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## Massillon

[William E. Jones](#)



*Massillon* is an unconventional autobiographical film, utilizing landscapes, exclusively, in tandem with a voice-over evocation of personal, social, and sexual history. Following a triptych form, Part One, "Ohio," recalls the film-maker's youth; Part Two, a section called "Law," recounts various state laws regarding sexually restrictive laws. Part Three, "California," juxtaposes landscapes of a town-in-process, Santa Clarita, to a voice-over examination of sexual persecution and regulation. What follows is a selection of frames from the film, accompanied by a selection from the voiceover.



**[End Page 151]**



When I came to California, I moved into a planned community on the edge of the desert. In the short time I have been here, thousands of people have moved into the area. A whole new city has been built. It conforms to a master plan conceived by the people who have owned this land for over a hundred years. The community is being promoted as a place to raise a family

away from the bad influences of the city. The new community is so popular that lotteries must be held to determine who will have the right to buy a house here. **[End Page 152]**



I recently stumbled upon a conference on the topic of urban planning. All of the participants wore white shirts and ties. Since I was inappropriately dressed, I stayed outside and listened at the doorway of the conference room. The panel discussed how to implement "neo-traditional" urban design, how to achieve a high quality of life in an area, and when cultural facilities would become economically feasible. **[End Page 153]**



The subject which interested me most was that of "heritage." The participants referred to "heritage" as an intangible asset; no one explanation could do it justice. The concept has to do with the way homeowners feel about where they live. The heritage of a community can be expressed in the names of towns, neighborhoods, and streets. When the traditional name of a place does not seem attractive or appropriate, it may be changed to reflect the values of the new community. **[End Page 154]**



Through a careful selection of names, a place may assume the aspect of a Mediterranean village, a Spanish mission, or an exotic oasis. The people buying the houses come to know a place by its new name; they may also accept the values implied by the whole program of design and planning. Of course it isn't exactly that simple, but as long as the houses continue to sell, all of this planning is understood to be successful.

[William Jones](#) was born in Canton, Ohio, and now lives in Los Angeles. He teaches at the California Institute of the Arts. His works include films *Massillon* (1991) and *Finished* (1997), and the video *The Fall of Communism as Seen in Gay Pornography* (1998). He received a 1999 Guggenheim Fellowship for filmmaking. *Massillon*, 1991. Directed by William E. Jones.

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