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THIS AIN'T NO HEARTLAND

INTERVIEW WITH ANDREAS HORVATH

By Claire Sykes

As the war in Iraq raged, Andreas Horvath wondered what people in the United States were thinking. So he flew from his home in Salzburg, Austria to the American Midwest, plopped himself down in a cornfield and turned his video camera to the people and places of rural Middle America. From this often-misunderstood region of the country, Horvath shows us what the title of his film spells out: *This Ain't No Heartland*. His pursuit of opinions about the war only raises more questions in this 105-minute, color documentary (2004) that weaves together interviews and images exposing as much an insularity and ignorance among the people there as their courtesy and kindness for this curious and sensitive foreigner. On May 26 and 28, 2004, by phone from his home in Salzburg, Andreas talked to me about *This Ain't No Heartland*.

Why did you want to make this film?

On Inauguration Day of “President” Bush, I consoled with my American friends via e-mail. This was a joke, of course. I had no way of knowing just how bad it would still get. There are a lot of dubious things going on in connection with the so-called “war on

terror,” but the invasion of Iraq was just scandalous beyond comparison. While every American casualty is meticulously recorded, there are only rough estimates for the Iraqi side, but the Project on Defense Alternatives (PDA) in October 2003 listed up to 15,000 killed Iraqis, about 4,000 of whom were innocent civilians (these are figures for the time until “major combat operations” had been declared over, so obviously not counting what happened since). And the reasons? Remember Powell’s “glorious” multimedia presentation before the UN Security Council? Ambiguous satellite pictures and all the “proof” of deadly Weapons of Mass Destruction condensed in one little test tube. It was ridiculous. In Europe most people felt that the decision to go to war with Iraq was crazy, would cause a wildfire in the whole region and would increase terrorism worldwide. Look at where we are now. Closer to the elections, more and more people in America finally come out and raise critical opinions. But after John Kerry’s mantra-like accusations during the TV debates, I have to ask, where was he two years ago? Where was the critical media? Where were all these people then? I acknowledge that there were demonstrations, but contrary to the rest of the world, the vast majority in America supported this war. I wanted to find out why.

How did you arrive at what you’d actually do?

The war had started and everybody focused on what was happening in Iraq. But I thought it might be more interesting to investigate the causes, not the effects. What was going on on the “home front”? At first, I was shocked at my own idea; it seemed so totally out of the question to do that, because I didn’t really have the time. I was finishing my book [of black-and-white photographs] of Siberia [*Yakutia – Siberia of Siberia*, Benteli Verlag, Bern, Switzerland (2003)], in Poland where I was getting the printing done, and had only two weeks to finish preparing for an exhibition of this work in Nyon, Switzerland. I had only a couple of days to buy my video camera, the plane tickets and go over there. Plus, it was a total risk, since I did not know what I would get.

When and where did you go?

The first day of shooting was the day they took down the statue in Baghdad, the 9th of April [2003]. I had only ten days. During that time I went to Iowa, Nebraska and South Dakota. I realized, though, that I needed more material to put in between my interviews, so I went back that summer for another six weeks. This time I also visited Illinois, Missouri, Kansas and Minnesota.

Why the Midwest? What did you know about this part of the United States and the people who live there, before you visited there to make this film?

Twenty years ago, I spent a high-school year in Iowa as an exchange student. I came back to visit the Midwest several times since, once in 1992 to make a black-and-white photo book about the Midwest, called *Cowboys and Indians* [Edition S, Vienna, Austria (1993), out of print]. In many ways, the Midwest is a strange place, and my film is also about all this strangeness, which lies underneath a seemingly harmless surface. I wanted to unearth some of the more disturbing aspects of the “friendly Heartland.”

As a kind of collage, you weave footage of demolition derbies and a Civil War re-enactment between straight-ahead interviews, as well as close-ups and long shots of the agricultural landscape, songs, radio-preacher excerpts and news clips. Can you talk about this?

I have been fascinated by John Dos Passos for a long time, particularly his opus magnum, *U.S.A.* In it, he uses a similar, collaged approach and mixes a variety of sources to present a kaleidoscopic view of a certain era. I always thought this approach would translate well into film.

