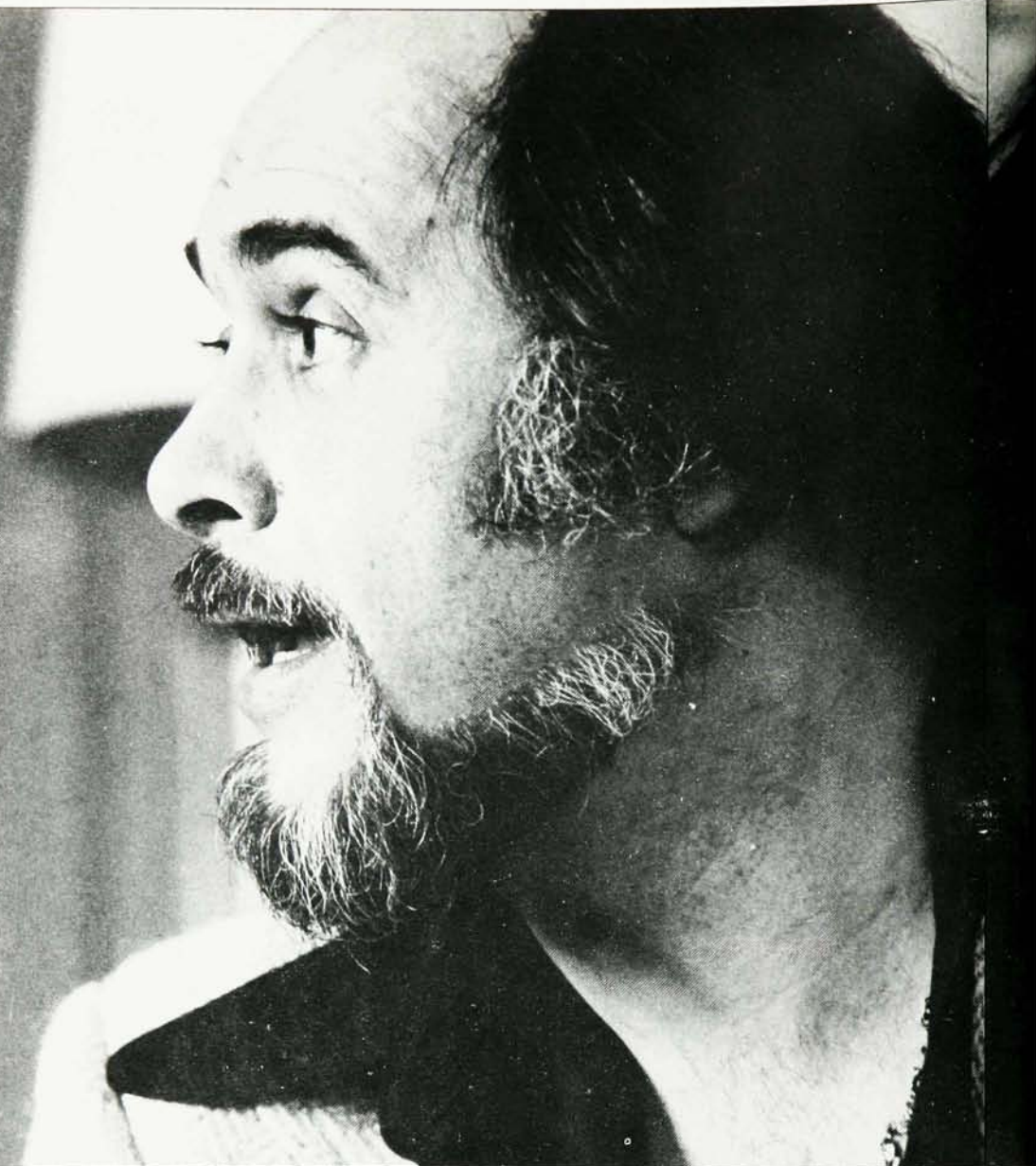


BLOOMFIELD



— A. Ibrányi-Kiss

Child Under A Leaf — written, directed and edited by George Bloomfield. Produced by Murray Shostak and Robert Baylis, Director of Cinematography — Don Wilder, Music composed and conducted by Francis Lai, Art Director — Jocelyn Joly, Location Sound Recordist — Henri Blondeau, Assistant Directors — Sunny Cullen, John Fretz, Maury Chaykin, Assistant Cameraman — Rick Maguire, Production

Manager — Stan Schwartz. Starring: Dyan Cannon, Donald Pilon, Joseph Campanella, Albert S. Waxman, Micheline Lanctot, Bud Knapp, Bess Bloomfield and Julie Bullock. Potterton Productions in association with Ethos Productions, with assistance from the Canadian Film Development Corporation.

