



*The state and/or/of Canadian cinema:*

Canadian cameramen in Has anybody here seen Canada?

## A debate around "The Cinema We Need"

Since its apogee in the Second World War, the role of the state in Canadian film production has been little more than a long series of compromises stemming from the refusal to directly address U.S. theatrical domination. Two years ago, with the Canadian Film Development Corporation's remarkable name-change to Telefilm and the creation of the Broadcast Fund, the state abandoned a lukewarm 15-year commitment to Canadian feature film production. Instead of theatrical film, the emphasis now shifted to Canadian television production on the grounds that reaching some portion of the 20% of the Canadian audience that watches Canadian-owned television was preferable to the 3% of the film-going audience that gets to see Canadian cinema in the U.S. 'domestic' market. And the industry, with the exception of outraged Canadian distributors, simply followed the new course set by the money.

Behind such sudden reorientations, of which this was only the latest (the post-war reduction of the NFB, the creation of CBC-TV, the miraculous rise of the Canadian feature in the NFB, the creation of the CFDC, the announcement of the CCA each mark earlier, equally important, ruptures) lurk underlying questions about the nature of Canadian audiovisual production that remain all too often confined within narrow divisions (feature/experimental, theatrical/broadcast, production/distribution) and are rarely the subject of discussions outside each specialized domain. Beneath the con-

fusion of the "Canadian cultural crisis" has been established the permanent situation of 'divide to conquer' that is produced when the state changes policies like its bureaucrats change their ties, producers wear themselves out scampering this way or that after money that appears and disappears magically, filmmakers try to maintain their sanity as genres rise and fall, and audiences, blissed out on 'choice', zap their way through an endlessly proliferating, but identical, landscape of media-product, most of it American. Somewhere along the line, the reason for all the activity in this country, namely Canadian culture and its manifestations, political and actual, is fragmented beyond recognition. And it's the same situation in those factories of the Canadian intellect known as universities, where a professional class of thinkers ponder, among other things, questions of cinema. For if it is true, as no less a luminary than Northrop Frye has alleged, that nothing has happened in this country in the last 50 years of the slightest interest *outside* the university, the scant attention given to Canadian cinema there is not exactly heartening. Nor perhaps is it surprising that one of the consequences is the almost total absence of any kind of dialogue about Canadian cinema or television within the public-at-large.

Now it may be that the basic absurdity underlying Canadian culture has simply become so general that the best that can be expected (as the state's retreat from the idea of Canadian film

development to television films suggests) is the preservation of a tiny market share within an openly continental (media) culture. This would suggest, however, that the Canadian cultural project has become largely museological, akin to a comatose body kept alive by the respiratory machines of the Canadian state in a grim hi-tech piece of installation art that is a vicious satire of Canadian culture. In the absence of outspoken voices to the contrary, it is tempting to conclude that the Americanization of Canada meets with the almost universal quiescence of government, public, university, media and film industry alike. If in T.S. Eliot's famous poem, the hollow men at least went out with a whimper, the tragedy of Canada's 'last men' would be that they couldn't even manage to do that.

Well, at least one artist-filmmaker was able to deliver a roar of objection that got itself into print in *The Canadian Forum* last winter. Bruce Elder's "The Cinema We Need" was perhaps the death cry of Canadian cinema or, as Elder would argue from the sole surviving tradition of an authentic Canadian cinema (its avant-garde, a much-abused term that in the Canadian context at least rediscovers something of its original meaning), an urgent, timely warning amid the prevailing amnesia that, yes, there is such a thing as Canadian cinema.

Because Elder's "The Cinema We Need" was in effect the first manifesto a Canadian filmmaker has ever produced, it seemed an occasion to radically re-awaken a debate around the

state of Canadian cinema that was buried in the rain of dollars of the capital cost allowance. For the first time, Canadian experimental cinema openly challenges the traditions of 'mainstream' Canadian feature film and this has led to a kind of critical discussion around Canadian media-forms that we do need. Or such is the hope of the present debate: that it will lead to others.

So Peter Harcourt and Piers Handling, the two principal expositors of the best in Canadian thinking about the Canadian feature film, were invited to comment on "The Cinema We Need." Bart Testa, president of the Film Studies Association of Canada, provides the context that situates "The Cinema We Need" in the Canadian philosophical tradition of cultural resistance on the one hand and the European avant-garde on the other. Elder responds to his critics. Cinema Canada associate editor Michael Dorland suggests some points of reconciliation. And, finally, critic Geoff Pevere brings the discussion back to earth by raising the (repressed?) issue of the Cinema we got.

The debate that follows, then, is occasionally abstract, is offered provocatively in the hope that there are still thinking bureaucrats, producers, filmmakers, or politicians, left in this country for whom the question of 'What is Canadian cinema?' can cause something other than complacent boredom - even inspire wonder whether or not we ever seriously took the trouble to inquire.

# So, what did Elder say?

by Bart Testa

So, what did Elder say when he wrote that piece for *Canadian Forum*? Lots of things, some of them open to complicated interpretations. But, first, we might want to know how Elder came to say what he said and this involves several circumstances.

The piece that appeared in the February *Canadian Forum* under the title "The Cinema We Need" was originally the artist's "statement" Elder wrote to accompany grant applications to the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for his new movie, *Lamentations*. The slightly edited *Canadian Forum* version appeared in a special section devoted to Canadian cinema along with articles by Gary Evans, Brenda Longfellow and Geoff Pevere. The magazine's regular critic, Robin Wood, took the month off and there is a tale here that, I believe, affected the tone of all but one of the pieces.

Once upon a time, until three years ago actually, *Canadian Forum* had a rotating chair that was held by a changing group of film critics that included Peter Harcourt, Kay Armatage, Seth Feldman, Joe Medjuck and others. They wrote often (but not always) on Canadian films. When *Forum*'s new editor, John Hutcheson, replaced Sam Solecki in 1982, Hutcheson canned this crew and installed Wood as the magazine's regular film reviewer. A distinguished academic critic who has written a whole shelf of invaluable film books since the mid-'60s, Wood is also a topnotch journalistic film reviewer who, in recent years, has done some really good things at *Body Politic* and *The Toronto Clarion* as well as at the *Forum*. Now Wood does not think much of Canadian films and writes about them less. He has explained why in the May *Canadian Forum* where he responded critically to Elder's "The Cinema We Need": basically, Wood does not believe in the project of

Canadian cultural nationalism, at least in the forms that project now takes.

Although I wish he would contribute more essays to the debates in Canadian cinema as penetrating as his "David Cronenberg: A Dissenting View" (which appears in *The Shape of Rage*, ed. P. Handling, Toronto, 1983), Wood's decision pretty much to ignore Canadian movies is his business. But this decision also has meant that in the three years Hutcheson has been running *Canadian Forum*, yet another outlet for writing on Canadian film has been stoppered.

The point is that when the special section ran in February, it provided a rare editorial window for Canadian film critics at *Forum* and the writers felt compelled to shout through it loudly. Pevere tried to nail down every male model movie in Canadian cinema; Longfellow crammed mentions of just about every feminist Canadian film of the last year into her piece. Only Evans was untouched by the others' urgent sense of the occasion, penning a trailer for his new book, *John Grierson and the National Film Board of Canada*. Naturally, it was a piece in praise of propaganda – just the cinema we need, right?

Carrying the monstrosity of experimental film into the critical procession, Elder delivered a manifesto. While Elder has indicated precious little talent for the strong rhetorical gesture in his writing before, this time he boiled over into belligerent accusation and prescription, regular moves in manifesto-writing and just the ticket for the ceremonies *Canadian Forum* unwittingly staged.

