

WITH FULL INTENT: THE MAKING OF THE FILM
"ACCIDENT OF GEOGRAPHY"

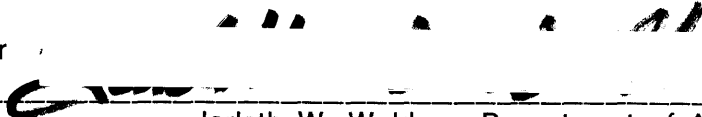
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**With Full Intent: The Making of
"Accident of Geography"**

by

Jarlath W. Waldron

Submitted to the Department of Architecture on May 10, 1991
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in Visual Studies

ABSTRACT

This thesis considers the making of a documentary videotape addressing the issue of Irish immigration - a phenomenon dating back hundreds of years and recounted in song, poetry and literature, but not a focus of serious film, either within or outside of Ireland. The subject of immigration is explored specifically through documenting Pat Ruth, a 63-year-old Irish native who was forced by the economic realities of Ireland to emigrate, first to England and then to America. His story evokes the questions of identity, nationalism, and human struggle common to all immigrants. Having to emigrate was a question of fate-- based on his country of birth-- and thus an accident of geography.

This thesis is accompanied by the videotape titled "Accident of Geography", a 45-minute videotape originally shot on Hi-8 and 3/4" U-matic cassette. It has black and white and color sequences, and the sound track is in English.

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PURPOSE AND ORIGINS OF THE FILM

Irish film has existed for nearly a century. The Irish public saw its first movie in April, 1896, four months after the first film ever was shown to a paying audience-- by the Lumiere Brothers in Paris in 1895. The earliest known film shot in Ireland was a newsreel taken of the visit of Queen Victoria to Dublin in 1900. And in 1904, Thomas Horgan, the first Irish-born filmmaker, along with his brothers, made his first film in Ireland by documenting the arrival of King Edward VII to Lismore Castle. The Irish *Youghal Tribune* described the event in this way:

When the brothers attempted to set up the camera outside the castle entrance, they were immediately surrounded by members of the {British} R.I.C. [Royal Irish Constabulary] and plain-clothes detectives who questioned them at length.

The film historian Anthony Slide reminds us that:

Anarchists were very active at the time and the police who had never seen a motion picture camera feared that the strange apparatus might be an infernal machine. (1)

1. Anthony Slide, The Cinema and Ireland (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 1988), p. 1.

Surely the arrival of this new technology had a startling impact on the mainly rural Irish society. But what is perhaps most telling in this account is that like so many elements of Irish culture, Irish film, from its inception, carried powerful political implications. What was selected as film topics, and how these were addressed in film were, first and foremost, political and economic decisions.

This can be best understood in light of the fact that "Irish film" is generally recognized to include the work of American and British as well as Irish filmmakers dealing with Irish subjects. One main reason for this more inclusive definition is the historically very limited size and scope of the Irish film "industry", a fact likely rooted in Ireland's long colonial past. While political independence from England officially came in 1921, the economic dependence continued, thereby keeping Ireland without the capital, technology and expertise necessary to develop its film 'muscle'. Indeed, as late as 1958, when Ireland opened its first film studio complex, the Irish studio head insisted on hiring an English director, Fielder Cook, because of the scarcity of experienced Irish directors. For the same reason, Cook insisted on his own English cameraman. (Irish support technicians were hired, however, precisely in order to develop Irish capabilities in those fields).

Therefore, the Americans and the British, and the Irish to a lesser extent, have all been involved in portraying or "explaining" Irish culture cinematographically; and the choice of subject matter and the particular treatment of the subject matter in Irish film over the century has been primarily based on the political and economic needs of these sponsoring countries (and its main players, such as Hollywood directors in the United States).

Accordingly, attempts at honest, insightful examinations of the realities of Irish life have not been a significant focus of Irish film. One such "reality", Irish emigration (mainly to England and the United States), has been a fundamental part of Irish life for centuries and would thus seem a likely subject for Irish film over time. The historical picture is striking: Ireland's prosperity in the late eighteenth century brought about a doubling of its population, so that by 1840 it had reached a staggering 8.2 million. This made Ireland the most densely populated country in Europe. The result, however, was a shortage of land (due to the constant subdivision of family agricultural holdings) which along with a chronic lack of industrial growth, led to massive impoverishment. Emigration was the only outlet.

