

In recent weeks, we have read ecstatic headlines about the sudden success of a number of Canadian films in the international market place. *Porky's* is breaking \$100 million, *Quest for Fire* has gone over \$25 million, and several others – *If You Could See What I Hear*, *Paradise*, *Visiting Hours*, *The Amateur* – are topping \$10 million.

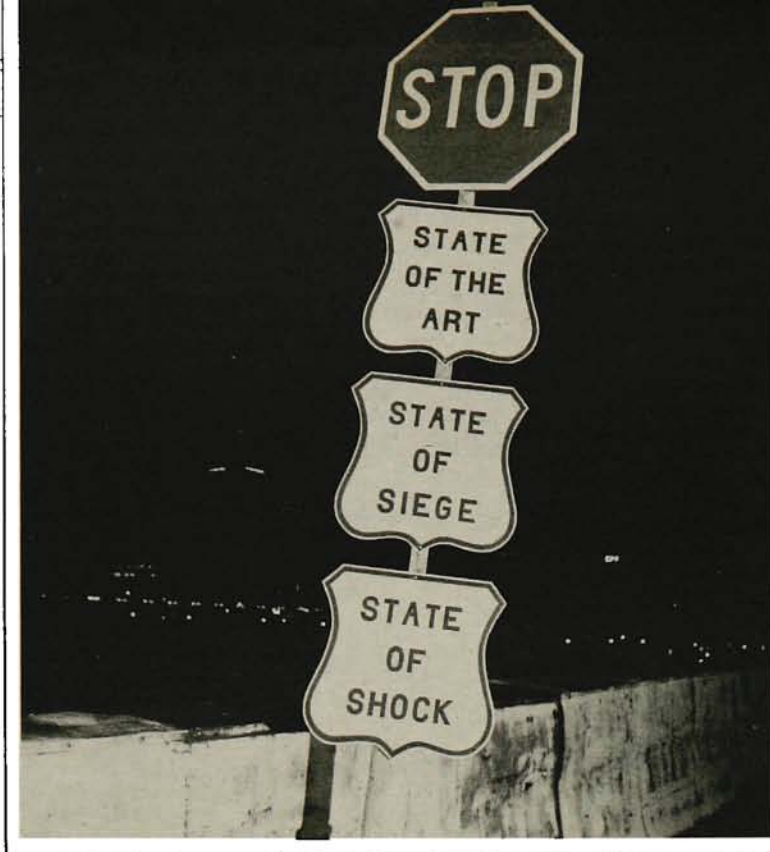
Of course, there is a lie in the preceding paragraph. It is found in the word "Canadian." *Porky's* is set in Florida, written and directed by an expatriate American, and produced with the help of an American, Melvin Simon. *Quest for Fire* is a Canadian-French co-production, with a French director, screenwriter, and composer. *If You Could See What I Hear* is a biography of an American pop singer which uses Canadian locations as Boston and New England. *Paradise*, a Canadian-Israeli co-production set in the Middle East, was written and directed by a Canadian who emigrated to sunny Southern California many years ago. *The Amateur* is about the CIA, and its director has never made a movie in Canada before. *Visiting Hours* is set in one of those classic 'unnamed American cities.'

This means that no Canadian movies have been hits. Furthermore, of the above films, only *Porky's* and *Quest for Fire* can legitimately be described as "hits" because, in these inflated times, with the cost of ad campaigns and prints running as high as \$6 million, big grosses don't go far. The reported \$15 million gross on *The Amateur* for instance will not cover the cost of the film and its campaign.

In an old issue of Cinema Canada, there is an interesting account of a conference in 1973, where one panelist suggested to Famous Players' president George Destounis that a lot of the American movies playing in Canadian theatres were just as bad as a lot of the Canadian films that weren't getting any screen time, and wouldn't it be nice if those Canadian films were to get that screen time. This is exactly what has happened. Aside from *Quest for Fire*, none of these films is particularly good. *Porky's* and *Paradise* are relentlessly stupid explorations of teen lust. *If You Could See What I Hear* is so mawkishly sweet and yet so aggressively obnoxious that the viewer doesn't know whether he should clasp the hero to his bosom or kick his teeth down his throat. *Visiting Hours* is a needlessly complicated slasher-on-the-loose horror movie.

So why are these movies so successful? Simple. They are hits for the same

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notes on a tax-sheltered cinema

by John Harkness

reason that almost any film is a hit these days. Marketing. In these times, there is nothing rarer than a true, word-of-mouth hit. *E.T. : The Extraterrestrial* qualifies, if only because Universal's campaign wasn't that good. *Arthur*, which did not pick up an audience until its fourth week, is the only other word-of-mouth hit in recent memory.

Indeed, it is hard to think of a picture in recent months that was more brilliantly marketed than *Porky's*. Its clever graphics and mid-run shifts in advertising copy told adult viewers that the grossest movie ever released by a Major was okay for them to see; they might be a little embarrassed, but no deaths. By way of contrast, *Quest for Fire* has to rank as a marketing failure. Twentieth Century-Fox (who did so well by *Porky's*) waited too long before putting *Quest* into wide release and never varied the rather crowded print graphic (United Artists made the same mistake with *Raging Bull*).

What has been proven by the recent successes is not that Canadian movies can hold their own on the American market, but that you can market any sort of crap with a pretty enough package.

The question one must ask is how this happened – how did Canadian movies become "Canadian" movies, and what were the factors that destroyed what was once one of the most distinctive cinemas in the world, only to replace it with a quasi-American branchplant?

The commercial reasons have been raked over the coals too many times – both in this magazine and in others – and the idea that greedy, rapacious and unscrupulous producers set out intentionally to strangle the struggling young cineastes is a touch too paranoid. It is true that no one sets out to make a bad picture. After all, Alexis Kanner, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, still believes that *Kings and Desperate Men* is a good picture.

Where we can fault the scores of producers who entered the industry with the coming of the tax shelter is in the area of national and aesthetic allegiance, not in that of commercial acumen.

The World According to Garth

The essential difference between the old-guard defenders of the Canadian cinema (Sandra Gathercole, Kirwan Cox, Gerald Pratley, etc.) and the new breed, born of the tax shelter, was not merely their conflicting aims. The two groups were not even speaking the same language; the former was obsessed (like good Canadians) with issues of cultural identity and artistic truth, and the latter much more interested in tax shelters and breaking into the international market. Had the newcomers been willing to listen to the old guard, we might have had a cinema similar to that of Australia today. Instead, mutual ignorance prompted brokers and lawyers to base their actions on a set of false

assumptions, forgetting several key factors.

The first feeling you get from people like Garth Drabinsky is that movies, as culture, are not important. This is not an attack on Drabinsky, but one need only listen to him talk about the importance to Canadian culture of the Toronto Theatre Festival (which he serves as chairman) and then look at the movies he makes, which tend to be set in all-Canadian locales like New York, Seattle and Washington. As the American humorist Fran Lebowitz has remarked, if movies were an art form, would they be shown in places that sell jujubes and Orange Crush?

A failure to believe in movies as a cultural product is a failure to believe in movies at all, because the best movies of any country are an expression of that nation's soul, be it the corrosive madness of *Mean Streets*, the gentle whimsy of *Jules et Jim* or the mad sexual-political maelstrom of *The Conformist*. Or even the singularly unlyrical depression of *Wedding in White* or the tract-home sterility of *Nobody Waved Goodbye*.

A disbelief in the potential of Canadian cinema led directly to a belief in the necessity of cracking the "international market," for which we should say, "the American market." There are a couple of fallacies here. First, and most important, no foreign-produced cinema has ever broken into the American market on any sustained basis. Various national cinemas have had brief moments of glory – the French and Italians in the early Sixties, the Czechs in the late Sixties, the Germans and the Australians in the Seventies. But all of them have had the limited success that comes to the art cinema. The top grossing Australian film by the end of 1981 was *Breaker Morant*, which had the advantage of being the film that replaced the ill-starred *Heaven's Gate* at New York's Cinema I. It returned \$5 million in rentals to its distributors. The top-grossing French film of all time is *La Cage aux folles*, which had a huge built-in subcultural audience, yet was still sufficiently conventional to cross-over to straight audiences. Next in line is *Last Tango in Paris*, which had the double advantage of being an extremely daring film in a period that was willing to accept daring films, and of starring Marlon Brando, fresh from his Oscar for *The Godfather*.

With those rare exceptions, the foreign film in America is a specialized film for specialized audiences, for the simple reason that Americans make the best American movies in the world. Why on earth would they want to buy American movies from someone else? They have the firmest grasp of film narrative (after all, they practically invented it) and the

actory system to support their needs. When Twentieth Century-Fox, for instance, began to pick up a number of Canadian films, the reason was not esthetic but economic - by and large, Canadian films were cheaper to buy than American films were to make.

The problem with using the Americans as a model was that Canadian producers attempted to mimic an industry that had been in existence for seventy years, yet they had neither the know-how nor the production infrastructure in place. It was like trying to compete with Ford by building cars in your basement.

Another aspect of the American cinema that the new producers failed to take into consideration was that the American film industry is virtually alone in its attempt to combine critical success with a box office hit. In France, no one applies the same standards to a new film by François Truffaut and the latest from Philippe de Broca. The same distinction is observed in Italy between an Alberto Lattuada on the commercial level and a Bernardo Bertolucci on the artistic. A Warren Beatty, who consistently tries for both the big box office success and the big commercial smash, is an almost purely American phenomenon.