So much for the genre, what about the auteur? Figuring out what Elder said is partly a matter of whom the article addresses and who's doing the addressing. At first it might seem silly to divide up one man into two writers but there are at least two Elders: the avant-garde moviemaker of long films like *Illuminated Texts* and the academic critical writer of long essays on Jack Chambers and Michael Snow. These two Elders are the same man entertaining the same ideas but writing under two compulsions, using two different rhetorics, serving two different projects. In this instance, Elder was writing as an artist addressing



groups of his peers gathered in council to deliberate on the grant-worthiness of his film *Lamentations*. The decision to widen the readership of his artist's "statement" came later and at *Canadian Forum*'s invitation to submit a piece to their special section on Canadian cinema. No doubt Elder also must have noticed that his writing, usually so diffuse and tortured by qualification and academes, had come out of the word-processor with sharp contours and a pissed-off charge of indignation. In short, a manifesto.

Some of the qualities of "The Cinema We Need," I should add, were borrowed from George Grant. The opening nine paragraphs are written in unmistakable Grantian cadences; Elder's use of "technology" as his central critical idea comes pretty much straight from Grant's *Technology and Empire*, and the politics Elder invoked were Grantian through and through. Although Grant is hardly known among film critics in Canada (Wood, for example, utterly misses the point of the term technology for this reason), Elder knows the philosopher's idiom well, having already deployed it extensively through *Illuminated Texts*. It must have been impossible to resist singing the heavy sarcasm that colors his artist's "statement" for *Lamentations* through the vocal arrangements of the Canadian author best known for *A Lament for a Nation*.

Instances of the artist's manifesto – the broad, combative declaration of purpose, intention, aspiration and prescription for artistic practice – are almost unknown in Canadian film culture since the days of John Grierson.<sup>1</sup> Typical of manifestos everywhere, the actual topics taken up in "The Cinema We Need" belong not just to the practice of filmmaking but to a politic of culture and to the agenda of art itself. It is also typical of manifestos that Elder's article has set off a controversy between the artist and the critics, so far in this case, Wood, Peter Harcourt and Piers Handling, the latter two right here on the pages of *Cinema Canada*. Elder's article openly attacks Harcourt and Handling naming them as the best representatives of what he opposes;

in fact, these two critics are father (Peter) and son (Piers) in the discussion of Canadian cinema.

Harcourt, who has done more to provoke the best writing on Canadian film than anyone, has many sons among English-Canadian film critics and Elder is one of them. Even when Elder critiques Harcourt's positions, which he has been doing since the mid-'70s,<sup>2</sup> as a critic speaking *molto sotto voce*, there is obvious care taken to honor this father. As an artist, however, Elder is not at all one of Harcourt's sons, but a child of the avant-garde brought up by that extraordinary teacher, Gerald O'Grady. It was inevitable that Elder's filial piety for Peter would cross wires with his fierce commitment to experimental cinema since Harcourt holds no discernible conception of avant-garde filmmaking as a distinct enterprise and Elder is a strict sectarian. The flash-point came with the vast – and vastly successful – retrospective of Canadian movies at the 1984 Toronto Festival of Festivals. The programmes were coordinated by Handling with Harcourt, Armatage, Jim Monro, Ian Burnie and other critics lending a hand, including Elder who ran the experimental programme.

My own impression is that neither Harcourt nor Handling should have expected the accusations Elder makes against them in "The Cinema We Need" since the festival was, for them, a vindication of the one big happy family of Canadian cinema. But when I expressed that view of the proceedings in *The Globe & Mail*, Elder promptly delivered an angry reprimand to me over the telephone. It should have been obvious that Harcourt and Handling believed the bright light of Canadian cinema all resemble what Handling repeated called the "small personal film" in press interviews published around the festival. For those two critics, the narrative movies of the early '60s are the paradigm of Canadian filmmaking. Even when pressed, on one of the panels Elder organized to accompany his programme at the festival, Harcourt would not speak to differences between "independent personal films" and experimental movies. This distressed Elder and for reasons "The Cinema We Need" tried to lay out. Its writing came shortly after the Toronto festival.

Elder argues for one politic of Canadian film and against another which may prove to be a phantom without force or trajectory. However, in its present form, as a critical model of what Canadian film might be (even without explicit political articulation), that politic shapes those in Canadian film culture who count themselves on its Left. (On the Right, of course, we have the sinecured hacks and snoozers of the NFB and the usual gaggle of sleazoids who run the laughable "commercial industry.") Because they are the most thorough of Canadian film critics, what Harcourt and Handling have to say does have wide currency among the enlightened. One of the purposes of "The Cinema We Need" is to force open the articulation of the politic behind the model – Elder's tactic is to be frontal and abrasive. Elder takes "independent personal narrative films" and argues its political importance

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can bring experimental cinema under the critique of cultural "utility." But Elder does this all ass-backwards, by putting his political critique first.

What he says in "The Cinema We Need" is, 'Okay, bring on the critique - I'm ready to play in your park, so put 'em up. Elder insists the politics of Canadian filmmaking come out in the open, by arguing how the cinema he espouses has its politic. This, I take it, is why he starts his manifesto with a statement of the Grantian politic, that structures Elder's most mature work of art, *Illuminated Texts*.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, Elder's rhetoric of counter-critique serves not so much as a defence of his own movies as a preemptive strike. For the usual reasons artists write manifestos, he wants to map out and occupy - bunker, mortar and sand-bag - the intellectual ground on which he wants to fight.

Elder's argument rolls up the atoll of cinema by asserting that film narrative always articulates the technological view of time, of purpose, of experience. "Narrative is the artistic structure of structure of technocracy," he says. The already known is enfolded, the subject of the discourse is already mastered, perception is closed, thrown into a past and denied its problematic. What is so striking about this assertion is that almost everyone involved in serious film criticism believes some version of it.<sup>4</sup> This goes for critics who just shrug, those who seek to discern subversions in some movies (Robin Wood, for example) and those who, like Claire Johnston, have sought to forge new tools of analysis in order to chase down the political implications to their last reverse angle.

Not many critics would, however, agree with Elder's Grantian formulation of the argument that narrative expresses a technological view. They would complain that his philosophical terms of reference are politically problematical. "Too metaphysical for me," is the succinct way one young film theorist put it on reading "The Cinema We Need." That's fair enough as far as it goes. Nonetheless, I have yet to read an adequate critique of Grant's thought that leads easily to dismiss its adaptation to issues of Canadian culture out of hand. On the contrary, the writings of Arthur Kroker (e.g., *Technology and the Canadian Mind*, Montreal, 1984) indicate that Elder argues from a strong political and philosophical position. However, on the side of film criticism, no topic has been so vexed in the last 15 years as the articulation of just what the big problem is with narrative. Elder believes he has the answer, backed by a national tradition, his "cinema of perception." That proposal raises its own problems and questions no doubt, but let's get back to the specific burrs under Elder's indignation.

The point Elder wants to clarify about the relationship between Canadian movies generally and experimental movies in particular takes focus on Harcourt and Handling's loose treatment of "personal independent film." Elder charges that they would, if unchecked, appropriate experimental film to narrative cinema by using the idea of "new narrative." Elder rests his case on a reading of the way these two critics handle Canadian film. They are, he says, committed to a cinema that "shows us as we really are... and so

engenders, or at least reinforces, our sense of identity." If this realist position Elder attributes to Harcourt and Handling sounds familiar, it should. Everybody - well, almost everybody - promoting Canadian culture makes these kinds of noises, as readers of *Cinema Canada* will have surely noticed. More to the point, Elder believes Harcourt and Handling do not underline the differences between the scruffy naturalist movies of Owen and Shebib, the lyrical art cinema of Lefebvre and the experimental films of Snow when they write their accounts of Canadian film.

