

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.



Bell & Howell Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

Transcending the Documentary: The Films of Arthur Lipsett

Michael Dancsok

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Communication Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for a Degree in Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

June 1998

© Michael Dancsok, 1998



National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-39429-8

TRANSCENDING THE DOCUMENTARY: THE FILMS OF ARTHUR LIPSETT

Michael Dancsok

ABSTRACT

Arthur Lipsett (1936-1986) was an innovative 'collage' filmmaker who worked at the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) from 1958 to 1970. By combining 'found film footage' and sound with images he shot, his work explored the human condition and challenged conventional notions of documentary film and representation. Although he made award-winning films, and his techniques have since been incorporated widely into much film practice, his work has been virtually ignored by film scholars. One reason for this may be the difficulty in positioning his work within a specific film practice. His films are a bridge between avant-garde and documentary, making them difficult to categorize. Another reason could be the apparent ambivalence within film studies towards the avant-garde's contribution to filmmaking, as well as Lipsett's own ambiguous relationship with this aesthetic. Finally the NFB, an institution that has had an evolving interpretation of its mandate, may have determined the ultimate acceptance of Lipsett's films. The institution that Lipsett deeply depended on may have contributed to the minimal amount of access the Canadian viewing public had to his films.

Through a multiperspectival analysis this thesis explores the complexity of these issues, and in doing so points to the significance of Arthur Lipsett as a filmmaker. In this exploration several questions arise concerning the relationship between avant-garde and documentary filmmaking, and the nature of Lipsett's involvement with each. The thesis will also analyze a number of influences on Lipsett's work including his family background, his position at the Film Board, and his mental state during and following his tenure there. In addition because of the importance of canon formation, the process will be assessed in a Canadian context and its bias revealed. The primary purpose of this research is to contribute to a broader discussion about Lipsett's position in Canadian film history.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been completed without the assistance and guidance of the following people:

I was fortunate and privileged to have as an advisor Rick Hancox. Because of his experience as a filmmaker, and because of his many years as a professor and advisor to a large number important filmmakers in Canada, I felt that I was able to tap into a resource that is rich and rare. His knowledge of filmmaking was a valuable guide in my theoretical formation of Arthur Lipsett's motivations and practice. In addition, his ability to focus on details helped me to clarify my thoughts and forced me not to accept mediocrity in doing the research or writing. His dedication to the project was deeply appreciated. And although he has warned me against making any apologies, I do apologize to him for any inconveniences this project may have given him.

Bernard Lutz, Archivists at National Film Board of Canada took time to sit down and discuss with me all the quirky, anomalies tied to the otherwise "normal" documents in their holdings. His understanding of the institution and the people involved with the Board was very valuable in assisting me to form some ideas about the Board's influence on Lipsett's work.

Eric Vanasse, Archivist at the Museum of Fine Arts and all the staff at the Mediathèque Cinémathèque québécoise were always willing to answer any questions. Their professional attitude was well appreciated. These archives are highly recommend for any researcher.

The people I interviewed were very generous with their time. They also showed a strong conviction in contributing to "Arthur's story". I particularly wish to thank Christopher Nutter who discussed Lipsett's work and personality with me over two days and many cups of coffee.

I will never forget the staff at Concordia University Archives - Nancy, Natalie, Caroline, Vincent, Yves. Your understanding and sympathy has shown me what true friendship is all about. I am sorry for any inconvenience I have given you over the last two or three (!) years. You will always be special friends to me and I hope you realize I would not have accomplished this without your collective strength. It's with great affection that I thank you.

My Yuko. Itsumo, itsumo...

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Forward</i>	1
Chapter 1 - Introduction	3
1.1 Introduction	3
1.2 Explanation of the Title	3
1.3 Statement of Problem	4
1.4 Research Questions	4
1.5 Significance	4
1.6 Review of Literature	5
1.7 Research Methods	9
1.8 Theoretical Considerations	12
1.9 Other Theoretical Consideration	14
 Chapter 2 - <i>The Films of Arthur Lipsett in Relation to Avant-garde and Documentary Filmmaking Practices</i>	 16
2.1 Introduction	16
2.2 The Films	17
2.3 Arthur Lipsett's Collage Techniques and Avant-garde Filmmaking	22
2.4 Arthur Lipsett's Collage Techniques and Documentary Filmmaking	30
2.5 Compilation and Collage Filmmaking	36
 Chapter 3 - <i>Contextualizing the Films of Arthur Lipsett: His Life and Influences</i>	 39
3.1 Introduction	39
3.2 Before the National Film Board	40
3.3 Life in the National Film Board	46
3.4 Life after the National Film Board	59
 Chapter 4 - <i>Canon Formation, The Cinema We Need Debate and the Films of Arthur Lipsett</i>	 67
4.1 Introduction	67
4.2 Canon Formation	68
4.3 The Cinema We Need Debate	70
4.4 Other Issues Related to Canon Formation	75
 Chapter 5 - Conclusion	 80
 <i>Selected Bibliography</i>	 85
<i>Newspaper Clippings</i>	90
<i>Primary Source</i>	91
<i>Interviews</i>	94
<i>Filmography</i>	95
<i>Appendix A</i>	98
<i>Appendix B</i>	99
<i>Appendix C</i>	100

FOREWORD

The first time I watched an Arthur Lipsett film was in 1985. I was a second year undergraduate student in the University of Regina's Film and Video Department. The film was *21-87* (1963). The professor, Chris Gallagher, showed us this film to demonstrate how unique editing techniques could create profound interpretations of the world around us. At the time I remember feeling totally liberated by the film. There were probably several reasons for this. With *21-87* I could ignore the narrative developed by Lipsett and create my own; I could follow the patterns created by the uniquely combined sounds and images without attempting to rationalize them; or I could try to work out the puzzle Lipsett had to offer. These choices did not seem to be right or wrong, but equal. In addition, the film introduced me to the numerous possibilities available when producing a film - possibly my own film.

Two years later, after spending a year teaching in China, I returned to the University to complete my film degree. I was having trouble trying to find an idea for a film or video project that I could afford to make in order to graduate. Knowing my financial woes, Richard Kerr, who had recently become a faculty member in the Department, shoved an article in front of me and said, "Here. Read this. It's about a guy who used found footage to make films". It was Lois Siegel's 1986 article in *Cinema Canada*, "A Clown Outside the Circus" and was, more or less, an obituary about Arthur Lipsett. Siegel interviewed some of Lipsett's colleagues, and revealed how some of his films were made.

It was after reading this article I decided to make a found film collage on video. I dug through National Film Board science films that Kerr had salvaged from a garbage bin when the distribution office of the NFB in Regina closed. It took me six months to make a four minute piece titled *Embryonic Development of Fish* (1989). The video was an examination of the physical differences between film and video, and it explored how the sublime image distorts the experience of witnessing. The video cost me only one hundred dollars. Naturally, it paled in comparison to Lipsett's work. I had made my collage out of convenience. Conversely, Lipsett was using the collage technique to explore the concepts of art and representation with a mature intellect, one nurtured with a strong sense of purpose. My work didn't have the texture and irony that his films seemed to possess. But of greater significance was my disappointment in learning that Lipsett's obvious filmmaking talent has been largely forgotten by film critics and scholars. It is the intention of this paper to try uncover why this seems to be the case, and in doing so

hopefully open avenues of discussion about Lipsett's work which might generate the kind of recognition I believe he deserves.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In 1962 a twenty-five old Arthur Lipsett at the National Film Board of Canada was nominated for an Academy Award for his film *Very Nice, Very Nice*. Although the film did not win what it did do was introduce to an uninitiated audience a method of filmmaking that combined seemingly unrelated sounds and images to construct a coherent vision. From that early experiment with photographs and ‘salvaged sound’ until 1970, Lipsett continued to create collage films at the NFB. Although these collage films utilized what have been called *actuality* images they were never considered documentaries - if they were considered at all.

Regardless of the ambivalence towards Lipsett’s films within the NFB, and their neglect by film scholars, his films are valuable in the way they utilize images. They explore the constructed boundaries of what distinguishes documentary film from other works. Through this exploration these films also point to our own limitations in viewing. In addition, Lipsett’s films are provocative because they seem to transcend the time in which they were created. This thesis is an exploration of both Lipsett’s contribution to concepts surrounding film practice as well as an attempt to open avenues for discussion concerning the significance of his work.

The following chapter will explain why this research was undertaken. The chapter will discuss the significance of Lipsett’s work. It will also explain the methodology and theoretical considerations I have employed. A “Review of Literature” is also included.

1.2 Explanation of the Title

The title *Transcending the Documentary: The Films of Arthur Lipsett* was chosen for a number reasons. In the majority of his film proposals Lipsett spoke of two general purposes for the films. One was to show the interconnectivity of people and things. This interconnection transcends the material pursuits of the society that the audience participates in. The second purpose for the films, according to the proposals, was that for the viewers to break from the material reality they must be introduced to new structures of thinking - such as the type found in his films. Through the new structures Lipsett hoped they would transcend to a reality of greater significance.

Another reason for choosing this title is because I believe Lipsett was an unique documentarian. The majority of his films utilize actuality sound and film either found at the NFB or in stock libraries and combined with scenes shot by Lipsett.¹ Through this film technique Lipsett bridged two film practices - avant-garde and documentary. By bridging these practices his films transcend what are considered to be separate visions of interpreting the world.

1.3 Statement of Problem

Arthur Lipsett's films are provocative and innovative in the way they employ actuality sound and film, explore the values associated with image and representation, and contribute to the artistic exploration of the human condition. Lipsett has become regarded as an important contributor to filmmaking by some people involved in this artistic pursuit because of his innovative methods. However, within film scholarship, very little discourse has been developed concerning the critical and theoretical significance of Lipsett's techniques.

1.4 Research Questions

What are the unique characteristics of Lipsett's films? What factors led him to develop his innovative filmmaking techniques? How did his life prior to, during and following his involvement with the National Film Board of Canada affect his artistic endeavors? How did his relationship with the NFB affect his reception within film scholarship and the general Canadian public? What affect do the concepts surrounding canon formation in Canada have on Lipsett's films being recognized as significant works.

1.5 Significance

As early as 1970 Terry Ryan had written an article about the significance of Lipsett's work:

Virtually every television show which purported to sum up the decade we have just closed included a second rate. "Very Nice, Very Nice" - with more quicker cuts, less resonant images and less meaning.²

Twenty-eight years later Ryan's statement is still relevant in this society. Music videos, news capsules, and documentaries have appropriated the techniques and ideas that Lipsett explored. This statement is not intended to suggest that video artists, filmmakers, and

¹John Grierson stated that documentary is "the creative treatment of actuality". The concept of "actuality" will be discussed at length in this thesis.

²Terry Ryan, "Six Filmmakers in Search of an Alternative", *Artscanada*, April, 1970, p.25.

commercial enterprises have stolen directly from Lipsett's work. It is merely suggesting that many of today's film images depend upon a style that he explored at an earlier time. This style exposes the possibilities of utilizing pre-existing images and sounds from various sources and in doing so, questions the concept of representation. This research should then reveal the importance of Lipsett's work to film practice in general. In doing this, film scholars may be drawn into a discourse about his films.

In addition, through an analysis of Lipsett's life and work, other societal factors are discussed, thus adding to the significance of his films. For example, by exploring the relationship between the operation of the NFB as an institution, with all of its goals, commitments and bureaucracy, and the role Lipsett played in the institution, the dynamics between artist and institution become highlighted. Since NFB films have been major contributors to the creation of a Canadian film canon, it is important to profile the limitations and privileges Lipsett may have had at the Board. Of particular interest are two elements in the relationship between Lipsett and the NFB. The first is how the evolving structure and department 'cells' influenced the way Lipsett made his films. The other is how the production and distribution mechanisms of the NFB contributed to Canadian culture and Lipsett's reception in that culture.

Another element of this research that suggests Lipsett's works are significant is the way the films imply an interrelationship between the aesthetic styles associated with avant-garde and documentary filmmaking. As Lipsett pointed out in a 1978 *Cinema Canada* interview, he was neither "underground" nor "conventional".³ The rift between these two practices, including their codified differences, are bridged by his work. Through his films, questions of what constitutes "documentary" or what constitutes "experimental"⁴ are raised.

1.6 Review of Literature

Very few studies have examined Lipsett's works thoroughly. The majority of published sources that acknowledge him are concerned with broader studies - the history of the National Film Board of Canada, for example. These books include *Movies and Mythologies*, (Harcourt, 1977), *Movies and Memoranda: An Interpretative History of the National Film Board of Canada*, (Jones, 1981), *The Best Butler in the Business: Tom Daly of the National Film Board of Canada*, (Jones, 1996) and *In the National Interest: A*

³Lois Seigel, "A Close Encounter of a Fifth Kind". *Cinema Canada*, February, 1978, p10.

⁴Throughout this thesis I will use the terms and "experimental" interchangeably to represent practices within the avant-garde.

Chronicle of the National Film Board of Canada from 1949 to 1989, (Evans, 1991). Although this literature is valuable when analyzing the operations of the National Film Board, and although Jones' biography on Tom Daly helps to articulate how Daly may have influenced Lipsett's work, they are not adequate in providing an account of the relationship between Lipsett and the NFB and how that relationship affected his creative process.

One unpublished source that proves to be a major contribution to studying the work of Lipsett is Richard Magnan's thesis, *Les collages cinématographique d'Arthur Lipsett comme métaphore épistémologique*, (1993). This thesis gives a general overview of Lipsett's work and life. It also explores the technical style used by Lipsett and the theories surrounding collage film techniques. Because it is the first, albeit admirable, attempt at compiling a scholarly analysis of Lipsett's life and work, it does have some missing elements. One is that Magnan does not examine Lipsett's life prior to his arrival at the NFB. Another is Magnan does not interview people that knew Lipsett. This limits his examination about what may have influenced Lipsett. Regardless of its limitations this work is a good foundation to begin an academic discourse about Lipsett's films - in particular, how he managed to complete his collage films in an environment like the NFB, an institution known more for developing documentary techniques.⁵

Founder of the National Film Board, John Grierson, stated that documentary is "the creative treatment of actuality"⁶. The theory of what constitutes actuality in the context of collage is important in understanding Lipsett's relationship to the documentary, the NFB and Lipsett's own belief, as it is cited in his proposals, in "transcending reality". Lipsett's use of collage radically alters the discourse traditionally associated with the documentary as it is found in Rosenthal (1988), Nichols (1991), and Winston (1995).

In other writings the relationship of Lipsett's work to the theories associated with avant-garde filmmaking are examined. Examples of such literature are *Political Language of Film and the Avant-Garde*, (Polan, 1985), *Robert Breer: A Study of His Work in the Context of the Modernist Tradition* (Medelson, 1981), and *Light Moving in Time; Studies in the Visual Aesthetics of Avant-Garde Film* (Wees, 1992). Of particular importance are James Peterson's *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order: Understanding the*

⁵Because of my limited ability in reading this level of French I was unable to use this thesis as much as I wished.

⁶ John Grierson, *Cinema Quarterly*, vol. 2 no. 1, Autumn, 1933, p.8. Quoted in Jones, *Movie and Memoranda: An Interpretive History of the National Film Board of Canada*, (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 1981). p. 6.

American Avant-Garde (1996) and William Wees' *Recycled Images* (1993). Both are valuable sources for analyzing specifically the practice of collage filmmaking and its relationship to other artistic practices.

With some sources an attempt was made at exploring the possibility of positioning Lipsett on the cusp of two artistic movements - modernism and post-modernism. However, although there are attempts to define the terms that signify these changes (from modernism to post-modernism) the definitions and the terms remain somewhat skewed with ambiguity. In fact, many attempts to explain post-modernist works, for the most part, borrow heavily from the ideas already associated with earlier modernist works, such as the Surrealism and Dadaism of the early 1920s. In *Postmodernism: A Reader* (ed. Docherty, 1993) Ihab Hassan expresses several points to show the problems in differentiating post-modern from modernist works⁷. In the same collection of essays Lyotard discusses this problem as well.⁸ In *Media Culture: Cultural studies, Identity and Politics between the Modern and Post Modern*, Kellner is very specific about the problems in setting out to differentiate the two movements:

Many theorists of the post-modern, or those who systematically deploy the term, often merely list a set of arbitrary characteristics which are said to be "post-modern,"... Many of these lists and examples also cite key modern characteristics or artifacts as examples of the "post-modern" and thus fail to adequately theorize the phenomena.⁹

Both Umberto Eco and Jean Baudrillard are profound, articulate writers about the contemporary western condition. They have been able to describe the shifting values of representation and meaning and the effect this shift has on western society. However, the shifting values are difficult to periodize. Therefore, to develop a strong argument about Lipsett being positioned on the cusp of two movements, one of whose meaning cannot be agreed upon, makes the attempt, at this time, too problematic.

Two sources are used in order to place the discussion about Lipsett's films in relation to canon formation in Canada. One is Peter Harcourt's *The Innocent Eye*. This essay was one of the first attempts at developing a canon of Canadian films. Another source is Bruce Elder's *Image and Identity: Reflections on Canadian Film and Culture* (1989).

⁷Hassan lists ten separate problems when one tackles the issue of differentiating between modernism and post-modernism, p. 147.

⁸Jean-Francois Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism", in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 38-46.

⁹Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity, and Politics between The Modern and the Postmodern*, (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 44.

Elder challenges the canon through a critique of what constitutes Canadian film culture and Canadian film aesthetics. He questions the concept that the realist narrative fiction found in Canadian cinema distinguishes Canadian films from other locations. Elder also defends the contribution the avant-garde has made to a Canadian film aesthetic. This book comes at the heels of a debate that grew in the 1980s between Elder and other Canadian film scholars. The debate came to be known as 'The Cinema We Need' debate. Articles from this discussion point to Canadian film scholarship's attempt at forming an understanding of answering not only the obvious question of what is Canadian cinema but the more profound query of what is film!

Since secondary sources about Lipsett and his films are very limited, a large part of the literature about Lipsett and his work will come from primary sources from various archives. These include: the Production Files at the NFB Archives in Montreal, the Arthur Lipsett Fonds at the Mediatheque cinémathèque québécoise, the School Registration Files and the Arthur Lismer Fonds at the Museum of Fine Arts Archives also in Montreal. Although each collection is separated by their internal function, combined, each will provide a composite of Lipsett's life and his works.

Other sources will assist in positioning Lipsett within a theoretical framework. For example, from a production dossier for the film *Free Fall* Lipsett quotes Siegfried Kracauer: *I cannot tell whether I am seeing or hearing - I feel taste, and smell sound - it's all one - I myself am the tone*. Although the theory of film representing "raw nature" promoted in *The Nature of Film*¹⁰ seems inconsistent with how Lipsett utilized collage techniques, the chapter titled "The Spectator" welds the theoretician with the practitioner. Kracauer's *The Nature of Film* will be used to represent theories concerning the reflective "nature" of film.

In addition to the literature cited in this introduction, a large number of articles from various other periodicals and newspapers have been cited for their support or refutations about ideas surrounding areas of film practice. In addition, each will contribute to the overall inquiry about the dynamic relationship between Lipsett and the NFB, theories of representation, image and collage, and what constitutes documentary.

¹⁰Siegfried Kracauer, *The Nature of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, (London: Dennis Dobson, 1961), p 192.

1.7 Research Methodologies and Design

Various methodologies are utilized in this thesis. The reason for using a “multiperspectival” approach is because there are so few literary sources to choose from. This makes it difficult to form a complete analysis of Lipsett, his films, and his relationship with the institution he worked in. By solely doing a textual analysis of his work, many questions are left unanswered about how his films managed to be produced at all within the apparent structure of the NFB. To attempt a strict institutional analysis of the Board ignores the importance of the films themselves. I recognize that various gaps will not be successfully filled with a multiple methods approach. By preferring a multiperspectival analysis of the life and works of Lipsett, there is a risk of diluting, or over-generalizing some important aspects of the study. I believe, however, that this approach does provide some perspectives unattainable using a single method.

The model I have chosen for this analysis is found in Douglas Kellner’s book, *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics Between the Modern and the Postmodern*. Kellner discusses media culture in the United States and its global effect and influences through a multiperspectival approach for the following reason:

Simply put, a multiperspectival cultural studies draws on a wide range of textual and critical strategies to interpret, criticize, and deconstruct the artifact under scrutiny...(O)ne could argue that the more interpretive perspectives one can bring to a cultural artifact, the more comprehensive and stronger one’s reading may be.¹¹

This approach is multi-disciplinary and although critical of single perspective analysis, such as textual analysis, does not ignore utilizing it. As Kellner states:

Transdisciplinary cultural studies thus draws on a disparate range of fields to theorize the complexity and contradictions of the multiple effects of a vast range of forms of media/culture/communications in our lives and demonstrates how these artifacts serve as instruments of domination, but also offer resources for resistance and change.¹²

Therefore, to determine the relationship between Lipsett and the NFB an institutional analysis is employed. By examining the evolving structure of the Film Board and its perceived mandate I hope to articulate the dynamic ties between Lipsett’s position in the NFB and the film techniques developed by him. I will also determine if this perceived mandate carried over into film scholarship’s understanding of the function of the NFB

¹¹Kellner, *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity, and Politics Between the Modern and the Postmodern*, p. 98.

¹²ibid, p. 28.

and, because of this understanding affected the reception of Lipsett's films nationally and internationally. Through this analysis, an interpretation about how the operations of production and distribution at the Board enhanced or attenuated Lipsett's reception to a Canadian film viewing public.

Textual analysis is also utilized. First, it is used to examine the literature associated with avant-garde and documentary filmmaking. By examining the relationship between these practices, the film theories associated with them, and the form and content explored by Lipsett, I can show how Lipsett bridges shifting artistic sensibilities. Comparing the language employed by both practices (including the discourse on film as "reflecting" or "constructing" reality) provides a better understanding of how Lipsett's films were influenced by earlier work and how it developed into its own unique voice.

Included in the examination of these creative sensibilities will be an analysis of their relevance to the documentary film. The notion of documentary as a construction or a reflection of reality will be discussed in light of Grierson's definition of documentary as "the creative treatment of actuality".

Another reason for using textual analysis is assist in reading Lipsett's films. Gordon Martin, the Education Liaison Officer for the NFB at the time Lipsett was there, mentioned in a 1996 interview that Lipsett's films were deemed "difficult" by the distributors at the NFB.¹³ The idea that his work was difficult may have contributed to the unwillingness of film scholars to study them. By deconstructing his films through an analysis of their structures, I hope to reveal their significance to Canadian film practice.

In examining the avant-garde, elements of cognitivism are utilized to determine the reception of the films by the audience. Cognitivism acknowledges that the audience is affected by physical attributes of film through an interplay of physical, cultural, and environmental factors. These elements contribute to the overall way the film is received. As James Peterson states:

[C]ognitivism can be seen as a reaction against behaviorist theories of mind which held that human behavior could be explained in terms of stimuli and responses, without recourse to "mentalistic" concepts such as beliefs, plans and desires.¹⁴

However, I am cautious in utilizing such an approach. The reasons are found in Howard Gardner's book *The Mind's New Science: A History of the Cognitive Revolution*.

¹³Gordon Martin interviewed by author, October 4, 1996.

¹⁴James Peterson, *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order: Understanding the American Avant-Garde Cinema*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), p. 7.

In this book Gardner suggests less a rejection of “behaviorist theories of minds” and more of a refinement of behaviorist beliefs.¹⁵ Cognitivism does, however, supply some assistance in understanding audience reception to avant-garde films.

Although there is a danger in doing a psychological profile of Lipsett because of my lack of expertise in that area, I believe a cursory psychological analysis is necessary. There has been much speculation about his mental state during his tenure at the NFB. I hope to answer some of the questions about his psychological make-up in order to determine how this may have influenced his relationship with the NFB, as well as his own creative process.

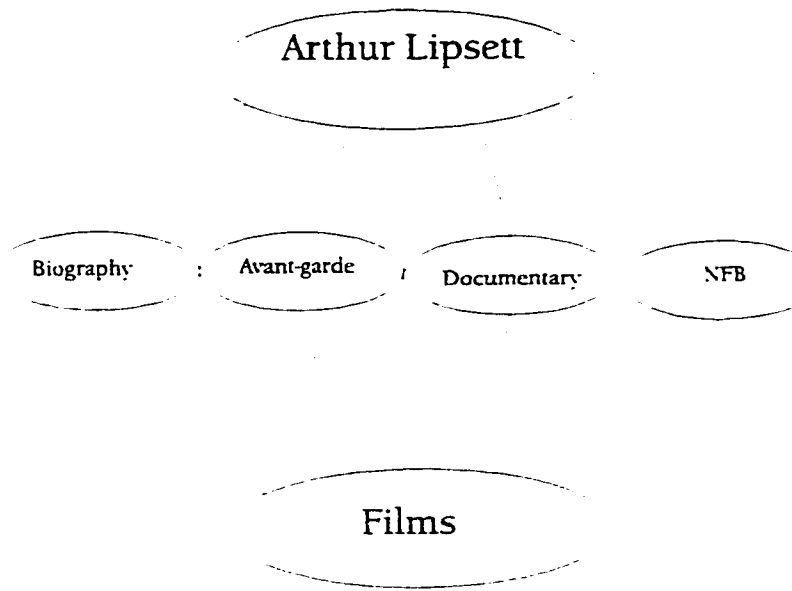
Assisting in a multiperspectival analysis of this research are interviews I conducted between 1996 and 1997. The people interviewed come from various fields and cover a variety of purposes. Some were interviewed for their knowledge of the day to day operations of the NFB during the time Lipsett worked there. Others were interviewed for their association with Lipsett on a personal level. Still others are experts in the field of film practice in particular the practices associated with the avant-garde in Canada.

These interviews serve to counter or defend official accounts of institutional operations. At other times they help to clarify Lipsett’s psychological state in relation to his film practice. And finally, some of them explain the creative process of experimental and documentary filmmaking in Canada.