As for the demolition derbies and Civil War re-enactments, these are as close as it gets for a lot of people as far as confronting images of war. Watching as an outsider, I couldn't help noticing the ironic side of it. While the actual war with all its horror was raging thousands of miles away, people at the home front saw mere “projections” of war

as a form of entertainment. I mean, even a “fun thing” like a demolition derby is a pretty martial show, if you think about it. It reminded me of one of those futuristic novels, like Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* or Huxley’s *Brave New World*, in which people are being soothed by easy-going entertainment in order to keep them sedated and detached from reality. In the film, the demolition derbies and Civil War re-enactments also work as metaphors for war, moving the real conflict even farther away. For a lot of people, Rumsfeld conducted a righteous and “clean war” somewhere out there, and they did not want to be bothered with the details. But there is no such thing as a clean war, and Americans have been painfully reminded of that during the last months.

What is the significance of the title of your film, *This Ain’t No Heartland*?

For a lot of Americans, the Heartland is the quintessential, the ideal America. It stands for the values of the bigger, the actual America. “It ain’t called Heartland for nothing” is a popular saying. To me, phrases like “Heartland” or “God’s own country” reflect the hypocritical nature of a self-absorbed society. I saw a lot of hypocrisy in rural America: all the religious and anti-abortion road signs. Yet, when you knock on people’s doors, you find they have absolutely no problem with innocent people being killed abroad for questionable reasons. In negating the positive connotation of the word “Heartland,” I refer to that dichotomy of the American self-image.

At the same time, the title is based on a quote from the protagonist of the film who is actually referring to his own situation when he says, literally, “This is not no Heartland.” Originally, he came from Florida, but somehow got stuck in the Midwest without a job. So the title works on two levels, a metaphorical one and a concrete, more tangible one that relates to a character in the film.

Why did you care what people in the Midwest thought about the war in Iraq?

I am usually more interested in ordinary people and their views. What ordinary people say and think—this is oral history and it is eternal in a way, because it has been handed

down for generations. This is the backbone of a nation. And it is not filtered by spin-doctors or opinion polls. Political leaders like Bush or Kerry come and go. But the people—on the plains, in the mountains, in the cities—they really make up a country, and their views don't change so easily.

Why should viewers of your film and readers of this publication—people who attend documentary film festivals and, most likely, oppose the war—care what “ordinary” people in the Midwest think about the war?

Because this is exactly what should interest them! In my films, I like to deal with issues I cannot comprehend. It is the “other side” that interests me, the mystery, not what I already know. I have seen a lot of documentaries this year, many of them from an extremely liberal standpoint. They usually show how much has been done, how many demonstrations against the war they had organized, which is great. But they didn't succeed in preventing the war, did they? So what's the point of patting yourself on the back and reaffirming your own community's views? It is the alien point of view that should interest you, in order to understand a problem.

How did you find the people to interview? What was your intent in then having them, as opposed to any others, appear in your film?

I rented a car and drove around all day, trying to talk to as many people as possible. Whenever I saw someone, I'd stop and ask if they wanted to talk. Sometimes I'd knock on doors. I wanted to meet people by pure chance, trying to get a broad representation of the population there. So even though the setting was limited in a way (i.e., the rural areas, only), I still worked within this setting without trying to manipulate it, selecting people at random, and not deliberately picking a certain type. Of course, I had to edit and condense the original footage, but in general I would say what ended up in the film is pretty much representative of what I originally got.

How did you gain people's interest and trust to talk to you, and how do you think they generally perceived you, this foreigner with an accent asking them questions about the war?

I am often surprised at how much people want to talk and how much they have to say, but that's the way it is. I am totally opposite. I never say much and I am never so sure about my opinions. I guess most of them perceived me as what I was: a filmmaker from another part of the world who spontaneously hopped a plane to be dropped off in the middle of nowhere and talk to people out of a very sincere interest to understand their views on a topic he obviously had very different views on. It was pretty straight forward and honest, on both parts.

One of the people you interview in your film briefly entertains the fact that you, this stranger coming into town asking questions about the war in Iraq, might very well be a terrorist—which brings me to my next question. Only your interviewees know what you look like in this film. Why did you choose to hold the camera yourself, and not be filmed with them?