For Elder, all this is, so far, the backdrop whose design stands out in thick relief when he reads Harcourt or Handling and whose surface just got a bright new coat of paint, with a bit of big-time glitter, at the Toronto film festival. Centre stage now, though, is Elder's distress over the possibility that the critical appropriation of "new narrative", which Elder properly views as pseudo-avant-garde filmmaking, will be taken up by Canadian critics as a way of rejuvenating the tradition represented by Owen, Jutra, Shebib and that bunch. On one side, the critics want a return to art-films; on the other academic publicists for "new narrative" claim to be waving the banner of experimental cinema. Canadian critics have been passing a decade praising mediocre Canadian feature films using the tools of an outworn auteurism while standing knee-deep in the ruins of a realist theoretical scaffolding. The history of their critical project culminates in *The Shape of Rage* (1983) and the bulging middle-section of *Take Two* (1984). Surveying this critical terrain from the gay hot air balloon set aloft at the Toronto film festival, Elder has cause to worry Canadian criticism as a whole could catch the "new narrative" virus now epidemic among younger, academically trained Canadian film critics. Elder believes that, if the contagion catches on, everyone will be coughing up the opinion that - now! today! this week! - experimental film means "new narrative" movies and "new narrative" movies means a re-birth of Canadian cinema.

So, what will happen then? Nothing interesting will happen with Canadian cinema but, according to Elder, the avant-garde cinema represented by Snow, Rimmer, Razutis, Hancox, Wieland, Hoffman and, well, Bruce Elder, will appear to be an irrelevance of dubious ("too metaphysical for me!") political significance. Elder's response is to dig in and maintain the traditional strict opposition between narrative films and experimental movies, that opposition marking the spot where Elder really wants to fight it out.

Harcourt and Handling answer Elder's charges against them on their own realist/auteurist turf but their articles in this edition of *Cinema Canada* don't effectively move to his ground. I'm pretty sure that Elder has correctly stated what is at stake when his peers sit to deliberate over a grant application for a film like *Lamentations*. I'm less sure he does more than this. Elder's combative statement is not for him an airy abstraction but an urgent address made in the middle of an activity of film criticism, the granting process, that has the most serious consequences for an artist. And, as an

artist, Elder lives by his opposition between narrative and experimental filmmaking and his manifesto explains why he, at least, continues to make that choice.

I also think there are reasons to take his warnings seriously, if not whole hog. The critical confusions that attend "new narrative" films and the foolish try at moving Canadian art-film from its shrunken domain to the tiny island of experimental cinema probably do conspire to damage the further possibilities of the best avant-garde cinema being done in Canada. This will benefit no one, least of all the feckless filmmakers who want to make movies like *Low Visibility*, a perfect and sad example of what comes of such ill-considered sideways motion, as Elder fears and predicts.

Let's sum up and see how the controversy around "The Cinema We Need" shapes up, and shapes our reading of that text. Wood, I think, believes the cinema we need must come inside an accessible popular moviemaking that draws the viewer into his "nation", the community of those who resist the dominant capitalist-patriarchal ideologies. And, for Wood, Elder writes like an authoritarian. Harcourt believes the cinema we need tells Canadian stories, reflects Canadian lives, in short, expresses/creates an identity that he associates with Canadian culture. And, for Harcourt, Elder writes *religiously*, like an impractical mystic who just doesn't know what the score is. Handling slyly sees Elder as re-summing the prescriptive proposals of John Grierson, not in content but by genre, casting Elder as someone both authoritarian and at least moralistic. Handling's position is close to Harcourt's but his is a more historical and film-historical sensibility and his critical writing serves an "archeology" of Canadian film tradition.

These critics all come from and are still committed to kinds of film work that can be called auteurist/realist/sociological, with the accents falling on different sides of sensibilities at different times. In my view, Harcourt and Handling can (and do) provide ammunition for the practical battles on arts councils and at film festivals and they serve the cinema they think we need, or are mostly likely to get if we're lucky, as academic publicists modelled on early *Cahiers du Cinema* and early Andrew Sarris. As a critic, Elder is not so different in the purposes he serves, as Harcourt correctly mentions in his response to "The Cinema We Need." What is different, of course, is the canon of films Elder's criticism serves to exfoliate and to publicize, and that changes everything about the kinds of film criticism Elder practices, and makes for the differences on display in the current controversy.

But "The Cinema We Need" is not really criticism at all but a manifesto in which Elder tries to put the experimental cinema at the centre of Canadian film. This prompts reasonable people to ask who's cinema can this be? Harcourt and Wood answer by drawing on the perfectly obvious truth that that cinema will never belong to a *sociologically* significant audience. Harcourt probably has Elder dead to rights when he lashes out with, "To

offer a theoretical argument to cultural bureaucrats, to the guys who pull the strings of cultural practice in this country, is to commit an act of suicide." Sure as shootin', they won't know what Elder is talking about. As you might imagine, bureaucrats are less likely to know George Grant, even in Tory Ottawa, than film critics are and, if they did, they could hardly be expected to embrace an essay like "In Praise of North America" as a basis for Canadian cultural policy.

So, what else is new? You think sociologically and you don't think like an avant-garde filmmaker or a Canadian philosopher. What could be more obvious? But film critics don't have to think sociologically all the time and everywhere and experimental filmmakers almost never do. I bring up Grant again for two reasons. First of all, he is a crucial Canadian philosopher and has taught us much about the kind of imaginary Canadian Tony Wilden cannot teach us. Grant is also a curmudgeon. So, I hasten to add, is Bruce Elder. But it is precisely the job of the philosopher and the avant-garde filmmaker to serve as points of resistance to the dominant discourses, if you will, in the sense Michel Foucault describes the matter. This has been the case since the 1920s with Delluc, Epstein, Vertov, Eisenstein and Kuleshov; it doesn't change 40 years later when you come to Conner, Brakhage and Mekas, and I don't see any reason to be annoyed now, 60 years later when, locally, you come upon Razutis and Elder. More, that Elder takes up Grant at the same time he moves to the high ground of "The Cinema We Need" is doubly traditional for an avant-garde manifesto. Elder owes the style of his gesture to a whole history of attacks on narrative and on its high valuation within a sociological film criticism, the history of avant-garde film theory and criticism. And he owes his local color and politics to a philosopher who upholds the political-ethical distinction of Canada by articulating how the nation can occupy a point of resistance, however weak it might be, against the technological empire.

It is embarrassing that film critics like Harcourt and Wood do not acknowledge these rather transparent features of "The Cinema We Need" before attacking Elder. They attack him personally. They see in his text not an artist making an artist's big noise for his kind of art but only a nefarious ambition. Nefarious because Elder's politic does not accept their sociologies, ambitious because he dares to say what artists should do. These critics have read Elder poorly when they could be reading him well and cutting him four ways to next Tuesday.

There is a personal side to "The Cinema We Need," in fact an auto-critique. Harcourt declares "more recently, certainly in this last article ("The Cinema We Need"), his theoretical work has been designed to justify his own filmmaking activity." Harcourt is mistaken. The cinema Elder proposes is to be a "cinema of perception" and will not be concerned "with ideas" and will not be a "narrative" cinema. Well, we have not yet seen *Lamentations* but all of Elder's major work - *Fool's Gold*, *The Art of Worldly Wisdom*, *Illuminated Texts* - is obsessed with ideas and thoroughly

narrative in design. Elder's mature cinema could hardly be called a cinema of perception, though it longs for such a cinema just as Elder the critic lingers over the films of Chambers, of Snow, of Brakhage. These filmmakers are the ones making the movies Elder himself needs. The kind of cinema they have made is the kind he aspires to make and, so far, has not made. In the themes Elder's recent films take up and develop he tries to discover how he wound up in a spot where he cannot make the cinema he needs; in his manifesto he tries to imagine what that cinema would be like were he – or anyone else – able to make it. This, too, is a Grantian gesture; to call up the image of idea of that to which one aspires and cannot attain now. It is also the gesture of the unhappy modern Romantic, a figure stricken with memories of the future he imagines, the frantic, frequently abrasive, rather funny figure who writes our manifestos.