The result of using a multiperspectival analysis of the life and work of Lipsett will be a thesis design that integrates and intertwines a variety of conditions, institutions, and theories about art and society and their relationship to Lipsett as well as to each other. As the diagram indicates, this type of analysis attempts to point to an interlocking of affairs. This interlocking is not on a cause/effect grid. It is more fluid and discursive than this

¹⁵Gardner writes this about cognitive science, “First of all, there is the belief that, in talking about human cognitive activities, it is necessary to speak about mental representations and to posit a level of analysis wholly separate from the biological or neurological, on the one hand, and the sociological or cultural, on the other. Second there is the faith that central to any understanding of the humankind is the electronic computer...the computer...serves as the most viable model of how the human mind functions. The third feature ...is the deliberate decision to de-emphasize certain factors which may be important for cognitive functioning but whose inclusion at this point would unnecessarily complicate the cognitive-scientific enterprise. These factors include the influence of affective factor or emotions, the contribution of historical and cultural factors and the role of the background context in which particular actions of thoughts occur. As a fourth feature, cognitive scientists harbor the faith that much is to be gained from interdisciplinary studies. A fifth...is the claim that a key ingredient in contemporary cognitive science is the agenda of issues, and the set of concerns, which have long exercised epistemologist in the Western philosophical tradition, pp. 6 -7.

diagram can express. However, the diagram's purpose is not to portray a literal representation but to assist in explaining the structure of this thesis.



1.8 Theoretical Considerations

In *Recycled Images*, William Wees describes the function of collage filmmaking as follows:

An image's historical referent...may continue to be important in a collage film, but the more significant referent will be the image's original context of production, distribution, and reception: everything the media do to invest their images with an aura of reality...the collage film subjects its fragments of media-reality to some form of deconstruction...¹⁶

The majority of Lipsett's films are corollaries to this description. What Lipsett did was revitalize the filmic image's historical referent by placing the image out of its original context, juxtaposing it with other images and surrounding it with sound from yet other sources, including his own. Through the combination of found images and sound with footage he shot, Lipsett creates a new value for the archival piece of film and the referent. This value can not eliminate its origin or the aesthetics that accompany it. Rather, by releasing the image from the image's representational intention, Lipsett highlights its representational value. The purpose of this exercise is not to exploit the

¹⁶William Wees, *Recycled Images*, (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1993), p. 47.

nature of the image, but to create a situation that allows for a re-presentation of the society and culture that he is part of but feels disconnected from.

Another major theoretical consideration is the relationship between the definitions that surround what constitutes actuality, in the Griersonian sense of the word, and how Lipsett's films challenge these notions. By the rearrangement of the found record, and by his ability to give the record new meaning, Lipsett challenges the accepted ideas of what constitutes a documentary. Through the deconstruction of images his films question the constructed boundaries assumed to be fixed, permanent and real.

Lipsett's films suggest that the documentary is not defined by how close to reality the images are, but rather, as Carl Plantinga states in his dissertation *A Theory of Representation in the Documentary Film*, by the aesthetic codes entrenched in the image.¹⁷ The audience recognizes that the accumulated images and sounds of a Lipsett film originate from assorted documentaries. In the process of creating a montage of originally unrelated images and sound, a new actuality is born. As Lipsett stated in a 1962 proposal for the film *21-87*, he hoped this method of filmmaking would allow the audience to "transcend" both the reality, represented in the images and our "experiences of the known world".¹⁸

Through this description of Lipsett's work we can differentiate his art from both the modernist tradition of contesting representational value, through its emphasis on formalist themes, and "appropriation", that Wees associates with post-modernism, which attempts to eliminate its original value¹⁹. However, we cannot ignore the influence the modernist tradition had on Lipsett's films. Nor can we escape the influence Lipsett had on the aesthetics that have become a part of our viewing experience. As Ihor Holubizky points out in a *Images '89* program, "His vision was not post-modern but post-historical"²⁰

In formulating this theory of Lipsett's works, we must also consider the relationship between an artist like Lipsett and an institution like the NFB that employs such an artist. It's important to recognize the dynamics of this relationship in order to examine some of the questions about his films. For example, is Lipsett's use of actuality footage an

¹⁷Carl Rendit Plantinga, *A Theory of Representation in the Documentary Film*, (diss. University of Wisconsin, 1996), p. 47.

¹⁸Arthur Lipsett, proposal for *21-87*, Production files, National Film Board of Canada Archives, Montreal, 1962.

¹⁹Wees, *Recycled Images*, p. 34.

²⁰Ihor Holubizky, "Films for the End of the Century: The Films of Arthur Lipsett", *Images '89*, Toronto, 1989, p. 39.

accident of his position in the NFB? Another question is how much support was there for his work within Unit B and how did that affect the reception of his films? We can also speculate on how different Lipsett's work would have been if he created films independent of the Board. These questions relate to the process Lipsett adopted to create his work, how his work was recognized and, finally, how the dynamics between an institution and the individual affected Lipsett's artistic development.

1.9 Other Theoretical Considerations

Film and video are media like the artistic media of writing and theatre in that they all are dependent on a temporal element in revealing their respective purposes. Because of this element, all films can be considered "narrative". They begin, they end. In between, something occurs that the viewer accepts as a range of images, one following another until the film has finished saying what it wishes to say. Although this may upset the structuralists or minimalists²¹ who feel a closer affinity to the static, formal practice of the formalist painters, no filmmaker can remove the time factor from the image. As James Peterson points out

Even with non-narrative forms, only in the rarest of cases does the viewer simply look at the unfolding images without actively processing them for some overall significance.²²

It can therefore be said that Stan Brakhage's *Garden of Earthly Delights* (1981) can be considered an "interpretative narrative" like Warhol's elongated documentary, *Empire* (1964).²³

The films of Arthur Lipsett, at first encounter, can be mistaken for being "disordered film[s] about disorder".²⁴ Their rhythms, coupled with their disruptive sounds and images, demand that the audience scrutinize an unfamiliar form of filmmaking. But as Lipsett's own proposals for many of his films suggest, his ideas are not far removed from what are known as conventional narratives. Each proposal suggest a narrative structure - one that has a beginning, a conflict, a climax, and a resolution. This structure however is

²¹I define the structuralists as filmmakers who foreground the material elements of film. They are less concerned in creating illusionary representations and explore the film's ontological framework. This definition borrows and combines the definitions proposed by Sitney (1979), Gidel (1978), and Peterson (1994).

²²James Peterson, "Bruce Conner and the Compilation Narrative", *Wide Angle*, 8 Nos. 3 and 4, p. 58.

²³I will explain the term "interpretative narrative" at length in the following chapters.

²⁴D. B. Jones, *Movies and Memoranda: An Interpretive History of National Film Board of Canada*, (Ottawa: Canada Film Institute, 1981), p. 83.

not the most important element within his films; it is one of many. As long-time friend of Lipsett, Christopher Nutter states:

Different people can watch different lines. People can follow more than one line. Some people might get one thing. Some people might get a bunch of things. Different lines. Different lines, different lanes.²⁵

Viewers can decipher the story, they can follow the rhythmic patterns, or they can enjoy the relationships between sounds and images. Regardless, Lipsett's multi-*laned* films allow the audience the choice.

The notion of what narrative is will be discussed in the context of what Lipsett suggested in his proposals, in his films, and in the theories and movements that nurtured those films.

²⁵Christopher Nutter interviewed by author, March 16, 1997.

CHAPTER 2

THE FILMS OF ARTHUR LIPSETT IN RELATION TO AVANT-GARDE AND DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING PRACTICES

2.1 Introduction

Watching the films of Arthur Lipsett is a liberating experience. Through their construction viewers are given the freedom to observe the films from a variety of perspectives. In watching the combined images and sounds viewers can develop their own narrative structures, allow the patterns of the images and sounds be a sufficient viewing experience, or follow the narrative structures suggested by Lipsett. None of these options supersede the other in importance. Each experience is as valid as the other. The result of creating such perspectives is that Lipsett's films have been criticized for being "jumbled"²⁶ or as mentioned before, "disordered", or as Paul Gaffney wrote in a 1970 review:

...Lipsett's pictures are inexorably tied to their director's psyche...they are loosely sewn and their threads, once broken, are hard to reunite.²⁷

Lipsett's films are more than "loosely sewn threads". They are rich interpretations of a world that has de-humanized the individual for the sake of science. They are also explorations of a practice, namely documentary, that through its supposed affinity with reality has assumed the high moral ground of truth. Finally they are mature artistic expressions using an artistic medium that projects moving photographs at twenty-four frames per second.

It is through Lipsett's aesthetic relation with both avant-garde and documentary practices that he liberates as well the film image along with the viewer. This chapter will examine Lipsett's films in relation to avant-garde and documentary filmmaking. Through the discussion of his work it will be shown how Lipsett bridged these two methods of filmmaking through his use of actuality film with various soundscapes within a complex editing style. The analysis will also show the complexity of his work and suggest that this complexity may have contributed to thwarting previous attempts at scholarly examinations.

²⁶Gary Evans, *In the National Interest: A Chronicle of the National Film Board of Canada from 1949 to 1989*, (Toronto:University of Toronto Press, 1991), p. 157.

²⁷Paul Gaffney, "Six Lipsett Films Get Tedium Rating", *Ottawa Journal*, Production files, National Film Board of Canada Archives, Montreal, October 23, 1970.

2.2 The Films

Before discussing the relationship between avant-garde and documentary practices and the films of Lipsett, I want to explain what is meant by his *oeuvres*. These are a specific group of films within his total filmography that display a consistent artistic pattern. These patterns are identified through the editing techniques and themes that Lipsett explored. The films include *Very Nice, Very Nice* (1961), *21-87* (1963), *Free Fall* (1964), *A Trip Down Memory Lane* (1965), *Fluxes* (1968), *N-Zone* (1970), and *Strange Codes* (1972). An exception to this group of films that does not match the artistic patterning, but is nevertheless an important work, is the made-for-television film, *The Experimental Film* (1962). Its importance will be explained later.

The editing technique Lipsett used in these films is collage. Collage is a term for film editing borrowed from early art movements such as Cubism and Dadaism, and although some would say the Cubists initiated the collage style,²⁸ the Dadaists were the first to make a consistent artistic practice from it. This group of artists broke from the European representational tradition of art by combining images from various media and placing them on the same two dimensional surface, or by creating three dimensional sculptures. The result was a sense of cohesion from disparate sources. The purpose of collage was to subvert conventional notions of the purpose of art. They challenged the theories associated with art criticism at the time by not only combining disparate media, but also by using images from the popular media and other ephemeral objects. Images from photographs, magazines, and newspapers helped break the dominant concerns of the art elite and their traditional concepts of art.

Unlike collage sculptures that use material from a variety of sources, the sources available to film collage can only be drawn from other films such as commercials, documentaries, and dramas. Because of this limitation, not only the image is important in film collage, but the editing that rhythmically combines the images as well. In Lipsett's films, the sound collage has just as important a role as the image collage. When speaking about the collage technique of Lipsett, Gordon Martin points to the importance of Lipsett's editing technique:

It was a break from the kind of linear narrative tradition. It was still linear. I mean it was working in a linear medium...It creates

²⁸Lois Mendelson, *Robert Breer: A study of His Work in the Context of the Modernist Tradition*, (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), p. 54.

essentially a whole which is very , very larger than the sum of its parts.²⁹

The linear narrative tradition is deconstructed by the *interpretive narrative* of the collage film. The interpretive narrative is a narrative structure that is an ontological and epistemological inquiry of the medium and the environment that nurtured the need to tell stories. Interpretive narratives do not eliminate the linearity of the film medium. It is a medium dependent on a temporal element - photographs being projected at twenty-four frames a second until the end of the film. Because the temporal element cannot be eliminated, a narrative has no choice but to unfold in time. For avant-garde film materialists or structuralists to claim their works are non-narrative, or for film dramatists to claim their stories are narratives while documentaries are not, ignore the temporal aspect of the medium. In addition, although Bruce Elder has made a large contribution to introducing the Canadian avant-garde to otherwise indifferent film scholars and critics, his concept of a "cinema of the present" is impossible.³⁰ This will be discussed further in the chapter concerned with the Canadian film canon and the "Cinema We Need" debate.

Of the twenty-nine films Lipsett worked on only two of these were produced outside the NFB - *Strange Codes* (1972) and *Blue and Orange* (1975). He was director for twelve of these films and either an editor or an animator for the others.³¹ Of the twelve films he directed, five were merely camera setups to record lectures for the Psychology Department at McGill University. Since these films seem to be no more than contractual obligations between the NFB and McGill, and do not invite aesthetic analysis they are noted only as an ironic coincidence, given the psychological problems Lipsett had at the end of his life. The films he worked on as editor or animator are significant in as much as there is a notable style in these works that is truly his. This style breaks the viewer's conditioned rhythmic associations between sound and image. As Canadian filmmaker Richard Kerr noted about Lipsett's editing technique, the image and sound are "contrapuntal worlds working together".³² Although the sounds and image seem to be rhythmically independent, working in rhythmic parallels, they form a whole.

²⁹Gordon Martin, October 4, 1996.

³⁰Bruce Elder, "The Cinema We Need", in *Documents in Canadian Film*, ed. by Douglas Fetherling. (Toronto: Broadview Press, 1988), p. 267.

³¹Richard Magnan, *Les collages cinématographiques d'Arthur Lipsett comme métaphore épistémologique*, (Maître ès arts, Université de Montréal, 1993), pp. XXXIII - XLIV. Although Magnan considers *Blue and Orange* a Lipsett film, in a May 1997 interview Tanya Tree disputes this notion. Since she was the producer I will only suggest that Lipsett was influential in the making of the film.

³²Richard Kerr interviewed by author, December 18, 1996.

An example of how this technique is manifested in his editing work on NFB films is found in *The Invention of the Adolescent* (1967). In one particular sequence the camera pans slowly over a group of portraits that describe how children were depicted in the seventeenth century. The music follows the movement of the pan over the pictures. As the viewer adjusts to this parallel rhythm there is a sudden bombardment of three short shots of different portraits. The slow pan returns for a few seconds and the quick shots appear again. The shots are extremely short, under a second, and are not equal in length. The rhythm is completely counter to the atmosphere created by the music and the pan.

In Lipsett's major works the jolting images are utilized in order for the viewers to be:

transported into a world beyond normal consciousness and perception where factual truth becomes irrelevant.³³

Although his films are linked by a particular editing style, the strongest link of these films is Lipsett's obsession for exploring, discovering, and revealing the interconnections between various realities. In a letter to Kit Carson, Lipsett explained how in his film *21-87* this theme is explored:

Each shot tends to have its own reality: by joining many obviously isolated shots each having their own reality, a multi-reality situation tends to emerge which has the ability to symbolically represent a larger multi-reality situation such as the collective consciousness (and unconsciousness) of a civilization.³⁴

This theme was echoed throughout the proposals for his work, including the critically neglected *N-Zone*:

[*N-Zone*] [d]ocument[s] the interconnections of various reality levels as they are now unfolding in 1968.³⁵

How these interconnections are manifested differ from film to film because of other multi-thematic structures. For example, in both *Free Fall* and *N-Zone* interconnectivity exists but in different guises. In *Free Fall* the combination of images suggest a connection between consciousness and nature or humanity and nature. Lipsett was the mediator of this connectivity, and through his combination of gospel music, ants carrying leaves, single-framed shots of tree trunks, and humans intermingling in a variety of settings, he constructed a site for a higher purpose - that being the melding of the

³³ Arthur Lipsett, proposal sent to Tom Daly for the film *Free Fall*, Production files, National Film Board of Canada Archives, Montreal, July 16, 1963.

³⁴ Arthur Lipsett, letter to Kit Carson, *21-87* file, Arthur Lipsett Collection, Cinémathèque québécoise Collection, Montreal. n.d.

³⁵ Arthur Lipsett, proposal for film title *Landscapes (N-Zone)*, Production files, National Film Board Archives, Montreal, September 4, 1968.

psychological and physical viewing experience of the audience. Through this construct Lipsett hoped his audience would reach a higher consciousness. As he stated in his proposal:

[*Free Fall*]attempt[s] to express in filmic terms an intensive flow of life - a vision of a world in the throes of creativity - the transformation of physical phenomena into psychological ones - a visual bubbling of sound and picture operating to create a new continuity of experience through the fusion of recognized past correspondences and mediated sensory patterns.³⁶

Lipsett's 1970 film *N-Zone* is as complex as *Free Fall*, however the quick cuts are not as present. In their place are a number of scenes that, on first viewing, suggest no direct relationship, other than they seem to be competing against each other for the audience's attention. For example, one scene is a party of young sophisticates (possibly friends of Lipsett), with the sound in lip synch. The outburst of laughter and the lack of coherence in the conversation suggest these people might be stoned. Another scene is a group of elderly people sitting around an opulent dinner table looking at and discussing what appears to be a family album. Tea is served as they pass the photographs to each other. The soundtrack over this scene varies from sound clips of Lipsett and Henry Zemel, the cinematographer, testing the sound level of the microphone, to a post 1949 revolutionary Chinese opera. Other scenes include various found footage of Buddhist monks, camels in the desert, clips from science films about weather balloons and agriculture, and finally, what seem to be 'outs' or candid shots from Lipsett's apartment showing Lipsett looking over his storyboard. Lipsett cut from one scene to another seemingly without course or direction. At times the soundtrack does carry over from one scene to another, but that is seldom. For Lipsett these were not only competing scenes but competing realities. Each weaved their own life cycle in parallel with, but interconnected to, the other scenes. In his proposal Lipsett revealed the result of these various realities intermingling with each other:

The overall feeling of the finished film will be like a long fold-out mural that unfolds in the manner of a book that is full of things that fold-out, pop-up, become 3-dimensional and generally keep the viewer busy.³⁷

According to Lipsett's friend and colleague, Terry Ryan, the struggle between these visual elements is resolved by a single image of a camel:

³⁶ Lipsett, July 16, 1963. p. 1.

³⁷ Lipsett, September 4, 1968.

And that camel, for [Lipsett] represented a state of mind of someone who's gone through this and has been able to resolve it, synthesize it, and make some kind of sense out of it.³⁸

In both *N-Zone* and *Free Fall*, produced eight years apart, there is a consistency of purpose and style that cannot be disputed. Both are strong examples of Lipsett's mature understanding of the medium and his strong interpretive style of the society he was a part of but highly critical towards.

Lipsett's creative ability did not go unnoticed by some well-known filmmakers. Stanley Kubrick called *Very Nice, Very Nice*, "one of the most imaginative and brilliant uses of the movie screen and soundtrack I have ever seen."³⁹ George Lucas stated that *21-87* was very influential in the making of his first film *THX-1138*.⁴⁰ Many of Lipsett's films have been recognized in international film festivals as well as by a small number of film critics. In a letter sent from the Canadian Embassy in Japan to the Under-secretary of State for External affairs in Ottawa, Donald Ritchie's review is cited when *Very Nice, Very Nice* was shown in Tokyo in 1962:

Perhaps the most authoritative comments would be those made by Donald Ritchie, the acknowledged expert on films in Japan. Writing in the *The Japan Times* of October 11, Mr. Ritchie declares, "This festival has become...a major showing place for the year's educational film products (and) ...the best of the 23 films shown this year was the Canadian entry, the 7-minute *Very Nice, Very Nice*, mordant, sarcastic, and extremely funny evaluation of western society."⁴¹

In addition to these critics, the students of Woodbridge High School in Ontario also showed a positive attitude toward his film *21-87*:

I liked it. I think it effectively gave some humour but it presented the horror and confusion of the world. It had no pattern skipping here and there and this made it more effective. (no name available) ...The title too was significant to me. It makes you wonder "Is every man just a number? Is he as mechanical as he is depicted nowadays?" ...The film was interesting and very true to life. I think it illustrates life much better than does some short stories or poems that I have read. (no name available)⁴²

³⁸Terry Ryan interviewed by author, November 22, 1996.

³⁹Stanley Kubrick, letter to Arthur Lipsett, *Very Nice, Very Nice* file, Arthur Lipsett Collection, Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montreal, May 31, 1962.

⁴⁰Kevin Courrier, "The Incredible Mr. Lipsett", *Globe and Mail*, February 25, 1997. p. D1.

⁴¹Canadian Embassy, Tokyo, Japan. Letter to The Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa, Canada, *Very Nice, Very Nice* file, Arthur Lipsett Collection, Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montreal, November 14, 1962.

⁴²Comments about *21-87* by students of Woodbridge High School, Woodbridge, Ontario, *21-87* file, Arthur Lipsett Collection, Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montreal, December 29, 1966.

Given these positive responses from both respected critics and filmmakers as well as average viewers, the question surfaces as to why Lipsett's films have not been studied more rigorously. Perhaps there is some truth in Bruce Elder's and Richard Kerr's assertion that the majority of film scholars have always ignored experimental films and will continue to do so.⁴³

2.3 Arthur Lipsett's Collage Techniques and Avant-garde Filmmaking

The beginning of avant-garde filmmaking as an artistic movement could be located in post World War I Europe. Filmmakers such as Dzigi Vertov, Hans Richter, and Fernand Léger created films that examined the physical medium, the relationship between the film and audience perception and the filmmaker's relationship to the environment in which the film was created. In their epistemological/ontological quest an underlying critique or subversion to what is considered normal erupted on the screen.

Many of the filmmakers involved with the avant-garde were influenced by Sergei Eisenstein's montage theory. For Eisenstein a "collision of independent shots - shots even opposite to one another..." develop the "'dramatic' principle..." of film.⁴⁴ He believed that "the dynamics for montage serve as impulses driving forward the total film". The dramatic principle - the development of conflict, climax and resolution - is dependent on the combination of images. To illustrate this theory Eisenstein studied how Chinese ideograms were created to make conceptual representations.⁴⁵ Unlike Roman-Arabic written language, which use phonetic representations, ideograms are visual - like the cinematic image. In Chinese ideograms the character for 'stone' is 石 and the ideogram for 'small' is 小. When these two characters are combined 石小 they form a third meaning - 'sand'. By combining these characters, like the combination of images in films, a new concept is introduced, one based on the dialectical association between the images. The two visual representations in Chinese characters *combine* to form a third meaning. The visual representations in film *collide* to create a new meaning. Although this is only a small example of Eisenstein's theory of cinema it is important to state that the avant-garde utilized this theory in a variety of ways.

⁴³Richard Kerr interviewed by author, December 18, 1996; Bruce Elder in "The Cinema We Need", in *Documents in Canadian Film*. ed. Douglas Fetherling, (Toronto: Broadview Press, 1988).

⁴⁴Sergei Eisenstein, "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form", in *Film Theory and Criticism*. eds. Gerald Mast Marshall Cohen. Oxford: (Oxford University Press, 1979). p. 104.

⁴⁵Sergei Eisenstein, "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram", in *Film Theory and Criticism*, Gerald Mast Marshall Cohen, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 85 - 100.

In *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order: Understanding the American Avant-Garde*, James Peterson cited three modes of avant-garde filmmaking: poetic, minimal, and assemblage.⁴⁶ Each mode's agenda is to subvert the recognized patterns of accepted narrative structures. However, each style makes use of separate definitive roles of representation within the narrative. For the poetic mode the filmmaker utilizes the representational value of the image to express, as Gerald Saul writes: "...[a] personal vision by artists...in often unconventional and always highly subjective ways, a view of the real or the imaginary world."⁴⁷ The representational value of the image is used to signify the internal beliefs of the filmmaker. Minimalist filmmakers explored physical elements of film - light, rhythm and time. They concern themselves with the ontological "purity" of film, foregrounding the elements and the processes rather than giving high representational value to the image, and in some cases attempt to remove the representation altogether.

Peterson's third mode, the assemblage or collage strain, will be the focus of this discussion because it is with this mode that Lipsett was most closely associated. However because assemblage can act as a dialectical bridge between the other two modes, they will not be dismissed.

According to Peterson the subversion associated with assemblage filmmaking rests in "the tension between the individual identity of the interpolated image and the new whole that comprises it."⁴⁸ The image is removed from and placed in a location that scrutinizes its original position and simultaneously gives the image a new purpose, a new meaning. Standish Lawder eloquently explains the process and the result of this act of sabotage:

'Decontextualization' is a lumbering term, but it does the job. Original context is obliterated. The shot is re-presented in a new context and, invariably, with a different soundtrack. Stripped of its original context, the shot becomes veiled with layers of speculation, subjective evocation, and poetic ambiguity. Questions of intentionality and meaning become slippery. The true significance of the *a priori* original image hovers just off-screen; we cannot be certain exactly *why* it was filmed. Yet *what* was filmed remains firmly fixed, only now surrounded by a thousand possible new *whys*.⁴⁹

⁴⁶Peterson, *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order: Understanding the American Avant-Garde Cinema*.

⁴⁷Gerald Saul, *Canadian Avant-Garde Film in the 1990s*, (Master of Fine Arts, York University, 1996), p. 4.

⁴⁸Peterson, *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order: Understanding the American Avant-Garde Cinema*, p. 147.

⁴⁹Standish Lawder, "Collage Films", International Experimental Film Congress, May 28 to June 4, 1989, (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1989), p. 58.

Although Lawder seems to contradict himself by stating that the original context is “obliterated” at the same time the “*a priori* original image hovers just off-screen”, his description of the process that takes place seems accurate. Through this process the act of sabotage exists against the school of thought that links representation to the denotative - “the visible world around us.”⁵⁰

In addition to questioning representation, the collage film exposes the audacious rhetorical strategies of the media in general. In displaying such strategies, the ideological motivation behind the media is revealed. In *Recycled Images*, Wees states how the collage film undermines the media’s status:

By reminding us that we are seeing images produced and disseminated by the media, found footage films open the door to a critical examination of the method and motives underlying the media’s use of images.⁵¹

What occurs is an interesting paradox. The image retains some aspects of the original intention even in its new location. For collage to work as a “critical examination of the...media’s use of images” the image must suggest its original location.

One of the most captivating issues about collagist filmmakers, and their use of found footage and sound, is the lack of control over the compositional, textural, and colour values of the image. The physical features of the items are related to their original source and not a product of the the filmmaker’s creation. Therefore the “*a priori*” that is hovering just off screen cannot be alluded to successfully without this reference.

The result of the lack of control over the image’s features is that the collage film develops a *tendency* towards two types of patterning. One can be called *intentional patterning*. In these films the representations in the found footage are combined to form a closed narrative. This form of narrative implies a classical editing style between disparate sources. The films tend to be an exploration of narrative concepts through storytelling ability. Because of their appropriation of Hollywood style editing techniques, they are also known for their pop culture sensibilities and ironic statements about narrative. Examples of this type of film are the works of Bruce Conner.⁵² In other cases, the collage film may tend towards *formalist patterning*. Here the physical elements of the image take precedent over their representational value. The artist combines images based on the inherent formalist qualities of the combined images. By focusing on the structural

⁵⁰ Kracauer, *Nature of Film; The Redemption of Physical Reality*, p. xi.

⁵¹ Wees. *Recycled Images*, p. 32.

⁵² Peterson, “Bruce Conner and the Compilation Narrative”, p. 57.

differences and removing the original context of the image the filmmaker reduces or eliminates its representational value. Fernand Léger and Robert Breer explored this type of collage.⁵³ It must be remembered however that formalist patterning does not reduce the narrative potential of the film. Viewers can still recognize and process their own narratives. What is of importance is that both styles rely on the indeterminate accidents that are inherent in the found image. The majority of Lipsett's films incorporate both types of patterning within a highly complex grid.

