

network (there's hardly a woman on screen in part one) of police, politicians, business leaders and Catholic prelates, all of whom knew full well what was happening and yet refused to act—the system and the status quo functioned so well, and so profitably, why rock the boat? Part one ends with a scene in which a cheque for the building fund is presented to the orphanage. The camera passes slowly over the smug, glowing faces of the archbishop and various government and community leaders, followed by a series of tight close-ups on to the boys, emphasizing their isolation from the world and from each other, their faces closed, mask-like, pinched and numbed by pain and hopelessness.

These are the faces of prisoners of totalitarian regimes, whether of the organized brutality of the state, the discreet sins of omission and commission of organized religion, or the house-bound depredations of the family next door—the boys of St. Vincent are the prisoners of male power, absolutely held, absolutely corrupt •

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Reviewed by Maurie Alioff

Le sexe des étoiles

Directed by Paule Baillargeon, **written by** Monique Proulx, **produced by** Jean-Roch Marcotte and Pierre Gendron, **with** Denis Mercier, Marianne-Coquelicot Mercier, Tobie Pelletier and Sylvie Drapeau. Les Productions du Regard Inc./Bloom Films Inc.

▼ The ad logo for Paule Baillargeon's *Le Sexe des étoiles* shows a band-aid placed horizontally across the nethermost area of a neatly trimmed pubis. This coy attempt at visual wit alludes to one of the movie's principal characters. Marie-Pierre (Denis Mercier) was once Pierre-Henri until, for reasons the film never explores, he opted for a transsexual's definitive commitment to gender re-shaping. During *Le Sexe des étoiles*' evocative, fluidly edited opening, Marie-Pierre has just rolled into Montreal on a bus from New York, dressed in the kind of tasteful outfit favoured by Outremont housewives who clock a lot of hours on bistro terraces. In shots that don't include her face, the character is introduced as an enticingly mysterious figure. Unfortunately, two hours later, you still don't know what Marie-Pierre's got on her mind, or in her heart. Neither Monique Proulx's script (adapted from her own novel), nor the



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film Baillargeon made from it, clue us in to the motives and impulses that drive this character.

Without the history and substance she needs, Marie-Pierre is reduced to a gimmicky plot device that adds a bit of spice to a fairly routine coming-of-age story. The main character of *Le sexe des étoiles* is Marie-Pierre's daughter, a lonely 12-year-old who faces the world through escapist fantasies, or by hiding behind adolescent disdain. Camille (first-time actress Marianne-Coquelin Mercier) is a brainy astronomy buff who likes gazing at the heavens through her telescope while making voice-over comments like, "Everything ends up in couples. Disgusting."

Trapped in a frosty, sexless galaxy of her own making, Camille is obsessed with her long-lost papa, convinced he is the only one who can save her from her gloomy solitude. Apparently, no one seems to have thought of telling the kid about papa's drastic change in lifestyle, even though her equally unhappy mother Michèle (Sylvie Drapeau) has a boyfriend who is both a psychologist and the student counsellor in Camille's school.

Once daughter and father meet, the prim, bourgeois girl has a mildly flustered reaction to dad-in-a-dress asking, "Think I'm pretty?" Camille determines to harangue Marie-Pierre into resuming her fatherly duties, oblivious to empirical evidence. She induces the gender bender to stay in Montreal and check into a seedy, but quaint rented room.

From this point on, *Le sexe des étoiles* narrows and flattens out. Risking absurdity, earnestly determined to be as tasteful as Marie-Pierre's wardrobe, it plods along from one soapy scene to another, drying up its own juices.

There are, of course, some touching moments in Baillargeon's film, and some good ideas implied by Proulx's material, for instance the anguish of a transformed person being forced to regress to a self that she has rejected. Unfortunately, as written by Proulx and acted by the teddy-bearish, incessantly beaming Mercier, Marie-Pierre doesn't provoke any feelings of urgency. She seems to have derived her idea of being a woman from *Homemakers'* magazine, or at best, *Elle*. When she lolls around in a kimono, contentedly snips out dress patterns, or admires herself in a mirror, the character is more silly than engaging.

As for Camille, her character sticks on one tedious note: depressed grouchiness. The movie reaches a point where you

want to tell her to shut up, stop harassing papa, and let the poor woman get on the next bus to New York. On the other hand, Camille could have been made more monstrous in her attempts to conquer her father while Marie-Pierre could have been a little dangerous and given the power to seduce Camille into her world. *The Crying Game's* strength derives largely from the fact that Dil bewitches both the hero and the audience, creating psychic disruptions that are exciting and provocative.

