

CAROLINE MARTEL

Director - Producer

Let the documentarian's world be full of surprises

*Let the form, the film, grow organically,
so that the maker doesn't know
its look until it's finished...*

*Those images that you have to struggle to find and to make
effective will endure, because history endures.*

Emile de Antonio

Almost ten years have passed since I began my archaeological exploration of the many faces of the "operators" – these women working in the service of the last century's communication machines. Having witnessed first-hand the last moments of their history while shooting **Hold the Line** (52 min, NFB, 2001), I began to sense – upon returning to my initial research – that these archival images of the operators were like phantoms, ranks of smiling simulacra.

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERATOR is a documentary that originally intended to investigate the history of these invisible workers – who were, paradoxically, ubiquitous stars on the corporate screens of their time. However, my research soon put me on the trail of a different sort of production – that of *ephemeral* films, the company productions of which I've since become a true fan. For this experimental R&D project, I identified some 350 films, watched 200 of them, catalogued and digitised 150 titles, and annotated more than 1 500 clips. After seven tours of duty in the editing room – the equivalent of nearly 50 weeks of editing over a four-year period – **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERATOR** is finally complete.

A narrative constructed from incredible publicity films that don't always speak the truth, but that testify to past assumptions that were very *real*, even "documentary", the film ultimately revealed itself in the form of a legend. Perhaps it will eventually be thought of as a sort of **Atomic Café** (USA, Pierce and Kevin Rafferty, Jayne Loader, 1982) of the telecoms age: a montage film made not from *found footage*, nor from *stock footage*, but rather from materials retrieved from national and internet databases and authorised for use, one by one. It's also a work of reappropriation, a creative recycling for a new media ecology. It exists thanks to the generosity of exceptional cinema artisans and of collaborators who have adventured along with me on this unusual creation which – I hope – will resonate with the responsive chords of the 21st Century viewer.

Check out: www.artifactproductions.ca

CAROLINE MARTEL is a documentary artist who was born in Montréal the year the cellular phone was created (1973). She has been synthesising documentary theory and practice in a variety of projects since 1998, with a special interest in **archival materials, cinema history, women and communication technologies.**

Hold the Line (**Dernier Appel**, 52 min, **National Film Board of Canada**, 2001) was her début in professional filmmaking, following a number of short documentary videos and some student fictional pieces in 8mm and 16mm (**First Prize** - College Category - **International Montréal Short Film Festival for L'Univers du matelas**, 1992). Sound artist and radio practitioner, she received the MIX96 Prize for a documentary series: *Radio dans l'air* (1994). Caroline has authored online pieces for the International Festival of new Cinema and new Media of Montréal (FCMM, 1998) and for the Inter-Society for Electronic Arts (1999). She is also programming coordinator at **Studio XX**, Montréal's women's new media arts centre devoted to technological exploration, creation and critique.

BA in Communications and **MA in Media Studies** from **Concordia University**, Caroline received the Québec Government's **FCAR Master's Degree Scholarship**. She has worked as researcher and as research assistant, notably in collaboration with filmmakers Marilù Mallet and Sophie Bissonnette and with scholars Chantal Nadeau, Kim Sawchuk and Martin Allor. Collaborating with the Cinémathèque québécoise, she was the main researcher and writer of the virtual exhibit **De Nanook à l'Oumigmag** on the history of documentary filmmaking in Canada (Boomerang Prize, 2001). In 2002, she directed the production of the interactive workshop **Documentary Visions** at the Cinérobotique of the National Film Board of Canada, about documentary movements at the NFB since 1939.

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERATOR is Caroline Martel's first feature-length production as an independent director-producer.