A new set of questions arise when the image seems from a found source when, in fact, it was shot for that particular work. This is the dilemma the film historian faces when an analysis of Lipsett's films is attempted because although many of the images used by Lipsett were from stock or found sources, many were shot by him. An example is his first major film, *Very Nice, Very Nice*, in which Lipsett used sound from various discarded film reels at the NFB. According to Terry Ryan the reason Lipsett gathered these various soundtracks was in order to complete a sound editing assignment for an workshop sponsored by the sound section of the Board. The people involved with the workshop felt Lipsett's sound collage was so interesting they asked him to "take it a step further."⁵⁴ To fulfill this request Lipsett combined the soundtrack with photographs he took on a trip to New York, London and Paris the previous summer.⁵⁵ Footage from a few other sources was combined with these photos.

It's an exaggeration to suggest that these photographs were initially produced for the production of *Very Nice, Very Nice*. No evidence was found to prove this. However I do want to point out that these photographs were not a product of a source other than what the artist created. Lipsett took the photographs and therefore had creative control over the majority of the images he used in *Very Nice, Very Nice*. He combined these images with a minor number of found photographs(portraits) and two moving images from other sources - one of an atomic bomb exploding and the other of a rocket leaving the atmosphere. The soundtrack alone was completely found and maintained the chance characteristic.

This observation does not diminish Lipsett's affinity to the collage technique. Although the uncertainty element in the image is an interesting characteristic that exists in many collage films it can, as Lipsett showed, work in unison with the artist's own

⁵³Mendelson, *Robert Breer: A study of His Work in the Context of the Modernist Tradition*, p. 66.

⁵⁴Terry Ryan, November 22, 1996.

⁵⁵Dusty Vineberg, "A 'Short' Story: Waste-Basket to Potential Oscar", *Montreal Star*, Production Files, The National Film Board Archives, Montreal, February 24, 1962.

images. An interesting result of combining found footage with shots created by the filmmaker is that the uncertainty, or certainty, of their origin rests with the interpretive strategies of the viewers. The other films where Lipsett used this strategy are *21-87*, *Free Fall*, and *N-Zone*.

Although the use of found footage together implies that the filmmaker prefers chance to dictate the overall affect of the film, Lipsett had a strong desire to control all areas of his filmmaking. Christopher Nutter observed this about Lipsett's method:

I think that he would fiercely object to saying his films were experimental, other than that [the films] benefit from a lot of preparatory exploration...I remember him saying that it's always good to have three or four reasons to use whatever you use. He liked to have at least three or four good reasons to use [a shot] in a film.⁵⁶

Three people interviewed spoke about the massive amount of notes Lipsett would take for each film he was creating. Lois Siegel stated that Lipsett used small ten cent notebooks to write his ideas for the film. Each page represented a corresponding image that Lipsett would remove from the notebook and place in the order that he wanted. He would then add, subtract, combine and shuffle the pages until he found the most satisfactory combination of images to meet the desired end.⁵⁷

Additional evidence of Lipsett's meticulous concern in controlling all aspects of the filmmaking process is found in the initial stages of the development of *Free Fall*. In the first draft of his proposal Lipsett stated that the film would be a collaborative effort between John Cage and himself. Cage would do the soundtrack.⁵⁸ A brief correspondence between Cage and Lipsett found in the Arthur Lipsett Fonds at the Cinémathèque québécoise revealed that although the collaboration almost occurred, in the end Cage had to withdraw his support because he felt Lipsett was too concerned with controlling the material. Cage wrote:

For the past ten to fifteen years I have been concerned with not controlling a continuity of sounds, and certainly not controlling the togetherness of sound and images, sounds and stories, or sounds and movements of dancers, I am insistent upon letting things go together...Your letter makes me fear that you do not take this attitude.⁵⁹

⁵⁶Christopher Nutter, March 16, 1997.

⁵⁷Christopher Nutter, March 16, 1997; Terry Ryan, November 22, 1997; Lois Siegel, February 17, 1997.

⁵⁸Arthur Lipsett, July 16, 1963.

⁵⁹John Cage, letter to Arthur Lipsett, *Very Nice, Very Nice* file, Arthur Lipsett Collection, Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montréal, October 12, 1963.

Lipsett resorted to creating his own soundtrack for *Free Fall*. Although the sound came from a variety of sources it is rhythmically cohesive, measured and almost symphonic. The combination of gospel music with various other sounds imply an accidental relationship, however the dynamics between the sounds, the pacing and tempo, all suggest Lipsett was creating a musical piece for the images.

Two films Lipsett made that are comprised exclusively of found footage are *A Trip Down Memory Lane* and *Fluxes*. Both films show Lipsett's strength at arranging sounds and images to produce two different approaches to a similar theme. This theme was covered in an essay Lipsett wrote on Christmas Day 1965 to his producer at the time, Donald Brittain. The essay was an explanation to Brittain about what he was trying to accomplish thematically with *A Trip Down Memory Lane*. The reason for writing this is unknown but may suggest Brittain did not understand what Lipsett wanted to accomplish:

In this film, I am interested in exploring the connection between an individual's outwardly expressed inner reaction, (emergence of the spirit) and the influences that create this reaction. It is the intention of this film to study the reaction of an individual within the context of the group.

These answers will be found by investigating material where the individuals is [sic] face to face with essentials relation to his role as a human being; (as opposed to that of a lesser species).⁶⁰

Brittain was known for films on historical issues and biographies of prominent Canadians. Conversely, Lipsett was working with concepts pertaining to interconnectivity between the individual and the group and how the spirit was manifested in this connection. These are highly esoteric concerns, the type that may have baffled Brittain as much as the executives at the Film Board, however these issues run consistently through Lipsett's work. To explore them using found sound and images is an amazing feat must have been quite a challenge, but *A Trip Down Memory Lane* was successful.

The film uses archival clips of individuals attempting to participate and connect with their environment: a boy is shown attempting to fly across America, a young girl straddling a hot air balloon thousands of feet in the air, and a very old Mr. Rockefeller attempts to look comfortable in front of a new toy - a movie camera. To contrast the individual actions, Lipsett used images of groups attempting to *control* their environment; images of generals, politicians and religious leaders combine to show the strength and threat of the group over the individual. The ideas of psychologist Warren McCulloch

⁶⁰ Arthur Lipsett, notes to Donald Brittain "in order to communicate to him some basic thinking on our film *Time Capsule*." *A Trip Down Memory Lane* File, Arthur Lipsett Collection, Cinémaèque québécoise Archives, Montreal, December 25, 1964, p. 3.

were used to emphasize the direction humanity is heading. McColloch speaks about the interest he has in observing “the give and take between an organism and its environment.” Nutter observes how Lipsett interpreted McColloch’s remarks in the context of the film:

And it’s almost like God sheds a tear from the big, balloon eye that has a swastika on it. And the tear is a person falling to his death. There is a bishop doing a mass, or a pope doing a mass, and a huge crowd of people and torpedoes are like dolphins. I think that is a real pivotal thing. And then in the end the Second World War was sort of a monstrous science experiment. Science becomes the religion and goes mad.⁶¹

Although it is esoteric, in some respects, *A Trip Down Memory Lane* is known as one of Lipsett’s most accessible films. The reason for this is because it displays a certain linearity that doesn’t exist in his other films. There is a temporal progression that is not only filmic, but historical. The audience watches the historical progression images at the same time the film directs the viewers’ attention to the dynamics of individual/group connections. The time periods are highlighted by the textural value appended to the film image as well as the boosting of the sound level of the old optical soundtracks attached to much of the found footage. The film ends with a contemporary image - Nixon speaking to the public on another image maker, television.

Fluxes maintains the exploration of relations between the individual and the group within a science-dominated society, but in a more sophisticated manner. One reason why *Fluxes* has a close association with *A Trip Down Memory Lane* may be because it was the film that Lipsett preferred to make to *A Trip Down Memory Lane* but didn’t have the support from Britain.⁶² *Fluxes* was the out-takes from *A Trip Down Memory Lane*.

In *Fluxes* Lipsett used a large variety of soundtracks that, when combined, imply a dialogue between image and sound. The richness of the selected and fragmented soundtrack contributes greatly to *Fluxes*’s ironic examination of society’s movement towards scientific dogmatism. Images of scientific experiments are shown while the soundtrack plays snippets from B-grade science fiction movies. In many scenes a dialogue is initiated between two snippets of sound from separate sources over the image it is covering. A short example of this is in the Adolph Eichmann sequence, which shows Eichmann on trial refusing to give an oath to his testimony on the Bible. In this fifteen second sequence, the sound used comes from several different sources but implies one

⁶¹Christopher Nutter, March 16, 1997.

⁶²Terry Ryan, November 22, 1996.

source. The following is from the post-production script of *Fluxes*. An asterisk indicates where the sound switches from one source to another:

Man: What? Oh! I am going to miss you.
Man: I hope so.
*(phone rings)
*Woman: How do you feel?
*Man: Are you kidding?
*Man: And if you don't touch this box while you're are doing it...
*Man: Are there any clues?
*(buzzer rings with laugh track).⁶³

In this short sequence Lipsett made use of sounds from seven different sources, many recorded directly from television or radio. The static that accompanies this type of recording is intentionally boosted, which adds to the overall discomfort viewers may experience from the sequence. A relationship is implied between these sounds and images of dark irony, as a laugh track is inserted while Eichmann moves the Bible further away.

A minor controversy occurred over this soundtrack at the NFB. Executives were concerned that the use 'appropriated' sound from television and radio may have violated copyright laws. This problem was resolved by Gérard Bertrand in the following memo:

...in building his sound-track. [Lipsett] made use of pieces of sound material, which he had recorded on tape or collected over a period of years from a wide variety of sources. Most of these sound elements are used in so fragmentary a form as to be unidentifiable; however a few may be sufficiently identifiable to constitute a possible infringement of copyright, but their source cannot be located. ...the Board is willing to pay the usual fee for the rights to use this material if and when the owners of the copyright approach the Board...⁶⁴

The controversy Lipsett's films caused at the Board will be discussed in the next chapter. For now, I want to close this section by reinforcing Lipsett's association with avant-garde filmmaking. This can be seen in his use of a collage editing technique and by his subversion of conventional film structures. His use of found images and sound combined with his own shots suggest society's dependency on science at the expense of spiritual values. Mark Slade's observation about Lipsett's *Fluxes* could be used to describe the other important works of Lipsett:

⁶³Post-production script for the film *Fluxes*, "Notes and Manuscript" file, Arthur Lipsett Collection, Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montreal, 1968.

⁶⁴Gérard Bertrand, Memorandum to Secretary of the National Film Board of Canada, Production Files, National Film Board Archives, Montreal, November 26, 1968.

But inside the moment where all times and places coalesce, where science fiction hyperbole is as true as newsreel footage, where weird gadgets, complex apparatus, a man on trial for his life, a professional wizard, professional statesmen and degrees centigrade all compete for meaning or power or applause, only the human element is missing.⁶⁵

2.4 Lipsett's Collage Techniques and Documentary Filmmaking

There is a direct link between the perceived notion of what a photograph *is* and the emergence of documentary filmmaking. This notion suggests that the photograph has a stronger affinity to the reality it represents than any other artistic practice. Painting and sculpture are believed to be more flexible in their ability to convert the representational value of their images' symbolic representation but are limited in their ability to reflect physical reality. The photographic image is believed to be truer in its reflective ability. Roland Barthes cites the photographic image as:

... not the reality but at least it is its perfect *analogon* and it is exactly the analogical perfection which, to common sense, defines the photograph. Thus can be seen the special status of the photographic image: *it is a message without a code*.⁶⁶

Because of its *denotative* purity, the *connotative* element of the photographic image is relegated to a secondary position contingent on the different levels of production.⁶⁷ The reduction of the signifier, the image, heightens the real significance of what is signified. Reality is suspended in the representation. It is proof of an event, an historical document rather than an artistic impression. As well, unlike other artistic practices the photographic's 'aura' is reduced because it can be readily reproduced.⁶⁸

Given the perceived attachment the still photograph has to physical reality extending the temporal value to the photograph, such as moving film does, must only increase the affinity to reality because, like film, reality is in constant motion. It is because of this that Siegfried Kracauer suggested these traits for film:

First, film records physical reality for its own sake...Second, in keeping with its recording obligations, film renders the world in motion... Third, film not only records physical reality but reveals so otherwise hidden provinces of it, including such spatial and

⁶⁵Mark Slade, "Arthur Lipsett: The Hyper-anxious William Blake of Modern Cinema", *Gazette*, Arthur Lipsett Collection, Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montreal, December 7, 1968, p. 21.

⁶⁶Roland Barthes, *Image, Music and Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 17.

⁶⁷*ibid*, p. 18.

⁶⁸Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 221.

temporal configuration as may be derived from the given data with the aid of cinematic techniques and devices.⁶⁹

There is a problem with this description of the moving image, or the photograph for that matter. Kracauer insists in describing what film *is* and rejects what film *has done*. Fiction and experimental films displace Kracauer's belief in film's nature by showing other means of using the medium. In *The Nature of Film*, Kracauer acknowledges their presence, but admonishes them for not respecting film's nature:

1) The experimental film gravitates toward achievements which, it is true, shun story telling but do so with little regard for the affinities of the medium. 2) The film of fact in the effort of the film on art is likewise a problematic hybrid as long as it is patterned on the experimental film. 3) There remains documentary itself, the main genre of the film of fact. ...all such documentaries as show concern for the visible world live up to the spirit of the medium. They channel their messages through the given natural material instead of using the visual merely as a padding.⁷⁰

Kracauer switches from an absolute position describing the nature of film to a position of what film *should be*. Regardless of the problems in Kracauer's description, the traits that he emphasizes are what underlie the distinctions between the documentary and dramatic or experimental narrative. In documentary there is a belief in the ability to record reality. Although it's necessary to enhance recorded reality through editing, this can only sharpen the focus on the external event.

Countering this description is one that recognizes the limitations in representing reality by any artistic practice, including photography or moving image. This belief suggests that all representations are constructs. The creative process is as important, if not more important, in determining the success in recording an event as the medium being used, be it a movie camera, or acrylic paint on canvas. As early as 1933 Rudolf Arnheim noted the necessity for creative intervention in interpreting reality:

...people who contemptuously refer to the camera as an automatic recording machine must be made to realize the even in the simplest photographic reproduction of a perfectly simple object, a feeling for its nature is required which is quite beyond any mechanical operation...In order that the film artist may create a work of art it is important that he consciously stress the peculiarities of his medium. This, however, should be done in such a manner that the character of the objects represented should not

⁶⁹Kracauer, *The Nature of Film*, p. 158.

⁷⁰ibid, pp. 211 - 212.

thereby be destroyed but rather strengthened, concentrated, and interpreted.⁷¹

Lipsett's films balance between Kracauer's ideas about film's nature and Arnheim's rejections of these ideas. Although Lipsett utilized images to show "the peculiarities of the medium", he also took advantage of Kracauer's assertion of the 'psychophysical' affect of film on viewers when engaged with the life flow on the screen. Like Kracauer, Lipsett accepted the link between physiological reaction to the projected reality and the psychological response to the filmic reality. For Kracauer, the recognition of the psychophysical response is due to film's ability to capture life:

Due to the continuous influx of the psychophysical correspondences thus aroused, they [films] suggest a reality which may fittingly be called "life". ...Accordingly, one may also say that they have an affinity, evidently denied to photography, for the continuum of life or the "flow of life", which of course is identical with open-ended life.⁷²

As mentioned earlier, in *Free Fall* Lipsett wanted to exploit the flow of life in film with the psychophysical to "create a new continuity of experience *through the fusion of recognized past correspondences and mediate sensory patterns*." (Lipsett's emphasis)⁷³ Lipsett was cognizant of the reality patterns of film but used them to inform the audience of other experiences or realities.

Is this enough to suggest that Lipsett was a documentarian? Before this is answered, how the documentary has traditionally been defined must be examined. The first definition has already been cited in Chapter One - John Grierson's statement that documentary is "the creative treatment of actuality". The reason for examining this definition is because of the great influence it has gained over the years. In October of 1997 I asked the people on the Association of Moving Image Archivists' listserver to answer the question "What is a documentary?" From the six responses four of the archivists referred to Grierson's definition. One referred to Jean Rouch and his concept of the negotiated position between subject (reality) and object (camera). Only one person agreed with Bill Nichols who had written:

Documentaries always were forms of re-presentation, never clear windows onto "reality"; the filmmaker was always participant-witness and an active fabricator of meaning, a

⁷¹Rudolf Arnheim, "The Complete Film" in *Film Theory and Criticism*, eds. Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 281, 284.

⁷²Kracauer, *The Nature of Film*, p. 71.

⁷³Arthur Lipsett, July 16, 1963.

producer of cinematic discourse rather than a neutral or all-knowing reporter of the way things truly are.⁷⁴

This small survey is mentioned to show the popularity of Grierson's definition, even in historical record circles. I say 'even' because many print historians distrust the ability of moving image to give an accurate interpretation of an event, be it historical or contemporary. Some print historians at times sound similar to structuralist filmmakers in their disdain for the supposed accuracy of the representational image in film.⁷⁵

Regardless of the criticism directed towards the filmmaker in documenting events, Grierson's definition is regarded as the quintessential explanation of what a documentary is. It will be shown how Lipsett fulfills this definition.

The accumulated images and sounds Lipsett utilized in his films are recognizable as originating from documentary film. Their aesthetic codes are entrenched. How these codes become apparent to viewers is explained by Bill Nichols:

Most basically, viewers will develop procedural skills of comprehension and interpretation that will allow them to make sense of documentary. These procedures are a form of recipe knowledge derived from an active process of making inferences based on prior knowledge and the text itself.⁷⁶

The codes that are entrenched in the image combine with the viewers' knowledge and assumptions. According to Carl Rendit Plantinga the documentary becomes most apparent through the "indexing" and "bracketing" strategies of the filmmaker in creating the image⁷⁷ and as Noel Carrol states, indexing, bracketing and scaling are also what distinguish "movies" from documentaries.⁷⁸

An example of how indexing, bracketing and scaling can distinguish this is found in the NFB documentary *Lonely Boy* (1961). One scene shows Paul Anka entering a dressing room unaware that the camera is recording. He bolts into the room wearing underwear and buttoning a shirt and suddenly notices the camera. His boisterous entrance is diminished as Anka, now embarrassed, continues to button his shirt. The framing is in medium shot and unsteady. It connotes an uncertainty about Anka's reaction to this

⁷⁴Bill Nichols, "The Voice of Documentary", in *New Challenges for Documentary*, ed. Alan Rosenthal, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 91.

⁷⁵Clifford M Kuhn, "A Historian's Perspective on Archives and the Documentary Process". *American Archivist*, Volume 59, Number 3, Summer, 1997, p. 312-320.

⁷⁶Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality*, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 24.

⁷⁷Plantinga, *A Theory of Representation in the Documentary Film*, University of Wisconsin, 1996, p. 47.

⁷⁸Noel Carrol, "The Power of Movies", *Daedalus*, 114, No.4, 1985, p. 79-102.

intrusion. Will he leave the room? Will he compose himself? A level of accident exists in this shot.

The images used in Lipsett's films retain this uncertainty element. This element is the hallmark of Direct Cinema which implies an event is being observed rather than controlled. An example of documentary indexing in Lipsett's films can be found in what could be called "the circus sequence" of both *Free Fall* and *21-87*. It is an important sequence both thematically and as an indication of how an event is indexed in documentary film. Thematically we see close-up images of people looking up (possibly at a high wire act or trapeze) as the soundtrack plays Gregorian Chants, suggesting these people are searching for a higher truth. However the sequence also implies the recording of an event. The camera, possibly handled by Lipsett, tries to follow the events in the middle ring of the circus. The camera angle is compositionally inadequate to cover the scene with any controlled aesthetic quality - one shot is too far away, the other is at a poorly composed acute angle to the action. To emphasize the accidental value of the image Lipsett edited in the tailings of one of the shots indicating the end of a roll of film.

In addition to the indexing, Lipsett creates another interesting phenomena. Through the creative use of actuality, that is, through the montage of originally unrelated images and sounds, a new actuality is born. This new actuality is a multi-thematic interpretation of contemporary society. It also reinforces the consistent theme of the interconnectiveness between people and their world:

Why people participate in all these activities? Is there a cohesion and a purpose? "There's so many ways of living lives." Lipsett stresses.⁷⁹

Lipsett observed these activities, gathered evidence about them, and interpreted the "many ways of living lives".

The second definition of documentary that will be examined is by Alan Rosenthal, who stated that:

The key function of documentary...is to explore the hard, awkward questions more deeply and more critically than other branches of the media do.⁸⁰

All of Lipsett's films search out the "hard, awkward questions", and although he avoids concrete answers, he nevertheless speculated on the consequences of searching for these

⁷⁹Siegel, "A Close Encounter of the Fifth Kind", p. 10.

⁸⁰Alan Rosenthal (ed.), *New Challenges for Documentary*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 6.

questions. Thematically, there should be no denying Lipsett's social concerns, his social criticism, and his social commentary. They are woven into his films with all the other narrative threads.

To understand his concern for these issues two sources can be cited. The first is the diagram he drew for his first collage film *Very Nice, Very Nice* (Appendix A). In this diagram we see his collage has a narrative structure. The diagram shows the rhythmic progression of the film - starting very slowly, but rising sharply to an ecstatic resolution. On the diagram Lipsett explains the progression:

The film will start off in a somber repressive mood and builds to one of great exultation and release, because of a way of life that is revealed and accepted by the tired and frustrated people who appear at the beginning of the film.⁸¹

The second source is the soundtrack. To reinforce the narrative the soundtrack uses voices from various documentaries which include criticisms of contemporary values perpetrated by this society. These voices are documents which reflect a time and place.

Another interesting component to these voices on the soundtrack is that the relevance of who is speaking is reduced. The voice of Northrop Frye or Marshall McLuhan are of secondary value to what they are saying, and of equal value with the other anonymous voices. Their value is also determined by the juxtaposition of the images that are involved with the voices. Below are examples from *Very Nice, Very Nice* that show the societal values revealed by the voices and how they are underscored by the images:

Voice 1: People who have made no attempt to educate themselves live in a kind of dissolving phantasmagoria of a world. (scenes of faces dissolving into each other.)

Voice 2: But if you feel well you know that whatever is going to happen you feel well anyway. (moving image of an atomic explosion.)

Voice 3: People don't seem to want to get involved in anything...I mean really involved. (shot of a burnt corpse)⁸²

Bill Nichols stated that documentary "offers access to a shared, historical construct. Instead of *a* world, we are offered access to *the* world."⁸³ Lipsett agreed that the documentary, as it is conventionally perceived, had limited constructs to offer. His films

⁸¹Diagram for the film *Very Nice, Very Nice*, Production Files, National Film Board of Canada Archives, Montreal. 1961.

⁸²From *Very Nice, Very Nice*, director Arthur Lipsett, produced by the National Film Board of Canada, 1961.

⁸³Nichols, *Representing Reality*, p. 109.

reveal multi-faceted worlds - worlds that cannot be represented with an absolute premise, but only in an interpretative framework.

In the proposal for 21-87 Lipsett stated that he wished to depart from “surface realities in the search for an expression on film of heightened inner states which could transcend experiences of the *known* world.”⁸⁴ The known world is represented by the images. Are they reflections? Perhaps not. Lipsett could still mold these images to his satisfaction in order for the viewer to transcend the reality they represented. In other words he utilized actuality to subvert the ‘reality claim’ of the footage.

2.5 Compilation and Collage Filmmaking

In continuing the discussion on how Lipsett’s films bridge the avant-garde with the documentary filmmaking, a distinction must be made between the compilation film and how Lipsett used collage in his films. The distinction is important because although one is associated with the documentary tradition (compilation), and the other with the avant-garde (collage), Lipsett’s films still maintain their differences.

The compilation film has been associated with the documentary for almost as long as filmmaking. The first known use of compilation was as early as 1898.⁸⁵ From that time compilation has been used, for the most part, to convince the viewer that what they are seeing is related. Wees defines the compilation as:

...shots taken from films that have not necessary relationship to each other; a concept (theme, argument, story) that motivates the selection of the shots and the order in which they appear; and a verbal accompaniment (voice-over or text on the screen or both) that yokes the shots to the concept ⁸⁶

Compilation is effective in convincing the viewer that the images are more closely related to the subject than they actually are because the voice-over gives contextual credence to the image. The image has been removed from its origin acoustically, and given new meaning by the soundtrack.

This explanation suggests a strong link between compilation and collage. Both remove their respective images from their original context and implant new meaning to the image. However the difference between collage and compilation is that collage, besides building a new meaning, also questions the old one. An ironic situation is

⁸⁴Lipsett, *Proposal for 21-87*. Production files, National Film Board of Canada Archives, Montreal, 1962.

⁸⁵Wees, *Recycled Images*, p. 35.

⁸⁶*ibid.* p. 35.

established between the image and its referent. The original site of the image continues to be referred to in the collage and the implication of this acknowledgment is highlighted. Compilation, on the other hand, attempts to erase any reference to the image's original location yet maintains its representational value. Its purpose lies within the confines of the new context where it supports the argument being addressed by the voice-over.

An example of the use of compilation is found in the *Canada at War* series produced by the NFB in 1962. Directed by Donald Brittain the series purports to show Canada's role in the Second World War. According to D.B. Jones, how this was accomplished was by following an established tradition at the NFB in:

writing commentaries that made disparate images, particularly from archival footage, cohere meaningfully.⁸⁷

The "meaningful" arrangements of sounds and images are filled with deception. Their claim to re-present an event is more suggested than accurate. The result is a film that is manipulative in the way it purports to represent the truth. Contemporary examples of how compilation exploits images to convey an argument is found in *Civil War* (1990) by Ken Burns and *The Valour and the Horror* (1992) by Brian McKenna.

Civil War is a compilation film of photographs about the civil war in the United States. The camera moves over the photographs, and as it does the audience hears letters from soldiers from the war being read by various popular actors. The film's intention is to create narratives that are seldom discussed, those of the common soldier. But by implying that the letters are closely associated with the images, *Civil War* creates a deceptive arrangement of events.