All *Le sexe* can deliver in its penultimate scene is Camille gazing morosely at her first menstrual blood and taking a wintry bike ride with Lucky (Tobie Pelletier), a boy who's been pursuing her throughout the film. Ah yes, she's a woman now, and life will continue, for better or for worse, without papa. Unfortunately, *Le sexe des étoiles*, although competently shot (by Éric Cayla), acted and directed, is too genteel and puritanical to ignite real sparks ●

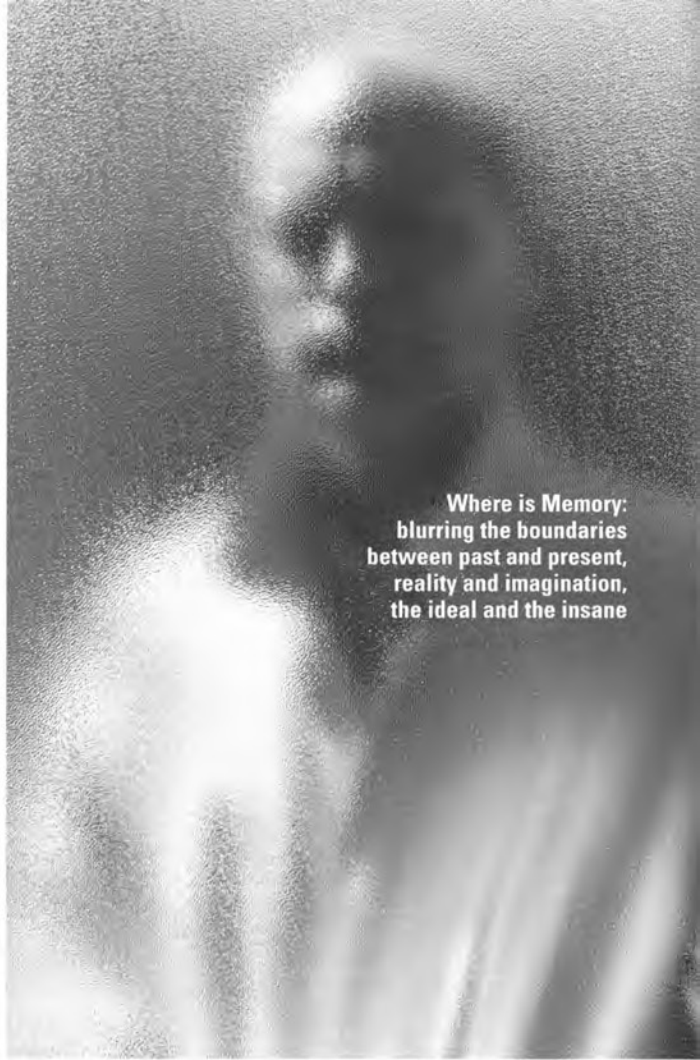
Reviewed by Peter Harcourt

Where is Memory

Written, produced and directed by Christopher Gallagher, with Peter Loeffler. Foxglove Films Inc.

▼ Until recently, Chris Gallagher made short, experimental films that, in the intricacy of their conception, seemed typical of the West Coast. Rimmeresque in their apparent simplicity, *The Nine O'Clock Gun* (1980), *Seeing in the Rain* (1981), and *Terminal City* (1982) were actually short disquisitions on the relativity of perception and on the relationship of space to time.

Undivided Attention (1987) represented a giant leap forward. Obviously influenced by the formalist landscape studies of the American filmmaker James



Where is Memory: blurring the boundaries between past and present, reality and imagination, the ideal and the insane

Benning, *Undivided Attention* continued Gallagher's concern with perception to create a most intriguing variation on the traditional road movie that gives to point of view in cinema an entirely fresh articulation.

Where is Memory represents yet another leap forward. Devising the imaginary character of a German sleepwalker (Peter Loeffler), Gallagher sends him back into Germany where, against his will, he becomes involved in the aspirations and atrocities of WWII.

Where is Memory blurs the boundaries between past and present, reality and imagination, between the ideal and the insane. Like Gallagher's short films, *Where is Memory* examines the relationship between knowledge and perception. How can we know the past except through random records of it? How can we know these records except through an effort of the imagination? And how can we imagine except in terms of the value systems available to us today?

Where is Memory is both magnificently executed and deeply disturbing. Matching live-action with archival footage with an exactitude that takes