

## Controlled Disturbance: Donigan Cumming \*\*\*

(2005) 3 discs. 359 min. DVD: \$1,000. Videographe (dist. by Video Data Bank). PPR.

Donigan Cumming is a U.S.-born artist who emigrated to Canada nearly 40 years ago and has been making videos for more than a decade, most of them featuring not only himself (as observer, investigator, interrogator, and friend) but also a kind of stock company of acquaintances, whom he's filmed over time in scenes that are sometimes spontaneous but often staged. The people are generally extremely troubled fringe-dwellers, many of them elderly and desperately ill, whom Cumming films amid the detritus of their lives in tight close-up as they talk about themselves, or struggle to get another beer, or make their way to the bathroom, or even lie near death. This three-disc collection contains the 18 pieces Cumming made between 1995-2003. About half run just a few minutes in length, but many range from 20-40 minutes, and are—by turns—harshly comic, poignant, and deeply unsettling, blurring the line between revelation and exploitation, as well as between artifice and reality, while concentrating on disintegration, disease, and death. Some of the images will shock: there's considerable nudity (though not of a titillating sort), and many will be repelled, for example, by the close-up footage of an old man masturbating while singing "What a Friend I Have in Jesus." Taken as a whole, *Controlled Disturbance: Donigan Cumming* represents the admittedly challenging oeuvre of a significant contemporary artistic voice. DVD extras include excerpts from a Q&A with Cumming at a screening of his work, as well as eight essays on the filmmaker. Definitely recommended for those with substantial experimental video collections, this might also be considered by more adventurous libraries with very large budgets. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)