In the *Valour and the Horror* Brian McKenna begins the series by stating that what the audience is about to see is "the truth. There is no fiction."⁸⁸ To prove his argument concerning how Canadian soldiers were coerced into sacrificing their lives, not only does McKenna use disparate images out of context, but also actors to stand in for the soldiers. The actors recite the letters of soldiers found by McKenna's research. This criticism is not questioning the ability of Brian McKenna to do research. In fact much of what he did uncover about Canada's war effort does give a new perspective to that topic. But it should be emphasized that the truth claim that accompanies the interpretation of events and the deceptive use of images is problematic.

⁸⁷ Jones, *Movies and Memoranda*, p. 115.

⁸⁸ *Valour and the Horror* (Canada, 1992, Brian McKenna).

As stated earlier Lipsett's films are interpretive narratives. The result is that Lipsett created an exposition of the reality he was exploring without suggesting it was the truth. He wanted the viewer to be aware of the multitude of combinations available in living and how they can be manifested in a construct like a film.

With this in mind it can be suggested that Lipsett was a poetic documentarian. Support can be drawn for this position from William Wees's essay "*Making Poetry Where No Poet has Gone Before*": Jack Chambers *Hart of London*. In this essay Wees examines Grierson's definition of documentary in the context of literary narratives, in particular, collage narrative. Wees agrees with Manina Jones when he describes the technique of 'literary collage':

[It is] a technique that self-consciously transcribes documents into the literary text, registering them as 'outside' writings that readers recognize both as taken for a spatial or temporal 'elsewhere' and as participating in a historical-referential discourse of 'non-fiction'.⁸⁹

Wees goes on to explain how Lipsett was related to this literary technique:

Lipsett's collage films emphasized, rather than played down or disguised, the diversity of sources, the ironic incongruities and surreal juxtapositions of his documentary material...Lipsett's films communicate through fragments of sound and image which are recognizable as "documents," as "raw data" carefully selected and juxtaposed to evoke Lipsett's complex, tragi-comic view of the world.⁹⁰

Lipsett documented his time with relics from the past and with footage from the present. Through his welding of disparate sounds and images together he created films that do not purport to display an absolute. His films suggest interpretations and allow viewers to interpret the experience in their own ways.

By bridging avant-garde and documentary filmmaking, and through the complex editing technique of collage, Lipsett's films can be placed as important works in the realm of the avant-garde. As well, through his use of actuality footage which he shot or found, Lipsett created in the combination of these shots a new actuality. This new actuality explored the interconnectivity of humanity, provided a social critique, and questioned the conventional parameters of the documentary.

⁸⁹Manina Jones quoted in William Wee's "*Making poetry Where No poet has Gone Before: Jack Chambers' Hart of London*", paper presented at the Film Studies Association Conference, Brock University, May 26-28, 1996, unpublished, p. 3.

⁹⁰ibid. p. 4.

CHAPTER 3

CONTEXTUALIZING THE FILMS OF ARTHUR LIPSETT: HIS LIFE AND INFLUENCES

3.1 Introduction

In 1986 Lois Siegel wrote this about the inherent problem of discussing Arthur Lipsett's life:

The problem with compiling a story about Arthur Lipsett is that one has to invent the subject as a coherent whole to bring together in one place a variety of reflections. When the subject is Arthur Lipsett, this is not a simple matter.⁹¹

Lipsett's life seems as fragmented as his films. Many aspects of it are elusive to even his closest friends. Doing a textual analysis of the films alone is not enough to form some understanding of his life. The structures are too dense and the themes too numerous. Long-time friend, Christopher Nutter once had *Free Fall* on a set of rewinds in his living room for an entire year. He wanted to look at the film "frame by frame" to try and discover how Lipsett worked and what, if anything, could be understood of the person. When asked what was the result of viewing the film this way, he replied he found "a terrific life force."⁹² Lipsett's films do have a "terrific life force." However this life force derives from Lipsett's experiences outside the actual films. To neglect making a speculative inquiry about how he was raised, who or what his influences were, and what prevented his films from receiving the exposure they deserve, would risk this terrific life force being kept in a marginal position.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first will discuss his early life and will speculate on how he developed his artistic methods as well as his thematic obsessions. The second section will analyze the NFB as an institution, its evolving structure, the relationships Lipsett made with the people there, and how these relationships affected the creation of his films. The final section will discuss his attempt at filmmaking and making collage art after leaving the NFB. It will also refer to his psychological problems, what may have caused them and what may have led to his suicide.

⁹¹Lois Siegel, "A Clown Outside the Circus", in *Cinema Canada*, October, 1986, p. 12.

⁹²Christopher Nutter, March 16, 1997.

3.2 Before the National Film Board

There is very little information about Lipsett's early life. A lot of it comes from only three sources, one being the article already mentioned, "A Clown Outside the Circus", by Lois Siegel. This piece is a general overview of his life and work. However, although Siegel considered herself a friend of Lipsett, she could not provide much information about his life prior to him going to the NFB. The second source is Christopher Nutter. Nutter was a friend of Lipsett from about 1966 to Lipsett's suicide in 1986. In an interview Nutter stated that Lipsett seldom spoke about his upbringing. However Nutter interviewed Lipsett's sister, Marion Arnold, for a project he was working on, and this interview is used here because she couldn't be reached before this thesis was written. The final source is the Museum of Fine Arts Archives in Montreal. In the archives is evidence that supports the belief that Lipsett had a mature understanding about modern art prior to going to the National Film Board.

Arthur Lipsett was born on May 13, 1936 in Montreal. His father was a chemist and his mother was a Russian Jew originally from Kiev. Marion to Nutter that their parents met in Winnipeg. At the age of ten, the year after World War II ended, Lipsett witnessed the suicide of his mother.⁹³ There is no explanation for his mother's suicide and, according to Lipsett's sister their mother was a solid, loving and charitable individual.⁹⁴ If it is true that she was this kind of person, then perhaps knowing the cataclysm and horrors occurring in her home country, and quite possibly to her own relatives, may have led her to commit such a desperate act.

According to Nutter, Saul Lipsett was cold and insensitive. He was a scientist who had little faith in aspects of life that could not be measured empirically such as the arts. His inability to show emotion and to appreciate the value of art may have added to an already unhappy household.

At the age of eight Lipsett was encouraged to enroll in the Museum School of Art and Design in Montreal because his teachers felt he was a gifted artist. According to Nutter this brought a lot of stress between the father and son:

And they[teachers] said he was too intelligent for school and they really couldn't do anything for him. So they suggested art school. So he started going to the museum school when he was eight. Now this would be what all the fighting was about, all the tension. This is why his father was so disappointed in him. I mean, the

⁹³Siegel, "A Clown Outside the Circus", p. 13.

⁹⁴Christopher Nutter, March 16, 1997.

closet he came to giving his son a complement was to say, "Well,
he always was good with his hands" when he won some award.
95

Although his father's disdain for Lipsett pursuing a career as an artist did not deter him from becoming one, it did influence the subjects and themes of much of his work. In his films science and the epistemology associated with it is stripped of its power. His criticism is based on the sciences' empirical bias - reducing humanity to an observable and decipherable experiment stripped of emotion, passion, and artistic value. The films *Down Memory Lane*, *21-87*, and *Fluxes* are ironic gestures against the dogmatic belief in science that has permeated modern society. His films question this blind pursuit.

In addition to the ideological critique there is a more personal side to the films. In the interview with Nutter, Marion told him that she could not watch Lipsett's films "because they bring it all back."⁹⁶ What do they bring back? Perhaps it was arguments father and son had over career decisions. Saul Lipsett, being the pragmatic scientist, could not value the exploration of speculative worlds. The criticism in Lipsett's films directed towards the sciences may, on one level, be seen as being directed towards his father. Marion may have been reminded of that.

There is no evidence of any reconciliation between father and son throughout Lipsett's life. At one point, at the end of their lives, both men were registered in the Montreal Jewish Hospital. They didn't visit each other because neither knew that the other was there.⁹⁷ Correspondence between the two does exist however. One letter found at the Cinémathèque québécoise indicates a level of respect that does imply, at the very least, common courtesy. In the letter, written in 1973 when Lipsett was living in Toronto, Saul Lipsett replied to a question his son had asked. Lipsett wanted to know more about the term *quantum jump*. His father attempted to answer in lay terms. He also included articles for his son to read. He concluded the letter by stating:

If you are interested in the mathematical background you might refer to "Quantum Theory" in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* or to textbooks on Physic of which the local university libraries should have plenty of. I am not sure I have answered your questions but I have tried. I hope everything is going well with you. Love to you and Judy[Arthur's partner]. Dad.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ibid.

⁹⁶ibid.

⁹⁷ibid.

⁹⁸Saul Lipsett (Father), Letter to Arthur Lipsett, "Correspondence personnelle" file, Arthur Lipsett Collection, Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montréal. 197(?)

Reading was a large part of Lipsett's early development as an artist. Marion told Nutter that her brother would sit in his room "for hours" reading.⁹⁹ What he read in his room as a child was never disclosed, and his obsession for reading never left him. Out of the twenty-six boxes that make up the Arthur Lipsett Collection at the Cinémathèque québécoise, twenty-three are books that he had in his possession when he died. The titles suggest he was a person interested in a variety of subjects. In this collection runs themes of discovery, a deep interest in Eastern religion and its association with interconnectivity, and, of course, film theory. A sample of these books are: *The Yoga Sutra*, *The Abitabha Sutra*, *Bible Stories*, *Eastern Religion and Philosophy*, and Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of German Cinema*.¹⁰⁰

Following high school Lipsett studied full time at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts School of Art and Design. For two years he was under the instruction of Arthur Lismer.¹⁰¹ Lismer was a member of the Group of Seven and the recognized patriarch of art education in Canada. Lismer had already completed a life time of creating art by the time Lipsett began studying under him. As well, with the Group of Seven Lismer had broken artistic barriers through his introspective explorations of Canadian landscapes. A speech found in the Lismer Fonds at the Museum of Fine Arts Archives is a sample of what he believed the role of the art teacher should be in developing the potential of the young artist:

We must by that appreciation help the artist to create a nobler picture in song and story...He must weave, carve and mold upon the story of human progress the living truths that masking creates as well as destroys.¹⁰²

In a 1953 lecture series for CBC radio Lismer spoke of the role of the artist in the modern era:

"Canada needs the artist in this *Atomic Age* for the new function of art is not to beautify but to transform life."¹⁰³ (my emphasis)

This type of rhetoric, coming from a person Lipsett studied under for two years, may have had a strong influence on Lipsett's own belief in his duty to create meticulous acts of "transformation".

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Book listing, Arthur Lipsett Fonds, Cinémathèque québécoise, Montréal.

¹⁰¹ School of Art and Design Registration files, Museum of Fine Arts School of Art and Design, Museum of Fine Arts Archives, Montreal. 1954-1957.

¹⁰² Arthur Lismer, File A22, Arthur Lismer Fonds, Museum of Fine Arts Archives, Montreal, 195(?)

¹⁰³ Arthur Lismer, Transcripts from the CBC radio lecture *Art in the Atomic Age*, File C7, Arthur Lismer Fonds, Museum of Fine Arts Archives, Montreal. 1953.

The school not only provided courses in the traditional arts like Modeling, Painting and Life Drawing, but also in commercial arts like Graphic Design, Commercial Art and Lettering.¹⁰⁴ The multidisciplinary approach at the school may have also contributed to Lipsett's varied use of images, particularly as they are used in *Very Nice, Very Nice*, 21-87 and *Free Fall*.

One fact that remained surprisingly unknown to many of Lipsett's friends at the NFB was that he won scholarships for receiving the highest grades in his classes two years in a row.¹⁰⁵ Nutter also said Lismer was very aware of Lipsett's artistic talent, at one point offering him three thousand dollars for one of his sculptures. Lipsett declined the offer.¹⁰⁶

What is interesting is how Lipsett's accumulated artistic knowledge, for the most part, went unnoticed at the NFB. As Nutter states:

As far as I know, they never, while he was there, with him all that time, knew that he had established himself as a sophisticated collagist, sculptor [before arriving at the NFB]. I've seen sculptures that he made. He made beautiful wood carvings when he was eight... And Marion said that there were a whole bunch of sculptures that Renée [Lipsett's stepmother] threw out because she thought they were garbage.¹⁰⁷

Lipsett's understanding of current artistic practices, particularly those associated with the avant-garde, surfaces early in his career at the Film Board. In Siegel's 1986 article Judith Sandiforth, Lipsett's partner for eleven years, discussed the films they used to watch in those early years:

Guy Viau, whose films became the start of the Cinémathèque, had a fantastic personal collection. We used to go over and see films by Maya Deren, Bruce Conner, Kenneth Anger...¹⁰⁸

His admiration for the avant-garde did not stop at watching the films. He also wanted to collaborate with the people involved. As noted in the previous chapter Lipsett wanted to work with John Cage on the film *Free Fall*. Although this didn't happen what is significant is Lipsett's knowledge and admiration of Cage's work at all. When they began their correspondence Cage was still considered an underground New York artist. The

¹⁰⁴School Registration Files, Museum of Fine Arts School of Art and Design, Museum of Fine Arts Archives, Montreal, 1954-1957.

¹⁰⁵"Art, Design Winners Get Awards", *Montreal Star*, Monday, April 9, 1956, p. 6; "Arthur Lipsett Best Student in Art School", *Gazette*, Monday, April 4, 1955, p. 12.

¹⁰⁶Christopher Nutter, March 16, 1997.

¹⁰⁷ibid.

¹⁰⁸Siegel, "A Clown Outside the Circus", p. 11.

music he produced was available to a small elite group who had a common interest in avant-garde art. The Neo-dada group *Fluxus* had only just been established in New York and they were all still “starving artists.”¹⁰⁹ Not only was Lipsett aware of John Cage and other marginal artists, his own work emulated them.

This did not go unnoticed by the jury of the 3rd Annual Independent Filmmaker’s Festival at Foothill College in California. Lipsett’s 21-87 took second prize between Kenneth Anger’s *Scorpio Rising* (1963), first prize, and Bruce Conner’s *Cosmic Ray* (1962). The jury chose these three because of their common original pursuit of societal “problems and disturbances.”¹¹⁰

It is understandable that certain individuals at the Film Board who did not have the privilege to study the importance of the avant-garde would suspect Lipsett’s work as being “jumbled” or “difficult”. The lack of understanding Lipsett experienced at the Board may have compelled him to direct a more conventional work for his second film. *The Experimental Film* (1962), a made-for-TV discussion on the merits of experimental filmmaking. Three film critics and a film producer are gathered at a television studio where they discuss the value of experimental films. Inserted in the discussion are examples of experimental films which range from Robert Breer’s *A Man His Dog Out For Air* (1957) to Norman McLaren’s *Blinkity-Blank* (1955). The filmmakers are also interviewed about their respective practices. Lipsett included *Very Nice, Very Nice* as an example as well.

The Experimental Film is significant for three reasons. First, it shows that as early as 1962 Lipsett was trying to explain his practice to an uninitiated audience. He was aware of the gap between the people involved with experimental film practice and the audience. By spending time in creating a conventional television program he may have felt this gap could be narrowed. The film opened avenues of discussion about the limitations, beauty, and relevance of experimental film.

Secondly, it is significant in the way Lipsett constructed the film. The program, in a contemporary context (ignoring the billows of cigarette smoke in the background and foreground), seems like a conventional television program. However in the context of 1962 the film was relatively radical. To begin with, there is no narrator or moderator to

¹⁰⁹Thomas Kellein, *Fluxus*. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995), pp. 10 - 12.

¹¹⁰Report of the Jury, 3rd Annual Independent Film-makers Festival, Foothill College, California. 21-87 file. Arthur Lipsett Collection, Cinémathèque québécoise Archives. Montreal. n.d.

introduce the program. It begins abruptly, with a medium shot of Clyde Gilmour giving his opinion about experimental films:

I must admit that for me, most of the experimental film I've seen seem complete idiocy, meaningless infantilism -- infantilism...however it's pronounced. It reminds me of a Rorschach test - something that's intended merely to test the emotional soundness of the viewer, but not to have any meaning, not to have any coherent meaning whatsoever. There's no effort made at all, in most of these pictures, to communicate.¹¹¹

Through the first lines of the film the viewers are introduced to the subject - the value of experimental films. By the way Lipsett opens the film it seems the discussion between the film critics and producers has been captured in mid-discussion.

Subtitles are super-imposed over the individual speakers rather than a voice-over to identify them. The subtitles also introduce the films which are clipped to the end of the critics' statements. The discussion seems to flow without interruption before and after each film is inserted. A moderator is not utilized throughout the discussion.

The third unique aspect which makes *The Experimental Film* significant is Lipsett's use of reaction shots. He shows how effective inserting silent reactions to what is being said could build emotional tension in a discussion. Lipsett may have been influenced by how effective reaction shots were utilized in NFB films such as *Lonely Boy* or *Paul Tomkowicz*. However in 1962 it was a completely new device in tele-journal settings. As Christopher Nutter pointed out:

Think of *The Experimental Film*. It seems so conventional. But back then it wasn't. They hadn't quite caught on that yet. And he was really onto it. It's incredible that way he cut that debate. Cutting back and forth between Herman Weinburg and Guy Glover. Incredible!...Not only did he consolidate his own position at the film Board with that film, he also improved relation between the Film Board and The CBC, and he taught the CBC how to make these programs better.¹¹²

The importance of *The Experimental Film* was noticed by Terry Ryan, a friend of Lipsett and one of the organizers of the NFB's Screen Study Program. In 1969 Ryan tried to bring the film back into distribution for these reasons:

Although *The Experimental Film* was made in 1962 the points of view represented by the four protagonists are still with us. What is more the two main strategies for dealing with the disorientation

¹¹¹Transcript of *The Experimental Film*, Production files, National Film Board of Canada Archives, Montreal, 1962.

¹¹²Christopher Nutter, March 16, 1997.

caused by the experimental films as evidenced by the historian and critic on the one hand and the sociologist and film-maker on the other are even more with us.¹¹³

Ryan's observation seems just as relevant today. Regardless of the film's significance the consolidation of Lipsett's position at the Film Board was short lived. Although he lasted twelve years at the NFB many of those years were spent trying to defend his work. The artistic knowledge Lipsett had accumulated, coupled with his peers' misunderstanding of that knowledge, ultimately influenced how his films were received by the general public. This will be discussed more in the next section.

3.3 Life in the National Film Board

Unit B

The National Film Board of Canada began as an act of Parliament on May 2, 1939. Titled the National Film Act its mandate was to be overseen by its Commissioner who would:

a) advise upon the making and distribution of national films designed to help Canadians in all parts of Canada to understand the ways of living and the problems of Canadians in other parts; b) co-ordinate national and departmental film activities in consultation with the Board and several departments and Government work; c) advise as to methods of securing quality, economy, efficiency and effective co-operation in the production, distribution and exhibition of Government films; d) advise upon and approve production, distribution and exhibition contracts and agreements in connection with film activities of the several departments of the Government and, in respect of these, act as intermediary between such departments and commercial firms; e) advise upon all departmental expenditures in the production, distribution exhibition of films; f) represent the board in its relations with commercial newsreel and non-commercial film organizations; g) advise as to the distribution of Government films in other countries; h) co-ordinate and develop information services in connection with Government film activities.¹¹⁴

The catalyst behind the establishment of the Film Board, and its first Commissioner, was John Grierson. If there is any confusion concerning the function of the NFB it may partially rest in trying to analyze the political character of Grierson. Peter Morris believes Grierson's political thoughts were deeply rooted in Hegelian philosophy. This philosophy contends that the dynamics found in conflict resulted in progress. For Grierson this

¹¹³Terry Ryan, Memo sent to 'distribution colleagues' at the NFB, *The Experimental Film* file, Arthur Lipsett Collection, Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montreal, 1969.

¹¹⁴Canada, *An Act to Create a National Film Board*, in *Statutes of Canada*, 3 George VI, Ch. 20 (Ottawa: Joseph Oscar Patanaude, 1939), May 2, 1939.

progress would surface through an integration of capitalism and socialism within a centralized political process. Viewed as neo-conservative by Morris, Grierson's notion of a centralized, responsible state would influence the design of the NFB.¹¹⁵ More radically, Joyce Nelson believes that Grierson was "a champion of the emergence of multinational capitalism."¹¹⁶ Brian Winston takes a more balanced approach to Grierson's legacy suggesting Grierson had an affinity to the French Realist school of filmmaking. This school concentrated on the practice of revealing on film the common, the everyday. Through this depiction of life a social criticism might be established. However Winston points out that once this type of film practice is situated in a government sponsored setting (like the NFB) the criticism is diluted. In this setting the official position of the sponsor cannot be averted. Winston believes that the result is social problems are "presented as passing phenomena, actively being corrected by the officials paying for the film. Serious social analysis [is] impossible."¹¹⁷ The ambiguities in Grierson's character can be extended to ambiguities found in the institution he established. Was the NFB designed to truly engage Canadian viewers in discovering their identity? Was it designed to protect the interests of Canadian multinational power brokers? Or was it strictly a propaganda tool to be utilized by the government in power?

It is not in the scope of this thesis to fully discuss the operation of the NFB in relation to John Grierson's political tendencies. Rather the intent is to uncover circumstances leading to institutional policies at the NFB that may have influenced Arthur Lipsett and the making of his films. This includes looking at key personnel and how their interpretation of the NFB's mandate affected Lipsett's craft, as well as his films' availability to the general public.

The first situation to be discussed will be the NFB's contribution to the war effort in Canada. As a newly formed government institution the Board had to learn immediately what its role would be. The NFB was thrown into a global crisis. Grierson's objective was to establish an effective propaganda program to assist the Canadian government in recruiting and supporting War Bonds. The Board had to create a large number of films informing the Canadian public about Canada's war effort as quickly and consistently as

¹¹⁵ Peter Morris, "Re-thinking Grierson: The Ideology of John Grierson", in *Dialogue: Canadian and Quebec Cinema*, eds. Pierre Verroneau, Michael Dorland and Seth Feldman, (Montreal: Mediatexte Publications and Cinémathèque Québécoise, 1987), p. 42.

¹¹⁶ Joyce Nelson, *The Colonized Eye: Rethinking the Grierson Legend*, (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1988), p. 13.

¹¹⁷ Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Documentary Film Revisited*, (London: British Film Institute, 1995), p. 73.

possible. This meant developing a style of filmmaking that would propagate and infuse patriotism in Canadians without revealing too much information.¹¹⁸ Two film series produced by the NFB set out to do that. They were the *Canada Carries On* and the *World In Action* series. The most economic means of promoting Canada's war effort was using previously shot images that were edited together to support a wall-to-wall soundtrack of narration. Being only a couple of years old, there was little opportunity to build an extensive stock library at the Board. Many of the shots were borrowed or pirated from sources in the U.S. and Europe, and from companies who had the resources to have filmmakers covering the various fronts.¹¹⁹ Nelson suggests that because the images came from sources outside Canada this somehow subordinated Canada's involvement with the war. However the images, as in all compilation films, were re-contextualized by the soundtrack. As Jones states about Canadian war films:

The soundtracks in *Canada Carries On* and *World In Action* overwhelm the images. The commentary is shouted, the music shrilly dramatic. Artful the films may have been; art, no. They were tracts. They drew only from the Russian half of Grierson's original synthesis.¹²⁰

The war years at the NFB are significant in influencing Lipsett's films for three reasons. The first is that through this type of film practice an understanding of where to locate necessary shots was developed. Stock libraries can be a maze if the researcher is unfamiliar with their holdings and how they are indexed. The research knowledge accumulated over the war years was passed down to the next generation of filmmakers. Lipsett learned how and where to search for many of the images that he used. In the Production files at the NFB Archives are several examples of letters Lipsett wrote to stock libraries around North America searching for different types of images. An example of such a letter is one sent to Indiana University, Department of Folksong Archives:

We are making a film at the National Film Board which requires certain sound effects which we hope you might have on tape. Below is the description of the sound required: The sound must fit visuals of Arizona white snake cultist, (in action) around 1944. They are outdoors and clapping, playing guitars and shouting.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Jones, *Movies and Memoranda: An Interpretive History of The National Film Board of Canada*. p. 30 - 40.

¹¹⁹ Nelson, *The Colonized Eye: Rethinking the Grierson Legend*, p. 73.

¹²⁰ Jones, *Movies and Memoranda*, p. 39.

¹²¹ Arthur Lipsett, letter to Indiana University, Department of Folksong Archive, Production files, National Film Board Archives, Montreal, November 27, 1964.

The second reason to cite the NFB's war years is because within the six year period of war, a particular craft was developed. The craft was an economic editing style that combined images from various sources. The editing had to accommodate the narration and suggest a continuity between disparate shots.

The third reason this period was an influence on Lipsett is that wartime editors were people who would later become his producers. These people included Tom Daly, Guy Glover and later, Colin Low. All three developed their knowledge and editing skill in an environment that required fast and effective results. They understood their goal was to create films that convinced a Canadian public, and they had to learn the best means of carrying out their task. This required a thorough understanding of the image and its potential relationship to other images, as well as the sound that could be attached to the images. The knowledge of editing that Daly, Glover and others acquired during the war would echo throughout the NFB for many years and influence younger filmmakers.

Following the war the NFB divided into four units - A, B, C, and D. Each unit was responsible for a certain area of filmmaking in the institution. Unit B for example became responsible for sponsored, cultural, and animation films.¹²² This Unit was particularly important because of its attempt to fuse two aspects of the NFB's mandate into their work. Inspired by the 1950 amendments of the National Film Act and because the war had ended the unit began to soften their role as propaganda instruments of Government and produce films that attempted to "interpret Canada to Canadians," and "engage in research in film activity and to make available the results thereof to persons engaged in the production of films".¹²³ The films they produced in the early fifties were the antithesis of the propagandistic style of documentary that had been the norm. Three films, *Corral* (1954), *Paul Tomkowicz: Street Railway Switchman* (1954), and *City of Gold* (1957), are examples of how this unique Unit approached their respective subjects. *Corral* combines music with images of a roundup in Alberta and used no narration at all. *Paul Tomkowicz* is a portrait of an immigrant streetcar rail sweeper in Winnipeg. The audience hears Tomkowicz speak over images of himself working in the frozen streets of Winnipeg. *City of Gold* is a historical documentary using camera movement over archival photographs of Dawson City, Yukon during the gold rush at the end of the 19th century. In a recent interview with the *Globe and Mail*, Unit B producer Colin Low said:

¹²² Jones, *Movies and Memoranda*, p. 60.

