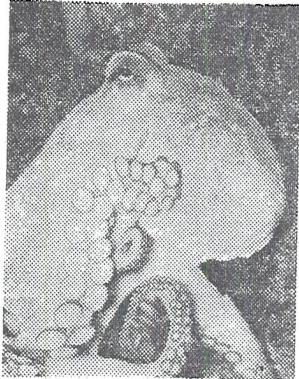


Terrence O'Flaherty



Cinema Not-so-Verite

IF TELEVISION seemed to be unusually thoughtful last week there was a good reason for it. The Nielsen audience rating machines were turned off — presumably on the premise that nobody watches TV during the holidays. As a consequence the networks tossed in a lot of documentaries like "Vietnam Hind-



The winner

sight," "A Day in the Presidency," an insect special titled "Land of the Small," "Octopus, Octopus" and "Christmas at the White House" — endeavors which are doomed to attract fewer viewers than "Gunsmoke" or the aches and pains of Marcus Welby M.D.

Clearly it was the animals versus the President — with the octopuses of Jacques

Cousteau coming off slightly better than either the insects or the presidency, I would say, largely because they were more natural performers.

★ ★ ★

IF THE WELL BEING of all of us weren't so completely entwined with the actions of Richard Nixon, last week's "A Day in the Presidency" would have been hilarious. But picture, if you will, the President being followed in his daily rounds by the intimate little band of ten technicians with cameras and lights — leaning over his shoulder, eavesdropping at the conferences with international leaders, and jogging after him into public buildings and limousines.

And, all the while, everyone — Nixon, Prime Ministers, Cabinet members, dogs and daughters — all pretending the cameras weren't there.

While there is considerably merit to any project which increases public understanding of the highest office in the land, there was an air of phoniness about the proceedings which helped substantiate any suspicion that politicians are actors. Nixon's brief scene with daughter Julie seemed particularly contrived as did the interlude with Connally, where they congratulated the new Cabinet member.

★ ★ ★

THE ONE MIND I longed to be able to read during last week's White House romp was that of Canada's Prime Minister Trudeau, whose visit happened to be one of the things on Nixon's engagement pad for that day. A man of such keen humor must have had some delicious personal reactions to the cinema verite — White House style.

We are all aware that the presidency is a busy office. It was the President himself who was the prime focus of the program. I am not sure that it taught me any more about this complex and uneasy man, but one fact came through loud and clear: He is enjoying his office with all the exuberance of a "Boy's Day" substitute plus the underlying caution which comes from the knowledge that it won't last forever. Indeed, it may not be happening to him at all.



The loser

I am not certain this is what President Nixon had in mind. The program undoubtedly will impress those who see the presidency as a challenge to corporate ingenuity. Those who hope for an air of statesmanship at the highest level in the land found little to substantiate its existence.