The third problem with imitating the Hollywood model was that Hollywood itself is an industry in turmoil, chaos and collapse. The studio system, where the producer was king and randomly assigned writers, directors, and actors to projects, is long dead. What is left is a welter of conflicting interests, where a director with one hit can demand \$36 million for his projected epic on the lint in his own navel, stars battle openly with directors, and the agent has reduced the art of filmmaking into the art of the deal. While numerous fascinating and even great films have been produced by his system (if indeed it is a system), the greatest American films of the past few years - *Taxi Driver*, *Raging Bull*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Thief*, *Pennies from Heaven*, *Cutter's Way* - are darkly corrosive works that are at war with the very mythology that produced them. Watching the spectacle of Hollywood's interminable war with itself is akin to watching a wounded animal gnawing at its own entrails.

Fourth and finally, Hollywood has maintained its commercial and artistic hegemony over the world cinema because it is one of the most voracious and culturally imperialistic industries in the world. It absorbs talent the way a black hole absorbs light. In the Twenties they snapped up Lubitsch and Murnau. In the Thirties, the massive wave of German emigrants fled Hitler and gave birth to the *film noir*. In more recent times, Roger Corman's New World Pictures signed Werner Herzog to make *Fitzcarraldo*, Milos Forman and Ivan Passer came from Czechoslovakia, and the big three of the Australian cinema - Peter Weir, Bruce Beresford and Fred Schepisi - have all made their first American films. Thus, if the Canadian producers developed commercially successful directors, the odds are that after a hit or two, Hollywood would beckon, leaving the producers with the job of creating new directors from scratch.

Finally, Canada was not in the position of France or Germany, which could make dumb movies for home consumption and class for the world export market, because our dumb movies come from south of the border.

Boy Meets Girl in Winnipeg. Who Cares?

While attempting to match the Americans in the creation of entertaining, critically successful box office hits, the new producers of Canadian films like *Running, It Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time*, *Gas* and *Prom Night* were accused of selling out Canadian culture, of betraying the Canadian cinema. It is easy to accuse the makers of pseudo-entertaining films like this of being anti-Canadian, but again, this is too simple.

What has really happened here is that the average young Canadian lawyer who drives a Mercedes, wears Cardin suits and a Rolex watch while vacationing in Bermuda probably does not perceive any difference between himself

that are place-specific for no apparent reason - *Thief* in Chicago, *Blow Out* in Philadelphia - gain a level of realism simply by being set in a specific place.

Can anyone identify the setting of *Prom Night*, *Terror Train*, *Visiting Hours*, *Happy Birthday to Me*, *Gas*, *Cries in the Night*, *Pinball Summer*, *Nothing Personal*, *High Ballin'*, *The Last Chase*, *ad infinitum, ad nauseum*? By believing that no one could possibly be interested in specifically Canadian stories, the producers managed to rob the Canadian cinema of its most distinctive aspect, which is its extremely dense sense of place.

The Quebec cinema has maintained it, of course, as have rare tax shelter productions like Gilles Carle's *Les Plouf-*

substantive subtexts. They are ultimately films about nothing.

The destruction of the Canadian settings establishes another problem, perhaps even more serious.

Funny, You Don't Look Canadian

Each country's cinema has its own distinctive cinematic look. This is dictated by the light, by the training of its cinematographers, the types of cameras and film-stock used, and the background and intent of its directors.

However consciously illiterate a filmmaker may be, subconsciously he is prepared to recognize and accept that which is alien. Or, as is more often the case, to reject it. One of the reasons that foreign films have become hits among the American intelligentsia since the Fifties is that they provide an insight into issues, problems and aspects of human relationships that the American cinema was not dealing with. Another, is that they looked different from the Hollywood style that has become all too familiar. If one looks at movie reviews from the Fifties, one finds critics who wouldn't know a pan from a dolly waxing rhapsodically over the starkness of Bergman's image, or the lyric camera of the early Truffaut.

However, the run-of-the-mill film watcher, trained in his early years to accept the all-American gloss of MGM or the gritty realism of Warner Brothers, tends to sniff suspiciously at the sight of something that looks different. Indeed, one of the most commercially dangerous trends in the American cinema is the use of foreign cinematographers and/or art directors by directors like Paul Schrader (Ferdinando Scarfiootto), Warren Beatty (Vittorio Storaro), Coppola (Storaro), Terence Malick (Nestor Almendros) and the absorption of European styles by directors like Walter Hill (*The Driver*) and Michael Mann (*Thief*), because the American viewer will tend to reject it. One could almost claim that *Reds* failed commercially because it looked like a foreign movie, whereas Coppola, a director much more conscious of visual style than Beatty, could get away with *Apocalypse Now* using Storaro because he was in control of those elements.

Thus, what has seldom been recognized by the Canadian producers is that there is a distinctive cinematographic style in Canada. Ontario light tends to be somewhat drab. Our cinematographers, trained largely in documentary, tend to a slightly darker palette. Also, as we do not have a feature tradition, our lighting style tends to blend people into the scenery. The high-key star lighting that lifts and gives dimension to the American hero (or heroine) is not a traditional element of a cinema whose most masterful films - those of Shebib, Spry, Arcand, early Fruet, Allan King, André Forcier, Jean-Pierre Lefebvre - tend towards a non-heroic, perhaps even an anti-heroic stance.

As a colonized nation, where much of the Western settlement was government sponsored, and whose heroes tend to be part of a collective and often to be losers (the Jesuit Martyrs, the Metis under Riel and Dumont, the Cameron Highlanders at Dieppe), there is a distrust of an individualistic star system. It is significant that the two most successful movies ever made in this country, *Porky's* and *Meatballs*, feature collective heroes rather than individual. Thus, our cinematographers do not tend to light stars out from the group. This relates to the sense



● In his original role, Steven Lack on Montreal's Main

and his young American counterpart on Wall Street. Their belief in an "international" (i.e. American) style of cinema was no doubt legitimate.

By way of comparison, had Barry Levinson taken the script for *Diner* to a group of investors in Baltimore, the response doubtless would have been, "Are you kidding? Who wants to see a movie about a bunch of guys hanging out in Baltimore?"

The internationalism of the new producers was actually the narrowest sort of parochialism, a belief that no one would actually want to see a movie set in Toronto (or Vancouver, or Montreal or Halifax). What they failed to recognize is that so many of the best American movies are place-specific. Martin Scorsese's films are resolutely set in New York, as are Woody Allen's. The Dirty Harry films and *Bullitt* are pure San Francisco. Could *Death Wish* happen anywhere but New York? Even films

fe, Robin Spry's *Suzanne*, Don Owen's *Partners*, Allan King's *Who Has Seen the Wind* and *The Silence of the North*, Silvio Narrizano's *Why Shoot the Teacher*, Zale Dalen's *The Hounds of Notre Dame*, and Allen Eastman's *A Sweeter Song*.

Most of the films created under the shelter, however, seem like movies from nowhere. One need only think of George Mendeluk's *Stone Cold Dead*, which intercuts the Yonge Street strip with New York's Times Square Tenderloin, creating a sense of spatial disorientation eerier than the oddest science fiction. Or even of a lovely film like Don Shebib's *Heartaches*; though the director uses his Toronto setting very intelligently, he feels compelled to have his characters handle American money.

Finally, by making films that are set in no place in particular, they are also no place in general. And by being in no place in general, the films lack any

of place in the best Canadian films, and one of the most striking things about Don Shebib's *Goin' Down the Road*, Paul Lynch's *The Hard Part Begins*, Ted Kotcheff's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, or William Fruet's *Wedding in White* is the way in which characters fit into their environments.

The corollary of this is that to be successful in the American market, the films cannot look Canadian. It is significant that many of the most commercially successful Canadian films have used either foreign born directors (Bob Clark, Paul Lynch, Ivan Reitman) or foreign born cinematographers (John Coquillon, Anthony Richmond, Billy Williams, Reg Morris). Garth Drabinsky has never used a Canadian cinematographer. Bob Clark almost never.

So our producers have attempted to sidestep the problem of an intrinsically Canadian cinema not merely by using foreign settings, but by employing foreign born creative personnel. But this is the point at which two further problems arise.

Whose Movie Is It, Anyway?

Our big-name producers do not see a great deal of difference between themselves and the Americans. Their films consistently prove two things. First, that they believe they are American. Second, that they are wrong. A classic example of this is the Bob Cooper/Ron Cohen production of *Running*, directed and written by Steven Stern. A thirty-ish Michael Douglas decides to concentrate on his running and make it as an Olympic marathoner, proving to his estranged wife that he is not a total failure. He heads off, makes the Olympic team and runs the marathon in Montreal. In mid-race, however, he falls over and is injured. If you are an American producer, the rest is simple. He rises from his pain, grits his teeth, and charges back out, manfully passing his hated rival and finishing fourth, not winning, but proving his spirit. Rocky-esque. A real crowd pleaser.