¹²³ Canada. *An Act Respecting the National Film Board*, in *Statutes of Canada*, 14 George VI, Ch. 44, (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1950)

My principle interest has always been the possibilities of film - and its limits. Entertainment isn't my forte. Social action is.¹²⁴

Another important element in Unit B was the influence the animators, like Colin Low, had on the documentarians. Placing these two practices together may have been for economic reasons or for convenience. The animators could provide the necessary graphics to the documentaries as they were required. But the animators proved to be more beneficial to the documentarians. What they brought to Unit B was an understanding of the essential elements of a moving image. The animators continually worked with single images that, when projected at twenty-four frames a second, created an illusion of continuity. Working with single frames enables the filmmaker to focus at a microscopic level how the entire film will be eventually be revealed.

The combination of animation with documentary was noticed by Peter Harcourt, who suggested the result of this affinity was perhaps what made the NFB documentary so unique:

Animation, then, might be said to represent the more introspective aspect of filmmaking...Documentary, on the other hand, always altered by the reality it encounters...But perhaps the fact that so many people at the Film Board have worked both in animation and in documentary explains to a degree the moral seriousness and introspective quality of so many Canadian documentary films¹²⁵

Another person who found the affinity between animation and documentary in Unit B important was Guy Glover. Glover articulated six reasons why the documentarian benefited from following "real life" on film with the observational habit of an animator:

1. That film is made up of 24 still pictures per second and that these still pictures can be drawn or painted...He observes the frame as keenly as the non-animator observes the shot.
2. From drawing frames for animation he learns a lot about the nature of cinematographically synthesized motion and therefore also about relative speeds, pacing, rhythms and about what the camera does to the material it "captures".
3. How compositional emphasis in *motion* worked and the relation between foreground, mid ground and background elements in motion.
4. He learns to be concise because he has to and, having learnt that, it is carried unforgettably with him into situations where strictly speaking he does not "have to."
5. Animation forces the animator to give life to his film organism; later, if he comes to live action, he is aware

¹²⁴ "A Canadian Film Champion", *Globe and Mail*, December 12, 1997, p. C3.

¹²⁵ Peter Harcourt, "Some Relationship between the NFB Animation Department and the Documentary", in *John Grierson and the NFB: The John Grierson Project McGill University*, papers presented at a conference held at McGill University, Montreal, (Quebec: ECW Press, October 29 to 31, 1981), p. 153.

that the life "out there" of some fleeting moments on which he has trained his camera, does not guarantee the life of his film. The subject is not the content. 6. He is haunted by thoughts of artifice knowing better than most, however, that in documentary he is dealing with the most treacherous artifice of all - the artifice which maintains that to "bring 'em back alive" is gospel truth.¹²⁶

Lipsett began his career at the NFB with Unit B in 1958. According to his biographical profile, written at the NFB, the wife of a producer at the Board met Lipsett in a drawing class at the Museum of Fine Art School of Art and Design. She told Lipsett that the animation department needed people. It was through this so-called "accident" that Lipsett got the opportunity to work with film.¹²⁷ Ironically Christopher Nutter believes that Lipsett also was hired because "they heard his voice and thought he would make a good narrator."¹²⁸

As a member of the animation section he was involved automatically with Unit B. It was an exciting time to be part of this unit. The small group of filmmakers had already established a reputation for their innovative, award-winning films. But in the NFB they were mostly known for being "arrogant and pretentious", or worse yet non-drinkers.¹²⁹

By the time Lipsett had arrived at the Unit its days were already coming to an end. However, in that short period Lipsett seemed to fit the system well. The Unit allowed him to explore his art with more support than at any other time in his life. It was in Unit B that *Very Nice, Very Nice*, *The Experimental Film, 21-87*, and *Free Fall* were made. With *Very Nice, Very Nice*, Lipsett was given an opportunity to create from wastebins a film which would eventually become an Academy Award nominee. Not only was *Very Nice, Very Nice* unique because it was a film using discarded sound, but it was also one of the few attempts to edit actuality images to pre-existing sound. The technique of putting image to sound in this way was an animation technique. But Lipsett used this technique to work with non-animated images.

Unit B was a good environment to work on a film like *Very Nice, Very Nice*. The flexibility of the Unit to support this type of project probably raised the comfort level high enough for Lipsett to create such a complex work. The time allowed for the project to mature was also beneficial for its final look. A full year before *Very Nice, Very Nice*

¹²⁶Jones, *Movies and Memoranda*, p. 76.

¹²⁷Biographical profile of Arthur Lipsett, Production files, National Film Board of Canada Archives. Montreal, n.d.

¹²⁸Christopher Nutter, March 16, 1997.

¹²⁹D.B. Jones, *The Best Butler in the Business: Tom Daly and the National Film Board of Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1996), p. 118.

was released Lipsett had already gained a reputation for gathering material from wastebins. In a 1960 letter addressed to Lipsett from his former colleague, Neil Shakery, he asked:

Do you still make those midnight raids on the sound library? I remember someone predicting that you would get tangled in the tape someday and be eaten alive by a moviola.¹³⁰

At the time Lipsett began working in Unit B a new aesthetic theory had begun to influence the people working in documentary. This theory was developed by photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson. In his book *The Decisive Moment*, Cartier-Bresson offered a definition of the moment when meaning and form in photography become one:

[Photography] is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as the precise organization of forms which give the event its proper expression.¹³¹

The compositional elements of the photograph balance the subject, or reality, at a perfect moment. At that instant, a kind of serendipity takes place that transcends the common experience.

The Decisive Moment sparked questions about the camera's association with the subject. Was the camera acting *upon* the subject by its presence or was it merely recording the event without influencing the nature of the event? From these questions two styles of documentary emerged, 'direct cinema' and 'cinéma vérité'. Both styles were experimented with at the NFB when Lipsett arrived. The proponents of direct cinema believed they could record the truth of the event as an omnipresent, but effaced observer. The cinéma vérité practitioners believed that the camera was both viewer and participant. The NFB's *Candid Eye* series epitomized the influence Cartier-Bresson had on Unit B. It depended on the belief that the subject should be allowed to express its essence without the filmmakers manipulating the event, as long as the filmmakers were ready to move decisively to capture that essence.¹³²

At this time Lipsett was also cooperating with the French language filmmakers. Their experiments with cinéma direct embodied the Cartier-Bresson traits. Films like *À Saint Henri le cinq septembre* (1962) and *La lutte* (1961) have for their subjects the

¹³⁰Neil Shakery, 1960, in "Correspondence, professionnelle" file, Arthur Lipsett Collection. Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montréal, 1960, p. 3.

¹³¹Henri Cartier-Bresson, quoted in Jones, *Movies and Memoranda: An Interpretive History of the National Film Board of Canada*, p. 76.

¹³²Jones, *Movies and Memoranda*, p. 77.

under-represented working class. The films had a mission to express in filmic terms moments of the ordinary. By allowing the subject to establish its own presence the subject was given apparent control over its representation.

Lipsett was one of the camera personnel on *À Saint Henri*. His contribution on *La lutte* is less known, although in the credits he is given an “acknowledgment” below Roland Barthes’ name. Terry Ryan believes that Lipsett provided a lot of help to the French language filmmakers at the NFB. Ryan stated that it was common knowledge that Lipsett was a “great editor” and the French teams took advantage of his knowledge by inviting him to assemblage meetings to get his advice about how their films should be cut.¹³³

Lipsett’s own films during this time were influenced by Cartier-Bresson’s notion of the decisive moment. Many of the images in *Very Nice, Very Nice*, 21-87, and *Free Fall* are of ordinary people doing ordinary things. In 21-87, a man is sitting in a park looking up at a building. In *Free Fall* an old man is shown walking through a park. Coupled with these shots is a soundtrack which heightens the moment captured.¹³⁴ In his last film at the NFB, *N-Zone*, Lipsett used a photograph by Cartier-Bresson. Peking Opera music track is heard over Cartier-Bresson’s photograph of a Chinese restaurateur in Shanghai.

Returning to the personnel in Unit B and how they influenced Lipsett’s films, the importance of Tom Daly must be stressed. Daly was producer for the four films Lipsett made in Unit B. He was considered the intellectual ‘godfather’ of the NFB.¹³⁵ Daly was technically astute and philosophically consistent in how he approached his position as producer. He was also very meticulous in knowing the shots of a given film. Former NFB producer, Ches Yetman, recalls the assemblage meetings with Daly:

Daly used to have a small clipboard with a light on it and he’d go into a screening and he could look at the film and write his notes without taking his eyes off the screen. He wrote enormous amounts of notes on every film ...And then the director had to sit down and discuss his notes with him...Tom would say, ‘You know that shot near the opening. I think there’s a better shot than that one. Remember that shot where the bird goes from left to right and then just hovers there? That one would be better there.’¹³⁶

¹³³Terry Ryan, November 22, 1996.

¹³⁴Lois Siegel mentioned in an interview that one thing that “devastated” Lipsett was the Film Board disallowing him to continue taking his candid shots on the street without using release forms. February 17, 1997.

¹³⁵Gene Watz, “The NFB is a State of Mind: An Interview with Ches Yetman”, *Film History*, Volume 9, 1997. p. 139.

¹³⁶*ibid*, p. 138.

His ability to know which shot worked likely came from the hours he spent compiling the *World at War* series. He also felt a strong sense of responsibility towards each film that he produced. In a 1968 interview at Sir George Williams University (now Concordia University) Daly described the method he used in approaching each film:

I consider it my job as a producer...to try to understand what is their original thing, the same way I look at that film material what it is now and not what it should be. I try to look at the person making the film: What are they really trying to get at? And I try to help them do that, better than, perhaps, what they can do alone.¹³⁷

If Lipsett felt he needed “three or four” reasons for using a shot, it may be because of Daly’s persistent questioning about the relevance of each one. Although his knowledge of the avant-garde may have been limited, Daly’s appreciation for experimentation was not. Gary Evans observed these traits in Daly’s approach to filmmaking:

Thoroughness and excellence were his minimum criteria, and a probing the filmmaker’s footage he was apt to discuss Socrates to give context to the film images. His purpose was to stretch the artist’s emotional understanding of the world and to help them focus on the individual’s relationship to what he called ‘organic wholeness.’...Daly infused Unit B with a classical approach, while trying to manage the natural conflict between the personalities. He had a remarkable talent: to bend their self-destructive impulses and use them as a source of energy for the group.¹³⁸

The influence of Daly’s approach can be seen throughout Unit B’s productions. Many of the films were well-crafted, philosophical inquiries into the relationship between the individual and the world. Lipsett’s films are also inquiries into the interconnectivity of the individual and the world, if not the universe. The catalyst for these explorations seems to come directly from Daly’s spiritual values and his immense influence on Lipsett.

Tom Daly was a follower of George Ivanovich Gurjieff, an early twentieth century Armenian mystic who created a spiritual movement which attempted to tie Western analytical philosophy with Eastern meditative pursuits. According to Gurjieff’s philosophy, everything and everybody are connected - the individual with the group, the group with the world, the world with the universe, the individual with the universe¹³⁹.

¹³⁷Tom Daly interviewed by Rob Kidd at Sir George Williams University, Audio tape, Audio Visual Department Fonds of Concordia University, Concordia University Archives, 1968.

¹³⁸Gary Evans, *In the National Interest: A Chronicle of the National Film Board of Canada from 1949 to 1989*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), p. 69.

¹³⁹Jones, *The Best Butler in the Business: Tom Daly and the National Film Board of Canada*, p. 98.

The purpose of human life was to search out these connections and accept them. As D.B. Jones explains, this required first accepting that:

... almost every human being remains in an undeveloped, barely conscious, 'mechanical' or sleeping state in which he or she is dominated by one of three aspects of the self: the intellectual, the emotional, or the physical. In this mechanical state, a person has no will.... The first step to freedom from mechanical enslavement is the development of an unbiased attitude toward others and . especially, oneself.¹⁴⁰

In his associations with filmmakers and their films, Daly maintained an "unbiased" approach to both the person and the films he was producing. As stated, he tried to approach every film without any preconceived ideas in order to draw out what the filmmaker wanted to say. He also took it upon himself to take the most problematic filmmakers and relished the thought of taking a chance on, "something that looks like it could make an original new thing."¹⁴¹

Not only were Lipsett's films an attempt to make an "original, new thing," they were also attempts at expressing Gurjieff's ideas. Each film explores the interconnectiveness of elements in human lives. They also attempt to release the audience from their "mechanical sleeping state." To understand this aspect of Lipsett's films, a person has to have access to his film proposals. Each proposal speaks of examining interconnectivity, or transcendence, or both. However, because of the esoteric characteristic and marginal availability of Gurjieff's thoughts, this aspect of Lipsett's films may be elusive to many. This problem is heightened by Lipsett's use of Eastern religious motifs. In his oeuvres Lipsett incorporated an image of a Buddhist monk or a sound clip of a Buddhist monk into the text. In *Very Nice, Very Nice* a 'mantra' being utilized by a Buddhist practitioner is heard followed by an approving, "Bravo! Very nice, very nice." In *21-87* a young monk is shown preparing for his initiation rites. In *Fluxes* an image of a Thai monk receiving food from a villager and giving a blessing is used. In *N-Zone* the monks are heard reciting a sutra in a Japanese monastery.

All these examples, as well as Lipsett's collection of books on Eastern religion, would suggest more an interest in Eastern thought in general than Gurjieff in particular. Lipsett's penchant for Eastern religious values is also incorporated in his own definition of film and how one should approach making and relating to it:

¹⁴⁰ibid., p. 53.

¹⁴¹Tom Daly, 1968.

Film is like entering a temple and looking at the 1000's [sic] of images inside it. Each image representing one state of consciousness. Many purification (sic) rituals required before entering many guardians, messenger and protections leading to temple door.¹⁴²

In addition, returning to his letter to Kit Carson, Lipsett mentioned that:

I had started out with the idea of shooting trivialities, but as the shooting progressed I began reading the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, and I suspect these two journeys intermingled.¹⁴³

In the same letter Lipsett stated that he wanted to build a "multi-reality situation". This too is found in Buddhist belief. As Lama Anagarik Govinda stated in the introduction to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead or The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane*:

The Buddhist universe is alive through and through; it has no room for inert matter and mere mechanism. And what is more, the Buddhist is alert to all possibilities of existence and to all aspects of reality.¹⁴⁴

The confusion over which spiritual values played a role in Lipsett's films is not relieved by speaking to his friends and colleagues. Henry Zemel, Lipsett's cameraman for *N-Zone* and *Strange Codes*, and a close friend, believed that Lipsett's spiritual explorations did not go beyond artistic inquiries:

He explored eastern mysticism as an artist; looking for inspiration and ideas. As far as I know, he never undertook a devotee's daily regimen.¹⁴⁵

Conversely, Chris Nutter believed Lipsett was deeply involved with Buddhism and suggested that he may have done extensive research in Eastern religions.¹⁴⁶ However, we could still surmise that because Tom Daly played an important role in overseeing Lipsett's films, and because Lipsett's proposals discuss values that are also in Gurjieff's thought, it could be suggested that many of Lipsett's films leaned towards a Gurjieffian view of the universe.

¹⁴² Arthur Lipsett, notebook found in "Ideas" file, Arthur Lipsett Collection, Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montreal, n.d.

¹⁴³ Arthur Lipsett, letter to Kit Carson, 21-87 file, Arthur Lipsett Collection, Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montreal, n.d.

¹⁴⁴ *The Tibetan Book of the Dead or The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane*, according to Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup's English Rendering, edited by W.Y. Evans-Wentz, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. lxii.

¹⁴⁵ Henry Zemel, e-mail correspondence with the author, August 1, 1997.

¹⁴⁶ Christopher Nutter, March 16, 1997.

The Pool System

In 1964 the administration of the NFB was convinced to abandon the Unit system. Donald Brittain and John Kemeny produced a report criticizing the “rigidity” of the system. The report stated that the “free movement of ideas” was hampered because the Unit system did not allow one unit to contribute to a project from another. The report suggested that the filmmakers should be “pooled” together, as should the producers and other executives. The pooled filmmakers would take their ideas to a committee of filmmakers who would decide the programming requirements of the NFB and endorse the films they felt had merit. The filmmakers would then approach the producers with their ideas and the committee’s endorsement to begin the project.¹⁴⁷

Although this system was meant to liberate the filmmaker from bureaucratic constraints, it may have harmed Lipsett’s filmmaking. The security of a small compact unit where everyone supported the other’s work had disappeared for Lipsett. He had to somehow fit into a larger pool of filmmakers; perhaps he would have to compete against them for attention.

As is evident in his proposals, Lipsett had trouble articulating in non-filmic terms what his work was about. Like his films, the reader is pressed to follow a flow of thought that is more difficult. His sentences were awkwardly strung together and his thoughts scattered as he tried to condense in written terms what, for many of the ideas, could only be articulated in filmic terms. Donald Brittain, the first producer Lipsett had in the pool system, explained to Lois Siegel the problem Lipsett had in front of the programming committee:

At NFB program committees he would show up with circular charts to explain his next film project. No one on the committee wanted to admit they didn’t know what Arthur was talking about.¹⁴⁸

This problem did not go unnoticed by Daly who took a more philosophical approach to the problem. He was more accepting of the limitations some filmmakers had in expressing their views other than in filmic terms:

I found that there are certain filmmakers that have a plethora of ideas and even give some to other people. Some others don’t have ideas of their own but can easily take one over from somebody else and make something good out of it. Some others are totally inarticulate in expressing ideas but if you give them film to work

¹⁴⁷ Jones, *Movies and Memoranda*, pp. 111 - 136.

¹⁴⁸ Siegel, “A Clown Outside the Circus”, p. 14.

with, they come back with wonderful film stuff which makes a good film. But they can only say it by doing it.¹⁴⁹

It is this acceptance by Daly that may have convinced Lipsett to acquire Daly as his producer for his final film at the NFB, *N-Zone*. With Daly, Lipsett found comfort in the trust Daly had with the final product.

This was a very rare relationship for Lipsett at the Film Board, especially in the Pool System. Either because of contempt, jealousy, ignorance, or pressure from the administration to produce economically viable films, Lipsett was not given serious consideration by the programmers at the NFB during the Pool System years. Rather than continuing on with his formal explorations into film, and the esoteric forays into interconnectivity, Lipsett was relegated to menial editing jobs. In one task he was commissioned to edit out the flies in a travelogue about Northern Canada.¹⁵⁰ Rumours also persisted that his films were being held back by the Distribution Department of the NFB. One rumour suggested that Lipsett's films were unwanted by the public.

This last rumour upset Lipsett greatly. He was hurt to the point of going to his films' defense. In January, 1968, Lipsett sent a memo to twenty people in production and distribution. In it he listed the number of sales and library bookings for his films. The statistics indicated that much more than the rumoured 'seven prints' had been sold from 1961 to 1968:

<i>Very Nice, Very Nice</i>	-	180
<i>21-87</i>	-	065
<i>Free Fall</i>	-	066
<i>A Trip Down Memory Lane</i>	-	023 ¹⁵¹

According to the memo, there were a total of 593 prints made from this group of films. These numbers are substantial, given the "difficult" nature of the films. By 1973 these numbers increased greatly. Appendix B shows the number of prints Lipsett's films sold in comparison to other films of the same year. What is interesting is that by 1973 *Very Nice, Very Nice* had outsold *Lonely Boy* and *Circle of the Sun* by over 100 prints. *Free Fall*, *21-87* and *A Trip Down Memory Lane* all had reasonable sales.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹Tom Daly, 1968.

¹⁵⁰Siegel, "A Clown Outside the Circus", p. 11.

¹⁵¹Arthur Lipsett, memo sent to NFB Colleagues, "Correspondence, Personnelle" file, Arthur Lipsett Collection, Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montréal, January 23, 1968.

¹⁵²Statistics from the *Title History Index* of NFB films, National Film Board of Canada Archives, March, 1973.

I do not want to give too much weight to these figures however. I agree with NFB archivist Bernard Lutz that these numbers have to be thoroughly contextualized before they can be analyzed with any authority. For example the sales figures do not indicate whether these films were distributed to schools, libraries, or circulated in theatres, which would have been significant in determining the number of films sold. For example, a 1963 instructional film like *Children Learn from Filmstrips* could outsell *The Experimental Film* (produced in the same year) because the *Children* film had a larger volume of venues (schools) for distribution locations. *The Experimental Film* was initially a one-broadcast program. However given the purpose of this film it is still remarkable that it sold twenty-one prints.¹⁵³

This said, it is difficult to ignore a dramatic drop in sales for Lipsett's last two films at the NFB, *Fluxes* and *N-Zone*. It indicates an unwillingness in Distribution to find a niche for them. There is no dispute that some effort was necessary to develop an audience for the films and in the past the distribution office did make an effort. Gordon Martin, Education Liaison Officer at the Board and supporter of Lipsett's films had to contend with selling them. Martin recognized the problem but found ways around it:

[In trying to sell Lipsett's films]...we would try to use the vocabulary of the people we were talking to. you know if it was a group of art teachers we would try take some artistic angle In Ontario, about that time they introduced a course title "Man and Society" which was a...humanities course.. There was a lot of latitude in such h a course so we obviously promoted Lipsett in courses like that...It was kind of fun, you know, just explaining to people just how a film like *very Nice, Very Nice* was bang on for their curriculum. ¹⁵⁴

However, the effort to expose Lipsett's films waned to the point where, by 1970, he decided to leave the National Film Board. The large support from Daly and a small number of others of course diminished following his departure. On his own Lipsett would have trouble continuing to create art.

3.4 Life After the National Film Board

It was following the completion of *N-Zone* that Lipsett left the NFB. Although he may have felt rejected by his peers, he was nevertheless leaving with a sense of optimism.

¹⁵³I am indebted to Bernard Lutz for the time he spent with me discussing the issue of using statistics from this source.

¹⁵⁴Gordon Martin, October 10, 1996.

According to Terry Ryan leaving the Film Board for Lipsett meant he could pursue his passion for collage sculpture. Lipsett left believing he had done all he could with film.¹⁵⁵

After a three month journey through Europe Lipsett and his partner, Judith Sandiforth,, returned to Montreal in the middle of the October Crisis. Disliking the situation in Montreal, they left immediately for Toronto.¹⁵⁶ From here the chronology of events becomes unclear. What is known is that he was hired by the Canada Council to act as a juror for grant applications for film and photography in 1971. He then applied for a grant to the Visual Arts Section of the Council to complete a collage mural. The Canada Council turned down his application because they believed that he did not have “visual arts” experience.¹⁵⁷

The type of collage Lipsett was interested in making was a large mural, perhaps similar to the work he may have done at the Museum of Fine Arts School. There was also a direct relationship to the films he had made at the NFB and the type of collage sculpture he wanted to make.(See Appendix C) Lipsett’s notes show a strong link to previous work Lipsett had done in film. In this collage sculpture he wanted to create ‘Chakpa-murals’ that would be “cross sections of the tree of man in various ways.” Lipsett’s sense of detail and his concern for colour, texture, and placement of the images in the collage is evident throughout the notes. Although this proposal was rejected by the Canada Council, they did give him money to make a film. With this money he produced *Strange Codes* (1972).¹⁵⁸

Although he worked on two other films in the late seventies, *Strange Codes* was Lipsett’s last completed film. The structure of the film suggests a finality to a film career that thematically continued to seek out the “hard, awkward questions”. There is a unifying link between *Strange Codes* and other Lipsett films. The structure suggests a direction the other films were moving towards.

In *Strange Codes* Lipsett does not abandon the themes developed through his re-construction of actuality in his previous films. *Strange Codes* addresses the issues related to science and how it reduces humanity to an observable experiment. It also creates a site that explores the role of interconnectivity in society’s pursuit of knowledge.

¹⁵⁵Terry Ryan, November 22, 1996.

¹⁵⁶Christopher Nutter, March 16, 1997.

¹⁵⁷Siegel, “A Clown Outside the Circus”, p. 11.

¹⁵⁸ibid., p. 11.

However rather than placing these themes in a collage of found film, he has situated them in an exclusively epistemological, fictional narrative.

Strange Codes is a story of a person in search of the secret codes of the universe. The person, played by Lipsett, changes his character several times. His search begins with the character as a 'Shriner detective' searching through a small Chinese magic box and discovering a roll of paper with a large number of Latin words written on it. The detective character finds a Latin dictionary to uncover the meaning of the words. A metamorphoses takes place and the character turns into the 'Monkey King'. The Monkey King, a mythological figure in Chinese literature, is curious, arrogant, adventurous, and cunning.. Traditionally his curiosity and arrogance lead to dangerous situations. In *Strange Codes* the Monkey King uncovers more codes and discovers more hidden meanings. In total the protagonist changes into four different characters: a Shriner, a Russian Cossack, the Monkey King, and a shaman. As he attempts to unmask the codes the protagonist comes across more codes with multiple connections. At the end of the film Lipsett as filmmaker appears, overlooking the collage of items (codes) he or his characters, or both, have unearthed. The collage is scattered on his apartment floor yet there is a cohesiveness to the disunity of the final scene.

The entire film is shot in Lipsett's apartment, which is transformed into one large collage of various shapes, sizes and media. The film's structure may be described as an antithesis to his previous work. Gone are the multi-layered, rapidly cut images. Rather than having the edited structure of the film as the collage, the set displays the collage that is being constructed by the character in his search for the codes. In *N-Zone* Lipsett hinted at this structure by allowing each scene to evolve rather than deconstructing the images through a barrage of editing. In *Strange Codes* Lipsett emphasizes the action within the scene.

Unlike his other films the soundtrack has been reduced to two competing tracks. One is the voice of Warren McCulloch, while the other is a Peking Opera. On the McCulloch track we hear him postulating on the relationship of humanity to the environment. He reduces the relationship to mathematical formulae, atomic plays, where the human can be replaced by numbers. The Peking Opera is used as a device to jolt the viewers from what is being said by McCulloch. It is highly doubtful that Lipsett understood Mandarin well enough to create a banter between the two tracks. Although there is no evidence to support this, the opera Lipsett used may have been titled *The Monkey King*. In many of his films Lipsett used as a recurring motif images of monkeys in relation to statements made by McCulloch. McCulloch's voice was used in 21-87, *A Trip Down Memory Lane*,

and *Fluxes*. In each of these films his voice is accompanied by footage of a chimpanzee being used in an experiment. As well, in *Strange Codes* Lipsett played the part of the monkey, wearing a monkey king mask as he searches through various areas of the apartment for the codes.

As a fiction, *Strange Codes* suggests Brechtian theatre - a type of drama that, according to Dana Polan:

...attacked both naturalism, which [Brecht] saw as blocked from an engagement with historical situations by its concentration on surfaces, *and* abstract art, which he saw as blocked by its concentrations on the sight of its own forms. Both arts ran together for Brecht as examples of the fetish of the spectacular.¹⁵⁹

Like some of Brecht's most political dramas, the film challenges the conventional forms of story telling by combining illusionary methods associated with the craft. The viewers are privy to the construction of the story, as they witness the character changing from outfit to outfit. The set is the authentic apartment of the filmmaker. At one point in the fiction, reflexivity is underlined when Lipsett's character holds a mirror to the camera lens, moving it up and down. The mirror reflects what is behind and above the camera.

