notable among them were Robert McLachlan's **An Egg Story**, Drew Morey's **This is the Title of My Film**, and three animated one-minute pieces, **Animals**, **Specimen**, and **Night Time**.

Originally conceived as a promotional film for a client in the B.C. egg industry, **An Egg Story** lost its financial support when it was half finished, so it was completed independently by Robert McLachlan. In keeping with his original intent, McLaughlan has produced an entertaining, informative film about eggs. It also contains some nice, light touches of satire.

The film begins in the kitchen of a large restaurant, where serious voice-over narration announces a government-sponsored contest to find The Perfect Food. This inspires a goofy, gullible, underdog chef, Norman, to embark on a quest for the perfect egg. Not content simply to choose a perfect egg, he must breed it, which of course affords the filmmaker the "perfect" opportunity to expose the viewer to every aspect of egg production. We follow Chef Norman ("My name's Chef Norman...perhaps you've heard of me?") to the henhouse, where a farmer humours him by choosing the finest egg from among thousands for him. But at the hatchery, the chick from Norman's egg is accidentally lost in the crowd. He assumes that the one he receives is from his extraordinary egg, and christens her Margaret. When Margaret reaches maturity, Norman ecstatically fondles her first egg, the perfect offspring of the perfect hen. However, in his excitement he loses the egg on a conveyor belt which bears it, with the letter 'M' marked on its shell, into the sorting/packaging facilities. Norman dashes frantically around among eggs in various stages of processing — uniform rows of virginal, fresh eggs reflecting in his glasses. Finally, a fork-lift operator takes pity on him, writes an 'M' on the shell of an anonymous egg, and hands it to the credulous chef.

Norman's egg is judged in a laboratory setting by two scientists who, as they come to their decision, manage to enumerate the egg's most attractive attributes — plentiful, delicious, nutritious, versatile, etc. Chef Norman's "Eggs, Any Style" becomes the official food of the Prime Minister, indignant citizens complain about the government wasting money to come to such an obvious conclusion, and the officials reply, of course, that it was worth it.

The occasional intervention of the narrator's voice over the story of Norman Odyssey adds a mock-serious documentary note to the film. Deft editing to the rhythm of a lively, Haydn violin



opus lends a sophisticated, delicate mood, at once humorous and appropriate, to the various stages of egg production. Both the direction and editing of **An Egg Story** reinforce the combined comic and documentary aspects of it, sustaining a sense of the absurd urgency of Norman's mission and the indifference of the chicken/egg industry to it. The various environments of kitchen, farm, and hatchery are rendered accurately and sympathetically, and Norman's ebullient, bug-eyed wonder keeps most of the film's sequences fresh and amusing.

This Is The Title of My Film is a delightfully subversive black-and-white parody of soap operas, which also examines and satirizes predictable dramatic constructions, the mechanics of emotional manipulation in film and life, and the craft of filmmaking itself. Like a Beckett play, the film suggests that "all men talk, when talk they must, the same tripe," but this attitude is expressed in a style which provokes belly laughter and snickers rather than the mirthless smile.

The dialogue of the entire film consists of exquisite one-line descriptions of a soapy script, delivered dramatically, complete with verbal sound effects of the iron on the ironing board, the door slamming, the phone ringing, etc. Here is an approximate sample of the screenplay:

SHE answers the phone saying...)
 "Rring!" (grinning brightly) "Greetings. Meaningless inane chatter concerning the weather. Subtle innuendo about relations with caller; distinct sexual undertones." (sexy smile)

The direction is punchy and relentless, the acting nicely restrained and well-timed for comic and melodramatic effect. Everything is effectively combined

to give bite and savour to the ironies in the script. The final credit echoes the self-descriptive statement of the film's title — "Director's Name". The principal, creative contribution to the film apparently came from Drew Morey.

The animated short, **Animals**, illustrates a poet's subjective, nostalgic comparison of the green world of wild animals and the urban world of men. The animal-filled forest, where curious bears are less threatening than human vandals, gives way to the angular, menacing architecture of the city. The poet/narrator looks back upon her fear in an underground parking lot, confronted by a beast of the urban jungle. A grisly bear rises up snarling from behind a parked car, and its features metamorphose until it becomes a threatening city punk. The poet comments finally that this apparition was "most fearsome for what in it was man," as word and picture meld into a succinct, provocative image of the dark side of human nature.