It is a more direct and intimate approach. I usually don't like it too much when filmmakers put themselves in the foreground. There is no need to emphasize that. You don't really need to see Michael Moore go into a building to understand that it is him who is trying to get an appointment. So if you show that in a film, it is only because you want to show it. The same goes for voice-overs and commentaries by the filmmaker. Of course, Michael Moore is often trying to prove something and convince his viewers, thus his ubiquitous presence in his films. I am not trying to prove anything or convince anybody. I think the New York screenings of my film during the Republican Convention confused a few critics, because they viewed it as an activist film, which clearly it is not. The people I interview are important. And I regret that, due to time constraints, I could not use more scenes with them. But if you look closely, I am there anyway a great deal—in the questions I ask, in the way people react to me, in the way I move the camera, and in the way I respond to their comments which is inevitable with a topic like this. I

had to interrupt people every now and then, because I couldn't let them get away with some of the things they said.

It's interesting, because usually it is thought of as being unfair to show only the interviewee and not the interviewer. But in this case, since I am all by myself in a foreign country, and exposing myself to a majority of people who think differently, I guess it is the other way around. I seem vulnerable, and the whole venture of getting satisfying answers seems more desperate, more like a futile odyssey. I wanted to show that. It is just me and the people, and my Canon mini-DV recording these encounters. I've made Super 8 and 16mm films, but I really enjoy the freedom of using these small cameras that have a monitor and don't weigh anything, with a grip on top. No sound engineer, no crew distracting. Besides, I like to work by myself. I would have problems letting someone else operate the camera. It would feel ridiculous telling someone how to shoot a scene for me. Maybe that comes from my photographic background.

What Richard Leacock postulated for the Direct Cinema—that the camera should be like a “fly on the wall,” always there but never noticed—really can be done today with these small cameras. While interviewing the old man with the bike alongside the road, I'm moving the camera, starting with his hands, then slowly up across his overalls to his head and above over his baseball cap, until the countryside in the background becomes visible. This one shot shows you so many perspectives of this character, not only his face, but also his hands, formed by decades of hard labor, his position in the ambience, like someone from another epoch with the occasional car roaring by. I usually don't watch through the viewer, but the monitor, which also makes it easier for me to talk to people. In general, I think the people in my films are very natural, like they're in a one-on-one conversation, which they are. That's also because people can see my face while I talk to them. The camera doesn't even seem to be there. I'm mostly using a wide angle lens, which allows me to get a floating feeling of the camera, without needing a crane or dolly, because the wide angle gives you more stable control over the image.

It's clear to me that you're interviewing these people with a sincere curiosity, sensitivity and, well, affection.

I do feel affection for the Midwest and its people. I always have. It goes back to my high school year there. Regarding the old man with the bike, he's giving a lot of information—the Chicago stockyards, how he used to ride the trains. This is all part of American history. He grew up at a time, when there were hardly any cars and the train was about the only way to get to Chicago. He is talking about all this as these cars speed by, talking about another generation, another time. At first I thought the cars might be a little too loud to achieve a good sound recording, until I realized that these “disturbances” add a lot to the sentiment of the scene.

In what ways did those you interviewed, and their responses to your questions, surprise you, if at all?

I was surprised at their method (which is probably not so much a method than a habit, something they cannot help) to turn every abstract, philosophical or ethical question into something very profane. Let me use the old man with the bike as an example again. In answering my initial question, within one sentence, he manages to switch from the war in Iraq to tractors and combines and the weather in Iowa. That happens with nearly everybody in the film! I'd ask my question and they'd start in a broad way, but soon spiral down to their own front porch and end with their belly button. The protagonist, for example, can only comment on my questions from his very own point of view which, ironically, leads him (who comes from the South) to the conclusion, “this [Iowa] is not no Heartland.”

At first, I thought I wasn't provocative enough, couldn't get people to talk about the war in Iraq. They were being so evasive in their answers, yet in such a friendly manner talking about their own worlds. Then I realized this was really the strength of the film. The more you get into it the more surreal a world unfolds. Think of the advice in the local newspaper on how to avoid “anxiety and depressive symptoms” due to the consumption

of war images on TV. Well, what about the people in Iraq who are experiencing all this live? Again, hypocrisy. People are so detached from the issues. They don't care, don't know; at the same time they have very strong feelings in support of the war and the troops. But for some of the people I interviewed, their views of the war crumble. That's certainly true for the protagonist who makes a 180-degree turn, from give me a gun and I'll go there and have fun to, in the end, questioning why the Americans are there, that most Iraqis are good people after all and "we" shouldn't be doing this to them. But also, the guy in my film standing on the street corner holding a sign asking people to honk in support of the troops. Back in his apartment, without the honking cars, he suddenly becomes more insecure, he smokes and seems more tense. I don't know whether he questions his pride in America, but he certainly becomes more cautious of his views.