(Interviewed by Stephen Chesley and Á. Ibrányi-Kiss.)

How has "Child Under a Leaf" been received?

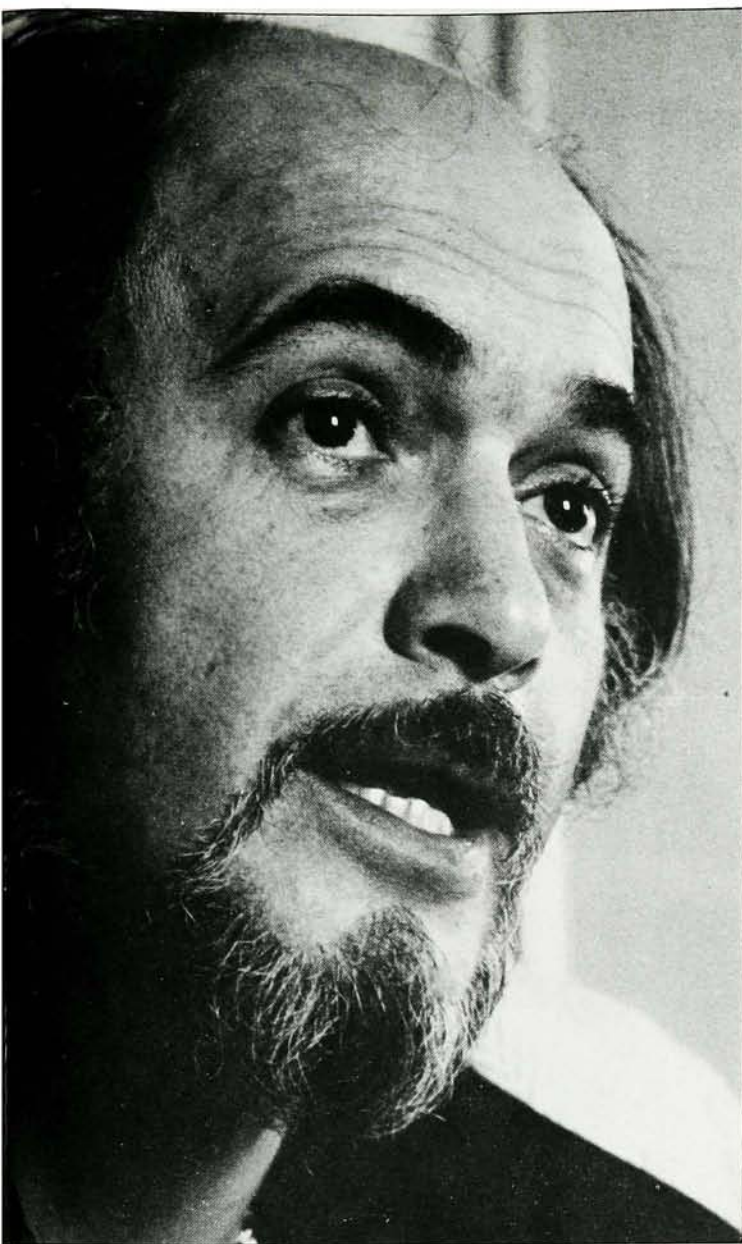
It's a strange thing. It's had a mixture of reactions, which has really surprised me. I thought if anything, it's one of those pictures that would have a generally sympathetic reaction. It has gotten some violent reactions in a number of people! Most women have responded well. It's a very romantic film, I think. But men, very sensitive men have responded very well, but men who also may be sensitive but who are nervous in their relationships with women, men who are a little uneasy about man/woman roles and, I suppose, men who are nervous about their wives — it's amongst those men that I have had very violent reactions.

That probably has a lot to do with the fact that your film is obviously from the point of view of the man — who is depicted as being very sensitive towards women. That has become

unusual in the wake of films like **Clockwork Orange**, **Easy Rider**, **Straw Dogs**, **Last Detail**, **Carnal Knowledge**, etc. — all films which have reacted against the Women's Movement.

The film is from Pilon's point of view, you're absolutely right. He represents the fantasies of what a lover would be in the minds of an awful lot of mature women. He has that sensitivity, that virility, but at the same time he's not a bull. That could very well be what makes some men very nervous seeing it.