Then in 1845, the devastating Potato Famine, which killed more than one million Irish citizens, forced a major exodus of survivors, with 1.5 million more Irish men and women fleeing the country. In all, about 4.5 million Irish emigrated to the United States between 1820-1930, with 3/4 million emigrating to Britain and another 1/2 million to Canada. Only approximately four million Irish remained, or about one half of the population of 70 years before. The trend continued, albeit less dramatically, to the 1980s, when economic conditions again forced hundreds of thousands of young people abroad.

Thus, for both the sending and receiving countries, Irish immigration has been a major force. Yet as the following review of twentieth century Irish film illustrates, the subject of Irish immigration-- the focus of this thesis and accompanying film documentary-- has not played a role in American, British or Irish films on Ireland and its culture.

Irish Films from America

D.W. Griffith's early American movies of the 1920s focused on the fears of the Anglo-Americans towards these new arrivals to America, the Irish immigrants. His screenwork

depicted sprawling ghettos and ethnic violence, perceived by the WASP mainstream as a threat to the fabric of their way of life. In his later years, however, Griffith unveiled certain positive traits of these newcomers in such movies as his *Madonna of the Storm* (1913) starring Lillian Gish. Here, the characteristic Irish confidence and innocence were highlighted, two traits that, as historian Henry May has noted, American Protestants were keenly aware they lacked. (2)

Like Griffith, John Ford sought for his films those character traits of the Irish immigrant that would be valued by the Anglo-American. Such qualities as the capacity for hard work, eagerness to succeed and perseverance were perfectly suited to the Anglo success ethic. *The Iron Horse* (1924) stereotypes the Irish immigrant in the role of the crude, bullying, yet useful foreman who directs workers of Italian, Chinese and other ethnic backgrounds for the benefit of the Anglo-American employers.

Thus, while the Irish depicted in American films were not full characterizations, they did represent the image that

2. Quoted in Lee Lourdeaux, Italian and Irish Filmmakers in America (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), p. 49.

Hollywood wanted to project. And as Irish immigrants made up a significant percentage of the cinema-going audience, and because they were making inroads into acceptance in American society, they began making demands on Hollywood to depict them in more positive roles. Ford met this demand, and in 1926 directed ***Shamrock Handicap***, a romantic film about an Irish upper-class immigrant family. For Hollywood, it was a purely commercial venture, and a review of the film today shows that it, like so many of Ford's movies, presented a patronizing and unrealistic view of the Irish in Ireland, a land that Director Ford had yet to visit. Ford went on to make several more movies with similar themes.

The Quiet Man (1952), Ford's last film about Ireland and shot on location, revolves around an Irish-American who returns to Ireland to reestablish his roots after his family had left for America years before. Because of the feeling of displacement experienced by the Irish Americans in their new land, they enjoyed this nostalgic film view of their heritage in general, and of the natural beauty of the "old country" in particular, shown in numerous pastoral scenes. As A.H. Weiler wrote in the *New York Times* in 1952, Ford was "in love with an ideal he has cherished and makes no

effort to hide the fact that his heart is on his sleeve and that it has shaped him and his films." (3)

Ford had a great chance to make a major contribution to Irish life: he had both the tools and the opportunity to portray Ireland and the new Irish community in America in a fully developed and realistic manner. It is unfortunate for both the Irish in America and in Ireland, and for the strength of the film heritage he left behind, that he did not do so.

In the following decades, the Irish became fully assimilated into American society: they exemplified the melting pot ideal. Yet they were in a curious position-- neither WASP, nor part of the still romanticized, yet unassimilated immigrant groups such as the Italians and Greeks. Moreover, new immigrant groups began to arrive from Asia, the Caribbean and Central America gaining the attention of the media, including film. The number of films focusing on Ireland and on the Irish decreased substantially.