Some viewers may argue that your film fails to provide a balanced representation of voices from this part of the country you've chosen, and that it focuses on a few mostly isolated, insulated, uneducated, conservative and (in their own way) arrogant individuals, only a few of whom are women. What can you say about this?

There is no such thing as a balanced documentary. The discussion about the "objectivity" of documentaries is as old as it is fruitless. As soon as you set up your tripod or turn on your camera, you begin to express your view. You can't help it, even if you tried very hard to be objective, so you might as well accept the fact and welcome it. I think a personal approach is much more interesting anyway. This is a problem people only seem to have with documentaries, by the way. No one has ever accused the Cohen brothers or David Lynch of not providing a balanced picture of the world they choose to talk about. If you see a film like *Fargo* you say, Oh my God, this is so true, this is rural America. Well, I have heard people say the same about my film. Or think of [Lynch's] *The Straight Story*. The old man with the bike at the side of the road in my film always reminds me of the main character in Lynch's film. When you see the fiction film, you laugh because you have no problem accepting the humorous side of stereotypes in a fictitious story. As soon as you are being told that a stereotype in a film is "for real," you think this must be biased. But these characters really do exist. The demolition derbies, the Civil War re-

enactments, this is what people in the Midwest do in the summer. There usually is a good reason for stereotypes to exist.

I guess a lot of it has to do with irony, too. People are reluctant to accept irony in documentaries. For every opinion you show, you need to present a contradictory opinion in order to appear balanced. But this can also be boring, and often destroys subtlety or irony. Besides, some people don't realize that the so-called balance of a documentary is always a fake balance, since truth has to be crippled in order to fit into something as limiting as a 90 minute film. My film is about people who support the war. I am trying to understand these people and the reasons for their views. Everything else would have been beside the point.

Regarding your point about "few women in my film," maybe I simply ran into more men than women. Maybe you are more likely to run into men when randomly driving around in the Midwest and not always being invited into people's homes. Maybe I even felt more comfortable talking to men. If so, this might have to do with the theme, which is about war. I don't know. It wasn't something I gave much thought to, to be honest. I don't think film is an adequate medium for any measures of "affirmative action."

My film is about people who are insulated, and out of that they tend to become more xenophobic. Being xenophobic comes from feeling insecure and in danger. My film is a reflection on how insulated people (probably all over the world) tend to be more afraid than necessary that their world is endangered. In discussions I have been asked why I interviewed "only stupid" people, but I don't think they're stupid. I think it's arrogant to say that. In any case, it is not so much a question of intelligence or education, but attitude. Even a "total idiot" can answer whether he feels sorry for the killed civilians in Iraq. If he does not feel sorry, he is not necessarily uneducated or stupid; he is just merciless.

You mean like when the protagonist says, "The civilians? We told the whole world we were gonna do it. They should've got out of the way."

Yes. I see the problem also as one in the media and the degree of misinformation in America. The *New York Times*, in a noteworthy article from the editors, called “The Times and Iraq” [May 26, 2004], admitted that they “found a number of instances of coverage that was not as rigorous as it should have been. In some cases, information . . . was insufficiently qualified or allowed to stand unchallenged.” How serious is the situation if a paper like the *New York Times* admits to that? I mean, we are talking about the reasons for going to war here! On the other hand, how many Americans regularly read the *New York Times*? In the local papers in the Midwest (which, when it comes to newspapers, is pretty much all a lot of people will read there), news about the Iraq war is often boiled down to a story like the one about the “five Iraqi dogs” that had been “rescued” and brought to the United States by an animal lover. This, read from the off, are the last spoken words in the “epilog” of the film. Of course people who read only this kind of news are convinced that “we are doing the right thing over there.”

My film is exploring where the combination of ignorance and misinformation can lead. That’s why, at the beginning of the film, I put the quote by Hermann Goering at the Nuremberg trials: “Of course the people don’t want war. But after all, it’s the leaders of the country who determine the policy, and it’s always a simple matter to drag the people along . . . All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism, and exposing the country to greater danger.” Isn’t it remarkable that this quote from a Nazi leader seems so appropriate for America today? Had there been more critical media coverage during the build-up of the Iraq war, and therefore more opposition to it, Bush maybe would’ve thought twice about invading Iraq. He wouldn’t have felt the majority of the population behind him. I mean, I could hardly think of a more inadequate president than Bush, but blaming only him or the administration is carrying it not quite far enough. It is also the people who have responsibility for a country’s actions—at least those who supported this war.