#### NOTES

(1) I think Piers Handling takes this up in the present issue of *Cinema Canada*.

(2) See, for example, Elder's "On the Candid-Eye Movement," *Canadian Film Readers*, edited by Joyce Nelson and Seth Feldman (1977), pp. 84-94.

(3) This is, in turn, why I take it that anyone who wants to argue with "The Cinema We Need", the text of an artist, must also be prepared to argue with *Illuminated Texts* and do so in political terms. Peter Harcourt's article in this issue of *Cinema Canada* indicates this is the case but if the article does not engage in the argument it, I hope, prefigures. I would guess *Lamentations* will also be of interest in this regard. What Harcourt misses when he says Elder's films are becoming more philosophical is that the way they are becoming more philosophical is political.

(4) Elder utterly despises (or professes to despise) Stephen Heath but, at the broad level of current film theory isn't *Questions of Cinema* really in the same universe of critical assertions as this sentence by Elder: "Narrative first creates and then reconciles discord"?



by Piers Handling

Bruce Elder's "The Cinema We Need" is the first theoretical manifesto of principles to have appeared in English-Canada since John Grierson laid down his views in the '40s. Coming as it does from one of our most prominent film thinkers, both at the level of practice and of theory, it needs to be taken seriously, especially at this point in time when Canadian cinema seems to be standing at yet another crossroads in its history.

Yet, Elder's proposals, despite the eloquence with which they are argued, must be countered and questioned in a variety of ways, from the assumptions that he makes, to the conclusions that he draws and the cinema that he proposes.

It almost goes without saying that Grierson has been the most important aesthetic influence on the way our cinema has evolved. The tradition of realism that Grierson spawned was vital for its period. It gave us the freedom to explore the social, cultural, and occasionally the political and economic reality of our country while establishing an indigenous style of our own. It served its purpose but, like all theories, it was specific to a certain historical period and its usefulness was, or should have been, consigned to those times. Like all theories, it needed to be challenged, built upon, used, and then ultimately transcended, synthesizing into something else. Filmmakers in Quebec understood this dialectical process and perhaps as a consequence their films grew in stature as a result of this dynamic. In English-Canada, a similar debate did not occur and perhaps our cinema has been the poorer for it.

Much of the recent debate in contemporary film criticism has centred around the question of realism, a debate that has particular relevance for Canada because of the overwhelming documentary tradition in our art. Elder is right to foreground this issue and posit it as problematic. Certainly it is beginning to assume a position of centrality in my own thinking on Cana-

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## The cinema we need?

dian cinema, and ironically I agree with many of Elder's conclusions in this regard, although he ascribes to Peter Harcourt and myself the position of being the defenders of the "realist" cinema. This accusation I find puzzling, for nowhere, to my knowledge, have I assumed this position. I may have written on filmmakers like Don Shebib, Bill Fruet, Gilles Carle and André Blanchard but never in any prescriptive way, and those directors whose films I have recently examined – Derek May, Mike Rubbo, Larry Kent and David Cronenberg – all trouble the realist surface, contest it and situate it as a problematic. But, at the same time, Elder also maintains that Harcourt and I are proponents of the New Narrative, a form that deliberately calls into question realist conventions.

This, however, is not the primary focus of Elder's piece, nor should it be, and I would like to confront that. Elder, throughout, seems to be simultaneously afraid of the present, yet determined to give it a place of centrality in the cinema he proposes. There is a strong element of *passéisme* to Elder's article, a hatred of the technical/managerial, of what he thinks we have become, of the present. He even cites Adorno to emphasize what we have lost, and Milton as an example of the enduring past. Indeed, much of Elder's analysis of our technological society could have been written a hundred years ago by someone warning of the dangers of the industrial revolution. And Elder's sense that we have been dispossessed of "that realm known to the ancients, the realm of mystery and wonder" carries overtones of a late nineteenth-century romantic sensibility confronted with the evil machine age. So much of Elder's article is defined by a sense of loss. Things have been "vandalized," "commercialized," "hijacked," and "pillaged." Surely, if anything, we must learn to take the new technologies and adapt them to our own purposes. We live in a technological society whether we like it or not, and there is nothing we can do to reverse that reality, in the same way that we live in an atomic age. We cannot ignore technological changes; we can only learn to control them and use them to our advantage.

But, if there is a fear of this technological present, there is also a fear of fruitful intercourse, of a mingling of forms and strategies and a desire to erect barriers, to mark off the avant-garde from the New Narrative, to dismiss narrative, to create something pure and untainted. On the one hand Elder criticizes the New Narrative and its breaches of the conventional as having "little lasting value, for what seems unconventional one day, often becomes a cliché the next," while proposing a cinema of the present that presumably avoids these clichés – as if art and the forms it takes is somehow timeless. Is this what is important to art, that it simply endure? This idea that there are unchanging standards with which we can judge "art" has surely been undermined in the past decade, and the question of good or bad has tended to become an irrelevant question.

Narrative he discards as a form, but his objections to the New Narrative I find weak. He argues that Harcourt and I view the New Narrative film as a revitalization of the "Canadian Art Film" after the dark years of the capital cost allowance. While I have great admiration for the films made here between 1962 and 1974, I do not think it possible, or maybe even desirable, to turn back the clock and recreate those times. As Godard noted at the end of *Prénom: Carmen*, the days of the personal film are dead. That historical period has passed; we have entered into another and our films must reflect that change. It doesn't mean that I don't value some films that are independent and personal but I don't feel that the future lies here, in the same way that I don't think Godard is as central to our experiencing of the world now as he was in the '60s.

Elder objects to the New Narrative in two important ways:

- These films are still fundamentally narrative. Narrative in Elder's world is a falsification of experience that conceals more than it reveals, that essentially closes off the world and suggests that experience is ordered, rational, explainable. To speak against Elder, all art is a falsification of experience. No art that I am aware of can replicate experience. Furthermore, if New Narrative is narrative, it

also calls this ordering into question, subverts it, troubles its surface, creates ambiguity, often denies the notion of closure, and by so doing forces the viewer into a position whereby s/he becomes the active producer of meaning.

• Elder does not believe that "self-reflexive strategies used in some forms of avant-garde filmmaking can be comfortably accommodated within story-telling forms or that they serve important ends when used in that context... Such breaches of convention have little lasting value, for what seems unconventional one day often becomes a cliché the next." What are these "important ends" that remain unspecified? Again we are back in the domain of Milton and "lasting value" as if there is some imaginary standard against which art can be measured. Elder's statement denies the historical specificity of art, the fact it speaks to a particular set of historical, political and economic realities, and espouses the notion of an art that transcends this specificity. Is this the art of the present that Elder argues for so vehemently?

Let us take a look at the cinema that Elder proposes, a "cinema that can deal with the here and now," "a form that will immediately present the coming into presence (that is, the formulation) of present experience." He describes the terms of this cinema as follows:

1. "A cinema not of imagination but of perception... we must cease to impose ideas on experience... we must rid art, and ourselves, of self-consciousness." Surely this is impossible. What is art but a re-ordering of experience that automatically infers a degree of self-consciousness? The only artists to escape this are either the naive or the primitive. Is Elder proposing that we turn back the clock to try and rediscover a lost childhood of perceptual art free from social influence? His own films both impose ideas on experience and are self-conscious; they are certainly amongst the most intricately mediated and philosophically sophisticated art works currently being produced.

2. "The cinema we need will be a cinema of perceptions, of immediate experiences. It will not be a cinema of ideas. Like narratives, ideas are formed only after the fact, serve only to represent what is already past." All of experience, except the microsecond of the present, is in the past. Film, because of its photographic base, is an art form that exclusively preserves what has passed, the past, and nothing else. Formally, this is a restriction of the medium. At the level of content there is a possibility, obviously, of orienting us to the present and the future, but Elder talks little of content, being far more interested in the formal properties of the cinema we need.