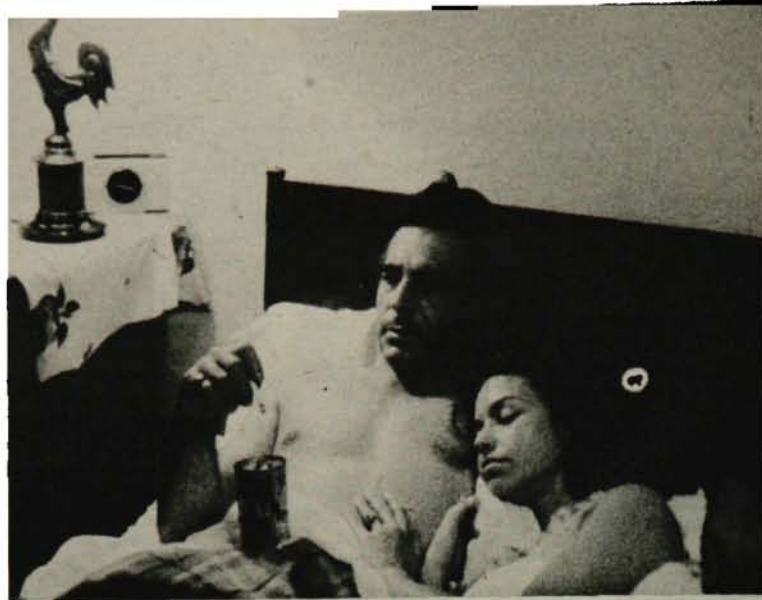
In the actual movie, he gets up, grits his teeth, and staggers into the stadium dead last, as wife Susan Anspach stands there, smiling through the tears. This writer saw the picture at the Bay Cinema in New York, and at the end the audience walked out looking puzzled, as if to say "What the hell...? Last! We sat there for two hours to see this turkey finish last?"

When the producers took control, the attempts at American movies were not Xeroxes of American hits (*Middle Age Crazy* of 10, *Paradise of Blue Lagoon*, *Prom Night of Halloween*, *Running of Rocky*), but carbon copies, fainter, slightly smudged, lacking the clarity of the originals and the motivating artistic force behind them.

This can be attributed to three factors. The absence of strong directorial personality behind the camera, the fact that we are attempting to reproduce foreign genres in the belief that they will sell, and the fact that the genres that we do do well are not the trashy American genres that others have perfected over the years.

So much of filmmaking is about power. Who has the biggest percentage, who has final cut, and who makes the best deal all have seemed more important than the script.

In the tax shelter cinema, the producer, having gotten the money together, feels that he should be in control. Yes, but... His control should be financial. What the best producer does is to bring to-



● Paul Lynch's country entertainers in *The Hard Part Begins*



● A harrowing view of small town Ontario: *Wedding in White*

● Duddy lusting after cash as he serves his apprenticeship



gether the best talents available to do a particular story and let them make the movie. Why hire the talent if you do not believe it can do the job? Control the purse strings, offer suggestions, certainly. But exactly what does a Toronto lawyer know about writing dialogue on the set of a comedy (that tidbit comes from an A.D. who saw it happen)? If the script needed rewriting, why was he being shot?

The tax shelter producers tended to make mistakes on every level imaginable, as far as talent was concerned. They hired directors totally unsuited to the material they were supposed to shape. What was Les Rose, who has a fine hand with gritty downtown realism, in films like *Three Card Monte* and *Title Shot*, doing on dumb, food-fight comedies like *Gas* and *Hog Wild*? Why was Paul Almond, whose specialty is intricate, Bergmanesque psychodrama, doing an international spy thriller? Alvin Rakoff proved himself, in quick succession, incapable of handling disaster movies (*City on Fire*), horror (*Death Ship*) and comedy (*Dirty Tricks*). George Mihalka, suddenly a hot young director because of the Quebec success of *Scandale*, directed *Pinball Summer* and *My Bloody Valentine*, two of the worst movies ever made.

The fact that Mihalka and Rakoff have each made more films under the tax shelter than major talents like Allan King, Robin Spry, Don Owen, Peter Pearson, Claude Jutra, and Zale Dalen is a sure indicator that producers essentially don't want troublesome directors who are likely to attempt to impose a personal vision on the film at hand.

"But we can't hire those guys," scream the producers. "They don't make any money!" This seems valid, until you look at the grosses for *Dirty Tricks*, *Final Assignment*, *City on Fire* and *Gas*. For a moment, put yourself in the position of that mythical orthodontist from Blossom, Saskatchewan. You've just sunk \$5 grand into a picture that you are going to write off on your taxes. You'd like to have the next *Star Wars*, but you're pretty sure you don't. Would you rather lose that money on *City on Fire* or *Goin' Down the Road*? *Gas* or *Alligator Shoes*, *Welcome to Blood City* or *The Silence of the North*?

One gets the feeling that investors seldom got to see either a copy of the script or a screening of the director's previous films. Would you have put cash into an Alvin Rakoff film if you'd seen *City on Fire*? Not very likely.

Because the producers refused to hire strong directors, and misassigned those that they did, very few careers had a chance to develop, and not a single major director has emerged from the tax shelter. Every major director, whether judged by his stature commercially or aesthetically, was making films before the tax shelter. David Cronenberg, Gilles Carle, Robin Spry, Claude Jutra, Denys Arcand, Francis Mankiewicz, Don Shebib, Allan King, Paul Almond, Bob Clark, Harvey Hart, Daryl Duke, John Trent, Eric Till, William Fruet, Paul Lynch, Jean-Claude Labrecque, Don Owen, Peter Pearson, André Forcier and Jean-Pierre Lefebvre which virtually constitutes a definition of the worthwhile Canadian feature industry - all made films prior to the tax shelter.

Even more intriguing is that when a producer has a really good film to his credit, he has a strong, intelligent director somewhere on the scene. Garth

abinsky's best film is *The Silent Part* (Daryl Duke). Lantos and Roth's best picture is *Suzanne* (Robin Spry). Film International has two good ones, *The Brood* and *Scanners* (David Cronenberg). The most successful films – both Astral and Dal Productions are a product, God help us, of single directorial visions – *Porky's* (Bob Clark) and *Hotballs* (Ivan Reitman). It is not at all surprising that the most consistently good pictures in this country come from Canada, because their directorial roster – Gilles Carle, Louis Malle, and Jean-Claude Lauzon – could hold its own anywhere. It is also no accident that both John Kemeny and Denis Héroux both have long backgrounds in production; Kemeny produced for over twenty years at the NFB, in Hollywood (*White Hot Fever*) and here at home (*Duddy Ravitz*), while Héroux was the director of a terrible director, admittedly, but still director) of over a dozen features. By their experience, they are among the best producers who can even approach the level of expertise required of a Hollywood or French producer.

More irritating than misassigning directors, is the tax shelter producers' way of stunting or destroying directorial careers. *Partners* is one of the strangest and most interesting films ever made on the relationship between Canada and the United States. Don Owen has not made a film since. Paul Lynch made two films which captured with precision and feeling the sense of the itinerant, second-class entertainer. Both *The Hard Part Begins* and *Blood and Guts* understand cheap hotels and comfortable busses and the travelling players who occupy them. Lynch now directs and horror films. William Fruet's *Wedding in White* is simply the best portrayal of life in a small Ontario town ever made. This is the man who wrote the script for *Goin' Down the Road*. Is anybody really looking forward to *Death Bite*, or another screening of *Tries in the Night*?

The absence of script sense on the part of producers compounds the problems. Bill Gray, who wrote the scripts for *The Changeling* and *Prom Night*, may be the best-known non-directing screenwriter in Canada. Yet, as Andrew Dowler noted in his Cinema Canada review of *Prom Night*, both films have an interesting structural flaw. In neither film is the central character ever threatened by the malevolent killer who haunts each picture. George C. Scott is not the target of *The Changeling's* murderous ghost and Jamie Lee Curtis is the sister of the mad killer in *Prom Night*. Curtis' boyfriend is threatened, but that is hardly the same thing.

This off-center quality is exactly what happens when we try to imitate the American genre film. It has been suggested that it is okay for us to make trash, because in the past, hotbeds of trash have given birth to fine artists. This is true. Out of *Black Mask* magazine came Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. From the Hollywood assembly lines came fine directors like Raoul Walsh and Michael Curtiz. Out of Coran's schlock machines at New World and AIP we got Francis Coppola, Martin Scorsese and Jonathan Demme.

However, all of those people came from an entirely different mode of production. If 30 directors are making a picture or two a year, the cream will rise to the top, and our Scorsese will emerge. But if 10 directors are making a picture every two or three years, it will not.

Perhaps more importantly, we have



● Vintage Shebib as Paul Bradley and Jane Eastwood reconcile



● Lack, less at ease, in Cronenberg's *Scanners*

● Blind dates and new friends in *Goin' Down the Road*



no real trash tradition in this country. Much of this comes from our stodgy, Presbyterian heritage. Much of it comes from a bankerly distrust of things that were fun. It is perfectly all right to promote a Margaret Atwood, because fine literature does so improve the mind. But movies? Trashy things. The lower classes like them, you know. This is the historical attitude that leads to reactions like Robert Fulford's offended-maiden-aunt shrieks at the bloody beauty of David Cronenberg's *Shivers*, and the disgust at the Ontario Censor Board with the kinky sexuality of Don Owen's *Partners* (with Hollis MacLaren in period drag telling her boyfriend, also in period drag, that he's going to find out what it's like to really get 'fucked by the Establishment').

By imitating American trash, we turn away from what we do well and attempt to follow trends in what other people do well.

John Grierson and a Nation of Realists

The problem with Canada is that we are a nation of realists. We love portraying our own landscape, whether it's Susannah Moodie setting down her diary, Margaret Atwood reinterpreting it, or all those paintings of pine trees and rocks.