Strange Codes is an economically spartan film. There is only one setting, the lighting is natural and the film stock is black and white. The titles and credits are written on cardboard paper and thrown carelessly in front of the camera rather than superimposed. It has been suggested that this film was proof that Lipsett could not cope outside the financial security of the NFB because of this low budget look.¹⁶⁰ However, evidence suggests that this is the film that Lipsett would have made with or without the resources. In a file at the Cinémathèque québécoise Lipsett's report to the Canada Council shows he completed the film under budget. In fact he calculated that he was to return \$604.70 to the Council.¹⁶¹ A synopsis of *Strange Codes* written by Lipsett explains the purpose of the film as well and hints at a link between *Strange Codes* and his other works:

...and [*Strange Codes*] might be viewed as a game being constructed that could enable a human being to help make translations and connections from his inner world of feelings, to the world of day to day reality systems...The film is operating at a

¹⁵⁹Dana B. Polan, "Above All Else to Make you See: Cinema and Ideology of Spectacle", in *Postmodernism and Politics*, edited by Jonathan Arac, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 63.

¹⁶⁰Terry Ryan, November 22, 1996.

¹⁶¹Arthur Lipsett, Report to Canada Council, *Strange Codes* file, Arthur Lipsett Collection, Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montreal, n.d.

midway point between the primitive ritualized world and the world of logic and science. But perhaps it can be experienced, simply as a strange play.¹⁶²

About the time of the completion of *Strange Codes* Lipsett began having psychological problems. His partner for eleven years, Judith Sandiforth, finally left him because she could no longer cope with his anxiety attacks. In 1973 he was institutionalized briefly in Toronto when one of his friends found him one evening surrounded by electronic appliances. Lipsett was apparently speaking to them.¹⁶³ He was given medication at the hospital and released.

In 1976 Lipsett went to Victoria and there worked on the film *Blue and Orange* (1978) with Tanya Ballantyne (Tree), a filmmaker at the NFB in the sixties. She was the director of the controversial 1967 film *The Things I Cannot Change*. Tree followed Lipsett to Victoria because she wanted to make a film with him. According to Tree, *Blue and Orange* was about “spontaneity”. The film has never been made into a release print, and the elements are still in Tree’s possession. She vividly recalls how *Blue and Orange* was made:

We were really just playing...One thing is I’m shaving my head. And then I go see [Lipsett]. And we have a big sort of reunion. And then there is the business where we went to the Parliament buildings in Victoria. And I threw the I Ching in the middle of the Parliament building in Victoria....It was just an ‘event’... It was 1976. It was just a ‘happening’. It was a ‘happening’. It was nothing!...I think Arthur was desperately trying not to hurt people. So the idea was to show people the playfulness of life. And they don’t have to take it all seriously.¹⁶⁴

Calling the film a “happening” refers again to Lipsett’s affiliation with the avant-garde and his apparent effort to keep pace with occurring trends. Happenings were theatre events created by neo-dadaists groups around the world from the early sixties to the late seventies. The Situationists in Europe, Nam June Pak in New York, and Terayama Shuji in Japan created performances in areas other than traditional theatre spaces. Their objective was to bring theatre closer to the people by discounting the constructed barriers between people and art. They also attempted to subvert the seriousness found in contemporary life. Although Tree insists that *Blue and Orange* was

¹⁶² Arthur Lipsett, “Concerning the Screening of the Film *Strange Codes*”, unpublished notes, in the “Notes for *Strange Codes*” file, Author Lipsett Collection, Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montreal, 197(?).

¹⁶³ Siegel, “A Clown Outside the Circus”, p. 11.

¹⁶⁴ Tanya Tree interviewed by author, June 5, 1997.

her film, given Lipsett's knowledge about the avant-garde, one can speculate he may have been influential in the overall making of the film.

While in Victoria Tree began to notice that Lipsett was acting strangely. He grew highly dependent on Tree's attention. She stated that Lipsett thought she came to Victoria to save him and when she returned to Montreal, he followed shortly after. Back in Montreal Lipsett began living "abnormally". He slept a lot, chain smoked, and would suddenly strike very peculiar poses that he would hold for long periods of time.¹⁶⁵

In 1978 Lipsett met Lois Siegel, who was doing an article for *Cinema Canada* and wanted to interview him. Although Siegel found him to be somewhat paranoid, she felt he was always "very lucid" and "funny". Being impoverished, by 1978 he had begun living with his Aunt Etta, sleeping in her living room. Siegel remembers being with Lipsett at that time:

He'd call up and we would decide to go to a Greek restaurant, like La Scala on Park Avenue. So I would go and pick him up and his aunt would give him ten bucks to take the 'girl out'. You know, you always got this feeling like you would go out and have a good time like back in the forties or fifties.¹⁶⁶

Siegel stated that Lipsett had just been invited to return to the Film Board to work on a vignette when she first met him. Problems were already beginning to occur at the Board because of Lipsett's presence there. Derek Lamb told Siegel that "out of respect" for Lipsett all the animators would stop their work and leave the editing suite when he entered. Siegel helped Lipsett find another editing suite. However, he began hiding his favorite splicer from other filmmakers.

To add to these problems the vignette was highly questionable to the people involved with its making. Titled *Traffic Signals*, no one associated with the film knew for certain what it was about. Fortner Anderson, a friend of Lipsett's at the time, also participated in the making of the film. He said that the film consisted of a bunch of people sitting in an apartment playing homemade musical instruments. Anderson believed Lipsett was beyond doing anything "normal" at the Film Board.¹⁶⁷

Lipsett also sensed that he was unable to work normally at the Board. After a considerable amount of effort to make the small vignette, Lipsett resigned from the

¹⁶⁵ibid.

¹⁶⁶Lois Siegel, February 17, 1997.

¹⁶⁷Fortner Anderson interviewed by author, March 14, 1997.

project. The reasons for his resignation is expressed in a memo he sent to his producer, Bob Verral, on September 21, 1978:

I, Arthur Lipsett have developed a phobia of sound tape. Also my creative ability in the film field had dissapeared[sic]. There is no way to explain this and the result is that I cannot continue to work for the government.

Sincerely,
Arthur Lipsett¹⁶⁸

By this time the people close to Lipsett were beginning to worry a great deal about what could be done about him. Both Tanya Tree and Fortner Anderson admit that Lipsett's lifestyle went beyond eccentricities. He began wearing winter clothing in summer. He also began taping his fingers into particular Buddhist mantra positions -- possibly for "protection".

In 1982 Lipsett was hospitalized for the first time in Montreal in what would be the beginning of several admittances and releases. One of the psychologists who treated him was Dr. Nancy Carpenter. According to her Lipsett was diagnosed with chronic or paranoid schizophrenia. In an interview she said that for him to be diagnosed with chronic schizophrenia at such a late age (he was about forty-five) was unusual. But one of the many symptoms of this disease is the hearing of phantom voices, which Lipsett claimed to experience. According to Dr. Carpenter:

He had auditory hallucinations, which were, sometimes, a great comfort to him. When they were nice, he loved them. And when they were nasty they were tormenting him...[They] tormented him for being a Jew. Being a Jew was to be weak and to be despised.
¹⁶⁹

In his sessions with Dr. Carpenter Lipsett also revealed that he never forgave his father for the suicide of his mother. He also stated that his anger was very dangerous, and that it was anger that propelled his films. But the films suggest more than unbridled anger. They show a concern for the fate of society. They also attempt to liberate viewers from their complacency positions. The psychologists would not have seen the connection between Lipsett's angst and his films however because none of the them had seen his films prior to his suicide.¹⁷⁰

As Lipsett's psychological problems progressed so did his desire to end his life. On several occasions he overdosed on the medication prescribed to him. He called his suicide

¹⁶⁸ Arthur Lipsett, Memo to Bob Verral, Production files, National Film Board Archives, Montreal, September 21, 1978.

¹⁶⁹ Dr. Nancy Carpenter interview by the author, July 11, 1997.

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.*

attempts his “little experiments”.¹⁷¹ The reasons for Lipsett’s flirtations with suicide may not rest exclusively with a chemical imbalance in his brain, but also with his realization of how far his career had faltered from the beginning of his artistic endeavors. In the sessions with Dr. Carpenter, Lipsett revealed that “Dying would be a good thing because I’ve finished . I have no creative ideas left.”¹⁷² In a notebook he kept with him this feeling of isolation and existential angst was echoed:

Chinese restaurant, moment of truth: bus passes by out in street at night reflecting neon images as it passes, then nothing is left but the black street. (like the life of a person.)¹⁷³

In April, 1986 Dr. Carpenter discovered Lipsett dead in his apartment. He had hung himself.¹⁷⁴

In the end he was a very wounded artist, one who Fortner Anderson describes “...was touted as a boy genius. His work was of the highest caliber. But he was unable to live with that.”¹⁷⁵ Lipsett matured perhaps too rapidly as an artist through the influence of people like Arthur Lismer and Tom Daly. The institutional structure of the NFB served, at the beginning, to allow his artistic skill to mature, but the same institution suppressed his potential by the end of his time there. After leaving the Film Board, although he tried, he was unable to continue pursuing the hard awkward questions to his satisfaction.

¹⁷¹Lois Siegel, February 17, 1997.

¹⁷²Dr. Nancy Carpenter, July 11, 1997.

¹⁷³Arthur Lipsett, Notes, in “Ideas” file, Cinémathèque québécoise, Montreal. n.d.

¹⁷⁴Dr. Nancy Carpenter, July 11, 1997.

¹⁷⁵Fortner Anderson, March 14, 1997.

CHAPTER 4

CANON FORMATION, THE CINEMA WE NEED DEBATE, AND THE FILMS OF ARTHUR LIPSETT

4.1 Introduction

Chapter Two showed the relationship between Lipsett's films and the aesthetics associated with avant-garde and documentary film practices. His films bridge the two through their complex collage techniques and their use of actuality sound and images. This analysis also pointed to the importance of Lipsett's work within a general filmmaking context. Chapter Three showed that Lipsett was involved in one of the more productive documentary units at the NFB, Unit B, as well as other documentary units at the Board. In Peter Harcourt's influential article *The Innocent Eye*, Harcourt suggests Unit B was the genesis of what would be called distinctively Canadian films. Although Lipsett's name is mentioned in the article his films are not assessed and essentially dismissed as canonical candidates.¹⁷⁶ The question should then be asked why his work have not been adequately examined within Canadian film scholarship. Part of the reason rests with how the Canadian film canon was created and is maintained.

This chapter will explore canon formation in Canada and how the reception of Lipsett's films has been affected by it. This exploration will include an analysis of Harcourt's *The Innocent Eye* and will also address Peter Morris's critique of Harcourt's piece. One other site that will be explored is the 'Cinema We Need' debate. Led by Canadian film scholars Bruce Elder, Peter Harcourt, Bart Testa, Piers Handling, and Geoff Prevere, the debate discussed reasons for the type of cinema supported in Canada and the cinema that *should* be encouraged. Through an examination of this discussion the complexity of establishing a Canadian film canon becomes apparent. The exchange also prompts suggestions for Lipsett's exclusion from any major analysis. The chapter will suggest other issues of canon formation and assess some links between past and current filmmaking practices. The closing part of the chapter will cite thematic tendencies within Canadian filmmaking that are shared by Lipsett's films but not addressed in the aforementioned articles. The purpose of this assessment is to expand the discussion about filmmaking in Canada in order to include films otherwise not discussed, particularly

¹⁷⁶Peter Harcourt, "The Innocent Eye: An Aspect of the Work of the National Film Board of Canada, in *Canadian Film Reader*, edited by Seth Feldman and Joyce Nelson, (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates Limited. 1977), p. 75.

those of Arthur Lipsett. It will also help to articulate where Lipsett's films could be positioned within Canadian film studies.

4.2 Canon Formation

University of Regina film professor Sheila Petty wrote this about the function of canon formation in society:

...boundaries are laid by the dominant culture in an attempt to contain and police the colonized cultural and societal roles as well as their sexual behaviour. Dominant culture...can only experience a sense of security when people's looks and behaviour conforms to expected binary patternings.¹⁷⁷

For this process to work the canon formers have to adopt a strategy that essentializes the patterns in the culture and ignore the so-called anomalies. Janet Staiger states this process results in a support system for a hegemonic society.¹⁷⁸

The paradox in Canada is that when one attempts to prove the above statement by watching how Canadian films reinforce the dominant patterns in Canada one only finds American "patternings" at the theatres. The closed, happy Hollywood ending is an example of a formal film structure that derives from outside Canada yet dominates Canadian screens and becomes an expected component in Canadian film production and film discourse. This experience may imply that Canadians are victims of a dominant, colonizing culture. However a dominant culture does exist in Canada too, and it is not blameless in building its own structures that the marginalized in Canada must adhere to. For example, as Canada celebrates its multi-cultural diversity there are tendencies in this country to promote this diversity within the framework established by the dominant culture. It is in this light that Homi Babba rejects the notion of multiculturalism because it is only allowed to exist within a grid that "contains" the diversity.¹⁷⁹

Nevertheless all societies practice canon formation and depend on it. The interesting result for Peter Morris is that the lists "...raise questions not only about what is *included* but also what is *excluded*."¹⁸⁰ Lipsett's films seem to be in the latter position. This

¹⁷⁷Sheila Petty, *Identity and Consciousness: (Re)Presenting the Self*, (Regina: Dunlop Art Gallery, 1991), p. 5.

¹⁷⁸Janet Staiger, "The Politics of Film Canon", in *Multiple Voices in Feminist Film Criticism*, edited by Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar and Janice R. Welsch, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 196.

¹⁷⁹Babba, Homi. "The Third Space", in *Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), p. 208.

¹⁸⁰Peter Morris, "In Our Own Eyes: The Canonizing of Canadian Film", *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, Vol. 3 No. 1, p. 31.

exclusion is not a product of race/gender issues but other dominant assumptions, limitations and constructs that are a part of canon formation.

An analysis of canon formation in Canada would not be complete without first looking at Peter Harcourt's essay *The Innocent Eye*. Written in 1964, this article is one of the first attempts to link the film practices in Canada to a national identity. For Harcourt the type of documentary practiced in Unit B not only influenced the fiction Canadian filmmakers created, but it was also a benchmark for identifying distinctive Canadian characteristics - in other words, a culture:

There is something very Canadian in all this, something which my own Canadianness prompts me to attempt to define. There is in all these films a quality of suspended judgment, of something left open at the end, of something undecided... There is something rather detached from the immediate pressures of existence, something rather apart.¹⁸¹

In addition to attributing a Canadian quality of "suspended judgment" to these films Harcourt also implies the documentary style developed in the unit became a distinctive characteristic found in narrative fictions. This observational style borrowed from the documentary allowed the films to present stories that seemed realistic. As well, these stories revealed to viewers something "so convincingly, so familiarly Canadian."¹⁸² Harcourt's focus on the importance of Unit B gave realist narratives a privileged position in the Canadian film canon.

In addressing what is considered distinctively Canadian this canon-making strategy has to ignore the popularity of the films. If Harcourt did include popularity as a criteria he would face the dilemma of comparing the Canadian characteristics found in *Meatballs* (1979), a relatively popular English Canadian language film with *Mon oncle Antoine* (1971), a popular French Canadian language film. Neglecting popularity as a factor for determining the canon is not a crucial oversight however. The level of viewership of Canadian films is so low it isn't a necessary element to take into consideration when assessing the value of a film in regards to the needs, desires or cultural tendencies of Canadian society. Because of this films such as *Nobody Waved Good-bye* (1966), *Going Down the Road* (1971), and *The Rowdyman* (1973), films that are realist narratives - and that were influenced by the observational style practiced at the NFB in the late fifties and early sixties - are given special status.

¹⁸¹ Harcourt, "The Innocent Eye", p72.

¹⁸² *ibid.*, p.77.

In his article *In Our Own Eyes: The Canonizing of Canadian Film*, Peter Morris questioned the assumptions credited to Harcourt about what makes Canadian films distinctive. Morris believes the concept of a Canadian cinema whose roots are found in a documentary unit of the Film Board is exaggerated. He claims that although realist narratives exist in Canada, the quantity of films with this signature is relatively small.¹⁸³ For Morris, the purpose of overvalourizing these films is to give a national agenda to Canadian cinema. Realist films are perceived to 'reflect' the environment in which they are produced. From this narrative style Canadians are able to see images that express their existence and affirm a national identity in a economic climate that threatens to dilute the distinctions between Canada and the dominant culture to Canada's south.¹⁸⁴

Although Morris is correct in pointing to an nationalist agenda for canon formation, the article remains skewed towards a very limited assessment of films being made in Canada. Morris fails to mention the relatively large amount of experimental work produced. Most of the films that he suggests as substantial yet excluded from the canon are fictional narratives. The result is although he manages to cite problems in the formation of the Canadian canon, he does so within the limited framework of a discourse on narrative filmmaking. This limitation by film historians like Morris, may have been one factor that led Bruce Elder to push the discourse beyond where it was situated, and re-assess the canon to include the undervalued experimental films. He achieved this through his book *Image and Identity* (1989) and through the more accessible but equally controversial article *The Cinema We Need*.

4.3 The Cinema We Need Debate

The 'Cinema We Need' debate expressed the maturity Canadian film scholarship has gained since Harcourt's 1964 article. The debate, a set of articles written for *Cinema Canada* in 1985, discussed not only what is Canadian cinema and how it contributes to formulating a distinct Canadian vision, but also the larger question, "What is film?" Positions such as the belief in narrative versus non-narrative and the relevance of representation, subjects that have been part of film discourse from almost the very beginning, drove the debate.

A cynical view of this debate might infer that it represented nothing more than academic quibbling whose sole purpose was to berate the opponent in order to gain some vague recognition within film scholarship. It could be construed as adding nothing to the

¹⁸³ Morris, "In Our Own Eyes", p. 36.

¹⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p. 34.

struggle of developing Canada's cinema in the shadow of the dominant Hollywood film industry. However the positive aspects of the debate override this view by displaying a discourse that shows the maturity Canadian cinema and criticism had acquired. The general positions held in the discussion were argued within the context of a cinema that had developed a diverse field of vision and voice. The debate also implied an exasperation about the difficulty in further cultivating this diversity in an environment that continually threatened any advancement.

In his article, *The Cinema We Need*, Bruce Elder called for "a cinema not of imagination but of perception"¹⁸⁵. He emphasized the need for Canadian cinema to reject the narrative form used in filmmaking. The filmmaker should adopt a style that allows for a manifestation of the process of experience. Elder's prescription called for a practice that:

...will have to allow for multiplicity and contradiction, since contraries are present in all experience. It will be a polyphonic cinema, possessing several concurrent lines of development...In such a form truth and method will become one.¹⁸⁶

In the article Elder believed that this would counter the ideological domination of the narrative construct in cinema, and in doing so recreate a cinema born out of a Canadian experience and not a cinema developed from a separate experience. In revealing the weakness of this formula, Bart Testa pointed out this prescription was not new. Testa stated:

Elder owes the style of his gesture to a whole history of attacks on narrative and on its high valuation within a sociological film criticism, the history of avant-garde film theory and criticism.¹⁸⁷

In the context of Canadian cinema, filmmakers such as Richard Kerr, Chris Gallagher, Ann-Marie Fleming, Rick Hancox and many others practice a form of cinema that explores the space/time/image boundaries of the medium, and through that process they are able to disintegrate the traditional, narrative norms of the medium. Their concerns rest in exploring constricted limitations of thought and expanding the possibilities of insight. But within their personal exploration of the physical boundaries of film there is found common thematic references to location, memory and displacement - themes that are also present in the fictional narrative.

¹⁸⁵Bruce Elder, "The Cinema We Need", in *Documents in Canadian Film*, edited by Douglas Fetherling, (Toronto: Broadview Press, 1988), p. 267.

¹⁸⁶*ibid.*, p. 268.

¹⁸⁷Bart Testa, "So, What did Elder Say", in *Documents in Canadian Film*, edited by Douglas Fetherling, (Toronto: Broadview Press, 1988), p. 282.

Elder claimed that the new-narrative¹⁸⁸ in Canadian cinema appropriated the filmic explorations of avant-garde artists. He suggested that new-narrative turns the avant-garde's filmic inquiries into mere filmic devices because it has not divorced itself from the linear narrative construct of mainstream cinema. For Elder the result of this appropriation is that the devices act on the "surface" of film. There is not any actual shift in perception through this appropriation. Rather, Elder contends that because new-narrative remains in the narrative form it legitimizes "the mainstream cinema's highjacking of the hard-won unrewarded achievements of vanguard cinema."¹⁸⁹ In addition he believed realist cinema suggests a linearity that cannot be experienced.

In defense of the realist style of filmmaking, Elder's complaint can be disputed. Because of its observational tendency and open-ended form, realist narrative is an alternative to the "hegemonic products of Hollywood".¹⁹⁰ However this is not a revelation, nor is it exclusively Canadian. For example, the neo-realists in Italy used this structure as a subversive strategy against the dominating forces at the end of the Second World War.

Following the critical backlash to *The Cinema We Need* Elder defended his position in the article entitled *Vindication*. In this article Elder conceded that "...like all occasions of speaking, that the telling of stories play some role in constructing the world in which we live."¹⁹¹ Films cannot be excluded from this statement. The mechanical process involved with the projecting of film images reinforces the notion that film has a potential for storytelling. Elder is aware of the temporal and linear characteristics of film, but avoids discussing this issue stating instead that film narrative should be abandoned. However, given the mechanical/temporal aspects of film, Elder's belief in a cinema of the *present* is not possible.

Elder's criticism about new-narrative and what he considered its appropriation of experimental techniques was based not just on theorizations about new narrative, but on the personal effect of its domination in the canon. As a filmmaker working in the avant-garde Elder saw how it was undervalued in the Canadian film canon. He wanted

¹⁸⁸By new-narrative Elder was describing the type of cinema that counters the conventional Hollywood cinema but retains a linear narrative. Elder was basically referring to a cinema that combines realist or naturalist style with Godardian editing and supported by Harcourt as distinctively Canadian cinema.

¹⁸⁹Bruce Elder, "The Cinema We Need", pp. 267.

¹⁹⁰Bruce Elder, "A Vindication", in *Documents in Canadian Film*, ed. Douglas Fetherling, (Toronto: Broadview Press, 1988), p. 302.

¹⁹¹*ibid.*, p. 303.

critics of Canadian cinema to recognize the avant-garde's contribution to the development of film practice. He believed that film scholars wrongly assumed:

...that experimental filmmaking is valuable only as a sort of research program and that its discoveries take on real value only when they are adopted and used by feature filmmakers.¹⁹²

This statement is difficult to deny. One only has to examine the lack of recognition Arthur Lipsett has received over the years by the people responsible for canon formation. Lipsett's films tackle issues about life and humanity as much as fictional narrative filmmakers, but the critical acknowledgment his films have received for wrestling with these issues has been limited. No major study has been published of his work and only a small group of people ever supported him. For example in a 1968 review about Lipsett's film, *Fluxes*, Mark Slade called Lipsett:

...the William Blake of the twentieth century...because there is no one else who speaks with images that startle ordinary perception with such pertinent relevance to our own technological era.¹⁹³

In the February 25, 1997 issue of the *Globe and Mail*, Kevin Courrier wrote:

Arthur Lipsett made films that deviated from the norm of rational judgment. He went after what he called "an intuitive expression which potentially could contain unexpected discoveries." Those unexpected discoveries, coming at a time when most of us are being encouraged to play it safe, might just excite a whole new audience.¹⁹⁴

The "audience" Courrier refers to could remain limited if there isn't an attempt to evaluate the importance of Lipsett's work. Lipsett combined found footage and sound with his own shots and through this combination created a new value for the historical original. This new value did not eliminate the representational value inherent in the original image or the aesthetics that accompanied it. Through the removal of the image from its original editorial context, its value as a representational image was highlighted. The purpose of this exercise was not to exploit the nature of the image (as in contemporary music videos,) but to create a situation that allowed for a new presentation of the society and culture that Lipsett was part of (but felt disconnected from.) In his use of mostly actuality images, Lipsett also challenged the concept of what constituted documentary and by extension other film practices.

¹⁹²ibid., p. 302.

¹⁹³Slade, Mark, "Arthur Lipsett: The Hyper-anxious William Blake of Modern Cinema", *Gazette*, in the Arthur Lipsett Fonds at the Cinémathèque québécoise, December 07, 1968. p. 21

¹⁹⁴Kevin Courrier, "The Incredible Mr. Lipsett", *Globe and Mail*, February 25, 1997. p. D1.

It's this undervaluing of such complex notions that Elder is lamenting. Further proof of this undervaluing can be found in the spring 1996 issue of *Take One*. In the article "100 Great and Glorious Years of Canadian Cinema - The Sequel", Wyndam Wise added one hundred more "major contributors" to film practice in Canada to the one hundred selected for a previous article. In this *final* one hundred, both Elder and Lipsett are listed. Jack Chambers, Joyce Wieland, and Mike Hoolboom are mentioned as well. Three interesting points can be raised from this listing. The first is that Elder's assertion that experimental filmmakers are underrepresented in canon lists may have some merit (of the 100 listed in the sequel, ten could be considered 'experimental' practitioners). Ironically, and to his credit, Wise does acknowledge that Lipsett is "one of Canada's most original artists and a key figure in the development of experimental cinema."¹⁹⁵ This is more than what Elder did. In *Image and Identity: Reflections on Film and Culture*, Elder suggested that the exploration of the avant-garde filmmaker can be proven to be an important component to Canadian filmmaking. Yet as an example of collage filmmaking techniques, Elder ignores the work of Lipsett in favour of citing an American, Bruce Conner.¹⁹⁶

The second point about this *Take One* listing is that it is people are listed alphabetically. The one hundred names are selected and listed in this order to avoid placing a hierarchical value on the chosen. Yet, the attempt at neutralizing this list is subverted by a simple comparison of the column inches of text written to describe the narrative fiction directors' contribution to filmmaking in Canada to the amount of text allotted for experimental filmmakers.

The third point is that there is no practice-based differentiation in the *Take One* list. The documentary filmmakers are listed with the fiction narrative and experimental practitioners, as well as the film actors and producers. This suggests two things: 1) The quantity of films produced in Canada does on warrant a practice-based listing. 2) The link between the film practices in Canada may be closer than many recognize.

