

**Johnston...Johnston**

*Directed by John Hopkins; Square Deal Productions; 23 mins.; 35mm.* PEI-based filmmaker John Hopkins's second short drama is an ambitious, inventive, and timely film about a "ghost in the machine" of corporate Canada. Revolving around its silent protagonist Johnston (Henry Czerny), a Toronto stockbroker whose dream life begins to filter into his workaday world, this kinetic exploration of the deadening effects of corporate greed and conformity soon splinters its central character's existence into a temporal and spatial fun house mirror of fear, loathing, and eternal recurrence. Johnston's simple desire to escape the daily grind of amorality and avarice distorts his world to the point where fantasy and reality are interchangeable. Directing an experienced, effective cast in addition to Czerny (Lenore Zann, Justin Louis, John Wildman, Ben Cardinal), Hopkins successfully constructs a dazzling and dizzying of individual powerlessness and alienation with nods to Buster Keaton and Samuel Beckett (Hopkins himself makes a rather obvious cameo appearance as a streetcar passenger absorbed in a copy of Beckett's *Endgame*). Despite some ostentatious moments, *Johnston... Johnston* is a rewarding follow-up to the talented Hopkins's award-winning 1980 debut, *Portfolio*, itself a satirical whirligig of one character's time and space meltdown ●

**Drowning in Flames**

*Directed by Gariné Torossian; Gariné Torossian Productions; 25 mins.; 16mm.* In her short but already impressive career, Toronto filmmaker Gariné Torossian has offered experimental explorations of memory and identity in both *Visions* (1992) and the award-winning *Girl From Moush* (1993). Her latest film, *Drowning in Flames*, furthers those concerns while engaging cinematically the work of visual artists Mike and Doug Starn. Described by Torossian as a "confrontation" with their art, the film is a commentary on the cinematic "re-imagining" of the Starns's work. Layering the Starns's imagery (itself a layering of borrowed and original images) on her own celluloid and video images, Torossian's baroque collage of sound and vision is evocative of everything from flicker films

to the work of the late Arthur Lipsett. Dense and dreamlike, *Drowning in Flames* examines relationships between body and technology, identity and memory, and it suggests new relationships between images and those who watch them. Within this poetic and strangely unsettling cinematic vortex of images, Torossian affirms brilliantly that the starting point for all image-making – the Starns's and her own – is uncertainty ●

**Reading Tom Sawyer**

*Directed by Ken Furlong; New Brunswick Filmmakers Coop; 20 mins.; 16mm.* From the New Brunswick Filmmakers Coop comes Ken Furlong's accomplished, assured drama about the nebulous region between reality and perception. In a tiny police interrogation room, two investigators grill a suspect about a crime he may or may not have committed. As the interrogation continues far into the night and the accused's exhaustion mounts, the relationship between the inquisitors' verbal reconstructions offered and the actual event itself becomes more and more tenuous. In this dark, Kafkaesque process, the accused begins to believe what his interrogators suggest to him. What actually happened, the structured absence in this taut little epistemological drama, becomes increasingly irrelevant. In a country of the falsely convicted (Donald Marshall, David Milgaard, Guy Paul Morin, et al.), *Reading Tom Sawyer* is a potent reminder of the power of those who speak from within the legal system. Stylishly composed in stark black and white and performed superbly by Barry Cameron, Robbie O'Neill and Rob

Pinnock, this "New Brunswick noir" is a chilling outline of that sinister space where deeds end and words begin ●

**From Pig to Oblivion**

*Directed by Simon Barry; 10 mins.; 35mm.* Just what is it about men in Canadian cinema? From the "cowards, bullies and clowns" (to borrow Robert Fothergill's description) who blundered across Canadian screens in the 1960s and 1970s, to the alienated, awkward boy-men who populate more recent films by Michael Jones, John Paizs, Jean-Claude Lauzon, Atom Egoyan, and Guy Maddin (to name but a few), Canadian masculinity appears to be in a state of constant crisis. To our cinematic gallery of befuddled and bamboozled Canadian males, then, let us welcome yet another: Stan, the central figure in Vancouver director Simon Barry's amusing *From Pig to Oblivion*. Not only has Stan just been dumped by his girlfriend, it's also his birthday. Visited that evening by two male friends (who else?!), Stan observes numbly while his two angels of coarse compassion deliver an unlikely remedy to their lovelorn friend: an inflatable pig named Suzy. Despite some crackly conversation and reassuring philosophy about modern love, Stan remains unconvinced and is still in pain when his buddies leave. Unlike his departed friends, though, Stan will find a measure of hope in Suzy's many polyurethane, porcine charms. Cleverly written and well acted by Ben Ratner, Nicholas Lea, and Raul Inglis, *From Pig to Oblivion* is a wry and sly commentary on the lonely, laughable, downright perverse limits of male bonding ●

Henry Czerny and director John Hopkins in *JOHNSTON...JOHNSTON*