Given the overwhelming reality of Canada, it is not surprising that our films do not look like the productions of Disneyland by the sea. California, home of the movie industry since 1913, is conducive to fantasy, and the American film industry might have been a very different beast had it remained under the lowering skies of Fort Lee, New Jersey. It is also not surprising that the genesis figure is that cold Scots documentarist, John Grierson. On the one hand, he created the structure that enabled an off-the-wall genius like Norman MacLaren to do his stuff. At the same time, he created a massive bureaucracy whose duty it was to reveal the soul of a nation. As Pat Ferns of *Primedia* once noted, what happened then was like what that happened in France after the Gaullists took power. They made sure that the news and informational services were controlled by the government, and let the leftists have the entertainment portion of the national television system, on the theory that entertainment is unimportant. Unfortunately, it is the entertainments of a people that reveal the nation, and in Canada, that job was forfeited to the Americans and the British.

Thus, when we came to creating entertainment, it was necessary to seek models from what we knew – which meant the realist tradition created by the National Film Board. With two exceptions, David Cronenberg and Gilles Carle, almost all our filmmakers tend toward the realist. There is even a group of filmmakers from the late Sixties that could be labelled "the Ontario realists" – Don Owen, Peter Pearson, Don Shebib, the early William Fruet, and, in the early Seventies, Paul Lynch. Add to that group Quebec anglophones like Frank Vitale, Alan Moyle (*Montreal Main*, *The Rubber Gun*) Robin Spry (who studied under Owen at the NFB) and a latter day version like Clay Borris, and you have the makings of a school.

The realists in Quebec tended more toward the political (Denys Arcand, especially, but also Claude Jutra, André Forcier, Jean-Pierre Lefebvre) and, in a sense, metaphysical-psychological (Paul Almond, Francis Mankiewicz, Gilles

Groulx, Michel Brault). Yet there is that palpable sense of being in a real place with real people. One is reminded of Michel Tremblay who, after his first great success with *Les belles soeurs*, was asked if he had attempted to say things that were universal. His response was that he was simply writing about the people that he knew.

Writing about people you know – or making films about them – is the easiest thing to do, on the surface, for all you need do is pray for interesting friends. Yet it is much harder to shape the forms that surround you than to jam together the forms and functions of old movie myths and to attempt something original with shopworn genres of old movies.

The young movie producer, who has just booked his latest horror-slasher picture onto the Marché at Cannes after finding no buyers at the American film market, sneers. But that stuff doesn't sell. No, it doesn't sell as well as *Star Wars*, and you don't get all the automatic buys from bloodthirsty markets like Hong Kong, but it is impossible to tell if that stuff sells because no Canadian film (for the moment we shall ignore *Meatballs* and the new group of Canadian "hits") has ever had the sort of national launching that is habitually accorded third-rate American films. *Les Plouffe* was marketed in English Canada with a cartoonish sketch and that kiss of death phrase "A Canadian classic" on the poster. That makes it sound like the sort of movie for which they drag innocent children out of classrooms to lock them in the theatre. *Ticket to Heaven* was stuck with that awful poster which was a wonderful graphic but gave you no idea of what the film was about. *Heartaches*, Don Shebib's best film since *Goin' Down the Road*, has yet to see American release, but in Ontario it suffered from an unfortunate colour scheme on the poster (pink and purple)

and a TV trailer that made it look less like a warm-hearted comedy than a female version of *Porky's*.

Once again, we return to marketing. You can sell people anything. You may not make a \$100 million selling them something like *Ticket to Heaven*, but you should be able to make \$20 million. The Canadian films are a different product, and marketing must be designed to handle that product. Pay-TV will not do the trick, because a film needs theatrical release (and will get a better price from pay-TV simply to get attention. What do Canadian television watchers think when all those unreleased tax shelter turkeys turn up on television? "Hey, Madge, here's something called *It Rained All Night the Day I Left* (the reader may substitute *Summer's Children*, *Stone Cold Dead*, *I Miss You Hugs and Kisses*, *City On Fire* or *Search and Destroy* at his or her own discretion) on Channel Nine." "Never heard of it, Harry. Let's watch *Headline Hunters* instead."

The marketing problem creates a catch-22 situation. The Americans know how to market these films, so that's the kind of films we'll make. The problem is that between the time a film hits and the time a Canadian producer can mount an imitator, shoot it, cut and get it into the theatres, a minimum of one, maybe two years has passed, leaving the producer with a product which is no longer in vogue, because there are...

No More Genres, No More Trends, And No More Stars

Once upon a time, people went to see Westerns, or horror movies, or Joan Crawford movies. Once upon a time there was a thing called a star. They had faces then, as one of them once said.

But there is not a single major star who has not had a major and spectacular flop in the past year or two – Jane Fonda,

Paul Newman, Clint Eastwood, Barbra Streisand – that mythical twelve-to-twenty-four year-old audience doesn't care about stars. (Where are the stars of *Star Wars*, *E.T.*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Poltergeist* and *Halloween*?) None of the stars of these monster hits have proven able to carry a film commercially on his own. Harrison Ford's efforts away from the Spielberg-Lucas extravaganzas have not made money, Carrie Fisher did not add a dollar to the grosses of the execrable *Under the Rainbow*, and just what does Mark Hamill do when he isn't playing Luke Skywalker?

The fact that *Porky's* and *Meatballs* have none of those proven box office names that producers like to bring in (They sure do line up in the old neighbourhood for Ava Gardner and George Kennedy) might have proven something to the local producers. Bill Murray, the then unproven refugee from Saturday Night Live, has had a career resembling a yoyo – down with *Where the Buffalo Roam* and *Caddyshack*, up when reunited with Reitman for *Stripes*. Though Murray is a star, you cannot bank on him.

The names above the titles promise nothing.

The classical genres have become meaningless. In January of 1981, would anyone have predicted that there would not be a single horror movie blockbuster in 1982 – particularly with *The Thing* and *Cat People* slated for the summer? A short three summers ago, Newsweek was shouting that "Horror is hot!" Will Stephen Spielberg's *E.T.* inspire a dozen or so movies about cute aliens who befriend small children? No, because producers have finally come to the awareness – a realization reached by people in the music world many years ago – that their target audience is more fickle than Marguerite Gautier and has the attention span of a hyperactive three

year old. We're talking about people who can't remember what they had for breakfast, let alone what movie they saw last week. They like what everyone they know likes – hence the success of *Porky's*; it's about their idealized self-image far more than it is about the Fifties.

Finally, there are no trends. *Porky's* all may wind up bombing as badly as did that other adolescent sequel, *Grease 2*. Four big budget musicals are being released in a summer when everyone was ready to pronounce the musical dead.

Nothing can be predicted, nothing can be calculated. It is an era of post-industrial filmmaking where the studios have turned largely into distribution arms for independently created product. All you can do is make your picture and hope.

The answer for the Canadian cinema is simply to stop imitating the Americans. Not because it is intrinsically evil to spend tax money on quasi-American projects, or even because we must stop so as to allow the flourishing of the indigenous product. It is simply that we do not do it very well.

Had we continued, in 1975, to make the sort of product that our directors had proven they could do well, those films would have benefited from the increased budgets made possible by the tax shelter and from the growing expertise of our crews. Eventually we could have "cracked" the international market with Canadian films. Now that the energy of the tax shelter boom-years seems to have dissipated, perhaps we can return our talents to what they do best, and stop making films for marketing strategies, aimed at markets that are so unpredictable that even their domestic producers can not understand them or predict them.



● Fighting to keep Canadian cinema authentic, Gilles Carle's film version of *Les Plouffe*



● Movie posters grace the Provincial Auditorium in Lanzhou

Photos: Kevin Tierney

Saturday night at the movies : Lanzhou, China

by Kevin Tierney

Introductions have a way of sounding pretentious, but in this case one seems unavoidable because a sense of context for what follows is necessary.

I have been in China for three months and speak very little of the language. Trying to cover Chinese film from Lanzhou – situated in a direct line, halfway between Beijing (Peking) and Lhasa – can be compared to trying to cover Canadian film from Sudbury, or the Hollywood scene from Pittsburgh. (If I were to describe Lanzhou's air, these comparisons would seem far less peculiar.) Nevertheless, Lanzhou has cinemas – lots of them – and I've been greatly assisted by my friend, colleague and interpreter, Mr. Gao Hailong: if ever the cliché, 'without him little of this would have been possible' was apt, it is now. Anyone who has spent any time in this country will, I'm sure, understand how important such friends can be.

Finally, it is my purpose here to sound provincial. What the West needs least is the voice of yet another expert, someone who comes here, looks around for awhile and then writes home, summing up not only the 'China of today,' but CHINA, a country that has existed for five-thousand years and shows every sign of maintaining its record of longevity, in spite of all we have written and will, no doubt, continue to write.

When I leave my apartment building at 7:45 p.m. for the university auditorium, accompanied by my interpreter, I am struck by two different sensations: one is the darkness – no stars in Lanzhou

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and very few street lights in the compound which houses most university employees; the second is the bustle – a quiet kind of quickstep shuffle. This is not only my first chance to see a Chinese Film in China, but it's the first time I've been out at night since we arrived here a week ago.

Approaching the gates which divide the compound from the campus, I am struck by the weird combination of features: the buildings are mostly Soviet-style, uninspired, Stalinist PLAIN – they are to architecture what 'sensible shoes' are to fashion; but the physical layout is *Father Knows Best* – tree-lined walk to the clock-towered library and all. A 60-watt bulb hanging naked outside the guard-house allows me to see what I've been hearing: people coming from every direction, moving through the darkness with a hush of suppressed excitement. The sound is broken only by the noise of sunflower seeds being eaten: bite, crush, spit and the crunch of the rejects underfoot. Sunflower seeds are to China what popcorn, gum and chocolate bars are to the West.