Although Lipsett's name reached the list his films continue to be underrepresented in Canadian film discourse. It is because of this kind of exclusion that Elder's point about the undervaluing of experimental filmmaking has some merit. However, caution should be taken when making this statement because by suggesting the experimental artist

¹⁹⁵ Wyndam Wise, "100 Glorious Years of Canadian Cinema - The Sequel", *Take One*, Spring, 1997, p. 31.

¹⁹⁶ Elder, *Image and Identity: Reflections on Film and Culture*, p. 337.

should be given more status within canon formation could create an ironic problem. Avant-garde artists challenge aesthetic norms accepted in society. The positioning of these artists within the centre of cinematic discourse could render their subversive and necessarily political edge flat. These artists, through their questioning of aesthetic values, position themselves on the margin. Nevertheless Canadian Film Studies should be more cognizant of Lipsett's works. At the very least, he was involved with the Unit at the Film Board that has been considered a site which prompted a Canadian film discourse. If critics are to accept the influence this Unit had in developing a Canadian vision they must also recognize the large contribution Lipsett had within the Unit, and by association with a collective Canadian vision.

In response to Elder's "manifesto" Peter Harcourt, Piers Handling and Geoff Prevere recognized the myriad number of factors involved in creating an indigenous cinema and warned of singular, prescriptive recipes for Canadian cinema. As Harcourt stated:

We need our own TV sit-coms, our own rock videos, our own dramatic features, both in the theatres and on television; we need to nourish and protect the distinguished 'minimalist' tradition of narrative filmmaking in Quebec... We even need our own industrial and educational films; but of course we must also nourish and protect our experimental filmmaking.¹⁹⁷

However, as it was shown in Peter Morris's critique of Harcourt's *Innocent Eye* article, their arguments for a diverse field of cinema remained limited to an analysis of fictional narrative. Besides Elder, all the critics discussed so far commend the documentary units of the NFB for contributing to the overall growth of cinema in Canada. They also recognize that experimental filmmaking does exist and contribute to Canadian cinema. But for the most part, these critics situate such practices on the periphery, but where they might still feed filmic techniques to the dominant forms.

4.4 Other issues relating to canon formation

It is difficult to formulate an absolute statement of what constitutes Canadian cinema. One reason is found in the way film production has manifested itself and has evolved in various regions of Canada. An illustration of this can be found in recent developments pertaining to film production in Saskatchewan.

In the late eighties the Saskatchewan film community formed SMPIA, the Saskatchewan Motion Picture Industry Association (now called the Saskatchewan

¹⁹⁷Peter Harcourt, "Politics or Paranoia?", *Cinema Canada*, July/August, 1985, p. 27.

Motion Picture Association). This organization was created to act as an umbrella for various interest groups and individuals directly involved with the production of film and video in the province. As an institution partially funded by the provincial government, part of its mandate was to raise the profile of the province as an inexpensive site for commercial film production. SMPIA was also formed to assist individual film practitioners working in Saskatchewan to receive a larger profile outside the province. At the onset the film community approached the possibilities of SMPIA with a lot of optimism. The community believed that this organization could raise the volume of film production for a regionally marginalized voice.

Within a couple of years of its formation SMPIA's presence began to take effect. Agencies across Canada such as Superchannel and Telefilm began funding productions in the province. In North America, the Saskatchewan film community successfully competed with other regional film communities for the high profile, Hollywood-driven, made-for-TV epics. The technicians and crafts people in the province proved to be just as professionally minded as others working in different areas of the continent.

However, as the exposure increased so too did the rifts between the people involved with SMPIA. Those wishing to develop stories with Saskatchewan themes or with personal approaches were becoming silenced by the improved position of Saskatchewan as an inexpensive, location to make American movies. The producers involved with American formulated films who could prove a market for their product became the dominant receivers of funds in the province. The filmmakers with personal vision, particularly the ones who challenged narrative structures of film, lost faith in the attempt to develop a place for their voices, and those that didn't leave the province returned to being dependent on the Saskatchewan Arts Board and Canada Council for funding. Ironically the added exposure through the market-driven films also increased the profiles of certain experimental and personal filmmakers. Filmmakers such as Brian Stockton, Robin Schlatt, and even Richard Kerr's exploration into fictional narrative owe much credit to the creation of SMPIA.¹⁹⁸

The reason this story is related is not to lament the ghettoization of the Saskatchewan voice. Nor is it to criticize the producers in Saskatchewan for competing for a small portion of the American market. Rather it is to show the inherent complexities found when analyzing the *cinema we need* and the *cinema we have*. Within this model there is the duel struggle between the advocates of culture as industry versus culture as art. On

¹⁹⁸From 1989 to 1991 I was a member of SMPIA as well as a volunteer for the group.

the one hand there are those who believe in creating an indigenous art aesthetic for the sake of retaining a cultural identity. On the other hand there are those who believe that by utilizing the conventional language formulated in Hollywood to generate a film industry, the culture will be stabilized by the increased revenues to the province.

Another reason why it's difficult to formulate what constitutes Canadian cinema is because of the elusive audience/filmmaker relationship in Canada. Ninety-five percent of Canada's cinemas continue to screen films that are imported from elsewhere, mainly the United States. If Geoff Prevere was correct when he stated, "All communal interaction depends on systems of shared symbols and codes which objectify and isolate experience so it can be traded among the constituents of all communities,"¹⁹⁹ then we must question the ability of Canadian cinema to contribute to this interaction. For if the cinema is not viewed by its indigenous constituency, then it is questionable if it can assist in developing a Canadian consciousness. (At the 1991 Tokyo International Film Festival, film critic Saito Tadao showed concern about the fact that only thirty to forty percent of screens in Japan played imported films. He considered this number a "dangerous precedent"!)²⁰⁰

Nevertheless Canadian films continue to be produced in spite of the lack of screens available for them. The result of the missing link between audience and filmmaker is a type of film that is generally personal in approach. Bruce Elder's *1857 (Fool's Gold)* (1981) is congruent with Joyce Wieland's *The Far Shore* (1976) or Frank Vitale's *Montreal Main* (1974) in the way each follow a personal, meditative route to their respective inquiries. *The Far Shore*, being the most misunderstood of these films, will be used as an example of this approach to filmmaking.

As Peter Harcourt correctly states, *The Far Shore* was not a failed attempt at telling a story about the murder of a historical Canadian artist.²⁰¹ It is a contemplation by an artist, Joyce Wieland, about her muse. Each frame is a study of her struggle with the irony of following a patriarchal, modernist tradition - one in which her work depends on but continually challenges. The surface narrative of the film is secondary to Wieland's own exploration of her relationship with art. Each scene is a historical referent to the modernist tradition. The parlour scenes relate directly to works by Monet or Matisse. The

¹⁹⁹Geoff Prevere, "The Rites (and Wrongs) of the elder or The Cinema We Got: The Critics We Need", in *Cinema Canada*, July/August, 1985, p. 37.

²⁰⁰Saito, Tadao, discussions at the "International Visual Image Symposium", Tokyo International Film Festival, 1991.

²⁰¹Peter Harcourt, "Roads Not Taken, Avenues Not Explored: Confessions of an Unconscious Canonizer", unpublished, shorter version found in *Take One*, No. 8, Spring, 1995, p. 6.

exteriors, set in Northern Ontario, reflect the works of the Group of Seven. A reference to the turn-of-the-century Symbolist movement is also cited in the final shot as the viewer waits for *Ophelia* to come floating down the river. This contemplative style is symptomatic of a cinema that is therapeutic for the filmmaker but elusive to an audience entrenched with “shared symbols or codes” developed in an American context.

However, even in these marginalized films we can explore their commonalities and suggest elements that deem these films Canadian. In her book *Survival* Margaret Atwood states:

...every country or culture has a single unifying and informing symbol at its core... which holds the country together and helps the people in it to co-operate for common ends.²⁰²

Although Atwood chooses *survival* as a pattern recognized in Canadian Literature, the concept of *displacement* can be considered as a common pattern in Canadian film. Displacement is at the root of the search in the ubiquitous Canadian road movies such as *Going Down the Road* (1971) or *Hard Core Logo* (1996). It is the cause for desire in *Masala* (1992) and exists dramatically in *Cold Comfort* (1991).

The reason for this common thread may be on account of the fact that Canada is a country of a great many displaced people. Not only are the majority of Canadians immigrants, a great many of them are reluctant immigrants. Many were forced by economics, genocide, and slavery.

Because the films I cited above are considered fictional narratives I, too, could be accused of limiting my exercise of canon formation to one that ignores other important forms of filmmaking. There are several reasons why these fictional narratives were chosen as examples of Canadian films. The first reason is that although they are claimed in the dominant form of filmmaking these particular films are still considerably inaccessible. Their marginality links them closer to the other forms of filmmaking such as documentary and experimental. A second reason for choosing fictional narratives is to show that although they cover a thirty year span of filmmaking in Canada, there is a thematic commonality that exists in all of them. A third reason is that many of these films are not from the same period that Lipsett created his work. This is intentional in order to determine if there are common traits between these disparate, yet Canadian, film forms. Finally to support Elder's claim the fictional narratives mentioned are evidence of the way this style of filmmaking consistently appropriates from the avant-garde.

²⁰²Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), p. 31.

In Lipsett's films the idea of displacement is as important to the narrative as the concept of interconnectivity. This is particularly evident in *Very Nice, Very Nice*, 21-87, and *Free Fall*. In each of these films Lipsett created expressions of the sense of loss and detachment from place. In 21-87 the viewer hears the voice of a woman as she describes the terror she feels climbing onto a bus. In the same film a man pleads to his doctor to "have mercy on my soul". In the opening shots of *Free Fall* the camera follows the frantic escape of an ant from the pursuit of the camera which seems futile and leads to nowhere. The displacement theme found in his films is partly based on Lipsett's belief in society's loss of spiritual values. However on another level traces of his own diasporic background can be perceived. Tanya Tree believed that Lipsett's own feeling of displacement was based on his Jewish background:

...he had this great big picture of Queen Victoria...on the wall...It was his whole relationship with the Empire. He was working it out. He was trying to work it out...Because he was a Russian Jew...And I think in those days people felt there were the anglos in Westmount and French Canadians were over there in the east...So that was the culture...And there was Arthur, an oddball.²⁰³

²⁰³Tanya Tree, June 5, 1997.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

I sat and watched quietly until it was run and then gave it the more fitting title "Hell". It was the briefest horror picture I have ever seen. In this short film it was able to interpret the degeneracy horror that fills the world today.²⁰⁴

...what I really wanted to do was express my gratitude . I would like sometime maybe to tell you just what was revealed to me in the film, but I am hopelessly tongue-tied when it comes to expressing the deepest things in words. For the present, know at least that if ever I am given the grace to complete a film of my own, whatever there may be of good in it will have been influenced by your vision.²⁰⁵

These two contrasting responses show the diverse viewing field that exists when watching Lipsett's films. Are the viewers watching "horror films" or are they witnessing "visions of beauty"? Perhaps the remarkable thing about Lipsett's work is that the answer could be both. As mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 2, watching his films is a liberating experience. The audience is free to witness and participate in these films on whatever level they wish. Lipsett avoids spoon-feeding his ideas in order for the audience to receive all the nourishment his films have to offer. It's perhaps one of the reasons why his work has been given a reduced stature in Canadian film studies circles. They are not "difficult", they are just hard to compartmentalize. Lipsett's works are open to interpretation but they maintain a narrative structure; they use a collage editing style from the avant-garde, but their use of actuality footage and sound implies they are tied to documentary filmmaking.

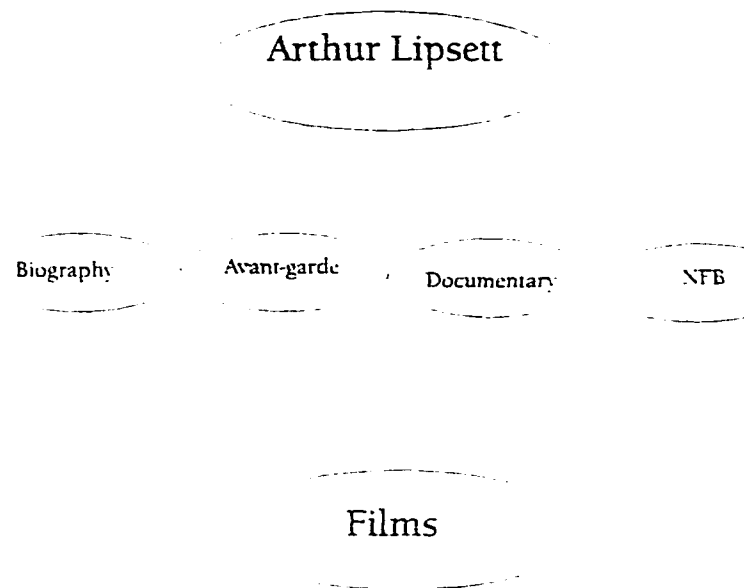
Given these ambiguous positions it could be suggested that Lipsett's films are satiric commentaries about any attempts to compartmentalize them. Similar to Lipsett's own questioning of the representational value of images associated with found footage, the films themselves question the procedures and values associated with the categorizing process. Because of this my thesis faces a paradox: To force the measure of discourse

²⁰⁴Edith Beckwith, letter to the National Film Board, Production files, National Film Board Archives. Montreal, November 17, 1962. (after viewing a televised version of *Very Nice, Very Nice*.)

²⁰⁵Martin Duckworth, letter to Arthur Lipsett, 21-87 file, Arthur Lipsett Fonds, Cinémathèque québécoise, Montreal, 1964(?). (After viewing 21-87)

required in film studies to give Arthur Lipsett a more deserving position in film history, and because of what is involved in completing a thesis, I am compelled to give his films an order - a classification. The result is that the films are unintentionally wrenched from their original purposes.

Returning to the diagram at the end of the “Introduction”, I would like to review what has been attempted in this thesis. The diagram shows links between disparate influences of Lipsett’s life and the films he created. The four prominent elements - biography, avant-garde, documentary, and institution - are connected to indicate their interrelationship, and to show how they combine to become part of a Lipsett film.



From his biography the thesis has shown that Lipsett was influenced by his father, a chemist who believed that truth could be measured empirically, and who did not appreciate his son’s artistic talent. To counter this rejection Lipsett created films that questioned the very scientific method that was the foundation of his father’s beliefs. The films are critiques of the dogmatic acceptance of science as the only revealer of truth. They are a call for society to re-evaluate its faith in science, or at the very least, balance that belief with pursuits that are intuitive and spiritual.

Lipsett’s biography also reveals a comprehensive knowledge of the visual arts prior to being hired at the NFB. With Arthur Lismer as his teacher, Lipsett was given a prescription for the artist in the “atomic age”. The prescription stated the artist should challenge and transform societal norms. This helps explain Lipsett’s consistently subversive use of found footage and sound. It was Lipsett’s hope that the films would

allow viewers “to transcend the known reality” and to reveal other options of seeing, hearing and living.

Speculation about Lipsett’s mental health is also part of this biographical diagram. Lipsett witnessed the suicide of his mother. This, coupled with an unsympathetic father, may have contributed to developing a very fragile character. Following the eventual rejection he experienced at the NFB, and after his departure from the Board, Lipsett was clinically diagnosed as a chronic schizophrenic. As it was revealed in the counseling sessions with his psychologist, Dr. Carpenter, these problems contributed to his inability to continue creating. The fragility of his character, and his belief that he had lost his ability to create eventually led to his suicide.

In regards to Lipsett’s education in visual arts, a link can be made between his knowledge of avant-garde art and his ability to utilize elements of this practice. Lipsett was a collage filmmaker. He merged found footage and sounds with images he shot to create a vision that challenged representation and identity. Within the avant-garde there is a long history of the use of collage techniques to subvert perceived ideas about reality and representation. The years spent at the Museum of Fine Arts School of Art and Design allowed him the opportunity to become aware of this history.

On the right side of the diagram the NFB balloon represents a different set of influences on Lipsett’s work. The Board nurtured a method of filmmaking that utilized stock footage to assist in the Canadian war effort. The staff that perfected this technique went on to become NFB producers. By the time Lipsett began at the Board, the three most prominent producers were Tom Daly, Guy Glover, and Colin Low. All three were working in Unit B, the unit where Lipsett developed his unique style. Their influence on Lipsett’s work is noticeable in two areas, the first being technical. Lipsett’s editing style was economical and precise in that he believed there should be “three or four reasons for using a shot.” Although this could be attributed to Lipsett’s own artistic perfectionism, producers like Daly echoed that sentiment.

The second area of influence was thematic. Tom Daly was one of Lipsett’s strongest supporters at the NFB. Daly was also a follower of Gurjieff, whose philosophy emphasized the interconnectivity of everything in the universe. The proposals that Lipsett wrote for his films consistently revealed a desire to put this idea into filmic terms. Although Lipsett’s interests also lay in Eastern religion his association with Daly in Unit B suggests that his films, on one level, could be interpretations of the esoteric beliefs espoused by Gurjieff.

When the NFB evolved from the Unit system to the Pool system, the support for Lipsett's work diminished. The group of filmmakers involved with Unit B had supported each other's work by allowing the ideas time to grow and evolve. The creative development of the films was placed before budgetary concerns. Lipsett's style of filmmaking required a large amount of time for each work to mature. His films were not discarded shots found in garbage bins and thrown together at random, but highly structured permutations of images and sounds. Given Lipsett's anti-science themes, it is interesting how much he depended on empirical structures in formulating his films. Nevertheless, Lipsett's filmmaking style required time and patience; he received both in Unit B. In the Pool system, although it was developed to give greater control to the institutional filmmakers, Lipsett's own agency was reduced. He was a filmmaker who could not articulate his film proposals to committees. The result was that a distrust grew in these committees about what he was making and who his audience really was. This latter question was given some credence when doctored sales figures about Lipsett's films began circulating within the Board. By 1970 Lipsett felt he had overstayed his welcome, and upon completing two of his most provocative films, *Fluxes* and *N-Zone*, resigned.

Following his resignation, Lipsett completed one more film, *Strange Codes* (1972). The construction of this film suggests that his previous films were leading, in a formalist sense, towards this final one. The film, financed by the Canada Council, did not possess any found actuality footage, but the soundtrack was from other sources. *Strange Codes* was a neo-Brexitian fiction about a group of characters, played by Lipsett, on a quest for all the hidden secrets of the world. The entire film was shot in his own apartment, which at first might suggest he simply didn't have the money or institutional support to make a film with a larger budget. However because evidence shows that he returned an unused portion of his grant to the Canada Council, it can be assumed that *Strange Codes* was indeed the film he wanted to make. Terry Ryan and Christopher Nutter both stated that rather than making films Lipsett wanted to return to making collage sculptures. But the Canada Council turned down his applications for visual arts money because he was not known as a visual artist. *Strange Codes* shows the process of constructing a collage sculpture, and at the end of the film the sculpture is complete. The money received for producing this film helped Lipsett construct a sculpture that he hadn't received funding to make.

Another link between the NFB and Lipsett's films was the development of the documentary tradition in the institution. His work challenged the concept of representation, or the idea that film can 'reflect' reality. The shots used in his films were

removed from their original purpose and given a new meaning. The found footage retains hints of its origin which allows an ironic questioning of the original value of the shots. These images are known to represent actuality by the way they are indexed. Lipsett accepted a level of representational meaning in these images but also challenged the viewers' perceived notions of them. In the process of utilizing footage known for its affinity to reality Lipsett created an *interpretive narrative* of the actuality he was examining. At the same time, as can be seen in the proposals of *Free Fall* and *21-87*, Lipsett hoped that the viewers would transcend their own reality through his linking of disparate actualities. Lipsett was able to juggle the subversive strategies of the avant-garde with the representational and expository aspects of documentary. By bridging the two film practices, he showed the kind of vision possible when artists dare to reject established conventions.

The analysis of canon formation in Canada showed the critical environment in which Lipsett's films were received. The analysis suggests that a nationalist agenda was an important aspect in forming the canon. In this country realist fictions are privileged because they are deemed to reflect Canadian stories and reinforce (or enforce) a national identity. Another aspect of canon formation in Canadian film is the privileged position given to fictional narrative. The "Cinema We Need" debate attempted to break the hold narratives had in the canon by expanding the discussion to include contributions by experimental filmmakers. However, even though Lipsett worked in the Film Board unit considered an important site for focusing a Canadian film discourse, and although his films share a Canadian thematic pattern of displacement, his work remains virtually ignored in film studies.

Finally, Arthur Lipsett's films exposed the image not only for what it was, but what else it could be. His work is still powerful today in the way it challenges conventional assumptions about art and living. He once told Lois Siegel, "There are so many ways of living lives."²⁰⁶ His films invite us to transcend the truth claim of the documentary by showing many ways of perceiving reality, and through this the "many ways of living lives."

²⁰⁶Lipsett quoted in Siegel, "Arthur Lipsett: A Close Encounter of a Fifth Kind", *Cinema Canada*, p.10

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arnheim, Rudolf. "The Complete Film". In *Film Theory and Criticism*, pp. Edited by Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979.

Artaud, Antonin. "Motion Pictures as Witchcraft". In *Festival du Film Maudit*. Translated by Victor Corti. 1949.

Atwood, Margaret. *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. Toronto: Anasi, 1972.

Babba, Homi. "The Third Space". In *Community, Culture, Difference*, pp. 207 - 221. Edited by Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990.

Barthes, Roland. *Image, Music and Text*. Edited and translated by Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.

Baudrillard, Jean. "The Evil Demon of Images and the Precession of Simulacra," pp. 194 - 199. In *Postmodernism: A Reader*. Edited by Thomas Docherty. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", pp. 217- 251. In *Illuminations*. Edited by Hannah Arendt and Translated by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.

Burger, Peter. "The Negation of the Autonomy of Art by the Avant-Garde," pp. 237 - 242. In *Postmodernism: A Reader*. Edited by Thomas Docherty. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Canada. *An Act to Create a National Film Board*, in *Statutes of Canada*, 3 George VI, Ch. 20 Ottawa: Joseph Oscar Patanaude, 1939.

_____. *An Act Respecting the National Film Board*, in *Statutes of Canada*, 14 George VI, Ch. 44, Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1950.

Carrol, Noel. "The Power of Movies", *Daedalus*. 114, No.4, 1985. pp. 79-102.

Cartwright, Lisa and Fonoroff, Nina. "Narrative is *Narrative*: So What is New?", pp. 124 - 139. In *Multiple Voices in Feminist Film Criticism*. Edited by Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar, and Janice R. Welsch. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

Chabot, Barry, C. "The Problem of the Postmodern", pp. 22 - 39. In *Zeitgeist In Babel: A Postmodernist Controversy*. Edited by Ingeborg Hoesterey. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

Docherty, Thomas. Introduction to "Crisis in the Avant-Garde", pp. 217 to 218. In *Postmodernism: A Reader*. Edited by Thomas Docherty. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

_____. "Postmodernism: An Introduction", pp. 1 - 36. In *Postmodernism: A Reader*. Edited by Thomas Docherty. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Dorland, Michael. "The State and/or/of Canadian Cinema", *Cinema Canada*, July/August, 1985. p. 26.

_____. "The Shadow of Canadian Cinema: Bruce Elder's Immodest Proposal", pp.260-271. *Documents in Canadian Film*. Edited by Douglas Fetherling. Broadview Press, 1988.

Eco, Umberto. "Innovation and Repetition: Between Modern and Post-modern Aesthetics", *Daedalus*. 114, No. 4, 1985. pp.161-184.

_____. *The Open Work*, translated Anna Cancogni, U.K.: Hutchinson Radius, 1989.

Eisenstein, Sergei. "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram", pp.85 - 100. In *Film Theory and Criticism*. Edited by Gerald Mast Marshall Cohen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979.

_____. "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form", pp. 101 - 124. In *Film Theory and Criticism*. Edited by Gerald Mast Marshall Cohen, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979.

Elder, Bruce. "The Cinema We Need", pp. 260-271. In *Documents in Canadian Film*. Edited by Douglas Fetherling. Toronto: Broadview Press, 1988..

_____. *Image and Identity: Reflections on Film and Culture*. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1989.

_____. "A Vindication", pp. 301-315. In *Documents in Canadian Film*. Edited by Douglas Fetherling. Toronto: Broadview Press, 1988.

Evans, Gary. *In the National Interest: A Chronicle of the National Film Board of Canada from 1949 to 1989*. Toronto:University of Toronto Press, 1991.

Gardner, Howard. *The Mind's New Science: A History of the Cognitive Revolution*. New York: Basic Books Inc., 1985.

Gidal, Peter. *Structural Film Anthology*. London: British Film Institute, 1978.

Greenburg, Clement. "The Notion of Postmodernism", pp. 42 to 49. In *Zeitgeist In Babel: A Postmodernist Controversy*. Edited by Ingeborg Hoesterey, Bloomington: Indiana University Press , 1991.

Gurdjieff, Georges Ivanovitch. *Views From the Real World*. New York: E.P. Dutton and Co. Inc., , 1973.

Handling, Piers. "The Cinema We Need?". In *Cinema Canada*, July/August, 1985. pp.29-30.

Hartcourt, Peter. "The Innocent Eye: An Aspect of the Work of the National Film Board of Canada", pp. 67-75. In *Canadian Film Reader*. Edited by Seth Feldman and Joyce Nelson. Toronto: Peter Martin Associates Limited. 1977.

_____. *Movies and Mythologies: Towards a National Cinema*. Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1975.

_____. "Politics or Paranoia?", *Cinema Canada*, July/August, 1985. pp. 27-28.

_____. *Reflections on the Real: R. Bruce Elder and the Canadian Empirical Cinematic Tradition*, unpublished. April, 1993.

_____. "Roads Not Taken, Avenues Not Explored: Confessions of an Unconscious Canonizer". Unpublished. Shorter version found in *Take One*, No. 8, Spring, 1995.

_____. "Some Relationship between the NFB Animation Department and the Documentary". pp. 152 -162. In *John Grierson and the NFB: The John Grierson Project McGill University*. Papers presented at a conference held at McGill University, Montreal, Quebec: ECW Press, October 29 to 31, 1981. .

Hassan, Ihab. "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism", in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, pp. 146 -156. Edited by Thomas Docherty. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Holubizky, Ihor. "Films for the End of the Century: The Films of Arthur Lipsett", *Images '89*, Toronto, 1989. pp. 36 - 39.

Huyssen, Andreas. "The Search for Tradition: Avant-Garde and Post Modernism in the 1970s. in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, pp. 220 - 237. Edited by Thomas Docherty. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Jonasson, Catherine and Shedden, Jim. (eds.), *Recent Works from the Canadian Avant-Garde*. Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1988.