What does your film tell us that we don’t already know? What does your film ultimately offer us?

I am not one to judge what the film eventually offers each individual viewer. It is a portrait of the American Midwest, and I have heard many say it is a very accurate one. Look at it like an ethnological documentary, in the true sense of the word. Like a documentarian who visits a secluded tribe in the South American jungle, I go to the Midwest and document different aspects of life. And believe me, even though in the heart of the US, the Midwest is an exotic place that a lot of people—even many Americans—know very little about.

There could be concern that your film may be perceived by those outside this country as depicting the reality of how most Americans view and talk about the war in Iraq, and that this depiction is intended to embarrass the United States. Can you talk about this?

Since I am not staging scenes, and basically let my interviewees speak about what they want for as long as they like, I *am* showing reality, even though only a part of it (but for an experienced viewer that goes without saying). If this is embarrassing it is not my fault. What I am showing, and this is all a filmmaker can do, by the way, are certain *aspects* of reality. Again, reality has nothing to do with objectivity; these terms often get mixed up. However, all that said, last year when I made the film, if you believe the polls, the majority of Americans was actually thinking the same way as those I interviewed. I guess that makes it a fairly important aspect of reality.

What were some of the challenges you faced in making this film?

It was a challenge to go there in the first place. I did not feel very comfortable in the United States last year. The people in America were so sure of themselves and did not seem to allow any arguing. All these flags, yellow ribbons and support-our-troops signs that paved the country made me, for the first time in my life, not feel at home in the US. Don't forget, it was the time when the term "French toast" was annihilated and French wine and German beer had been poured out—even on the streets of New York. And there

I was standing in endless cornfields trying to make a point for not going to war. The atmosphere was extremely constrained and hostile towards any different mindset. When the German stewardess on the flight to America saw me reading a book about Iraq, she warned me to put it away when reaching Customs, since last time she flew they had detained a passenger for hours for doing the same thing.

How long have you been making films, and why did you get into it?

Film has always been an interest of mine. I tried to get into film university, but didn't make it—trying to get into these universities is very competitive everywhere—so I worked as an assistant to a cameraman in Vienna for some time. Then I studied photography. But I've always been doing films, mostly Super 8. In 1992, I filmed a series of adverts for a friend who runs a literary magazine in Vienna. The idea was surrealistic, very low budget, representing the style of the magazine, which was erotica and very liberal, left-wing literature. I bought male and female inflatable dolls at a sex shop and friends helped me throw them into the air while I filmed them “floating around” in the woods. I only recently heard that an American couple (Steve Hall and Cathee Wilkins) was doing a similar thing in America around that time. In 1998 I shot *Clearance*, a trashy parody on violent computer games, basically re-enacting a computer game, with actors dressed as pigs, as the enemies, and the “viewer,” since it is all a subjective shot, shooting them. With *Poroerotus* [1999], about the reindeer selection in Finland, I got into doing documentaries.

In your 48-minute Super 8 film, *The Silence of Green*, you explore the 2001 hoof-and-mouth murders of millions of farm animals in the British countryside. How is this film similar to *This Ain't No Heartland*?

In both, the driving force was anger, I guess. I saw disturbing things happening in countries I have always had great affection for. So I went there to talk to ordinary people and try to understand. In *Silence*, it was the killing of (probably) ten million animals for economic reasons. The first weeks' news pictures of burning animals in the open went

across the world. This was horrendous, truly apocalyptic. I tried to get official permission, but couldn't. It was a touchy subject. You always run the risk of transmitting the disease yourself if you're close to an infected farm. They were bringing the military and police, closing off areas. There was really no way to do a film about it, but somehow that's exactly what the film is about. You see all these empty fields, a beautiful landscape in the spring, except with no animals, and from the off, a voice-over of the farmers and their stories. The whole thing is more like a mystery than an investigative report. A French critic compared it to Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow Up*. You look for the murder in the bushes, but there is no proof of it.