Everywhere I look people are walking in the same direction and their movement forces us to quicken our pace: men, women, children: all ages, shapes, sizes and descriptions – Saturday night at the movies in Lanzhou. A whole lot more than *The Drifters* had in mind.

Outside the auditorium the queues are long but orderly. The auditorium seats 1200 and tickets were on sale this morning for a couple of hours: good films take even less time to sell out. Because this is a 'Unit' auditorium (a Unit is the place of work but also the fundamental structure of this society),

which serves, among other purposes, as a cinema with both 16 and 35 mm facilities, the admission price is half what it would be in a 'commercial cinema' – one 'jiao' instead of two (i.e. 6 1/2 or 13 cents). In principle, tickets for unit film screenings are available only to the workers of that unit, but everybody's got friends. Films are shown in this auditorium on an average of twice per week, Wednesdays and Saturdays. People know if there's a movie by the posters on the community bulletin board situated outside the student cafeteria: same day advertizing, i.e., they tell you in the morning what will be screened that night.

Inside people are rushing about matching seat numbers to those on their tickets: there is no such thing as non-reserved seating in the unit auditoria or the commercial houses. Before the film begins a series of slides are projected, all of them urging better behavior: no talking, no spitting (an unfortunate habit that can make walking to class at 8 a.m. an excruciatingly painful experience), no smoking, etc. People try, but it's hard to break old habits.

When the film begins, so does my interpreter, and I feel badly for the people seated near us, for they have to listen to his valiant efforts at simultaneous translation. (He has since taken my advice and now only translates what makes the audience laugh and information he feels is essential.) Fifteen minutes into the film I tell him not to bother. The dialogue, however insightful and poetic it may be (it isn't), cannot possibly salvage anything from this waste of celluloid: set in pre-Liberation China, it's half kitschy American cow-girl (two pistols slung crossways across the breasts down

to the hips); half Hong Kong Kung Fu (complete with speeded-up editing and reverse action that has her jumping up mountains). I promise myself to forget the translated title, and I succeed; but I haven't been able to forget what got the biggest laugh from the viewers – who are, after all, the source of my real interest... Our heroine rides her white horse to the hideout of an ex-member of her gang. When she is converted from Robin Hood to People's Liberation Army revolutionary, this sort-of-bad-guy (he's not really *the* bad guy – that title is saved for Annie Oakley's lover who, of course, shows his real reactionary colors before the end of the film) says he wants to be a real thief – rob from the rich and give to himself. She challenges him to a dual of knives (choreographed in Chinese martial arts style) and he agrees, setting the stakes: if I win, he says, you will be my wife. Her response is given in close-up: if you lose, you will be my son.

The lights come on and my interpreter shakes his head, 'Silly film'. Silly, yes. But what the hell else is there to do in Lanzhou on Saturday night – or any other night for that matter? We make our way to the exists, just two of the 70 MILLION PEOPLE who will have seen a movie in China today.

Numbers. As overwhelming as that statistic is, it is but one of the many in this country available to us daily. From a report on a recently held Conference on Films, I read the following: "... according to the Film Bureau, China's film attendance was well above 10 billion in 1981." 'Well above'? How much more than 10 billion is 'well above'? People here are well aware of the effect their numbers have on us. Some of my colleagues delight in giving me theirs and asking for ours: the idea that the combined populations of Shanghai and Beijing are more than the population of Canada is

especially amusing considering that Canada is physically larger than China—a fact that everyone I speak to mentions. One must know one's place in the world, and isn't it more interesting to think of oneself as being part of 25% of the world, rather than living in just another country?

One of the reasons for such large movie attendance is that the films run all day and the better part of the evening: 8 a.m. starting, until the last screening around 9:30 p.m. If the film is a 'big hit', additional screenings may be added at 2 or 3 a.m.; a light social comedy before breakfast at 6? Such things have been known to happen in Lanzhou. Starting times are scheduled this way for a number of reasons, including a desire to accommodate those who work shifts. They, too, should be able to see films. Then there is the problem of the unemployed—what should they do all day—and the cinema provides at least a temporary source of escape from a difficult problem.

While the admission price for a film may seem ridiculously low to us, it is not so here, where every penny continues to count. In the commercial cinemas, of which Lanzhou has 30, the price is 13 cents for what is called a 'common film' and 16 cents for a 'wide screen film'. At least that's the official price established by the Film Bureau in Beijing. In reality, however, people are currently being charged more to see a new 'story' film (as features are known) due to a quietly capitalist-like trick that is loaded with all sorts of irony: I have paid as high as 19 and even 25 cents to see a new film and when I asked why the price was so high I was told because this film would be shown with some other films. How interesting. To me, perhaps, but not to the people I was with. They asked if they could pay less and skip the first films—which they knew would be documentaries—but were told no, they had to pay for the whole evening. "Not only do we have to watch science films that we do not like, but we have to pay more to do it:" a sentiment that was later confirmed as widespread by a representative of the provincial film office. Scientific and cultural films are added to the bill along with new features because the authorities feel these films are important and should be seen by the people. The people's version doesn't quite seem to match: "This is the way they can charge us more."

Distribution in China is controlled by a national agency headquartered in Beijing. In each province there is a provincial distribution office and it re-



● The box office rush

ceives the assigned number of prints for their area from the national office. A small province, such as this one, usually receives two or three copies, but that can fall to one or rise to five. Upon receipt of the copies, the provincial office will decide which of its districts should receive a copy and when, etc. In Gansu province the capital city of Lanzhou is considered as one district, but also as the most important of the 13 in the province; thus it usually gets at least one copy of all the new films (and often these copies are bicycled from one theatre to another with staggered starting times). But as the leaders of the provincial film office go out of their way to tell me, 'not all the time.' Fair is fair.

Each month the Gansu province film distribution office receives approximately 10 new films. This had been happening since 1978. Of these 10, three may be foreign films, but these would be new only in the sense of being new to this country. (I've only seen one—a Fernandel piece of racist fluff that was remarkable to some of the audience only because it contained a couple of rather mild belly-dancing sequences, which in China are close to *Caligula*.) How these films are chosen, and why, is difficult to understand. It probably has more to do with purchase price than either of the two loftier considerations, politics and art.

What is most pleasant is the fairness with which distribution is handled. Films open nationally, which means that just because Lanzhou is far away

from major urban centres, it is not made to wait, nor are the other regions. Thus, at approximately the same time as a new film plays Beijing, it is playing in the provinces.

The film community, like much of the artistic and cultural life here, cannot be understood only in terms of its present production figures. These do not begin to tell the story of the recent political past, nor do they reflect just how phoenix-like a phenomenon the present is, re-born out of the ashes known as the Cultural Revolution. Prior to 1966, during the first 17 years of the People's Republic, 600 features were produced. During the next 10-year period—which most people here refer to as 'the so-called cultural revolution'—only 109 films were made, and most of these, no longer in circulation, were filmed variations on the themes of the infamous eight 'revolutionary operas' insisted upon by Jiang Qing (Mao's wife and one of the Gang of Four). During this period studios were closed; actors, writers, directors, producers and millions of others were sent to the countryside to be 're-educated' and some didn't survive. With the demise of the Gang of Four production didn't resume, so much as start all over again, and the figures dating from this time are quite remarkable: between 1977 and 1981, 300 films were produced, and in 1981, 90 new films were made, a figure that is likely to be surpassed this year.

During all of its life, the People's Republic has recognized the potential

of cinema as a form of propaganda and it comes as no shock to foreign eyes to see this manifested on the screen. Perhaps it was exposure to the films of Leni Riefenstahl at too tender an age, but the very word 'propaganda' has an unnerving effect on me. When I am told that an interview with the Provincial Film Office has been arranged and that one of the 'leaders' (this is the Chinese equivalent for boss) is from the propaganda office, I feel a reaction coming on. I am not quite sure what to expect but when I see him, he isn't it. A slightly built man in his early forties, he is dressed much like everyone else and does not wear swastika arm bands or big red stars.

"Yes, film is propaganda," he says, and then proceeds to describe his view of it, as well as his specific function as the head of the propaganda department. Of the former, he says all films have their aims and the aim of good films should be to educate the people, i.e., first, knowledge; second, patriotism; and third, behavior. A good film must also be art, it must entertain the people. "We are trying to merge Art and Education, but the results aren't always successful." As for his department's specific functions, they begin when a new film is received. The film is previewed and they then go about 'calling on people to see the film; helping the people understanding the film'. "After the people have seen the film, they can be educated."

Listening to him describe these functions, I am struck by how much he sounds like a marketing man interested in finding the right 'target' audience and mounting campaigns to get people to see the 'product'. These campaigns take the form of posters (a major source of communication here is the wall poster); newspapers (his office publishes a bi-weekly film magazine); and preview screenings for leaders of large units who are then encouraged to show the film in their units.

A good example of this process would be the most recent film to cause a great deal of discussion and attention, *The Herdsman*. It also happens to be the best film I've seen here.