3. "The form will have to allow for multiplicity and contradiction... The attempt to dispose of contraries-in-experience is due to reason and perception." Perhaps this is true of science, but historians and artists, social scientists and philosophers have been aware of the hermeneutical principles of their disciplines that allow for the unresolvable, the unexplained, the paradoxical. This does not negate a desire to order one's perceptions, in the way that Elder has

done in his article, in an attempt to interpret the world and further understand its contradictions.

4. "In order to be true to the commitment to reveal the process by which events come into presentness, this form of cinema we need will reveal the process of its own emergence into being... The development of such a piece of cinema through time will be like that of totally improvised jazz..." Surely, this is an idealistic impossibility. Improvised jazz is one of the few forms that does indeed meet the requirements Elder desires, but film, because of its formal properties, can never represent the present in the way that improvised jazz can. And revealing the process of its own emergence into being sounds distinctly self-conscious.

5. "Our cinema should be profoundly rhythmic." Is this not a self-evident truth that defines the properties of most (not all) films as rhythms fundamental to film editing and structure?

6. "The cinema we need would be rooted in the place where we have our being. But where we are, always, is in language... It will not be a purely visual cinema, will not be a cinema against the word, but a cinema of the power of the word." How can one engage in this kind of practice without, to use Elder's words, imposing ideas on experience, being self-conscious in our art, both of which he regards as anathema?

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Apart from the strong drift towards a kind of mysticism, a desire to cleanse art of the rationality that imposes order and hence supports the present technical/managerial system, "the cinema we need" is perceived entirely in terms of formal principles. This formalist solution is the most limiting aspect of Elder's argument, despite its obvious fascination. When the form that art takes assumes a precedence over everything else there is a very real danger of isolating that art form, I would hesitate to say "reality", but from the daily intercourse of human life. This is not the first time that a formalist argument has been made. Its impulse is legitimate. We must find new forms of saying things to counteract the old way of perceiving the world. Experience, as Elder points out, is not reducible in the way that most films present it to be. It is far more complex, it is infinite, closure is a lie, etc. But does the formalist position provide a solution? It holds an obvious fascination for the film theorist, but it has resulted in increasing marginalization and thereby isolates itself from the very audience it is trying to educate. Joyce's experiments with the novel in *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake* marked an end; not a beginning. The formalist filmmakers of our times - Godard, Straub/Huillet, Duras, Syberberg (not to mention Snow, Brackage, etc.) - work in the margins and reach relatively small numbers of people, an intellectual elite. I value these filmmakers and their work but is this the *only* cinema we need?

Any piece of prescriptive writing opens itself up to an entire range of objections: Why only one cinema, one form and not a multitude of cinemas, of forms? Why exclusion and not

divergence? What I fear is that Elder is functioning from a defensive position where he tries to erect barriers between the avant-garde and New Narrative and narrative to preserve the purity of one particular cinema, one specialized form. In this way Elder wants a cinema that withdraws and detaches itself consciously from other cinemas, that defines itself in opposition to these cinemas. Is there any room in "the cinema we need" for a feminist cinema, a native cinema, a political cinema, that might want to employ different structuring devices? It is hard to tell because Elder, unlike Grierson, completely and no doubt consciously, ignores all questions of content. Is it enough to make films that are formally correct or should they not address themselves to the central ideological questions and events of the day: the representation of women, the absence of certain people and classes from our screens, the nature of the "hidden reality" that ideology obscures in modern society, etc.?

I do not intend to say that we need a cinema that deals with the nuclear issue, pornography, unemployment, abortion, the new technologies, native people - although these are all important and contemporary problems and I would hope that people would make films on these issues - because that would be slipping into a prescriptive trap. No, there is no *one* cinema that we need and there is no *one* form we need to contain our cinema. Hopefully, there will be a plurality of forms which call into question the dominant ideology, the accepted way of looking at the world that surrounds us.

If the cinema is to be a tool for change or function as a medium that re-orders our way of looking at the world it cannot be an elitist cinema. Its power is as a mass medium and it has to address itself to the general public. If the dominant form within cinema is narrative, we can't simply turn away from it, condemn it as impure and discard it as Elder wants to do. Narrative, on the contrary, has to be confronted head-on, as any form of colonization has to be faced, examined and transcended. Working within narrative obviously results in compromise and the danger of co-optation but at least it provides the possibility of assuming a centrality within the current debate that is otherwise abdicated. If we, as a culture and a film community, don't want to be confined to the margins, we must address this issue. Narrative, because it is so closely attached to pleasure cannot simply be dismissed. It has to be subverted from within, in the same way that technology has to be given a human face and harnessed to what we want it to do for us. As soon as technology, or narrative, is seen simply as the enemy we are lost and will just find ourselves plugging a leaky dam with our fingers.

I do not mean by this to dismiss Elder's vision of the cinema we need, but I would like to point out that it may well be a cinema we need but it is not *the* cinema that we need. I would like to see the avant-garde continuing to make films and am not proposing for a minute that we only make narrative or New Narrative films. The avant-garde and its innovations will always be valued and its experiments incorporated into the mainstream. This is also the history of art (and I might add,

civilization) and should not be perceived in negative terms as Elder does, but positively. This is how an art form or a culture remains healthy and progresses, by incorporating the ideas and inventions of its experimenters into the general fabric of society.

Apart from the theoretical questions raised by this debate, there is another realm of practicalities that Elder completely ignores: the pragmatics of an industry, the communications reality of 1985, the question of whether people will want to see this cinema, will understand it and want more. The '80s have not looked kindly upon experimentation in the arts. This doesn't mean that filmmakers should cease experimenting. What it does mean is: if this is what they want to do, they should be aware that audiences will be less receptive to these innovations. I lament this fact and wish it was not so but this too is the reality of 1985. On the other hand, to throw a positive light on things, experimentation flourishes in rock videos, a form that is becoming increasingly popular.

The one thing we must do now is deal with the practical reality of what we as a culture confront, of what it means to live in this society in the '80s, of how this society functions and expresses itself. I see little evidence of our filmmakers grappling with these questions although there are distinguished exceptions. Our women's cinema appears to be the most vital and engaged at this moment, the cinema the most connected to the present, but this should come as no surprise because women are currently asking the most pertinent questions about their role in society and the cinema reflects the health of this debate.

This raises another point. No matter how much I would like to believe it, I do not think that the cinema can have a potential to change society in any significant way. Films will not prompt people to want to alter their environment in any appreciable way, to "overcome this will to mastery." This will to change comes from an accretion of factors, of which the cinema is one of many and certainly not the most important.

It also strikes me that the cinema is no longer the pre-eminent art form of our time, that it no longer holds a position of centrality within our culture in the way that Elder by implication assumes it does. The zenith of the cinema's achievement has been reached, the creative people who really want to deal with the present will gravitate not towards the cinema but towards video in its many manifestations. As Louis Malle recently remarked, the only people who go to the movies anymore are teenagers on dates. Questions like "the cinema we need" will become increasingly marginal as films relinquish their hegemony in the visual marketplace.

However, the image industry - cinema, video, television, commercials - will always be important. An understanding of how these images are made, what they say, what they represent, what they reveal, what they conceal, is a vital undertaking. The image industry we need would, I hope, address these issues and situate them within a recognizably Canadian cultural, social, political, economic and physical landscape.

# Politics or paranoia?

by Peter Harcourt

"The Cinema We Need," Bruce Elder's article in *The Canadian Forum* (February, 1985) while challenging and insightful, confuses a theoretical debate with a political position and embodies assumptions that have to be confronted.