Jones, D.B. *The Best Butler in the Business: Tom Daly and the National Film Board of Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1996.

_____. *Movies and Memoranda: An Interpretive History of National Film Board of Canada*. Ottawa: Canada Film Institute, 1981.

Kellein, Thomas. *Fluxus*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995.

Kellner, Douglas. *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity, and Politics between The Modern and the Postmodern*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Kracauer, Siegfried. *Nature of Film; The Redemption of Physical Reality*, London: Dennis Dobson, 1961.

Lawder, Standish. "Collage Films", pp. 58 to 59. International Experimental Film Congress, May 28 to June 4, 1989. Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1989.

Leyda, Jay. *Films Beget Film: A Study of the Compilation Film*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1964.

Lockerbie, Ian. "Grierson and Realism", In *John Grierson and the NFB: The John Grierson Project McGill University*, pp. 86 to 101. Papers presented at a conference held at McGill University, Montreal: ECW Press, October 29 to 31, 1981.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois. "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism", in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, pp. 47-50. Edited by Thomas Docherty. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Magnan, Richard. *Les collages cinématographiques d'Arthur Lipsett comme métaphore épistémologique*. Maître ès arts. Université de Montréal, 1993.

Mendelson, Lois. *Robert Breer: A Study of His Work in the Context of the Modernist Tradition*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981.

Morris, Peter. "In Our Own Eyes: The Canonizing of Canadian Film", *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, Vol. 3 No. 1. pp. 27-43.

Morris, Peter. "Re-thinking Grierson: The Ideology of John Grierson", in *Dialogue: Canadian and Quebec Cinema*, pp. 21 -56. Edited by Pierre Verroneau, Michael Dorland and Seth Feldman. Mediatexte Publications and La Cinémathèque Québécoise.

Nelson, Joyce. *The Colonized Eye: Rethinking the Grierson Legend*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 1988.

Nichols, Bill. *Representing Reality*. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1991.

_____. "The Voice of Documentary", In *New Challenges for Documentary*, pp. 48 - 63. Edited by Alan Rosenthal. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

Peterson, James. "Bruce Conner and the Compilation Narrative". *Wide Angle* 8, Nos. 3 and 4. pp.53-62.

_____. *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order: Understanding the American Avant-Garde Cinema*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994.

Petty, Sheila. "Identity and Consciousness: (Re)Presenting the Self". Regina: Dunlop Art Gallery, 1991.

Pervere, Geoff. "The Rites (and Wrongs) of the elder or The Cinema We Got: The Critics We Need". *Cinema Canada*, July/August, 1985. pp. 36-38.

Plantinga, Carl Rendit. *A Theory of Representation in the Documentary Film*. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1996.

Polan, Dana B. "Above All Else to Make You See: Cinema and Ideology of Spectacle", pp. 55-69. In *Postmodernism and Politics*. Edited by Jonathan Arac. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

_____. *The Political Language of Film and the Avant-Garde*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985.

Renov, Michael. "Re-thinking Documentary: Toward a Taxonomy of Mediation". *Wide Angle* 8, Nos. 3-4, pp. 71-78.

Roby, David. "Introduction". *The Open Work* by Umberto Eco, U.K.: Hutchinson Radius, 1989.

Rosenthal, Alan (ed.) *New Challenges for Documentary*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1988.

Ryan, Terry. "Six Filmmakers in Search of an Alternative". *Artscanada*, April, 1970, pp. 25 - 27.

Saul, Gerald. *Canadian Avant-Garde Film in the 1990s*. Master of Fine Arts, North York: York University, 1996.

Siegel, Lois. "A Close Encounter of the Fifth Kind", *Cinema Canada*, February, 1978, pp. 9 -10.

_____. "A Clown Outside the Circus", in *Cinema Canada*, October, 1986, pp. 10-14.

Sitney, P. Adams. *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.

Staiger, Janet. "The Politics of Film Canon", pp.191 - 209. In *Multiple Voices in Feminist Film Criticism*. Edited by Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar, and Janice R. Welsch, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

Starr, Cecile. "Notes on Hans Richter in the U.S.A.". *Film Culture*, No. 79, Winter, 1996, p17-26.

Steven, Peter. *Brink of Reality*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 1993.

Taylor, Gregory. "The Cinema of Ontology: Sound-Image Abstraction in Robert Breer's TZ". *Wide Angle*, Vol. 15, No.1, January, 1993, pp. 44-63.

The Tibetan Book of the Dead or The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane, according to Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup's English Rendering. Edited by W.Y. Evans-Wentz, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.

Turim, Maureen. *Abstraction in Avant-Garde Films*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1985.

_____. "Cinemas of Modernity and Postmodernity", pp. 17 -189. In *Zeitgeist in Babel: A Postmodernist Controversy*. Edited by Ingeborg Hoesterey, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

"Two Quebec Artists". *CBC Times*, February 15-21, 1964. p. 15.

Walz, Gene. "The NFB is a State of Mind: An Interview with Ches Yetman", *Film History*, Volume 9, 1997, pp. 133 - 167.

Wees, William. *Light Moving in Time: Studies in the Visual Aesthetics of Avant-Garde Film*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1992.

_____. "Making poetry Where No poet has Gone Before: Jack Chambers' *Hart of London*", unpublished. Film Studies Association Conference, Brock University. May 26-28, 1996.

_____. *Recycled Images*. New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1993.

Winston, Brian. *Claiming the Real: The Documentary Film Revisited*. London: British Film Institute, 1995.

Winter, O. "Ain't it Lifelike?". *Sight and Sound*, Autumn, 1982, pp. 294 -296.

Wise, Wyndham. "Canadian 100: The Sequel" *Take One*, Spring, 1997, pp. 24 -39.

Zemel, Henry. "N-Zone Continued", *Artscanada*, August/September, 1971, pp. 54 - 57.

NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS

ABOUT ARTHUR LIPSETT

“Art, Design Winners Get Awards”. *Montreal Star*, April 9, 1956, p. 6.

“Arthur Lipsett Best Student in Art School”. *Gazette*, Monday, April 4, 1955, p. 12.

Courrier, Kevin. “The Incredible Mr. Lipsett”. *Globe and Mail*, February 25, 1997, p. D1.

“Film-maker to Address Forum Tues”. *News and Chronicle*, Thursday, March 11, 1965, Arthur Lipsett Collection, Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montreal.

Gaffney, Paul. “Six Lipsett Films Get Tedium Rating”. *Ottawa Journal*, October 23, 1970 (?), Production files, National Film Board of Canada Archives, Montreal.

McKie, Paul. “Tragic Figure’s Ground-breaking Movies Get Salute”. *Winnipeg Free Press*, November 14, 1987, p. 20, Arthur Lipsett Fonds, Cinémathèque québécoise, Montreal.

Sadler, Jean. “Television”. *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, February 21, 1964. p. 13, Arthur Lipsett Collection, Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montreal.

Slade, Mark. “Arthur Lipsett: The Hyper-anxious William Blake of Modern Cinema”. *Gazette*, December 07, 1968, p. 21.

Vineberg, Dusty. “A ‘Short’ Story: Waste-Basket to Potential Oscar”. *Montreal Star*, February 24, 1962 (?), Production Files, The National Film Board Archives, Montreal.

Zeldin, Arthur. “They Took Top Prize at Venice: Latest NFB Award-Winners Surpass Great Expectations”. *Toronto Daily Star*, Tuesday, August 9, 1966, Arthur Lipsett Fonds. Cinémathèque québécoise, Montreal.

RELATED TO ARTHUR LIPSETT

“A Canadian Film Champion”. *Globe and Mail*. December 12, 1997. C3.

Gutin, Jo Ann C. “Mental Illness: Going Over the Creative Edge”. *Globe and Mail*, December 7, 1996, p. D6.

PRIMARY SOURCES

GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE

FROM LIPSETT TO:

The Indiana University Department of Folksong Archive. Production Files. National Film Board Archives, Montreal. November 27, 1964.

Memo to NFB Colleagues. "Correspondence, Personnelle" file. Arthur Lipsett Collection. Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montréal. January 23, 1968.

M. Taylor. "Correspondence, Personnelle" file. Arthur Lipsett Collection. Cinémathèque québécoise Montreal, Montréal. April 30. 197(?).

TO LIPSETT FROM:

Cage, John . *Very Nice, Very Nice* file. Arthur Lipsett Collection. Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montréal. October 12, 1963.

Driscoll, Dan. Memorandum to Joe Keonig, Mark Slade, Bob Verral and Arthur Lipsett. 21-87 file. Arthur Lipsett Collection. Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montréal. May 21, 1968.

Lipsett, Saul (Father). 197(?), "Correspondence personnelle" file, Arthur Lipsett Collection, Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montréal.

Lomax, Alan. Director, Cantometrics Research Project New York. Production Files. National Film Board of Canada Archives, Montreal. November 23, 1964.

Jerome Liebling. University of Minnesota. "Correspondence professionnelle" file. Arthur Lipsett Collection. Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montréal. June 28, 1965.

Shakery, Neil. "Correspondence, professionnelle" file. Arthur Lipsett Collection. Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montreal. 1960.

OTHER PRIMARY SOURCES

Lipsett, Arthur. Composition Notes - for a collage mural. Ideas file. Arthur Lipsett Collection. Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montreal. n.d.

Lipsett, Arthur. Notebook. Idea file. Arthur Lipsett Collection. Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montreal. n.d.

Lismer, Arthur. Comment on the Fine Arts. File A22. Arthur Lismer Fonds. Museum of Fine Arts Archives, Montreal, n.d.

Lismer, Arthur. Script for the CBC Radio Broadcast titled *Art in the Atomic Age*. File C7, Arthur Lismer Fonds, Museum of Fine Arts Archives, Montreal. 1953.

Museum of Fine Arts School of Art and Design School Registration files. Museum of Fine Arts Archives, Montreal. 1955 - 1958.

PRIMARY SOURCES RELATED TO INDIVIDUAL FILMS

21-87

Comments on 21-87 by students of Woodbridge High School, Woodbridge, Ontario. 21-87 file. Arthur Lipsett Collection. Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montreal. December 29, 1966.

Duckworth, Martin. Letter to Arthur Lipsett. 21-87 file. Arthur Lipsett Collection. Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montreal. 1964(?).

Lipsett, Arthur. Letter to the Jury of the 3rd Annual Independent Film-Makers Festival. 21-87 file. Arthur Lipsett Collection. Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montreal. n.d.

Lipsett, Arthur. Letter to Kit Carson. 21-87 file. Arthur Lipsett Collection. Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montreal. n.d.

Lipsett, Arthur. Proposal for 21-87. Production files. National Film Board of Canada Archives, Montreal. 1962.

Promotion (draft) for 21-87. Production files. National Film Board of Canada Archives, Montreal. 1963(?).

Report of the Jury for the 3rd Annual Independent Film-Makers Festival. Paolo Alto, California. 21-87 file. Arthur Lipsett Collection. Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montreal. 1964.

A TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE

Lipsett, Arthur. Notes by Lipsett to Donald Brittain "in order to communicate to him some basic thinking on our film *Time Capsule*. *A Trip Down Memory Lane* file. Arthur Lipsett Collection. Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montreal. December 25, 1964.

THE EXPERIMENTAL FILM

Ryan, Terry. An analysis of *The Experiment Film* submitted to the Distribution Section of the National Film Board. Arthur Lipsett Collection. Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montréal. February 4, 1969.

Transcript from *The Experimental Film*. Arthur Lipsett Collection. Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montréal. 1962.

FLUXES

Bertrand, Gérard. Memorandum to the Secretary of the National Film Board of Canada. Production Files. National Film Board Archives, Montreal. November 26, 1968.

Post-production script for the film *Fluxes*. "Notes and Manuscripts" file. Arthur Lipsett Collection. Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montreal. 1962.

Weinberg, Sydney A. Letter to Arthur Lipsett from the University of School of Medicine and Dentistry. Production Files. National Film Board Archives, Montreal. April 3, 1969.

FREE FALL

Lipsett, Arthur. Proposal sent to Tom Daly for the film *Free Fall*. Production files. National Film Board Archives, Montreal. July 16, 1963.

Lipsett, Arthur. "Thoughts on *Free Fall*". unpublished. Production files. National Film Board Archives, Montreal. 1963(?)

Promotion flyer for *Free Fall*. Production files. National Film Board Archives, Montreal. 1963(?)

N-ZONE

du Plessis, Karl. "Some Recent Productions (i.e. *N-Zone, A Film for Max*)". Memo to Tom Daly. Production files. National Film Board Archives, Montreal. 1969(?).

Lipsett, Arthur. Letter to Tom Daly. Production files. National Film Board Archives, Montreal. February 5, 1970(?)

Lipsett, Arthur. Proposal for film title *Landscapes (N-Zone)*. Production files. National Film Board Archives, Montreal. September 4, 1968.

STRANGE CODES

Lipsett, Arthur. "Concerning the Screening of the Film *Strange Codes*". unpublished notes. "Notes for *Strange Codes*" file. Arthur Lipsett Collection. Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montreal. 197(?).

Lipsett, Arthur. Report to Canada Council. *Strange Codes* file. Arthur Lipsett Collection. Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montreal. 197(?).

TRAFFIC SIGNALS

Lipsett, Arthur. Memo to Bob Verral. Production files. National Film Board Archives, Montreal. September 21, 1978.

VERY NICE, VERY NICE

Beckwith, Edith. Letter to the National Film Board. Production files. National Film Board Archives, Montreal. November 17, 1962.

Canadian Embassy, Tokyo, Japan. Letter to The Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa, Canada. *Very Nice, Very Nice* file. Arthur Lipsett Collection. Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montreal. November 14, 1962.

Kubrick, Stanley. Letter to Arthur Lipsett. *Very Nice, Very Nice* file. Arthur Lipsett Collection. Cinémathèque québécoise Archives, Montreal. May 31, 1962.

Promotion for *Very Nice, Very Nice*. Production Files. National Film Board Archives, Montreal. 1961.

Proposal for "*Strangely Elated*" (*Very Nice, Very Nice*). Production files. National Film Board Archives, Montreal. 1961(?).

INTERVIEWS

Anderson, Fortner. March 14, 1997

Carpenter, Dr. Nancy. July 11, 1997.

Daly, Tom. Interviewed by Rob Kidd at Sir George Williams University. Audio tape. Audio Visual Department Fonds. Concordia University Archives, Montreal. 1968.

Kerr, Richard. December 18, 1996.

Martin, Gordon. October 4, 1996.

Nutter, Christopher. March 16, 1997

Ryan, Terry. November 22, 1996

Siegel, Lois. February 7, 1997

Tree, Tanya. June 6, 1997

Zemel, Henry. E-mail to author. July 24, 1997, July 31, 1997 and August 1, 1997.

FILMOGRAPHY

FILMS BY LIPSETT AT THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD*

Hors d'oeuvres; (Foot Clip)

Production date: 1960

Time: 7:23

Directors: Gerald Potterton, Rober Verrall, Arthur Lipsett, Derek Lamb, Jeff Hale, Kaj Pindal

Producers: Victor Jobin, Colin Low

Announcement for the 1st Festival International du Film de Montréal

Production date: 1960

Time: 1:00

Very Nice, Very Nice

Production date: 1961

Time: 6:59

Producers: Colin Low, Tom Daly

The Experimental Film

Production date: 1962

Time: 27:48

Producer: Tom Daly

21-87

Production date: 1963

Time: 9:33

Producers: Colin Low, Tom Daly

Free Fall

Production date: 1964

Time: 9:15

Producers: Colin Low, Tom Daly

Animal Altruism

Production date: 1965

Time: 17:20

Producer: Joseph Koenig

Animals and Psychology

Production date: 1965

Time: 11:10

Producer: Joseph Koenig

Fear and Horror

Production date: 1965

Time: 12:48

Producer: Joseph Koenig

* From Richard Magnan's thesis with some variations.

Perceptual Learning

Production date: 1965

Time: 11:43

Producer: Joseph Koenig

The Puzzle of Pain

Production date: 1965

Time: 12:45

Producer:

A Trip Down Memory Lane

Production Date: 1965

Time: 12:40

Producers: Donald Brittain. Arthur Lipsett

Fluxes

Production date: 1968

Time: 23:55

Producer: Guy Glover

N-Zone

Production date: 1970

Time: 45:28

Producer: Tom Daly

Traffic Flow

Production date: 1978

Producer: Robert Verrel

FILMS BY LIPSETT OUTSIDE THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD

Strange Codes

Production date: 1972

Time: 22:40

Producer: Arthur Lipsett

FILMS LIPSETT CONTRIBUTED TO

Opening Speech: McLaren

Production date: 1960

Time: 6:33

Role: Assistant Director

Producer: Tom Daly

Men Against the Ice

Production date: 1960

Time: 28:05

Role: Animation

Producer: David Bairstow

Les femmes parmi nous

Production date: 1961

Time: 29:30

Role: Animation

Producer: Jacques Bobet

La lutte

Production date: 1961

Time:

Role:

Producer:

À Saint-Henry le cinq septembre

Production date: 1962

Time: 41:36

Role: one of several cinematographers

Producer: Fernand Dansereau

Regards sur L'occultisme: Magie et miracles (part 1), Science et esprits (part 2)

Production date: 1965

Time: 58:10 each

Role: Editor

Producer: André Belleau

The Continuing Past

Production date: 1966

Time: 24:03

Role: Editor

Producer: Guy Glover

Imperial Sunset

Production date: 1967

Time: 17:58

Role: Editor

Producer: Joseph Koenig

The Invention of the Adolescent

Production date: 1967

Time: 28:13

Role: Animation and Editor

Producer: Guy Glover and Cecily Burwash

Data for Decision

Production date: 1968

Time: 22:15

Role: Editor

Producer: Sidney Goldsmith

North

Production date: 1968

Time: 14:08

Role: Editor

Producer: Editor

Blue and Orange

Production date: 1978

Time:

Role: Co-director

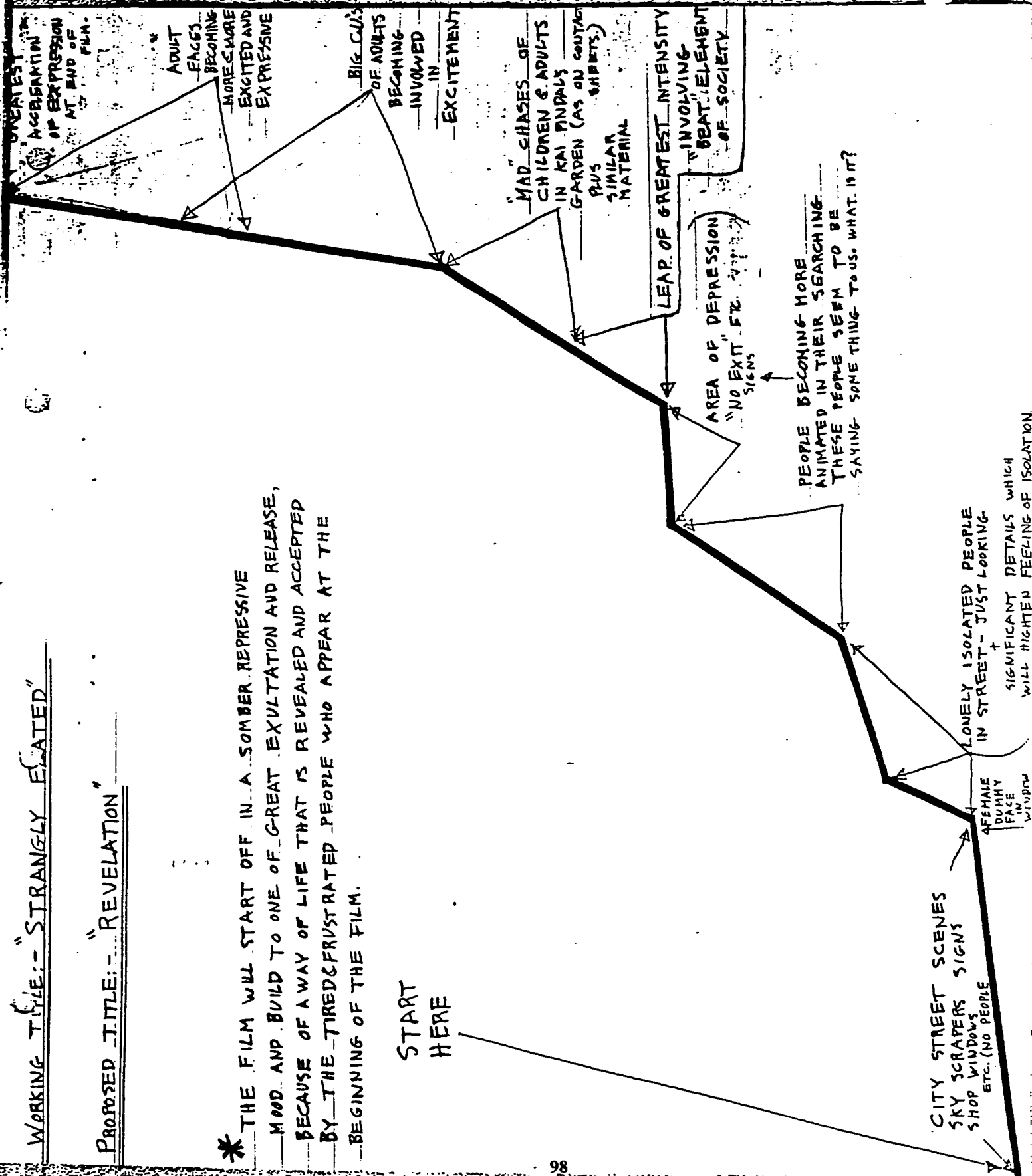
Producer: Tanya Tree

WORKING TITLE: - "STRANGELY ELATED"

PROPOSED TITLE: - "REVELATION"

* THE FILM WILL START OFF IN A SOMBER REPRESSIVE MOOD AND BUILD TO ONE OF GREAT EXULTATION AND RELEASE, BECAUSE OF A WAY OF LIFE THAT IS REVEALED AND ACCEPTED BY THE TIRED & FRUSTRATED PEOPLE WHO APPEAR AT THE BEGINNING OF THE FILM.

START
HERE



STATISTICS FROM THE TITLE HISTORY INDEX
OF NFB FILMS UP TO MARCH, 1973

Title	Year	Sales
By Lipsett		
<i>Very Nice, Very Nice</i>	1961	595
<i>Experimental Film</i>	1963	21
<i>21-87</i>	1964	223
<i>Free Fall</i>	1964	166
<i>A Trip Down Memory Lane</i>	1965	82
<i>Fluxes</i>	1967	32
<i>N-Zone</i>	1970	4
Sample of films from 1961 or previous		
<i>Neighbours</i>	1952	1546
<i>Universe</i>	1960	3268
<i>Lonely Boy</i>	1961	497
<i>Circle of the Sun</i>	1961	330
Sample of films from 1963		
<i>Origins of Weather</i>	1963	1580
<i>Sky</i>	1963	327
<i>Children Learn From Filmstrips</i>	1963	422
Sample of films from 1964		
<i>Eskimo Artist - Kenojuak</i>	1964	360
<i>Phoebe</i>	1964	2533
<i>Nobody Waved Good-bye</i>	1964	323
Sample of films from 1965		
<i>Buster Keaton</i>	1965	103
<i>A Trumpet for Combo</i>	1965	420
<i>Memorandum</i>	1965	138
Sample of films from 1967		
<i>Population Explosion</i>	1967	154
<i>Boomsville</i>	1967	713
<i>Pas de deux</i>	1967	679
Sample of films from 1970		
<i>Matroska</i>	1970	108
<i>Sad Song of Yellow Skin</i>	1970	117
<i>November</i>	1970	100

COMPOSITION NOTES

Appendix C

EACH MURAL SHOULD BE A
MANDALA OR CHAKRA CENTER.
PROBABLY WITH A CENTER AND
EQUALLY RADIATING LINES OF
ACTIVITY. (SUCH A CENTER
MIGHT BE DECHIRICO TRIANGLE
WITH RED GLOVE, ^{RIGHT} ^{OR} ^{BE} V. SMALL HARD PH

EACH OF THESE CHAKRA-MURALS
SHOULD HAVE ITS OWN
PECULIAR VIBRATION COMPLEX.
HEAD-CHAKRAS, THROAT-CHAKRAS, HEAR-
~~CHAKRAS, GUT CHAKRAS, PELVIC CHAKRAS~~
~~SPINAL-CHAKRAS~~
ALL SHOULD BE ELEVATING
AND CURATIVE, AND BE
USED FOR M.L.S. CONTEMPLATION
AS WELL AS C.V. DETAILS
INSTRUCTION.

THESE CHAKRA-MURALS
ARE ALSO CROSS SECTIONS
OF THE TREE OF MAN
IN VARIOUS WAYS.

COMPOSITION NOTES CONT

Appendix C

WHEN CHOOSING A CLIPPING, ATTENTION SHOULD BE PAID TO WHICH TYPE OF VIBRATORY CHAKRA IT BELONGS, AS WELL AS WHAT POSITION IT BELONGS TO BECAUSE OF WHAT IT IS; POSITIONS EXISTING FROM CENTER TO EDGES, TOP, BOTTOM AND EAST & WEST. EACH POSITION HAS IT SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE.

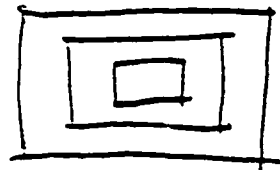
ATTENTION SHOULD ALSO BE PAID TO OVERALL TONES, COLOURS ETC OF EACH VIBRATORY CHAKRA.

COMPOSITION

Appendix C

NOTES ON POSITION:

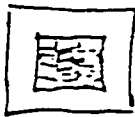
BORDERS (COSMIC)
VARIOUS BORDERS
OCCURRING ON ONE
MURAL (SEVEN HEAVENS)



ONE TYPE
OF ARRANGEMENT
OF BORDER-PATH

EACH BORDER IS PRESIDED OVER BY
AREA DEITIES

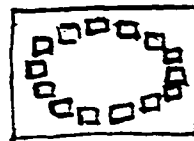
HERE ARE SOME OTHER SHAPES. (SOLIDS & BORDERS)



SQ ONE



STEP
PYRAMID



RINGS

AREA DEITIES: (EACH RADIATING A SPHERE
OF INFLUENCE.
CENTRAL CONTROLLING POWER OF AN AREA.
EACH DEITY HAS ASSISTANTS TO HELP HIM.
THEY MANIFEST SMALLER SPHERES WITHIN
THE LARGER ONE.