Based on a well known short story, *Body and Soul*, it was shot on location in southern Gansu province. Briefly, it tells the story, mostly in flashback, of a reunion between a father and son who have been separated for 30 years. The father went off to America when the boy was very young and while everything has gone well for him in his new adopted country (he returns a 'major capitalist'), life has been hard on the son. Not only

● The parking lot filling up as the attendant hands out stubs (on right)



has he been raised an orphan (his mother dies shortly after the father's departure), but he has been forced to pay for the sins of his father which have left him a legacy known in China as 'bad class background'. During the Cultural Revolution (an era that accounts for much of today's films) the son is branded a 'rightist' and forced out of his job as a school teacher. He is exiled to the new territories of China (the northwest) where he chooses to try and find a new life rather than kill himself. His work and his attitude soon ingratiate him among the local people and he becomes a member of their tight-knit community. He marries, has a child and when the Gang of Four are exposed he is reinstated as a full citizen and given his old job back. At this point the father returns from America for the first time. He wants to take the son back with him to America as his principal heir. It's a difficult decision for the son who, despite everything, continues to love his father. But ultimately he chooses to remain in China.

The allegorical possibilities are obviously as is the ultimate message, a timely one considering the present open door to the West policy. Because of its message the film is being recommended to all, but particularly to the young, for whom the lure of the West may become stronger and stronger. The propaganda department works out a strategy to get the film seen as widely as possible. It controls the commercial cinemas so that is no problem, but unit screenings are for many people their primary source of film viewing. Thus, all the appropriate unit leaders are invited to see the film and encouraged to book it into their respective units. The magazine devotes much space to interviews with the director, cinematographer, leading players, etc; and reviews of the film are published. Discussion of the film is encouraged at every level from the secondary schools to the places of work. It's a 'hot property'.

What is fascinating about this film to these foreign eyes is that in communicating its message of rejecting Western materialism, it employs both the film language and mythology of the 'new world', America. When the young hero decides against suicide the director begins to show us why, in the way he shoots these new open spaces, the free running herds of horses, this expanse full of possibilities and new beginnings. It's enough to bring a tear to John Ford's eye. Instead of pursuing this, though, the film opts for a patriotic leap of faith that is not confusing to me so much as it is distancing: I know little of such leaps and what I do know of them makes me uneasy. It manages, as well, to portray a world much closer to the real one than other Chinese films I've seen. Gone are the simple heroes and villains who must be all good and all bad. There is an exchange of gifts at the end of the film between the father and the son which is not only moving but symbolic: at this juncture compromise is possible.

Of course it is propaganda. But for 80% or more of its running time, there is no denying that its director, Xie Jin, one of the best known directors at work in China, is a world class director who displays remarkable sensitivity in following the dictum that blankets all artistic activity here: art must serve the people.

Propaganda. Art. Education. Are these three compatible? In films like *The Herdsman*, yes. But for every *Herdsman* there are six or seven other failures, as



there are failures of a different nature in every country where filmmaking is active. But what the leadership thinks of as propaganda or education, and what we might like to think of as art, do not necessarily take into account what local filmgoers seem to be most interested in, entertainment. It is difficult to have a 'serious' discussion of a film with either the students or the teachers of this and probably most universities, because their idea of film is so alien to that. (The idea that people actually 'teach' film borders on the proposterous.) It is equally difficult to discuss the politics of a film, or film in general. (I may be totally wrong about why this is so, and should I discover that I am, I will write a letter to the editor and *mea culpa* my way back to credibility.) In almost every conversation in English or in translation (but always unofficial), I detect an almost apolitical tone. Surprising to think that the people we consider to be among the most politicized in the world are the least interested in discussing such a topic. Or is it? A sign of reluctance to discuss this with a foreigner? This should never be discounted, but even those who have spoken freely in other situations display similar tendencies of disinterest. Too much politics? A real possibility; so much so that people

seem to have learned to separate national politics from their daily lives in order to survive the most tumultuous political history yet recorded: in 40 years they have gone from war to civil war, revolution, liberation, development, the Russians, the 100 Flowers Campaign, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, the death of the embodiment of the revolution, the Gang of Four, the four modernizations and the open door to the West—not counting other political shakeups that we don't even know about. Just reading the list is enough to make the eyeballs spin. To do no more than cope, a filtration system would have to be at work. It is this filtration system that changes propaganda to entertainment and like everywhere else in the world, there is good and bad entertainment. Like audiences everywhere else, people respond accordingly: they stay home, go to another movie, or line up at o'clock in the morning to see THE film that everyone's talking about.

Although more and more people are now buying televisions, and more and more money is being spent on television productions, movies remain the most important source of entertainment in Lanzhou and elsewhere. I have been to four or five different cinemas on many

different occasions and I have yet to attend a screening that was not sold out. (Even parking is a problem: lots, tickets and attendants – but waiting for the traffic to clear, bicycle or car, is a universal phenomenon, indeed.) Many people ask me about foreign films and clearly more of these would be welcome. The future seems bright for Chinese feature films, and should the present political situation remain stable even better films will be produced. A recent retrospective of 135 Chinese features dating from the '20s to the present is a most promising omen, for it shows that the authorities are interested in more film exchanges with the West: but even more importantly, they are interested in their own film history (an industry did, after all, exist before liberation).

As for me, I like going to the movies, here and everywhere else. Of the 12 films I've seen, one was very good, another quite good but not nearly as ambitious, while the other 10 run the range from dreadful to ho-hum. Not a bad average. Besides, like my friends say, what else is there to do in Lanzhou on Saturday night?

The Canadian Film Institute : Part II

or

How I Tried Very Hard to Interview Frederik Manter and after Waiting Fifteen Weeks, Decided to Write an Article Without his Participation

by Patricia Thompson

Many nations, interested in cinema, have film institutes. They tend to resemble each other, providing public screenings of important films, publishing books and guides (often including a film magazine like Britain's "Sight and Sound"), collecting material for archives and generally enriching a nation's film culture. The British Film Institute, the Australian Film Institute, the Swedish Film Institute and the American Film Institute are all cut from the same cloth.

In all of the above nations, the film institutes receive the enthusiastic (but not uncritical) backing of the nations' film industries. They are integral parts of those industries, and provide important services, defending film culture as others defend film business.

Only in Canada does there exist a film institute which, having accumulated a debilitating deficit, has ceased to perform all functions of a film institute. Only in Canada does that institute exist in haughty isolation from the industry, providing no important service and receiving no moral support.

The contacts between the private sector and the Canadian Film Institute have been frustrating in the extreme for some years now. Records are not made public, interviews are not given, and a veil of secrecy covers most decisions. *Cinema Canada* tried to tell the story in October 1981, but questions were not answered then by the executive director, Frederik Manter. The following story documents the frustrations of trying to find out what is happening there today, and why.

Pat Thompson's account is detailed and, some may think, overdone, as the simple sentence, "The CFI wishes to make no comment at this time," might have covered the situation adequately.

Cinema Canada felt it important to publish her account for several reasons. The reticence of the CFI to make clear its situation is not the product of a present reorganization, but is a reflection of its posture over many years. This organization, due to fold under the weight of its errors and, ultimately, its lack of essential services, has just

been bailed out by the Minister of Communications to the tune of almost \$200,000. Yet, the CFI is apparently in an illegal situation, having violated its own by-laws repeatedly in the past few years. The Minister has made no mention of any conditions he has imposed upon the CFI which might promise better management in the future.

Several years ago, the CFI nominated many new directors, and the roster began to look like a who's who of Canadian cinema: Sam Kula (director, National Film Archives), Ian McLaren (director, Cultural Industries Branch, Department of Communications), André Lamy, (executive director, Canadian Film Development Corp.) Peter Mortimer (policy writer, DOC), and Sydney Newman (past federal film commissioner). Wags have suggested that the Minister may have bailed out the CFI simply because it would have been embarrassing for the Institute to go bankrupt while his entire senior staff sits on the Board.

Film institutes are generally public trusts; members come from the private sector and meet annually to choose the directors. This is how the CFI was structured, but it no longer has an extended membership. It is now, as one director admitted, an organization in search of a role, a policy, a stance to justify its own existence.

Are we now so rich that we can afford to fund organizations which have outlived their usefulness? Does the Minister, or the directors, or even the executive director have some new agenda, one which will rally the private sector around the Institute and move it back into center stage, giving it the pivotal position occupied by every other film institute around the world?

The will of the new board is to get on with business at hand, and to forget about the Institute's past shortcomings. These, however, are not minor occurrences, but major problems. Until some questions are answered, publicly and fully, no amount of goodwill can make up for the damage done to the CFI by the past and present reticence to join in open dialogue.

In April 1982 I set out for Ottawa, and an Easter weekend with Friends. After a pause, the week would be devoted to another article on the Canadian Film Institute. This to follow-up Penelope Hynam's piece in *Cinema Canada*, No. 78, October 1981.

Well in advance I'd written a letter to Frederik Manter, CFI Executive Director, requesting an interview between April 13 and 16. Only a cloud or two marred the horizon - he hadn't replied or telephoned... and a current list of CFI Directors didn't seem to be available, and so they couldn't be contacted in advance. But, everything would work out...

A veritable torrent had flowed under the CFI bridge since the Hynam article. Piers Handling and three other employees had resigned, circulating an account of the CFI's deficiencies in November 1981, calling for an investigation. This statement cited many facts: almost no work was being done at the CFI; the National Film Theatre had been closed for five months; *Film Canadiana* was months late in publication. In addition, it was alleged that the CFI had broken its corporate by-laws with memberships being unilaterally abolished in 1975; no Annual Meeting was held in 1980, and on and on.

The most rivetting piece of information estimated the accumulated debt of the CFI at an astounding sum of \$180,000 as of April 1981.

As things turned out, I didn't get to interview Frederik Manter, and Judith Crawley (CFI President in April) side-stepped not very neatly. Since no one would meet me and answer questions, this safari resulted in a few notes about contacts and a list of unanswered questions.