3. Quoted in Anthony Slide, The Cinema and Ireland (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 1988), p. 82.

Irish Films from Britain

The British films of the early 1900s regarding Ireland demonstrate that England did not want to detail Irish life as it truly existed, including the poverty, the massive emigration to England that continued, or the hardships of the Irish on both sides of the Irish Sea. Instead, English directors made films of Ireland as the English gentry knew the country, focusing on such benign topics as the Irish cloth industry or on the beauty of the Irish countryside, and with little concern for the people of Ireland. Indeed, in 1937, Norris Davison wrote in *World Film News* that "Ireland has long been regarded as the lawful prey of any English-speaking director..... There is scarcely a lake and positively no fell in Killarney that has not been pressed into service." (4)

Often the entertaining aspects of British stereotypes of Irish life were stressed. Thus, *Irish Life* (1913), a film released by the General Film Company of England, played on the British public's image of Ireland, showing, for example, the unsophisticated country dwellers with a cow occasion-

4 Quoted in Anthony Slide, The Cinema and Ireland (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 1988) p. 52.

ally taking a shortcut through the house on its way to the barn. In the first decade of the twentieth century, English film never once tried to examine the political crisis that was so evident between the two countries.

By 1921, when Ireland gained independence from England, English film directors had largely left Ireland, also leaving the depiction of the Irish in films largely to American directors.

Decades later, Britain's revived interest in Ireland, as a consequence of the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland, showed up in new releases such as *Odd Man Out* (1947) and *A Terrible Beauty* (1960). But the perspective was always a staunchly biased one, leaving little room for an honest examination of the struggles of the Irish at home or abroad.

Irish Films from Ireland

From the initial development of film in Ireland, Irish directors saw film as a tool to promote political views that fostered independence. The issue of Irish independence was central to Irish life. Thus, even though social issues, such as pervasive poverty, poor education and hunger, were of concern, politics requested immediate attention after centuries of essentially English colonization. Most Irish films, therefore, both before and after Independence in 1921, promoted the cause of independence from Britain. Even the Irish-made films of the early 1900s were on revolutionary topics, though the British quickly suppressed these. Clearly Irish filmmakers demonstrated the skills required to make films of international status. But they lacked the money and the track record necessary to obtain funding from international sources. On the other hand, Irish writers were accepted on the international scene, and thus money was available for films that were the screen versions of works by Irish authors. Accordingly, even overtly political works such as Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* and Brendan Behan's *Borstal Boy* were produced.

The remainder of Irish-made films came from those who saw the commercial potential of this technology-- thus the array of film travelogues of the country such as John Furbay's *Ireland Today* (1948). While such films painted a physically appealing picture of Ireland, they were clearly an inadequate treatment of the country, then or today.

From the 1960s on, Northern Ireland was again in the throes of civil unrest, and Irish filmmakers turned their cameras to this problem. One prominent example was Pat O'Connor's *Cal* (1983), an adaptation of a novel dealing with the unresolved situation in the North, and a film which gained a wide international audience.

Thus, while commercially viable films have recently emerged [including *My Left Foot* (1989)], films focusing on major social issues remain unmade. One main source of funding of current films is Ireland's Radio Telefis Eireann (RTE), the government-run agency. The governmental connection is significant, for film subjects that highlight potentially embarrassing topics, such as the vast numbers forced to leave Ireland annually, are not chosen as worthy films for RTE financial support.

In the end, Stanley Kauffmann was probably correct in noting that:

The Irish film, in any large consequential sense, does not yet exist.... What is needed perhaps is a transmutation of the Irish poetic sense from flow of word to flow of vision; the dramatic sense is already there in abundance. If the ... medium ever truly touches Irish fancy and anger, the small country may have as disproportionately large an effect on films as it has had on other arts. (5)

5. Stanley Kauffmann, *The New Republic*, March 30, 1963, p. 23.

CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC CONTEXT

Ireland's history is full of old, unhappy things that curiously shake the heart. It is like an unweeded garden whose flowers grow wild, untamed, unaffected, nourished by those who have come to resemble it. Fairy rings, stone forts, strong walls around deserted cottages. A place where a thought may grow or an echo trapped forever. Or from deep within her, poetry or war may spring, or both.

The reason for choosing Ireland as the basis of my film was my concern for the little we in Ireland know from film of the human experience, the personal account of what has shaped the lives of people past and present. Instead, the constant attention and attachment is given to the political struggle in the North as if it were the only side of Irish life.

Indeed, Irish life has many faces. There are the travellers-- "gypsy" outcasts of Irish society who for generations have stood at the bottom of Ireland's social and economic ladder, a poor minority group of 16,500 in a population of 3.5 million people, a culture whose way of life is threatened by the ignorance of what the travellers call the "settled people".