There's certainly nothing controversial about it — it's a very simple film. We're talking about human beings and certain set of feelings between human beings. If you start dealing with the plot line of **Child Under A Leaf**, it's the same plot line you might find in soap opera. There's no question about it. It's true the emphasis goes entirely the other way, but the



situation occurs in exactly those circumstances. We look at it and say, "Isn't it obvious that the man should be wealthy and have a nice home?" But isn't it also true that the man is wealthy and has a nice home? A number of people have said, "Why doesn't she leave her husband and go to this guy if she really loves him?" How many people do you know who are absolutely miserable in their marriage? Why don't they leave?

It's strange because we live with that all the time. Yet, when it's put into a film, people ask those questions. The truth frustrates. People want a specific answer because they don't know why *they* don't leave and they hope to get an answer in the film. They don't get that answer, but maybe they see a mirror reflection of what they're doing with their lives and hopefully, that will give them the answer.

Why do we stay in situations we absolutely hate? We really hate being in our jobs, or we hate being with this other person. Yet we invite this other person over to our house – or we *live* with this other person. And it goes on and on and on. Why don't we stop that? That really has a lot to do with what the picture is about. Why don't we act on what we want to do? If we love, why don't we live out that love instead of living out the frustrations and masochistic things we do to ourselves to avoid dealing with it and taking our chances if necessary?

Haven't you been in that situation – where you couldn't do what you had to or wanted to? Where your situation seemed hopeless?

It's certainly not the way I live my life. I wouldn't do what those people in my film do – I did once. I was involved in something not unlike what the story is about. That's where the story came from. But I would never do it again. It's too destructive a force. I've taken a number of chances with my life. The day when I feel I've stopped taking chances is the day I'm going to feel I'm starting to get old. Getting old is being afraid to take chances anymore.

Your first film, "Jenny", certainly took a lot of chances . . .

I guess I was lucky to be asked to do *Jenny* at the time. Martin Lavut and myself rewrote that screenplay and it ended up being a slightly more sensitive film about that woman. I was very fortunate to be able to influence the producer with it, because it was a first film. That had a lot to do with the fact that Marlo Thomas loved it and wanted to do it and she was his name star at the time. Stars have a tremendous influence on what you're able to do as a director when you're working in the American film industry. That's a fact.

It's interesting that both these films have lead dramatic roles for women, which has become increasingly rare since the 1940's. Why aren't more scripts written with major female characters?

I think it's because there are more men writing scripts than women. . . . But one of the things you have to recognize is that the pictures which actually get done *get done* not because some sensitive writer has written a terrific script and a fine director comes along and says, "My God! This is a terrific script! Let's do it!" There's this other character involved, called the producer, who has to get the money. And that guy usually has a lot of opinions and usually they're not quite as sensitive as that fine writer and director. They're based more on, "Who's going to see this? Is this a grabber?" A lot of those things get involved when it comes to the nitty-gritty of actually making it happen. I suspect there are probably a lot of terrific scripts about women that aren't being made because a producer doesn't think it's going to be box-office.

Did you have any of those problems with "Child Under A Leaf"?

It was a different thing altogether because I had a producer who was enthused about making the same film I wanted to make. *Child Under A Leaf* was a script I wrote about eight years ago, just prior to leaving the CBC. It was sold to a Hollywood company a week after I wrote it and I had an option to direct. They came up with a package with a good name star who I couldn't see in the part, at all. I lost my option and they paid me for the script. Then, I guess, their money fell through and that script sat on a shelf down there for about seven years.

When I first got together with Murray (Shostak), I gave him a screenplay I had just completed – along with a number of other things including *Child* – so he could see where my head was at. He came back and said he liked my screenplay but he really loved *Child Under A Leaf*. So we bought it back and then I rewrote it completely. It irked me that we had bought it back, because the only things that remained the same were the characters and the title. The dialogue and the situation had to be changed because of the seven year gap. A lot of things had changed . . . but Murray Shostak happened to love that piece and supported me all the way. I didn't have any conflict in terms of whether it will be a box-office success or not – that's something we both have to live with.

How do you feel about directing material you wrote?

One of the things I try to do is to abandon the writer the moment I begin directing. When I've written it myself and I'm directing, I don't hesitate to slash it whenever it's necessary. I find myself cursing the writer when it's me . . .

What does Bloomfield the writer get cursed for most often?

Very often, he's excessive with dialogue. He sometimes doesn't recognize the fact that once the image is there the words aren't necessary. I think that's true for a lot of writers who are writing for film today.

Prior to film, you had an impressive career at the CBC — what made you leave?