First, the contacts.

Tuesday, April 13:
Telephoned Frederik Manter at CFI at 9:30 a.m., but he was not in. Manter returned the call, but I was unable to get back to him.

Wednesday, April 14:

Called Manter at home at 8:15 a.m. but no reply.

Called CFI at 9:30 a.m., to be told that Manter was out of town for the week.

Called Judith Crawley, CFI President, and left message on answering machine.

Crawley returned call. She launched into a long explanation, the gist of which was that my letter to Manter (a simple request for an interview and for a list of current CFI Directors) had been discussed at an Executive meeting the previous week. It had been decided that only Manter and Crawley would see me, and together. However, I had not been available the previous day, and Manter was now in Montreal for the rest of the week.

I pointed out that my letter to Manter was dated April 2 and there had been ample time for him to let me know he would be unavailable. Crawley then suggested that any interview would be more informative after the Annual Meeting in May. I then asked who the present CFI Directors were, as I couldn't find a list. Crawley told me there were 15, but the Board had "permission" from the Minister of Communications to increase this number to 21 the next Annual Meeting. I enquired as to how these people were chosen, and she said they were "nominated." I asked "By whom?" and who was entitled to vote for them, and Crawley then stated: "I don't want to give an interview."** I pointed out that I was only asking for facts.

She continued with a few remarks to the effect that I had been around a long

** I finally ended up going to the Corporations Branch in Hull, Que., to read the Canadian Film Institute file and look for a list of current directors.

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time and I must know that it took a long while to "recover". She then said it had taken "Frederik a long time to recover after the last debacle"...

Crawley added that Manter was "terribly busy" with financing and reorganization. I asked, "What reorganization?", and she replied that it had been going on for over a year - long before "we were asked to streamline", and when the people left last year. (The distinct impression at this moment was that Piers Handling *et al* were let go in a streamlining measure).

She also said Manter was working on the Animation Festival and its financing, leading to my immediate enquiry, "Is Kelly O'Brien the Festival Director this year?" Crawley confirmed she was, but that Manter had promised to help her. As an aside, I asked if it was true that Manter would not be at the French Embassy reception at the National Library, preceding the Abel Gance opening the next day, which was a CFI benefit. Judith laughed and said, "Well, yes, but Frederik is *terribly* busy."

Thursday, April 15:

Lunchtime call from Frederik Manter, who was apparently in town for a few minutes. He was aggressively pleasant, and laughingly brushed off the fact that Judith Crawley had informed me the CFI Executive wished the two of them to see me together.

He launched into some remarks about the CFI being sued by a group of former employees, so he couldn't say too much, then went on to the CFI reorganization "to get away from the public trough," and the intelligence that the National Film Theatre was closing because it was losing money. I managed to interpolate a query as to what the CFI was going to be doing.

Off and running again, Manter said its Library had been moved to Mississauga (Toronto), that this had been a high priority, and it was sharing facilities with others. Asked to define the Library, Manter said that it operated under a contract with the National Research Council and only distributed science material, old films and films of historical significance. "We don't want to compete with the private sector." Income from films rented was \$150,000, about 60% of which is required to operate the Library, with the balance going into acquisition of new 16mm films, and tapes. The Library moved February 1, 1982 and, when asked who had been informed of this major change, Manter said that notices went to all CFI customers. The CFI would continue to maintain an office in Ottawa.

Rattling over points like an express train, Manter mentioned the possibility of a Documentary Film Festival next year, and said that *Film Canadiana* was two years overdue. In January 1981, he continued, the Film Commissioner put together a meeting with the CFI at which Manter's position was that, if the CFI was to continue as it had been doing, it would require more funding from government. If this was not forthcoming, it would have to eliminate various things. Manter then averred that the CFI had its "first deficit last year since I have been running the money end." Following this meeting, Reta Kilpatrick (Assistant Film Commissioner) told him that the CFI should be a much "reduced organization with specific rules not covered by government." From that day, the Board's Executive instructed Manter to do this. "That is why the Library was moved and "we are getting

out of the record-keeping business."

An IMAX theatre in Ottawa is apparently an ongoing project, with Hamilton Southam working closely with the CFI, and funding to come from the private sector.

During this fifteen-minute avalanche of P.R., I was hard-put to get in a word or two, even though much of the above was obscure, even to me. I finally said that I had to have a personal interview to ask many questions about reports of the deficit; about secrecy of operations and decisions of the Board and its Executive; about how people were elected to the Board, and more. The call ended with Manter promising to call me when next in Toronto.

At the French Embassy reception, preceding the opening of the Abel Gance benefit for the CFI, Sam Kula (Director of the National Film, Television and Sound Archives) jocularly enquired what I was up to. He had that day received three 'phone calls asking why Pat Thompson was in town, and why was she asking a lot of questions? I remarked that anyone with whom I had communicated had been made aware that I was gathering information for a *Cinema Canada* article.

I was also introduced to Judith Crawley at the reception. She was pleasant but nervous, and right out of the blue said she hoped I understood her position, because she had been "instructed" by the Executive not to talk to me alone...

Wednesday, April 21:

Manter called from Ottawa and would be in Toronto April 29 and 30. He wanted to take me to see the CFI Library in Mississauga adding, "I don't think I gave you enough over the phone in Ottawa." I indicated I would be available at any time during his two days in Toronto.

Thursday, April 29:

Manter telephoned and left a message - he's still in Ottawa and won't get to Toronto today.

And there everything grinds to a halt. Not a word from Frederik Manter since that date.

Snippets of information have percolated through about the CFI and its operations - or lack thereof. A news release was put out by the Federal Department of Communications under date of May 31, 1982 (see box).

Omitted from the release is that the National Film Board of Canada has agreed to purchase contract services from the CFI during the early part of the 1982/83 fiscal year, up to a maximum of \$60,000. Add this to the grant and get \$185,000 - not bad going in a recession.

What does this mean? Has a foot been placed on the Film Commissioner's neck; has he been manoeuvred into this contract? The specific mention of "the early part of the 1982/83 fiscal year" appears to ensure that cash will be in the NFB coffers and available to the CFI.

A comparison between the Federal news release and some of the remarks made by Manter in his telephone conversation of April 15 indicates a gap between federal comprehension of the CFI's functions and what it is *actually* doing - or not doing. The National Film Theatre has gone; *Film Canadiana* may perhaps see the light just once more; the publications program is abandoned; what "contract services" will the NFB purchase from the CFI? With Manter running the Library of films from Mississauga, why is it necessary to have an office in Ottawa, and, if it can be justified,

The good news

Dear Mr. Manter:

Some time ago you wrote to me, requesting financial assistance from this department to help reduce the Canadian Film Institute's long-term accumulated deficit. I am pleased to inform you that I have approved your request for a one-time contribution of up to \$125,360.00 to your Institute for this purpose. A cheque in the amount of \$125,360.00 will be forwarded to you under separate cover upon receipt of the signed copy of this letter.

I am approving this contribution on the understanding that you agree to respect the following terms and conditions: this one-time contribution is made to the Canadian Film Institute to reduce its accumulated deficit and, following the close of the fiscal year, but not later than May 31, 1982, the Canadian Film Institute will provide to the department an audited financial report for the previous fiscal year. I reserve the right to audit the accounts of the Institute to ensure that funds provided were used for the purpose intended. The scope, coverage and timing of such an audit shall be as determined by me. The audit, if conducted, may be carried out by my agents, officials or employees.

If you are in agreement with these

conditions, would you please have this letter and a copy thereof signed by the authorized officer of your organization and return the copy to me.

You will also be pleased to know that the National Film Board of Canada has agreed to purchase contract services from your organization during the early part of the 1982-1983 fiscal year, up to a maximum of \$60,000. I hope that this assistance, in addition to the contribution being made by my department, will enable you to place the Institute on a sounder financial footing during the coming year.

I have noted with interest your recent correspondence with the Deputy Minister of Communications with respect to the quality of service to both official language communities and would encourage the Institute to take any action necessary to ensure an equal and acceptable quality of service to Canadians of both official languages.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you and your associates best wishes in your activities.

Yours sincerely,
Francis Fox

The press release

Communications Minister Francis Fox today (May 31) announced approval of a special one-time grant of \$125,000 to the Canadian Film Institute in order to help reduce its deficit.

"For the past 46 years, the Canadian Film Institute has provided the major alternative to the commercial theatre chains for film distribution and exhibition," said Mr. Fox. "For these reasons, it must be considered a national institution of vital importance to the Canadian film industry."

In 1980-81, the Institute loaned nearly 10,000 films to universities, community colleges, medical schools and other educational institutions across Canada.

"The Institute also plays a significant role in promoting the study, appreciation and use of film as an educational and cultural medium in Canada and abroad," added the Minister. "It provides up-to-date in-

formation on every film produced in Canada, and has published many books on Canadian films and filmmakers. Its International Animated Film Festival is the most competitive and important in North America."

"This special one-time grant is intended to reduce the Institute's deficit and constitutes a recognition by the government of the Institute's important contribution to Canadian film both now and in the past," said Mr. Fox. "I have every confidence that contribution will continue in the future."

"Last year, Institute management undertook an extensive reorganization and began to contract out many services such as book publishing and film distribution," said Mr. Fox. "These measures, along with federal support, should put the Institute well along the road to financial recovery."

does Manter journey endlessly between the two, rather like a filmic Flying Dutchman?

And where does all this lead to? A waste of money and a dead end? My overwhelming feelings are of frustration, sadness, rage, dissatisfaction and revulsion - not necessarily in equal parts.