To begin with, Elder's comments concerning the Canadian retrospective organized for last year's "Festival of Festivals" in Toronto: to what extent can any retrospective advocate a cinema for the future, the cinema we need? Are not all retrospectives condemned, by their very nature, to present the cinema that has been achieved? And did not this particular retrospective allocate 50 hours in one of the four theatres reserved for the Canadian product specifically for the presentation of "experimental" films? Was this innovative programming covertly designed to facilitate the "sacking" and "pillaging" of the experimental product by less imaginative filmmakers seeking to resuscitate their moribund narrative structures? Indeed, do *Sonatine*, *La femme de l'hôtel*, or *Le jour S...* display traces "hijacked" from *Wavelength* or from *Illuminated Texts*? To use Elder's own words to ask these questions is to underline the false assumptions that deform the tone of Elder's latest article on Canadian cinema.

The conceptual confusions embedded in this article can perhaps best be dealt with by positing the need for a variety of levels within cultural discourse and for an equal variety of assumptions about the production and consumption of art.

Take the problem of "realism" in the cinema. While the urge to use of medium as "naturally" as possible may well condemn the art work to the past tense and to the apparent naturalization of those aspects of the past that have been represented for our attention, has not this urge been an aspect of all cultures and civilizations since the beginning of speech? Is not the

impulse to tell stories and to listen to the stories of others both a primordial human need and a chief agent of social bonding? Has this not been so since the time of Homer through to Margaret Laurence? And without it, would we – as a social entity – have any sense of ourselves at all?

What I have always enjoyed about this impulse towards naturalism, especially in the cinema, is that it can never really work. Whatever the "intention" of *Nobody Waved Goodbye*, it cannot convey to us today the sense of "how things really are" but of how things were once imagined to be, of how they were felt by a certain group of people in a certain place at a certain time. And by what order of moralistic logic must we assume that such a work suggests that "the present order of things cannot be transcended"? I have always assumed that naturalism in the cinema suggests exactly the reverse: the present order of things must be transcended. Of course, it doesn't tell us how!

Furthermore, the passing of time systematically *de-naturalizes* the most naturalistic cinema. As codes of dress change along with codes of speech and behaviour, attentive spectators become more aware of the strategies of construction than they are of the "authenticity" of the moment of capture. Seen nowadays – largely because of its editing strategies, its "structured absences" – *A Married Couple* has as much in common with Sartre's *Huis Clos* or with Bergman's *The Silence* as it does with Rossellini's *Paisa* or with Zavattini and de Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*, those supposedly classical models of a "realistic" cinema.

I have always felt that Roland Barthes posited a somewhat specious distinction between "writerly" and "readerly" texts: while it is true that the "writerly" text remains irredeemably writerly – one has to work at deciphering *Finnegan's Wake* or *The Art of Worldly Wisdom* – one can choose (if one wishes) to work at deciphering a wide range of "readerly" texts. One can "read" *An American in Paris* as the vehicle for American cultural imperialism as much as we have been encouraged to "read" Donald Duck.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, I am arguing more on a sociological than on a theoretical



level; but my insistence would be that this level of social discourse also has validity – depending on whom you are arguing with and on what you are trying to achieve. Discourse does not take place solely on the theoretical level, especially discourse designed to intervene directly within the political arena. Any form of suasion must be cast in the language that the people with the power to effect change will be able to understand.

To offer a theoretical argument to cultural bureaucrats, to the guys who pull the strings of cultural practice in this country, is to commit an act of suicide. Furthermore, if we are going to talk about the cinema we need, surely it cannot be *only* the experimental cinema. If, with our limited economic resources in Canada, we should turn away from narrative and devote our energies solely to developing a cinema that "will use non-causal, non-teleological forms of instruction and will not attempt to arrest time," then on a political level we have completely surrendered our right to what we might call our narrative sovereignty, our right to tell our own stories about ourselves in our own way.

When I think about what kind of cinema we need, I would argue for *all* kinds of cinema. We need our own TV sit-coms, our own rock videos, our own dramatic features, both in the theatres and on television; we need to nourish and protect the distinguished "minimalist" tradition of narrative filmmaking in Quebec such as we find in the works of Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, Denys Arcand, Jacques Leduc, André Blanchard, Mireille Dansereau, Paule Baillargeon, and even, with *Sonatine*, Micheline Lanctôt (this is *not* "new" narrative: it has been going on for 20 years). We even need our own industrial and educational films; but of course we also need to nourish and protect our experimental filmmaking.

As Elder has argued, experimental films do address problems and complexities generally beyond the reach of most narrative films; but they often address them in such a way that only a specialized group of people can properly understand. If experimental films might be seen as salvation in some way from our technocratic, managerial

world, then they could provide salvation only for the very few.

Nevertheless, Elder is right to worry about the moral health of our society and he is equally right to stress the important role that culture can play in assisting us to understand what it is in life that might constitute the Good. Since it is so much at the base of his own artistic practice, I don't want to confront the religious emphasis that Elder places on rediscovering "our wonder at the gift of things, at what should be the wonder of wonders, that things are given"; nor do I wish to ask for greater specificity about what these "things" are that are given, nor by whom or to whom. I would, however, like to examine the logic around which Elder organizes his argument.

Elder begins by collapsing "technique" into the U.S. and then proceeds, to collapse "narrative" into "technocracy." Narrative, according to Elder, "eliminates the unmanageable ambiguities and the painful contradictions inherent in experience." From such a reductive description of narrative, which restricts to a single model an immense variety of organizational strategies, it is not too difficult for Elder to conclude that "narrative is the artistic structure of technocracy." "The cinema we need," he continues, "the cinema that combats technocracy, will, therefore, be non-narrative. It will not be animated by a rage for order – and order's concomitant, concealment."

But wait a minute! Did technocracy devise narrative, to use it for its own ends? Were there not stories long before there was technocracy, certainly long before there was a U.S.? And is this all that is going on in *Madame Bovary*, *Anna Karenina*, *Middlemarch*, and in *The Diviners* – a "rage" for order? In fact, has not Roland Barthes shown us how, through a series of intricate readings, we can find the concealed text within the ordered text? And isn't it an axiom of literary studies that the greater the novel, the greater the play might be between order and concealment, between the "manifest" and "latent" meanings of the text?

This hermeneutic activity is the very stuff of reading and thinking, of seeing and feeling, this continual play with texts – whether "readerly" or "writerly", closed or open, narrative or non-narrative, naturalistic or formalized. Some texts, of course, are more challenging than others, and some are of greater value. But to argue that a certain form of cinematic practice is "the cinema we need" while another form is "dangerous" is to imply a theoretical totalitarianism that must be resisted.

Were Elder's argument to be taken seriously, where might it end? Would there be public burnings of all copies of *Nobody Waved Goodbye* and of *Goin' Down The Road* and of all the published work of Harcourt and Handling? I hope that Elder wouldn't go that far. At the same time, his repeatedly emotive vocabulary implies a personal "rage" that seriously distorts his discussion of the issues he is dealing with. It seems like the rage of a paranoid, of someone who feels he is insufficiently appreciated, who is fearful of being stolen from, and who is increasingly intolerant of any form of artistic, critical, or theoretical practice that is different from his own. Now

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this kind of "concealment" may, in fact, be "dangerous" because so unacknowledged by the writer himself.

Yet buried within this latest piece of Elder's is an intricate and insightful theoretical argument. Elder is actually contrasting multi-textual non-narrative, non-teleological filmic strategies with more conventional forms of cinematic closure. The cinema that Elder is celebrating (which, since he offers no examples, seems largely to be his own) is a cinema of becoming rather than a cinema of having been; and I agree with Elder that this kind of cinema is immensely important within the realm of theoretical activity for those who have the leisure and the training to appreciate it.

What troubles me is that Elder makes no distinction between the political and theoretical realms and that he has to privilege this "poetic" practice over the more "prosaic" practices of other artists, railing against them and their expositors – Harcourt and Handling – as if they were "dangerous." It is, however, as I have argued, this confusion of discursive levels plus the prescriptive insistence on only one correct for filmmaking for the nation which, were these arguments listened to, would be dangerous.

