

USA, 1994. R. 119 min

Cast: Robert Crumb, Aline Kominsky, Charles Crumb, Maxon Crumb, Robert Hughes; Music: David Boeddinghaus; Cinematographer: Maryse Alberti; Producer: Albert Berger, Lianne Halfon; Director: Terry Zwigoff

attempts, their childhood of frequent forced enemas, and their history of sick sexual assaults. But we do laugh, a nervous and disturbed laugh, as we note with wonder that Robert Crumb is actually the most healthy and well-adjusted member of this family.

misogyny, violence, and hatred in his comics have led him to be hailed alternately as a god and a devil, and the film includes interviews with critics who take both sides of the issue. Some dismiss Crumb's work as pornographic filth; others say it is merely an expression of the darker fantasies we don't want to admit we possess. But in watching this film that all becomes irrelevant, we simply become grateful that through his art he found a way out.

In mainstream cinema, loneliness is Clint Eastwood nursing a beer alone at the bar, softly tickling jazz on the piano, cool and distant and sexy. In reality, loneliness is R. Crumb. His comics are the ugliness of loneliness, de-romanticized, sick and swampy. In Crumb's comics and in the film that carries his name, ugliness is ugliness, not romance. Isolation and rejection affect a person; grow inside them, distorting them, warping them. It becomes hatred, bitterness, and desperation. And the mythical "inner beauty" does not survive this world intact. The fact that R. Crumb's images are comics at all is a sick twist in and of itself. The humor is a kind of hysterical laughter, a mad glee rather than a feel-good guffaw.



Crumb himself rejects attempts to psychoanalyze himself or his work ("I don't know what it's about, ask a psychiatrist!" he says), and he hated this film so much that he told Zwigoff that after seeing it he didn't want to be R. Crumb any more. He continues to reject the acceptance of a culture that rejected him, holding tightly to the hatred that freed him by making him a freak.

- Written by Cynthia Rockwell

**C**rumbs Director, Terry Zwigoff, who also directed *Ghost World* (adapted from a comic book as well) has crafted a film that, much like Crumb's work, applies a startlingly light touch to the horrific unhappiness of his family and its history. We're not sure whether to laugh along with Crumb and his brothers as they describe their suicide

**A**nd it becomes unsurprising that out of this life grew the comic books of R. Crumb. "My work is full of sweating, nervous uneasiness, which is a big part of me and everybody else," says Crumb. "Most people don't want to see that though, because it reminds them of inadequate parts of themselves." The