There is the question of divorce for the first time in Ireland. A national referendum was held to decide this social issue affecting the youth of Ireland, a country with the largest population under 25 years of age in Europe. Yet the vote was taken when a significant percentage of the youth had been forced by economic realities to leave the country (at least temporarily) and who thus had no say in the outcome. The decision that would set a framework for Ireland's future was therefore left to an older generation-- and it was thus the status quo that prevailed.

Then there is the Ireland that would seem to have resigned itself to the fact that there is no other life for a sizeable section of the population but to emigrate to a new country-- whether they are equipped to handle it or not. My own experience of 'the immigrant' before I came to the United States was a limited one. After completing secondary school in Ireland, I took a summer job in London. I recall talking to an Irish laborer in his late forties who was working on a building site close to where I worked. We talked on several occasions, comparing life in London to life in Ireland. He wanted to be back in Ireland but didn't know if he could make a living there; he knew as I did that he didn't belong in England. I remember the last time I saw him

before I returned to Ireland at the end of the summer. He had tears in his eyes as he asked me, an eighteen year old, what he should do. I wanted to do something for him but I couldn't. I didn't have the means or the tools. But now, through film, I have a tool.

CONCEPTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE FILM

This film chronicles the life story of Pat Ruth, the immigrant. When I first heard Pat's story, it was one of bitterness and anger at the perceived injustices he experienced at the hands of the Irish legal and business systems. He knew I was involved in film and thus urged me to document his struggles. In fact, within days, he handed me a written sketch outlining his accomplishments both in Ireland and abroad, hoping that those "credentials" would encourage me to tell his story. It was through further conversations with Pat that I saw beyond the precise particulars of his story to other larger questions not treated thusfar in film.

Pat's Story

"Born in Tipperary Town, Ireland, on the 16th of February, 1929, I was one issue in a very large family of fourteen. I left school at age thirteen to work as a farm boy. This was followed by employment as a shoemaker in Northampton, England at age sixteen. Subsequently, I gained employment as a farm laborer, a fireman for the Northampton railroad and a plumber's apprentice, before emigrating to the United States in January, 1950.

I finally got to my destination - 23 Langley Road, Brighton, Massachusetts, U.S.A. in January 1950. There was a slight economic slump or depression so work was not easy to come by. However, I was fortunate in getting a job as a janitor at the Peabody Playhouse in the North End, Boston. My uncle kept

me, bought me American-type clothes, opened a bank account for me, etc. The job was very interesting - getting my first experience of different races and nationalities, of people that before I had only heard of. I adjusted fairly well, cleaning, waxing, taking care of the boiler room.

At this time, the Korean War was just about started and all able bodies were to register for the draft and be classified according to health, etc. I was classified A-1. I decided to join the regular Army where I was inducted at Fort Devens, Massachusetts in January, 1951. While there, a very well-dressed man with a swaggering and confident way in a paratrooper's uniform, spit shine boots, tailored uniform, etc. gave us a pep talk and lecture on wearing "the Badge of Courage", and volunteering for this elite outfit. It offered fifty dollars a week more than the regular army and I was duly impressed. I let my name go through.

A brief survey of my military career would reveal the following accomplishments: attainment of the rank of Parachutist Jump Master, Platoon Sergeant Squad Leader, Company Clerk and the rank of Sergeant First Class with a recommendation to become an officer. My military term of service took place in various locales such as the Republic of Korea, Japan, Kentucky, Georgia and New York State. Returning to civilian life in late 1953, and despite a limited academic background, I was accepted for a position with the Massachusetts National Guard, Yankee Division, as an administrative technician. Simultaneously, through the G.I. Bill, I attended classes in carpentry at Wentworth Institute, while pursuing a livelihood in general private contracting. Between 1953 and 1963, I gained an education and prospered.

It was about 1963 when a lifetime of travelling and learning began to enter a phase of personal misfortune. Upon the death of our second child due to colitis, my wife and I decided to return to Ireland and try a slower pace of life. We sold two homes purchased here in the United States and returned to

Youghal, County Cork, where I began importing American roofing shingles. In due time, I built 73 private dwellings and one hotel in County Cork.