After four years of 90-minute drama, I was gradually using videotape very much as film — I was shooting on one camera and editing as I would a feature. This procedure was not too practical within the Corporation setup, they don't really have the facility for it, and I'm remembered for that activity to this day! But I suppose I was preparing myself to make feature films, and when the opportunity came along, I took it.

As a person, I'm fairly competitive. By that, I mean I need to feel surrounded by people who are doing work that is better than mine. This sounds very immodest, but I felt I had reached the point, then, where I was doing the best work. So I decided to get into an environment where people were doing better work than me. That was the year after all the people who were better than me had already left! Or most, because there were one or two very good ones who stayed for reasons of their own.

But people like Jewison, David Greene, Kotcheff, myself — when we left the CBC, we didn't leave to go into the film industry here because it was non-existent. A lot of us are coming back now because it's starting to exist. I can't really speak for the others, but I suspect their motivations were very similar.

You recently taught the Directors' Training Course at the CBC — how did that come about? Have you ever done this kind of thing before?

I have never done anything such as that before, but when the National Theatre School first began, I taught there for two years. I came into this course at a late stage. I happened to be passing by and went to see some old friends at the CBC. I was there for five minutes when I was pounced upon and asked to conduct this training course. When they told me who the people were, I thought it might be a rather stimulating experience. Also they had asked me to do a television drama, and I hadn't done any for about a year, so I thought it might be a good idea to train these guys and get back into doing television that way.

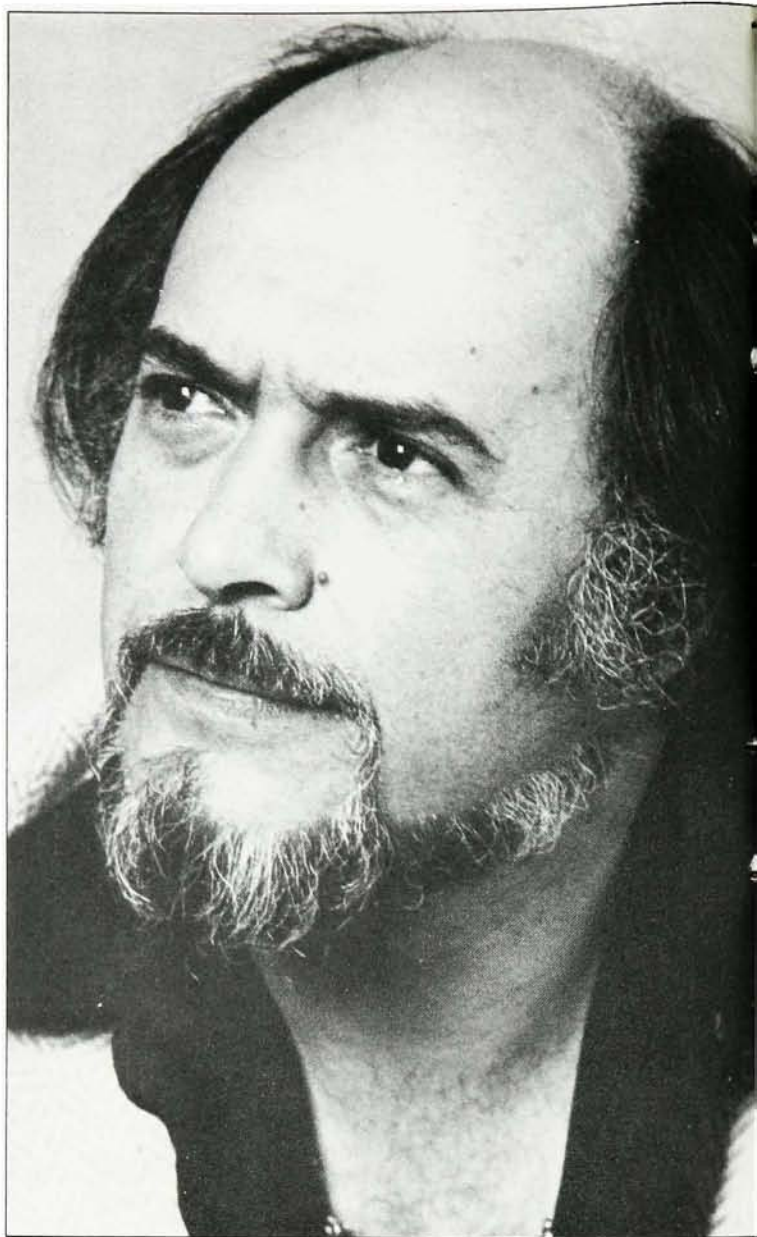
Specifically, what did these directors lack most?

