

1989 was really an 'astounding' year



John Sommer
Ideas and the Arts

We are at the end of a most astounding year, a year of earthquakes. I am not thinking about California but about the great earthquakes in eastern Europe that have started to free the political continent that was rigidly locked for almost 45 years. What the future will bring is totally uncertain and nobody can possibly know if Gorbachev's bold experiment will even partially succeed. There is, however, a faint hope at this moment, that the overwhelming problems we have created for ourselves through our scientific and economic advances might be solved by a concerted effort of all the people of this endangered planet. The amazing Madame de Stael said almost 200 years ago, long before Lenin, Hitler and Stalin could do their worst: "scientific progress makes moral progress a necessity, for if man's power is increased, the checks that restrain him from abusing it must be

strengthened." Which reminds me of a film I want to share with you, hoping that my review will tempt you to go and see it. The film is called "Roger and Me." Throughout the film Michael Moore, the creator of the movie, is in pursuit of Roger Smith, the mighty Chairman of the mighty General Motors Corporation. Mr. Smith is hiding away on the top floor of his company's headquarter in Detroit, surrounded by security devices worthy of a left or right wing dictator, and eager minions that shield him from the nasty winds of reality. Mr. Smith is always somewhere else, always unavailable, and you begin to wonder, after a while if he exists at all or if he is a figment of the imagination, an invention of p.r. men and lobbyists. Why is Michael Moore in pursuit of Roger Smith? Well, Mr. Smith has closed down the General Motors plant in Flint, Michigan, and moved it to Mexico and lower wages, thereby ending the American dream for the people of Flint.

Michael Moore's camera observes the decline of a once prosperous town, the boarded up shops and the unemployed workers. Some of them leaving the town as if a dreadful disease has

broken out, others being evicted from their homes on Christmas Eve by the Sheriff's deputy, while others still are trying to manage with ad hoc jobs and rather desperate attempts to stay afloat.

I could not help but think of Georgetown after the Avro closing almost 30 years ago. Michael Moore wants to ask the great Chairman a few questions as to the necessity of the plant closing and he finally gets his chance at the end of the movie. There we are at a lavish Christmas party for the executives of General Motors at the Waldorf Astoria in New York. Mr. Roger Smith turns out to be a dainty, dickensian elf with pink cheeks and a wonderfully insincere joviality. He reads aloud those timeless great sentiments from Dickens' great classic "A Christmas Story" and you feel like bringing up.

Don't get me wrong. Contrary to what you may think, this is not a grim film. It is a devastatingly funny film, black and satirical and subjective maybe, but funny nevertheless. You can watch the icons of the American Right like Bob Eubanks, Anita Bryant, Pat

Boone and even Ronald Reagan make absolute fools of themselves simply because they can't resist a movie camera that's pointed towards them. Are we in danger of becoming the victims of these clowns that television has elected for us for want of better material? I don't think so, in particular not now after seeing this hilarious movie. People in power can do a lot of damage in our kind of society, but not as much damage as Mr. Ceausescu, for instance, inflicted on his in Romania lately. The democratic way, the way of the movie "Roger and Me," if you like,

is that assumptions remain open to amendments and interpretations. Untidiness and inefficiency, thank God, bind democracy to human existence and keep it from becoming another ideology in disguise.

I do not know if I have found any readers for this column that was started last May. If I did, I wish them a happy and, occasionally, thoughtful new year. In the best of times happiness is not a constant visitor. Happiness is not given to us, we have to seek it and find it within ourselves. I hope with all my heart that you may find it in the year ahead of you.

Art gallery holds dinner

The Color and Form Society exhibition at the Campbell House Gallery will be closed for the day on Jan 5 for a dinner at McCarthy's Tea Room.

Laurie Pallett, administrator of the Mississauga Arts Council will be at the Tea Room for the dinner.

The executive and artists from the Color and Form Society will

also be at the dinner.

The show, which opened Nov. 30, has works by 30 different artists.

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