In showing this idyllic landscape, my film denounces it as what it was, a façade, behind which Government officials thought they could do whatever they wanted. The degree to which the local population had been incapacitated and terrorized was scary, almost reminiscent of the medieval ages, in any case not worthy of an enlightened society. And what is even more amazing is that this area (North Yorkshire) is merely 20 minutes away from big industrial cities like Manchester or Sheffield. You leave the city's borders and you are in a totally different world! People in the cities often would have no idea what was going on in the countryside. They would be so surprised when I told them my stories, that in fact the killing still went on everywhere. The world is growing together more and more; at the same time you still find these differences between country and city life. One of my favorite scenes in *This Ain't No Heartland* is when the protagonist muses about where or how far away New York might be. Eventually, he motions in a direction and says, "I think it's out that way somewhere." What a great line! I mean it really is not that difficult when you stand next to a highway in Iowa to figure out east or west. So he basically had no idea. I am not laughing at him. He says some very profound things in the film. But this particular question was just not important to him. Fantastic! Fantastic that the world is not so small, after all.

The world itself maybe, but people's own worlds certainly can be small, as your film clearly shows. In doing so, would you say this film and others of yours are as much art as they are social-documentaries?

People like to pin you as either an art or documentary filmmaker. They don't like to see you do both. But I don't like to limit myself to things you have to do in order to call something a documentary. I find the borders between genres most interesting. If you expect a social documentary from *This Ain't No Heartland*, you are likely to be disappointed. This is why a lot of people have problems with it, I guess. But it is only called a documentary because we need labels for drawers to put things in. It certainly is not fiction, but does that necessarily make it a documentary? If you call it a road movie, that's fine with me.

You've mentioned novelist John Dos Passos, artist John Constable and, in previous conversations of ours, 20th-century, retro-romantic composers such as Havergal Brian, Allan Pettersson and Samuel Barber, the last whose *Essay for Orchestra No. 1* you used in *The Silence of Green*. What filmmakers have inspired you?

Well, it is true, I like the composers you mention, but this is only a very arbitrary selection. In general, of all artists, I admire composers the most, and of these it is especially Richard Wagner whose creative output remains a total mystery to me. I used the prelude to the third act of Wagner's opera *Siegfried* in *This Ain't No Heartland*, by the way. As for filmmakers, I guess the photographer and filmmaker William Klein has been an influence for me. I like many, also, fiction film directors. But apart from the most obvious ones, the great masters that everybody has learned to admire in film school, I guess Werner Herzog and Nicolas Roeg have been important influences. Stylistically these two may not have much in common, but I admire them for their ability to stick to their own ideas and create their own world on film. Because the making of a film is such a long process and involves so many different production stages, it is extremely hard to stay focused on your original idea. That's the hardest part of it. Despite all the economic and technical constraints, all the conventions, all the people who tell you not to do this or that—despite all that—to have the strength to abide by your intuition. For me the journey of making a film often means nothing but the struggle of getting past all distractions, obstacles and detours and coming back to where you once started, back to that first germ

of an idea. Directors like Herzog or Roeg often failed, but when they didn't, they created unsurpassable works. At least they took the risk.

People in the Midwest gave you their time and their words from which you ultimately earned esteemed recognition as a result of international screenings of your film and a first-prize award. You've gained so much. What have you given back to those you interviewed? Or do you even feel a need to give anything back?

It might sound rude, but I use people, if they agree, for my interest, which is making the film. I am a filmmaker, not a benefactor, and I am honest with people concerning my goals and intentions. Also I don't pay them, which you basically just don't do in the documentary genre, for obvious reasons. Apart from sending a copy of the finished film to the people who want one (a lot of them don't), I usually don't keep in touch. And often when I tried to keep in touch, the people did not seem to care much. It is always strange to contact former interviewees after some time. You spent so many months with them in the editing room, scrubbing the images and the sound back and forth, so you know every sentence by heart, every sigh, every peculiarity of their character, while they hardly remember you at all.

I have no urge to convert anybody or, on the other hand, give them something in return for my award. I spent more than a year, almost solely, working on this film. That's hard to fathom for somebody who does not make films. The way I work (which is independently and by myself), it could well be that the film never gets shown at all! So, in the end, I made the film at my own risk, even if people agreed to talk to me, and the film is based on these interviews and couldn't exist without these people. I am not sure if there are other ways to handle this.

What's your next film?