These 73 homes were to be sold for a total sum of L 1,241,000, or approximately L 17,000 apiece. As the builder, I had several partners: two Americans, Joseph Queally and Michael Hume, both of Milton, Massachusetts; and three citizens of Waterford: John Alyward, a businessman; Dr. Bobby O'Driscoll, a surgeon; and one P.J. O'Driscoll, a solicitor. The financial upheavals within which I became embroiled, however, commenced with the construction of the hotel "Hilltop" in Youghal, Cork. This was built at a cost of L 300,000. While my doubts as to the long range success of this project were assuaged verbally, a violation of personal trust and the solicitor-client relationship resulted in the hotel passing into liquidation. The proper legal papers, I later discovered, had not been filed and the structure was lost through default. Having given the solicitor, Mr. P.J. O'Driscoll, legal *carte blanche*, I was powerless in the face of this judicial decision.

Simultaneous to this unfortunate series of events, and while the hotel "Hilltop" case was involved in protracted litigation, the house construction continued. Besides myself, three shareholders were involved in this project: Michael Ruth, my brother, of Northampton, England; Dan Fitzpatrick, of New York City; and the solicitor, P.J. O'Driscoll. Through this partnership, 73 dwellings were built, until creditor pressures brought further activity to a halt. During this time, Mr. P.J. O'Driscoll, in collaboration with the accountant, Austin Bradley, possessed the power of attorney and thus sole access to the control of appropriate deeds and cash flow. As work continued, cash reimbursements for materials and labor were never paid. This obstructive inactivity was in total disregard of the principle of good faith and the best interests of the various investors and home buyers concerned. Subsequent efforts on my part to have the case publicized and the malefactors brought before a court of law have either fallen on deaf ears or inspired suggestions to let matters lie....

The psychological, emotional and financial reverses this series of events has occasioned have been major blows but have not left me feeling completely powerless...." (6)

Shaping the Film

The structure I first envisioned for the video when I initially decided to make this videotape of Pat and Marie Ruth was a chronological ordering of their life from the time they first left Ireland to their final return to America. I intended on contrasting Marie's need to stay connected to Ireland, regardless of the losses suffered by both of them, with Pat's demand that they sell their houses there and forget about Ireland. And finally, I anticipated contrasting Marie's determination, after they had lost their investment, to rebuild their life, with Pat's inability to find his feet. However, with Marie's death from cancer in 1988, highlighting these differences was no longer possible, and thus significantly affected my original conception of the film.

6. Pat Ruth, written statement, January 1984.

By March 1991, I resorted to my first plan-- to videotape Pat at his Belmont apartment. The first footage of him was uninspired: aside from technical problems, his description of his youth in Ireland was nostalgic or mundane.

After several weekends of shooting, the film remained unremarkable. It was only when I was finally able to get Pat to talk about his hurtful experiences in Ireland, that the character of the film emerged. Moreover, a revised structure took shape. In place of the chronological approach that I had automatically expected to follow, Pat's own choice of direction became the guideposts. Fortunately, by this point, Pat had presented enough chronological description of his life, that the less structured and more spontaneous approach was possible-- and effective. Indeed, it was at this juncture that the nostalgia took a back seat to an often passionate discussion of his deeply held, though not always positive feelings about the Catholic Church, the British occupation of Northern Ireland and the death of the hunger strikers in 1981, his pride at having served in the U.S. Army during the Korean War and his later dismay at not having been granted citizenship in exchange, at that time; his intense bitterness at the country of his birth yet his secret desire that his children maintain their heritage.

Throughout the film, what was perhaps most striking was the interweaving recurrence of the themes of despair and regeneration of belief, of the alternating reliance by Pat on the traditional and the new, of the often necessary balancing of loyalty between Ireland and America. And finally, the question of survival: in which of "his" two countries, he wonders, will he be able to afford to live when he is old and needing of medical attention.

TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In making films, there are always decisions to be made regarding the appropriate strategy to take in order to portray the subject as effectively as possible.

I realized that one difficulty I would likely encounter was Pat's reticence (an apparent Irish character trait). I did not want to find myself in the position of having to coax his life story out of him. Had he not been the sole subject, the ongoing interchange between himself and, for example, his wife Marie would have helped Pat not be overly conscious of the camera. Without Marie, the task would be challenging.

The High-8 video camera that I had ordered the previous year had just come in. I needed to use the new camera prior to shooting Pat so that I could get a feel for both how well it responded to me, and its limitations. But I did not have the luxury of time, and not knowing the camera's idiosyncrasies, I recognized, could present problems.