Elder's cinema is an intensely inward cinema. It involves increasingly an exploration of different states of consciousness and of the relationship of the self to culture. It is, in essence, a philosophical cinema.

Elder's theory, too, has been enormously important. Almost single-handedly he initiated a debate about the types of filmic practice that characterize filmmaking in this country;<sup>3</sup> and he has written a definitive account of the essential characteristics of the Canadian avant-garde.<sup>4</sup> More recently, however, certainly in this latest article, his theoretical work seems designed largely to justify his own filmmaking activity, making it seem monocratic and self-serving.

There can be no cultural health for any nation without a more pluralistic approach than Elder will allow. *We do need Elder's cinema* and, as Canadians, we can be proud that it was created here. At the same time, most of us want to watch other kinds of films at the movies on Saturday night and on television on Sunday. It would be fine, it seems to me, if some of these films might tell stories in innovative ways and if some of them might be Canadian.

#### NOTES

(1) *S/Z*, by Roland Barthes, trans. by Richard Miller. (London, Jonathan Cape, 1975). The original French words are *scriptible* and *lisible*.

(2) *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*, by Ariel Dorfman & Armand Mattelart, trans. by David Kunzle. (New York, International General, 1975).

(3) "Modes of Representation in the Cinema: Toward a New Aesthetic Model," by Bruce Elder, *Ciné-Tracts* 6, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Spring 1979), pp. 55-61.

(4) "The Photographic Image in Canadian Avant-Garde Film," by R. Bruce Elder in *Take Two*, ed. by Seth Feldman. (Toronto, Irwin Publishers, 1984), pp. 246-263.



by Bruce Elder

The cinema described in my article is not any cinema that actually exists, made either by myself or by any other filmmaker. My own films are far too conceptualized to be the films argued for in my article. More sensitive readers have commented, accurately, that the article is primarily self-critical. (In this respect, it is like my forthcoming film, *Lamentations*.)

But does one accuse Eisenstein of self-interest for formulating and publishing his ideas on montage, because they are ideas which he used in his own filmmaking? Or Vertov, for advocating a documentary practice rather like that in which he was engaged? Or Richter, for expostulating on a "true cinema" whose foundational ideas were derived from his "experiments" in filmmaking? Is Leacock condemned for speaking out for "an uncontrolled cinema" rather like the *cinéma-vérité* he was, at the time he made these statements, in the process of inventing?

For my part, I believe the fact these filmmakers worked out notions of cinema and made films based on the principles they have arrived at gives both their films and their writings a special strength. The co-incident of the principles they expound and the principles they have practiced indicates intellectual integrity. I wish I could say I follow in their path, but, in honesty, I cannot. My own writing has been only an admission of the shortcomings of my own work and a celebration of the strengths of others, the Michael Snows, Jack Chambers and David Rimmers, whose work has been so very rich.

The danger that I pointed out in "The Cinema We Need" was the threat to alternative cinema posed by a failure on the part of professors, critics and theorists to pay any heed to the practice, and even the advocacy of practices which are likely to usurp the avant-garde's claims on the attention of those who are interested in discovering alternatives to the hegemonic

**Bruce Elder's films include *The Art of Worldly Wisdom, Illuminated Texts* and the forthcoming *Lamentations: A Monument to the Dead World*.**

## A vindication

products of Hollywood/Mosfilm. The best rebuttal of my allegation would be to reel off a list of articles that professors and critics have produced on experimental film.

Another option that might have been exercised would have been to claim that, although professors have not actually written about experimental films, they really do recognize its importance. (One can imagine that this rejoinder would be offered to the accompaniment of much huffing and sniffing and wheezing.) I'm afraid that this response wouldn't be good enough either. In this period when Marcel Masse holds the purse strings, whatever cultural activity is not defended to the hilt is given away. Moreover, advocacy of one type of cinema (naturalistic fictions) along with demonstrable neglect of another type (experimental films) indicates a prioritization of practices on the part of professors. In fact, professors have often stated that experimental filmmaking is valuable only as a sort of research program and that its discoveries take on real value only when they are adopted and used by feature filmmakers.

I know experimental filmmakers who have worked for over 15 years now, have done fine work, and still have got none of the attention from professors that is regularly bestowed on mediocre narrative filmmakers. I know of experimental filmmakers who have worked at one-and-a-half or two regular jobs to earn enough money to allow them to make their art and, after years on such a regime, have only found themselves penniless and tired. Looking down from the Olympian heights of a university post, it is easy to pride oneself for a cool overview of things, to chide those of us who are reduced to scuffling to make their art and to upbraid us for using "emotive language."

My piece was not intended to be a contribution to film theory. I do not believe it reads like one. I think, rather, the piece has the rhetorical features of a polemic. Nor was it addressed to bureaucrats. It was written for people who, generally, are committed to developing a distinctive Canadian culture, and it was written to warn them that a type of cinema that I believe has

importance to the cultural life of our nation is being overlooked by nearly all of our cultural advocates. Perhaps, I even hoped to prod them into taking action. I hoped some of them would take a look at the work, think about it and, perhaps, take up the cause. Such interventionist ambitions embarrass me not in the least.

But these points seem to me obvious. Surely not every piece of writing on culture – nor even every piece of advocacy – is addressed directly to bureaucrats. Surely change occurs in many ways, and that one way of effecting change is to develop a cadre of people who are committed to some cause and might eventually challenge the policy-makers.

Now it is true, like all "occasions of speaking", that the telling of stories plays some role in constructing the world in which we live. All sayings act to set up the world shared by all those who speak a common language. But narratives have no particular importance in this regard. Which is not to conclude that all utterances (or, at least, all occasions of recounting a narrative) are equally valuable, since all participate in constructing the world that "a community of speakers" shares. But one would want to ask whether the world erected by one way of speaking might not be preferable to the world erected by some other way of speaking? One would want to ask whether the world set up in narrative does not have deleterious features due to the very nature of narrative? And, even if one answered this latter question in the negative, one would still want to inquire whether the world constructed by the common narratives of our culture is not less humane, less profound, less sensitive to the mysterious than the world set up by narratives of earlier periods in history?

I do believe what Hegel expressed in *Reason In History*, that "Everything that a man is, he owes it to the state; only in it can he find his essence. All value that a man has, all spiritual reality, he has only through the state" and that "No individual can step beyond; he can separate himself certainly from other particular individuals but not from the Spirit of the People." But I do not believe this implies a thoroughgoing moral relativism, since I believe

that there is moral progress – that, for example, the wider range of liberties we now enjoy represents a form of progress. (I also recognize our present condition is characterized by losses, but I do not believe these losses are wholly necessary nor that there is no way what has been lost can still be recovered.)

The derogatory comments pocket-book philosophers have made about Hegel's identification of the Christian-Germanic state of Prussia with the Ideal State do reveal a profound problem in Hegel's philosophy. The Young Hegelians pointed out what they believed was a contradiction in Hegel's thinking. On the one hand, they claimed, Hegel presented the dialectic of history as endlessly restless and as negating whatever exists so as to effect change and bring about progress toward greater rationality; on the other, they pointed out, Hegel seemed to enshrine the Prussian state as the culmination of history. This, too, is a real point, but I think it can be refuted. To do so would be important, for the alternative is moral relativism and I find this alternative abhorrent. I find it abhorrent because it really does entail, that objectively speaking, i.e., independently of participation in a tradition, there is not much to choose between humanitarianism and anti-Semitism. I would develop a counter argument that would depend upon the view that humans become free when they desire that which is truly proper for people to desire. Freedom, in this view, would arise when the human mind participates in the Absolute, when it becomes a living presence in the presence of the Absolute, the eternal world of truth and goodness. I would point out now that this view of freedom differs from the most common view about the nature of freedom, that freedom is the ability to do whatever one's desires prompt him to do, rather than the ability to do what is proper for him to do. I would show that this is an illusory view, because the prescriptions for behaviour that can be deduced from it would lead not to liberation but to enslavement. But I cannot undertake this task here.