Specimen opens with garishly tinted, animated, still photos of a couple laughing and walking in a park. Gradually the man walks ahead, leaving the woman looking after. The narrator is a female voice which becomes more venomous as the images advance, eventually ending with her avowal that, although he is gone, she still possesses him in photographs — preserved in emulsion/formaldehyde. This corresponds to a freeze-frame portrait, which takes its place in a gallery of several male faces arranged in rows. **Specimen** is a bizarre, choppy little piece which exposes the camera as a potentially perverse instrument, actually capable of lovelessly stealing a part of the subject's soul. It also illustrates a potential for emotional bankruptcy, and a demonic addiction to variety, two prevalent dangers in sexual politics since the revolution.

Using the technique of glass painting, **Night Time** explores a child's nightmare in fluid images which are at once sinister and ephemeral. A child's fears are imaged as dark, colourful, and unstable. Amoebic monsters emerge from a toilet bowl to swallow the dreamer, and other creatures loom and threaten. The dreamer runs, looking hauntingly like the desperate soul in Edvard Munch's lithograph, "The Cry". The title and credit, which do not appear until the end of the piece, come like an almost gratuitous note of objectivity.

Chris Lowry

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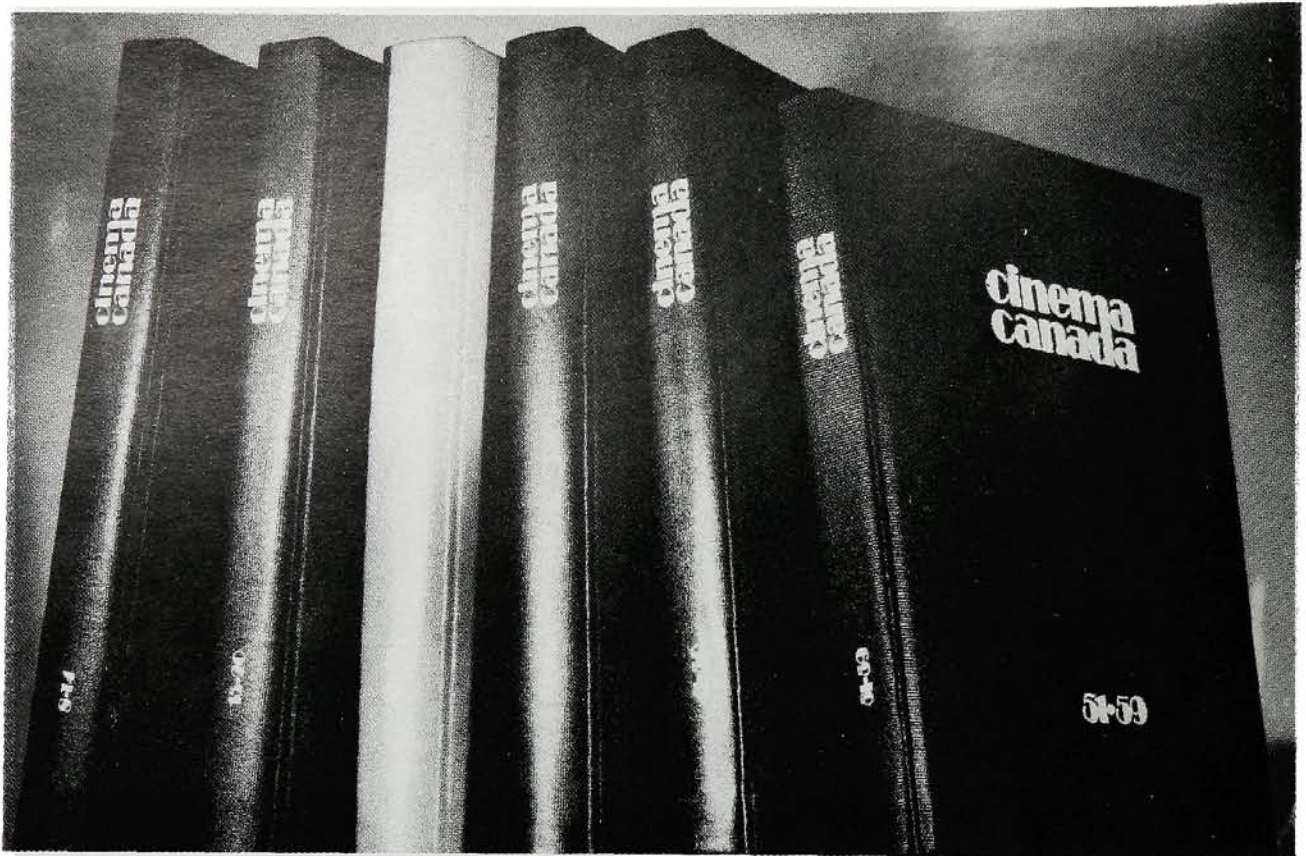
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