The first day of shooting went poorly; the lighting in the room was inadequate for a shoot, causing the image to be underexposed. Another problem surfaced: Pat's soft voice, coupled with his Irish accent, was almost inaudible. Yet the

last thing I wanted to do was to overtly place the camera within a few feet of him.

After showing the first footage in class, Professor Otto Piene's critique was that the video gave little or no insight into Pat the person. I was in agreement. Professor Piene advised me to consult Glorianna Davenport. She suggested that the next time I met with Pat, to sit down and talk with him about things that interested him.

Curiously, what helped Pat was his continuous criticism of the camera: it led him to gain a certain degree of familiarity with it over time. Moreover, his expectations about being portrayed in a film helped reduce his concerns about the process.

The next few shoots were much the same as the earlier ones (Pat as storyteller), although his attitude towards the camera 'softened'. Up to this point, however, I felt very concerned about having one person as the subject of the video: the last thing I wanted on the videotape was Pat and me having a conversation.

Finally a breakthrough came about a month later. As Pat spoke about how he felt let down by Ireland and his mistrust

of the British government, his earnest feelings came to the forefront, as did his passion. Equally profound was his silence.

Understandably, Pat's directness and emotion were not constants from then on. But I finally felt that making this kind of film was possible, and that realization gave me the confidence to continue.

What has appealed to me the most while working with the cinema verite technique of filmmaking is the idea of the non-script, that is, a method that allows the subject to speak as they think and feel without the confines of the written word. The notion that I can touch the very thing that traditional cinema has strived for, without my artificially creating it, and accept it without overly judging it, allows me greater freedom in choosing my subject matter and in developing non-traditional works.

The use of the tripod in filming one's work is a personal choice of the filmmaker. My decision to use both the tripod and the hand-held camera was a choice that I made based on what the shot called for.

When shooting Pat during his sit-down interviews, I decided to put the camera on a tripod, as I felt that there was nothing to be gained from handholding it. On the other hand, the only way imaginable for me to shoot Pat while he repaired a garage, or carried out various activities, was with a hand-held camera. Often times, the situation called for a quick response. The ability to follow Pat with the camera on my shoulder allowed for greater flow of sequences, and thus less editing time necessary, than had I used a tripod.

In a lecture on his *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania*, Jonas Mekas noted of his early film days:

I was always carrying a tripod.... But then I looked through all of my footage and I said: "the park scene, and the city scene, and the trees-- it's all there on film... but there is something very essential missing....What was missing from my footage was myself.... I had to liberate the camera from the tripod. (7)

I agree with Jonas Mekas; if it is possible to work without a tripod, then by all means one should do so.

7. Jonas Mekas, "The Diary Film" (A Lecture on *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania*) presented at the International Film Seminar, August 26, 1972.

Lastly is the issue of film length. Because a number of filmmakers use a 20:1 ratio, I decided to shoot approximately ten hours in order to complete a thirty-minute film. Nevertheless, I only use ratios as a guideline; the bottom line is intuitively knowing that I have something and that the viewer will leave with something.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT IN FILMMAKING

My experience in video/film has been relatively short (ten years), starting with a performance piece that I produced and directed entitled "*Interpretation of Dance through Color*" (1981). This was the setting for a meeting of dance, music and visual art that was created as a live performance and for videotape documentation.

The dancers were four women: one was dressed in white and the other three in one of each of the primary colors. They were set in a sculptural environment comprised of overhead changing lights, suspended colored tubes and a large fiberglass circle on the stage (12' in diameter x 5" high) divided into three equal sections. Each of these three compartments contained a colored substance representative of one of the primary colors. The three flaps which separated the colored liquids were collapsible.

The work examined human relationships through the interplay of light, color, movement, texture and sound. At one point, with Holst's "*Planets*" playing in the background, the dancer in white, the 'Bringer of Peace', knocked down the dividing flaps and thus provided an outlet for the liquids.

The three primary colors mingled but did not mix altogether because of their different properties. (8) The play of colors and the illusion of secondary colors was created by the changing lights above.

What was important to me in documenting this performance was the recognition that too often performances allow for only one perspective-- that of the spectator. I saw that videotaping could bring vital, varied perspectives to the work.