Confidence. The greatest thing you can give anybody dealing with self-expression is confidence. It's very vague whether you're going to reach anybody else when you're about to express yourself. You're in a very vulnerable position.

I assumed, and rightly so, that I was working with talented and experienced directors who knew how to work with actors and how to interpret drama. They had done mainly theatre. My job was simply to bridge the gap between their work in theatre towards being able to select a sequence of visual images.

Weren't any of the directors from a film background?

There were a couple . . . Deborah Peaker and Tim Bond have done more film. It's a reverse situation there — they needed more exercise in working with actors. They already had image selectivity going for them. Deborah, for example, is also very, very good with actors. She has a built-in instinct for it and I suspect Tim also has that. But even for them — they're used to shooting film. They're not used to the four-camera system. That's a whole different thing. I found that myself, after the luxury of the past eight years of carefully fixing one camera precisely where you want it and having the time to light that set-up perfectly — to suddenly controlling four cameras floating around the floor and getting into each other's shots and having to settle for general lighting because you have to light for all four of them . . . that's quite a shaking experience!



One of the strongest criticisms of Hirsch's approach has been that he's bringing in everyone from theatre. He doesn't think our filmmakers know anything about actors or directing. The composition of directors in that course seems to bear that out. What do you think of Hirsch's policies?

To go back for a minute — when that whole group of directors left the CBC years ago, the producers and directors for the Drama Department had to come from somewhere. So they came from other, totally unrelated departments, because they knew how to operate the booths. The fact that they didn't know how to control actors or put together a piece of drama led to that department's demise. It explains why Hirsch takes the attitude that directors don't know anything about actors or drama. As a generalization, it would be wrong to say that none of our filmmakers know the first thing about actors. But certainly a lot of them don't. What training have they ever had with actors? They may have some instinct but a lot of them don't know the first damned thing about drama and they're doing feature films! It might seem like an over-reaction on his part, but Hirsch is taking a strong, definite approach. His approach is to go back to theatre, find people who at least begin with the knowledge of how to put drama together, and see if they have an instinct for working the cameras.

It seems to me it's easier to learn how to control cameras and select shots than how to deal with people and get performances from actors and evaluate material. That's Hirsch's approach right now, and I think it's correct. I can understand his saying, "It's all shit" in order to try to start somewhere and make it better. That's perfectly valid. Hirsch is shaking up that institution!

Have you seen the changes?

I feel them within the Corporation, within the Drama Department. I don't see the results yet, but there hasn't been time for that to happen. Shows we are producing now are not going to come out until next season. Hopefully, that's when you'll see the results.

Is there anything terribly controversial I can answer for you?

Do you feel any obligation to work within the Canadian film industry and help it get off the ground?

No. I'm happier when I have an opportunity to do it here because I feel I'm contributing something more than just doing another picture. But do I feel an obligation to fight to try to make it happen in Canada? No. I'm a director. I'm not a politician and I'm not a businessman. To me, that's secondary. I have no energies to waste on that. Doing a film is more important than straightening out a country's attitude towards a business. That's all it is.

I've had an opportunity to do one for Canada, and I hope to hell it does well so that it helps the industry. I'm happier doing it here because that means that the business world, the government, and the attitude of this country towards an industry is ready to support my contribution. I am therefore ready to support theirs.