I want to do something about Poland. My wife, Monica is Polish, and we go there quite frequently. As of May 1, 2004, Poland is now part of the EU. I am interested in the

people who are the losers of these developments. There's a fascinating history of decades of communism, and people are eager to get rid of that. For a lot of people it's happening too fast. I'm interested in these stories. Whole areas of town are being torn down and replaced by postmodern architecture. Poland is very much oriented to America. There are so many McDonald's there, so many shopping malls. You go through areas of Poland and think you're in America. They're losing a lot of the culture, the identity. I'm interested in the culture that was left behind. But it's just an idea. It could become something quite different.

I'd also like to do another photo book for a change. After *The Silence of Green*, I made the photo book of Siberia. So maybe after *This Ain't No Heartland* I'll do another photo book, instead of a film. My wife is a writer (she wrote the text of the book on Siberia). There's a place in Norway, a huge bay with thousands of 10,000-year-old rock carvings, most of which depict the relationship of reindeer and people and their unique way of herding animals by leaving them in the open during the year and rounding them up twice a year to count and mark them, and select the ones to be slaughtered. They're still herding the reindeer this way in Scandinavia, and the corrals they used so many thousand years ago haven't really changed. I have already started putting images together and juxtaposing them, old rock carvings versus my photographs. It would make a fine book, but I need another trip to get more pictures.

Your book on the Yakutia Republic in Siberia is such a personal, authentic expression of some of the most remote communities in the world. I'm familiar also with your black-and-white photographs that portray the horrors of war through unsettling yet compelling, abstract, surreal images of maimed, mangled and dismembered toy soldiers on a battlefield among other tiny, plastic action figures. Your interests encompass quite a range of subject matter. In general, what feeds your ideas and motivates you to create? And why this obviously passionate interest in war, in particular?

To me, film and photography are excellent mediums to express my discomfort, but also wonder. They are very intuitive languages that don't require a spoken tongue in order to be communicated. I try not to consider, before I start, who will see my work or where could I sell it. I start from intuition and I often don't even know, myself, why I'm doing something, why I'm so obsessed with an idea. But if the urge is there, I trust I'll find out later and that there's some meaning behind it. If an idea keeps me awake until dawn, that's usually a good sign; I know it's an idea that I should pursue.

What was the most satisfying for you about *This Ain't No Heartland*?

To have finished the film. That I did it. That I went there in the first place. A lot of people say it was courageous to go to the States at that time. I don't know if that's true, but it's rewarding to have finished the film and that people want to see it. It's a film I still like to watch, and I totally stand behind it. I am, though, looking forward to a time when I can sit down on a Midwestern front porch again and talk with amiable Americans about all sorts of harmless things, without discussing an annoying war.

SIDEBAR

This Ain't No Heartland enjoyed its world premiere in January 2004 at the Rotterdam International Film Fest, and its North American premiere in March 2004 at the New York Underground Film Fest. In April 2004, the Chicago International Documentary Film Festival awarded Horvath with its \$15,000 first-prize Chicago Doc Grand Prix. Several screenings of the film later that month were also well received by audiences at Nyon, Switzerland's Visions du Reel and the Seattle International Documentary Film Festival. Horvath's film was shown in August 2004 at the InFACT Theatrical Documentary Showcase at the ArcLight Cinema in Los Angeles, which automatically qualified him for Academy Award consideration. Horvath's film was also screened while the Republican National Convention was going on, at the Pioneer Theater in New York.

Next screenings:

- November 4-10, 2004 at GetReal Festival – Minneapolis, Minnesota
- November 15-16, 2004 at Jackson Hole Cinemas – Jackson Hole, Wyoming as part of InFACT’s four-city tour.
- November 11-22, 2004 at Recontres - Montreal, Canada

Andreas Horvath’s other films include *The Silence of Green* (2001), *Poroerotus* (1999) and *Clearance* (1998). He has also published two books of his photography, the unfortunately out-of-print *Cowboys and Indians* (Edition S, Vienna, Austria, 1993) and his latest, *Yakutia Siberia of Siberia* (available at Antique Collectors’ Club at (800) 252-5231, <http://www.antique-acc.com> or through your local bookseller). The retail price is US\$ 65.00.

This Ain’t No Heartland is available on DVD from:

The Society for Arts
1112 North Milwaukee Avenue
Chicago, IL 60622
Tel. (773) 486-9612
Fax (773) 486-9613
email: info@chicagodocfestival.org

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