Accordingly, I built a platform thirty feet above the dancers so that an aerial view of the circle could be fully seen; this allowed the viewer of the videotape to see aspects of the performance that the spectator would not likely see. One such scene showed a dancer putting her hand through the blue liquid, thereby letting the yellow liquid underneath emerge. This result was not picked up by the ground camera which I had placed at the level of the audience.

Certainly the videotaped aerial view afforded the distance necessary to clearly delineate the individual colors and the

8. The red was a mixture of jelly and glycerine; the blue was a mixture of oil paint and white spirit, and the yellow was made from powder paint diluted with water.

movement of the colors in unison. At the same time, the videotape also brought forth the power of close-ups, an element that was not truly accessible to the spectator. Such paradoxical capabilities of the videotape process intrigued me and made me want to continue to explore the further possibilities inherent in videotape documentation. (Following the Dublin performance, the videotape was edited with slide inserts, and shown at the Paris Bienale Performance Festival).

"Aishling" (1984) was a thirteen minute video that I shot in black and white in Ireland, with additional black and white super-8 film footage and color video footage added at M.I.T. The videotape came about as a result of my experience in a strict school system in Ireland. School was a place of learning; it was also a place where corporal punishment was used as a supposed means to that end.

The videotape begins with black and white footage of a horse being lunged by its trainer in a circle on a rope. Being schooled is not a natural process for the horse and it goes into a cantor trying to break with the trainer; at other times, the horse sits down. But each time, the horse is forced to its feet or its stride slowed by the trainer.

Eventually, the trainer gets the upper hand and the horse obeys, moving in a balanced and rhythmic stride.

By next changing to slow motion, I went from a real image to an unreal image (dream). My intention was to show more detail, but also to draw the viewer into the rhythm of the circle activity. As the horse circles the trainer, the animal's calm stride is contrasted with the short measured steps of its trainer, who must be prepared for the unexpected.

At this point, the camera is tracking and circling the horse at a faster, dizzier pace than the horse is actually moving in the circle, thereby drawing the viewer into the film as if the viewer him/herself is being schooled. Finally, the viewer closes in on the circle that the horse has made with its feet, the product of its lesson. The video ends with color footage of a five-year-old girl playing scales on a piano as she imagines the horse.

My purpose in depicting the child and the horse as they go through their rigid learning process was to evoke in a subtle yet powerful way the harshness of the traditional teaching process that I remember.

A double soundtrack is used: one with four different instruments playing scales, and the second with an Englishwoman complimenting the horse for going through its correct diagonals. At the same time, the screen image shows the horse trying to break loose. I used the Englishwoman's voice because I have always heard it as an authoritarian voice.

I ventured into new artistic areas in creating this film, working with techniques that I had not used before. These included the use of slow motion; creation of my own sound track; the use of both black and white and color; the development of new camera angles, and greater experimentation with camera movement in order to involve the viewer more fully in the action and meaning of the film.

Film Influences

Surely the willingness to experiment, to try out new forms, new techniques and ideas is a vital part of my work. But that openness to experimentation is possible only because of the strength of the foundation I have gained-- one shaped and developed by particular works and film leaders of the past several decades. Two examples are Richard Leacock and Chantal Akerman.

Richard Leacock is considered to be the father of the American cinema verite school which has sought to realistically portray peoples' lives as they live them-- by observing, documenting and presenting reality without staging or controlling it. Leacock's *Happy Mother's Day* (1964) is a prime example of this film school. Set in the small town of Aberdeen, South Dakota, the film revolves around the birth of the Fisher quintuplets, born to a small farming couple of modest income who were raising their first five children. This was the news story of the day, with gifts coming in from all parts of the country.

Leacock shows the calm and grace exhibited by Mrs. Fisher as she deals with the unrelenting publicity, and he contrasts this with the frenzied, hungry response to the event by the town. Leacock is especially skilled at anticipating and then pin-pointing crucial junctures. Indeed, his filming of the Chamber of Commerce meeting shows that while the town leaders planned to celebrate the occasion, they also planned to make money from the tourists who would inevitably be coming to Aberdeen. Filmmaker Patricia Jaffe has commented that:

When the Chamber of Commerce and
the Ladies Auxiliary... move into action
to exploit the commercial possibilities

of the blessed event, Leacock's searching, probing camera almost unwittingly lays bare the soul of American commercialism. (9)