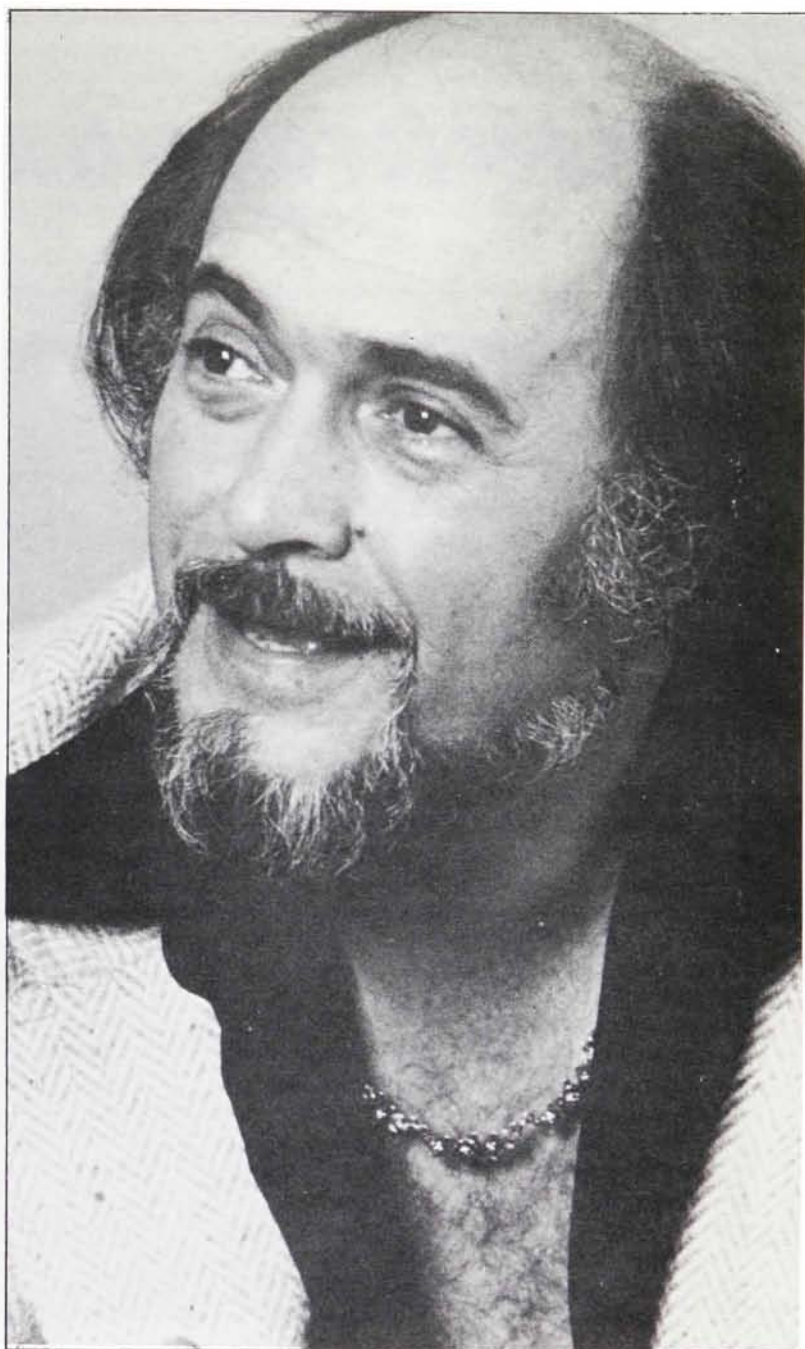
I don't think it would be difficult to get Canadian financing for Norman Jewison to make a movie here. It's probably more difficult to get financing for Bloomfield to do a film here, so why the hell should I hang around? When we all get this attitude, and go and make films everywhere else and start winning reputations elsewhere — then the industry is going to have a real boom. Why shouldn't I go away and come back with a reputation that makes financing for me to make a movie easier? And it's easier for me to do that elsewhere.

We're talking about the same end. We want to make movies. Businessmen want to make them to make money. We want to make them because that is our means of expression, our livelihood. I'll direct anywhere I can.

How does the state of the Canadian industry look to you?

The big thing we've got going for us now is the CFDC. The CFDC is in a position to do a hell of a lot of good, but in certain areas they're behaving in a totally stupid fashion. They try to evaluate the script and the business people involved. They'll give money to a tough producer because they know he'll bring that film in On Budget, On Time. And they end up with a pile of shit that was brought in On Time. A director and a producer have to come in together. If that relationship is not good, nothing is going to happen. The CFDC should look at who the director is and who that producer is — it's none of their business what is being made. They put as much money into skinflicks and straight exploitation flicks as they put into something that might be good — so who the hell are they to create a standard? That's bullshit!

They fancy themselves as business agents. They're not. Their survival is as touch and go as the rest of us, and they're not filmmaking oriented. They do a very clever thing in order not to have prejudice on script reports — they take the name of the director and writer off the script and hand it to somebody who says (and we had comments like this on one of the reader's reports for *Child* . . .), "I'm sorry but I've never done this before, but I'll try since you're paying me to do it." That is absolute idiocy! If Fellini or Truffaut came to me and said, "Here, I want to direct a telephone book . . ." I'd say,



"Let's get money! I've got Fellini!" You know? I can watch a Truffaut or Fellini film and make a rapid decision to become a tailor, because I feel there is so much further to go when I see something of theirs. I came out of seeing Bergman's *Cries and Whispers* thinking, "Possibly a tailor, maybe a carpenter. . ."