The CFI Board met on June 30, 1982 in Mississauga, and there are now twenty-one Directors and a new President - Harry Gulkin. However, once again, no information has been issued about decisions at this meeting, or a list of the new Directors and their qualifications. When is the film community going to learn how the CFI will operate in the

future, after its massive debt has been liquidated? Let me make a few predictions.

The International Animation Festival is being held in Ottawa, August 13-18 this year - it only occurs every other year, and is about the only visible sign that the CFI is alive. It is well-organized and run by Kelly O'Brien, who is devoted to its preservation. Frederik Manter helps her, but in what capacity it is hard to see. However, Manter will be front and centre at the National Arts Centre during the AnimFest, while O'Brien will, as usual, slog away cheerfully remaining in the background.

The CFI Manager will stage a press conference or other 'event' to present a new-look CFI with its new President

and 21 Directors during the festival. And all sorts of wonderful things will be announced - all within the atmosphere of euphoria created by one of the most friendly specialized festivals in Canada. No one will ask awkward questions to spoil the lovely summer film mood... so I'll ask them now.

- How can the CFI justify its existence as a *film institute*, when it has no National Film Theatre programs in the capital city or across the nation, no archives, no reference material?
- Why does the CFI need 21 Directors to run such a small organization?
- How are the CFI Directors nominated and by whom?
- Why were CFI memberships wiped out, thus cutting off support by people who cared about non-commercial film in this country?
- Why does the CFI need two office locations?
- If the CFI needs a distribution presence in Toronto, why doesn't it need one in Montreal too?
- If, as Frederik Manter has said, the CFI wants "to get away from the public trough," why does it maintain an office in Ottawa?

- Why does the Federal government give a special one-time grant of \$125,000 to reduce the CFI deficit - what makes the CFI so special above all other film activities?

- How did the past Directors let a deficit rise to such olympian heights - what about budgets, financial statements, management, forward planning?
- Why did Frederik Manter, Executive Director of the CFI for at least six years, fail to realize the extent of the CFI deficit and warn the Directors?
- What "contract service" is the NFB going to receive from the CFI in return for a maximum of \$60,000?
- Will the CFI make public its annual audit, which must now be concluded, as the fiscal year ends May 31?

Any CFI-watcher can go on and on with questions including, in my opinion, the really big one. Why wasn't the CFI allowed to fold quietly? Its present truncated form does not fulfill the functions of a film institute, and it would have been cheaper for the taxpayers, too. Maybe Manter fights so hard to keep the CFI head above the waves in order to keep his job - in these hard times it is understandable, but not laudable in this case.

A letter to Cinema Canada

"The recent decision of the Minister of Communications to award a special one-time grant of \$125,000 to the Canadian Film Institute (CFI) appears to have been misinterpreted by some sectors of the film community. I wish to clarify the matter.

"The CFI has long enjoyed close cooperative relationships with the Government of Canada and its related film agencies. It has provided valuable services, consistent with its mandate as a film institute, over a period of 46 years. For the last 7 years the Institute carried the burden of an accumulated deficit of more than \$100,000. Efforts at self-imposed economy in cultural organizations create their own internal problems and the CFI was no exception in this regard.

"The combination of overall constraints in cultural funding over recent years and the severe fluctuations in interest rates last year frustrated CFI efforts to handle their deficit and maintain their programs. The cost of carrying the deficit became insupportable and there were no further practical internal economies that could be made; at this point the Executive Director ap-

proached the Minister of Communications for assistance.

"Overriding considerations in our examination of the CFI situation were the undoubted contributions of the Institution in the past and its future potential, as a continuing resource to the film industry in Canada. These considerations and the present difficulties made it clear that if assistance were possible, then it should be provided. This was the basis of the decision made by the Minister. Mr. Fox indicated that the grant was special and specific to the retirement of the CFI deficit and a recognition of the CFI's past and potential contributions to film in Canada.

"The Institute is now free to develop ongoing sources of support for itself and its programs, untrammelled by the burden of a major deficit. I cannot imagine why anyone would wish them other than the best of luck as they tackle the difficult tasks ahead."

J.A. Ouellette
Director General
Arts and Culture Branch
Cultural Affairs

A statement

The Canadian Film Institute is unable to provide material to Cinema Canada to complement the article on the Institute which we understand is being written by Mrs. Patricia Thompson and published in this issue.

As most people know, the Institute has just emerged from a period of extreme financial difficulty and attendant internal strife.

At the recent Annual General Meeting held on June 30, 1982 an earlier CFI Board decision to increase the Board both in terms of its constituency and regional representation was carried through. The expanded Board will be meeting for the first time on 13 August 1982 to discuss and approve

the reorganization of the Canadian Film Institute with modified goals and objectives, the result of extensive discussion and work over the last several months.

Until the new Board has had the opportunity to consider the plans and proposals for the future of the CFI, it would be neither proper nor prudent to make these public.

After the August 13th meeting, the CFI will welcome any expressions of interest in the statement it intends to make.

Peter Mortimer
Vice President
Canadian Film Institute

"Misleading and erroneous..."

The following letter was received in response to one printed in issue 86 of Cinema Canada and entitled "Complaints to register."

Dear Ms. Grossman:

Your letter of June 11, 1982 has been reviewed by members of the Toronto Super 8 Film Festival Committee and by others present at the event.

We wish to draw to your attention that your letter is both misleading and erroneous.

First the letter claims to represent two filmmakers who requested information and submitted films in advance of the Festival instead of one. It should be made clear that you alone and not your companion, who co-signed the letter, was involved in this respect. The facts are as follows:

1. You requested and received the Festival's newsletter and entry form, copies of which are attached hereto.
2. You repeatedly telephoned the Festival Office in advance of the event inquiring about accommodation in Toronto for yourself and your companion.

3. On May 14th you mentioned on the telephone that you wished to enter a film. The Festival Director advised you to send your film immediately by overnight express in order to be received in time for the jurying as the final entry date was May 20th.

4. Your entry, postmarked May 17th, was received by the Festival Office on May 27th by which time it was much too late for viewing by the Jury. (Extensions had been made up to May 23rd for late entries.)

We note that your letter falsely indicates that you received information to the effect that "all films would be screened at the Festival regardless of jury selection." This is contrary to the Newsletter and has never been a practice of the Festival in its seven years of operation. However, films not selected by the Jury could be screened by the filmmaker under "Open Screening" in an area designated for this purpose as outlined in our newsletter.

In reference to your treatment at the Festival we would like to set the record straight.

1. Upon arrival at the Festival you demanded that your films, although unseen by the Jury, be included in its Programmed Screenings.

2. The Director kindly arranged for two Jurors and Mark Mikolas, author of *The Super 8 Handbook*, to view your films in a personal screening attended by yourself and your companion.

3. Your films were given a rating of 4 to 5 out of 10 by the two Jurors (7 being the lowest score of any film selected for screening in your category).

4. The Jurors and Mark Nicholas discussed the shortcomings of your films with you and suggested that you attend the Jury Nomination Reel Screenings to view the prize-winning film in your category as it happened to deal with the same subject matter as your own.

5. According to our information you showed no interest in benefiting from the suggestions made at your personal screening and made no arrangements for an Open Screening of your films.

6. Following your personal screening the Director and other members of the Festival administration received several

telephone calls from yourself and your companion demanding that your films be included in the Programmed Screenings and threatening to publicize your discontent.

Your widely distributed letter of June 11, 1982 is a deliberate attempt to harm the Festival by discrediting it with false information. Contrary to the contents of your letter the Festival is an international event. This year it received and processed 246 film entries from ten different countries. Five different countries were represented by its Workshop Speakers and its Trade Show included technical experts and manufacturers' representatives as indicated in the program. Half of the people attending the Festival were from outside Toronto, one third of these being from the United States.

The Festival Committee and the Administrative Staff take exception to the type of behaviour displayed by you during the event and to the contents of your letter referred to above. The Festival is for the benefit of Super 8 filmmakers in general and we are not prepared to sacrifice its integrity when faced with threats and abuse from particular individuals.

Richard H. Hill
Festival Chairman
The Toronto Super 8 Film Festival

No breakthrough for best film

The following letter is addressed to Wayne Clarkson, director of Toronto's Festival of Festivals; a copy was sent to Cinema Canada. For a review of the film in question, The Breakthrough, see Cinema Canada No. 85.

Dear Mr. Clarkson:

I am writing this letter on behalf of Peter Williamson and Ira Levy. Although they are currently on location in Ecuador I have spoken to them by phone and they were anxious that I should immediately express to you their disappointment and sense of frustration on learning that the Festival of Festivals has rejected their documentary film *The Breakthrough*.

Despite receiving the 1981 Bijou Award for the Best Independent Production and despite being purchased in July last year by CTV, *The Breakthrough* has yet to receive a public showing. The producers felt however, that at least they could look forward to seeing the film at the Festival of Festivals since it must qualify on three counts - as a first rate Canadian film; as an independent production and as a film which, despite its critical success, few people have had the opportunity to see. They were dismayed to discover that these weighty qualifications did not equal the seemingly inconsequential fact that a corporation (Commodore Computers) funded *The Breakthrough*.

Does this mean that the Festival of Festivals would have turned down an opportunity to premiere *Reds* because it received financing from Gulf and Western? or *Quest for Fire* because of the Royal Bank's involvement? Does the Festival of Festivals really only ever show films funded by private investors

(cont. on page 36)