In interviews following the screening of *Happy Mother's Day*, Leacock recalled an incident that occurred during filming, when Mr. Fisher asked the filmmaker whether he wanted him to carry out a particular action; Leacock would not tell him whether to do so or not. "You see," he later remarked, "once he [Fisher] does that [action], he will do something else that pleases me. I don't care how unhappy I am [with the way the shoot is going], I don't want to please him. And once I start asking him to do things, I'm dead." (10)

Leacock's staunch resistance to anything staged or contrived in film was a rallying cry of his during my training with him in the 1980s. His message made an important impression on me. Indeed, time and time again when I was filming *Accident of Geography*, Pat Ruth looked to me for directions. It was only by holding back and not answering him that I eventually got him to reveal more of himself.

9. M. Ali Issari and Doris A. Paul, What is Cinema Verite (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1979), p. 95.

10. Stephen Mamber, Cinema Verite in America (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1974), p. 197.

Leacock's film techniques have also significantly shaped my work. I strive for his mastery of the camera, the gracefulness with which he moves from shot to shot, evoking from the viewer the sense that the camera is moving on its own. I remain in awe of his in-camera editing, the very limited editing that his films require. And lastly, I learned from Leacock's techniques that as a cinema verite filmmaker, one can be a one-person production team: the director, soundman, cameraman and editor in one. Other film approaches require numerous players, with the cinematographer not in complete control of all the production factors. I recognize that I need and thrive in the centralized role.

Chantal Akerman's film, *Jeanne Dielman* (1975) depicts the breakdown of a Belgian housewife's orderly existence; how Akerman evokes this, using exquisitely honed tools of subtlety, timing and realism, defines for me her brilliance as a filmmaker.

The film portrays three days in the life of the title character, a single mother, who goes about a classic daily routine, from cooking a meatloaf, to washing dishes, to getting her child off to school, to, in her case, performing a

single act of paid sex every afternoon before her son returns home from school.

A powerful element in the film is Akerman's capacity to subtly connect the mundane to the profound. At one point in the film, we, the viewers, visit different rooms in the house; Akerman crafts this movement so as to make us feel that we are visiting different parts of Jeanne Dielman's being (or mind). Akerman repeatedly turns our expectations around: the house, which for most is a place of refuge, of reassurance and safety, is here a place of horror, a prison in which Jeanne is the prisoner, leading an uninspired, suffocating life, devalued as a woman by society. Moreover, while Akerman seems to hint that something might happen to alter Jeanne's life, nothing seems to change. Jeanne Dielman's reality is that of a woman who has pushed to the deepest part of her, unremitting pain that can only explode in time. Yet unlike the Hollywood model whereby much is explained upfront, Akerman challenges the viewer to understand what is transpiring, with only limited information given. The way we are led to understand the woman's undoing is precisely the way we all find out about ourselves and others: through slowly exposed hints.

On the third day, Dielman appears not to be in full control over herself; her routine that had been her steadfast way of coping with her life, is now disrupted. Without controlled order, her suppressed anger rises. The film ends with Jeanne stabbing the 'afternoon man' without remorse, that is, with the same lack of affect with which she has come to live her life.

While Akerman's work is clearly fictitious, not of the cinema verite, Leacock school, it is nevertheless a startlingly realistic portrayal of the impact of repressive societal forces on the individual.

I have chosen these two films to illustrate that what is important is not so much which technique gains the filmmaker's loyalty but rather what the subject matter demands of the technique. I could not imagine a cinema verite style film dealing with the housewife/prostitute theme, having the same impact as Akerman's powerful delivery. Nor could I imagine *Happy Mother's Day* as a fictional movie (although ABC tried)! I consider cinema verite to be the most realistic of the film styles employed in cinema today; but whether it has a stronger impact on the audience compared to a film of Akerman's stature is questionable.

OPERATING BUDGET

High-8 Video Pro Sony V-5000	\$ 2400.
Canon High-8 Super Directional Microphone	110.
Tripod	120.
Laveliere Microphone	400.
Century Strand Light [1000 w] with stand	350.
Century Strand Light [600 w] with stand	320.
Umbrellas (2)	40.
JVC Monitor - TM 224	470.
Sony Headphone	40.
Sony Battery Pack	80.
Electrical Extension Cords	35.
Sony Videotapes (10)	180.
Miscellaneous	30.
TOTAL:	\$ 4575.

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