

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 ●

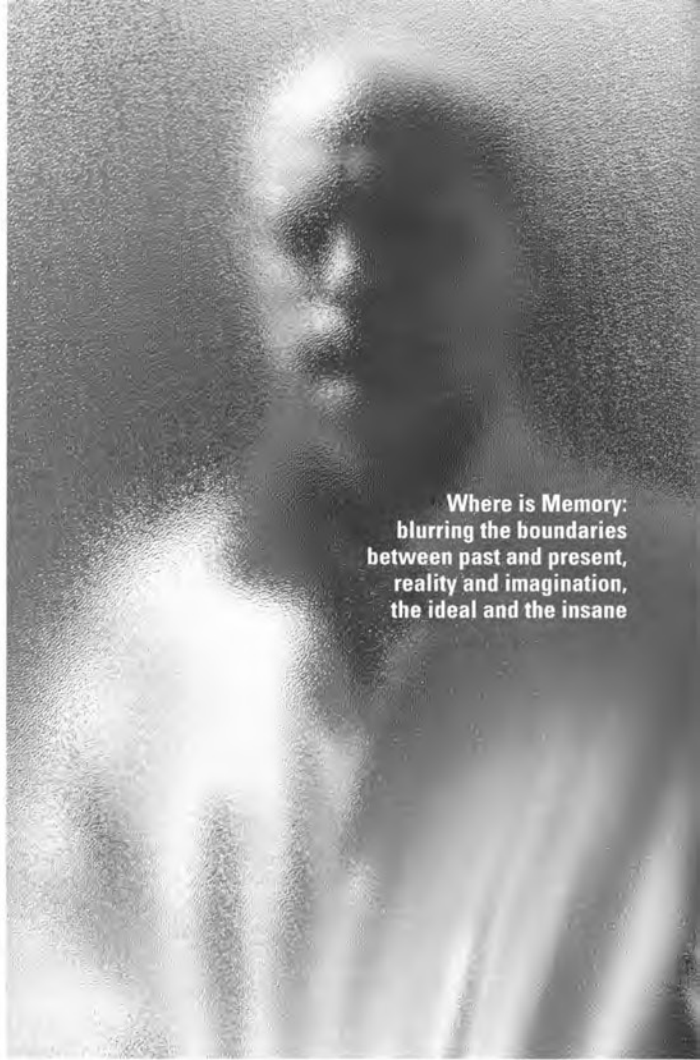
Reviewed by Peter Harcourt

## 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

your breath away, *Where is Memory* collapses the present into the past in a way that implicates us all.

We may not wish to be so implicated. We may prefer to think that what happened in Germany in the 1930s has nothing to do with what is happening in the world today, that it was all about them, there, then! Like *Nuit et brouillard* (1955), Alain Resnais' classic documentary about the concentration camps, and like Marcel Ophuls' extended investigations into Nazi complicity, it is the disturbing achievement of this film by Chris Gallagher that makes this thought untenable.

*Where is Memory*—a statement, not a question—is an examination of the past in which not even the technology is neutral. The Leica 35mm still camera and (supposedly) Eva Braun's 16mm Agfa camera that Loeffler discovers are used as accomplices in the events they were used to record. When we witness an aerial dogfight between Messerschmitts and Spitfires while listening to Franz Lehár's well-known waltz, *The Merry Widow*, we are invited to recognize, in Walter Benjamin's famous formulation, that every act of culture is at the same time an act of barbarism, that the achievements of a civilization are never separable from its most grotesque aberrations.

That this film strives to incriminate the viewer might explain some of the resistance it has encountered. It was apparently either too finely nuanced or insufficiently "politically correct" for the programmers of this year's Perspective Canada section of Toronto's Festival of Festivals. They refused to show it.

I consider this refusal an act of cen-

sorship. The film is not ambiguous in its ideological attitude, it is uncompromising. "Why were the Germans at war with so many people?" Loeffler asks about Hitler at one point. "There were never any replies," he concludes.

Rigorously considered, there are no replies. Evil has always stalked every civilization since the beginning of time, but it is organized in such a way that, to most people, it remains invisible. The sentiments of the neo-Nazi who opens the film, of the young German historian in the middle, or of the British soldier near the end may, indeed, be repugnant to us; however, our feelings of repugnance are not enough to make these sentiments go away.

"History is not memory," Gallagher has said about his own film, and memory is what is left after the past has disappeared. "Ashes are memory," the film concludes—the ashes that remain after the past has been consumed. But these ashes bear the traces of the past and must be assumed by all of us for the past to be understood. Only by smashing the portrait of Hitler can the actuality of Hitler eventually be comprehended.

Profound (and profoundly disturbing) though its argument may be, however, *Where is Memory* is not an essay, but a film. Its artistic achievement thrills us as we watch it and troubles our perceptions.

Towards the opening of the film, when Loeffler first arrives in Germany, the messenger that brings him the suitcase full of Nazi memorabilia is seen through translucent glass. His image thus appears both threatening and unclear. The Brandenburg Gate passes through a

number of transformations from the time of Hitler's power through the time of his destruction to the way that it looks today. So too does the Third Reich Chancellery, the interiors of which were built in marble, "the colour of blood mixed with soil, ornately trimmed in gold." Hitler's Berghof retreat has undergone similar transformations—a place at which, incredibly, Loeffler encounters a young woman who claims to be Hitler's granddaughter, displaying in her explanations an unsettling mixture of discomfort and pride.

Could it have all been stopped? Could Hitler have been assassinated? Could the process of destruction have been put into reverse? If a sensitive reviewer of conventional films refrains from giving away the concluding resolutions of the plot, I must refrain from describing the rhetorical trope employed by Gallagher to provide a wonderfully cinematic answer to these questions. But the closing sequence is astonishing in the simplicity of its conception and in the meticulousness of its realization.

Perhaps the voice-over narration in this film is at times too insistent; perhaps Dennis Burke's remarkable musical score is a little too relentless in its simulation of Wagnerian romanticism; nevertheless *Where is Memory* is a wonderful achievement. It should be screened widely and discussed passionately. It is not just an art film. It should be shown on network television, if (indeed) in Canada we had a network with the courage to permit such controversial and provocative programming •

*Peter Harcourt teaches film studies at Carleton University.*

## Celebrate Independents at LOCAL HEROES!



"(Telefilm's) John Taylor told me several times that I must go to this particular festival. Now I understand why."  
Mort Ransen, Director - *Falling Over Backwards*

For five days, morning to night, you can catch the spirit of independents at LOCAL HEROES. Key industry figures tackle the issues in gripping case-studies, Canada's hottest emerging filmmakers illuminate and deliberate their latest works in lively forums, and notable international features hit the screen at this celebration of independent films.

Make yourself a part of the warmest spot in a long Canadian winter - come to Edmonton and see the best damn independent films and filmmakers from Canada and around the globe.

**For tickets and information call the National Screen Institute (403) 421-4084**

Festival Investors include: Telefilm Canada, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Department of Canadian Heritage, The Edmonton Journal, Hook Outdoor Advertising, City of Edmonton, AltaWest Television Ltd., CBC Alberta, Rogers Communications, Cineplex Odeon, and Playback.

**Local Heroes International Film Festival • Edmonton, February 22-26, 1994**