In the "modified relativist" theories espoused by most "critical theorists" there, unfortunately, is a contradiction at the heart. For critical theorists argue that the subject is socially constituted and has no being whatsoever outside of "sociality" (as they so inelegantly put it). This would entail that dispositions toward action and judgements develop within and are conditioned by "sociality" and hence that those judgements are relative to that "sociality." At the same time, they petition to higher universal values when formulating a critique of those judgements.<sup>1</sup> This seems contradictory, and most of these "dialecticians" seem to want to avoid commitment to positions involving contradictions whenever they can (although I do not). This should be a reason for them (but not necessarily for me) to reject their positions of modified relativism.

Proposing a value of promoting social cohesion – to which most of us who live in the Sundered human universe of modernity would at least pay lip-service – implies that those who speak out against narrative advocate a practice that would result in social dysfunction. Thus are repressed ques-

tions about the quality of the narratives told in our time and about how their quality compares with that of narratives of other cultures and of other periods in history. I would argue that what promoted social cohesion in earlier historical periods was the shared belief that there was something higher than man which all men served. The narratives people told were grounded in that belief and in a world that had that dimension. Now that source of social cohesion has been forgotten. Our narratives have lost their roots in the realm of the transcendent. Their telling has become a ritual that has entirely lost its inner meaning, just as the ritual of the sacrament has lost its meaning by being interpreted as a social phenomenon. Formerly, the stories people told would allude to God, would speak of the Holy, and would display thoughts and feelings about the Good. Now they rarely do. More often, they reinforce the liberal world view.

Consider how rarely the narratives of the present age deal with ideas outside the ambit of liberalism, how frequently they adopt the standpoint of individualism and deal with problems of "personal" psychology – that is, with problems that develop in the relation to some "significant other" who is a member of the social group to which the individual belongs. Consider how often our narratives depict the individual as the maker of his own destiny, and how rarely the hero of the psychological narrative is depicted as answering the call of the Divine or as responding to the mystery of the Holy. Consider how often the problem of the narrative is the search for "personal" well-being or sexual fulfillment. Consider how often it is the quest for the healing of wounds inflicted on the psyche. Consider how rarely it concerns the Good. Our narratives promote the destitute world-view of liberalism. Our narratives – narrative itself – have become as worthless as emptied-out rituals are. They further the disenchantment of the world. If our works of art are to promote a re-enchantment of the world, they must find new means of working. These means are what "The Cinema We Need" sought. Whatever its limitations (and I acknowledge that they are many), it must be interpreted in this light.

My critics might have responded to this position in three ways. They might have claimed that the most significant films of our culture have retained the relation to transcendent values and do provide us with norms opposed to those of the tradition of liberalism. Secondly, they might have taken on the religious emphasis in my filmmaking and writing because there are, in the main, two available viewpoints from which to criticize this dimension of my work. One is liberalism and the other is its close relative, Marxism. At this point in history, the one appears only slightly more bankrupt than the other, as I think this becomes abundantly clear to anybody who sits down to critique my claims from either vantage point. Thirdly, one might argue along essentialist lines, claiming that even though the narrative has fallen to the state I describe, there is no reason to jettison it, for nothing in its own nature determined its present, fallen state. People adopting this tack would say that narrative has served other

cultures well, and it can serve ours well also.

This last claim has some force. Still, I believe that historical developments have made narrative useless – at least for the purposes I set forth – for our own time, certainly, though perhaps not for all time. They are like rituals that have become meaningless and empty. And just as rituals must be changed when this happens, so must the form of our cinema, if it is to help us rediscover our wonder at the gift of things.

My piece perhaps did not analyze, but certainly did comment upon a type of cinema in which story, representational images, and teleological structures that lead toward closure, interact in a complex manner, in a form one of whose cardinal attributes is the use of a sequencing of events such that the events seem to bear cause-and-effect relations to one another. To repress inquiry into that is to repress inquiry into what the motivation for realism is. I, for one, would argue that the impulse toward realism is connected with the positivist world-view of scientific liberalism. Remember Zola's claims for consistency of his naturalism with the scientific method!

Granted, the use of the realistic style can reveal something that the use of other "styles" cannot, and that is what the type of thinking is that prefers realism. And so we are back to the question of the motivation for realism.

Adopting a line of approach that reduces the nature and function of realistic images and representation to the merely sociological value of revealing how "a certain group of people in a certain place at a certain time" seems to be offered as a final value that puts all other lines of questioning beyond the pale. I, on the other hand, would argue that the thinking (imagining, feeling) of some periods may be richer and more profound than that of others. I also believe that a part of the critical task is to expose the debased character of thinking when it would restrict the critical enterprise to uncovering how people in a certain period "imagined" the world to be, and what such a restriction conceals about representation and narrative.

Barry Barns (in *Interests And The Growth Of Knowledge*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977) provides a useful starting point. "Representations," he states, "are actively manufactured renderings of their referents, produced from available cultural resources and as constructs for use in activity, where 'activity' can embrace the exercise of cognitive functions and where such functions are related to the objectives of some social group." All representations, verbal or visual, are constructs. They don't display the form of the real; Gombrich and Ivens, among others, conclusively demonstrated this. When a representation conveys information about an object, it does so by classifying it, by making it an instance of one or more kinds of entities recognized by the culture whose resources are drawn upon by the process through which representations are constructed. Representations make it possible for existing cultural knowledge to be applied to their referents while the referents themselves provide a check on the development of cultural knowledge.

There are many possible ways to

organize (or to construct) a world – the way our culture does so is just one possible way. Nevertheless, any viable organization, taken as a whole, is systematic and orderly. This is because any "model" world is connected, directly or indirectly, with the performance of some institutionalized activity, such knowledge is (to put my point in a somewhat Habermasian way) prestructured by a "situated technical interest" in prediction and control. Representations are assessed not by their accuracy in rendering the world (or, even, in the appearance of the world), but instrumentally, on the grounds of their efficacy in prediction and control. At least this is how representations have been assessed ever since the time when hierarchic rather than hieroglyphic thinking became dominant. In this way, representations are correlated with the historical development of procedures, competences and techniques. (A.N. Whitehead once made the remarkable observation that the greatest invention of the nineteenth century – and the nineteenth century was the time when liberalism finally achieved its hegemony – was the technique of making inventions.) In sum, representations are artifices, not accurate renderings of their referents – not even of how their referents are imagined to be. They are constructed forms that reflect the predictive, and other technical functions, which representations are required to perform, if procedures are to be carried out and techniques applied.

An analogy can be drawn to the nature of the foundational concepts of modern physics. They were not developed by chance, without sufficient reason. A certain conception of nature, of nature as a complex of forces, as so much energy and power waiting to be exploited, formed our physics into the sort of experimental endeavour it is. Modern science serves to discover the means (the machine techniques) and, more importantly, to clarify the world picture that aids us in our attempts to discover the means to dominate "what-is" (conceived of as stocks of energy for use).

Scientific representations, like all representations, have the form they do as a result of the uses they are put to and the institutional purposes they serve. They do not provide insight into the real nature of that which is brought forth into representation. People often overlook this and take representations as presenting the represented in full presentness. Thinking, by relying on representations that are informed by the institutional purposes they serve, has been converted into instrumental thinking, into reckoning and calculating. But thinking has not realized this about itself. Consequently, representations have come to dominate consciousness to such an extent that all other forms of thinking have been forgotten. The costs of this loss are obvious. What I argue for in "The Cinema We Need" is a form of cinema (and art) which, in small measure, might help restore those ways of thinking that have been lost. That is why I argue (some might say vehemently) against representations and representational thinking. We need to remember those forms of consciousness that have no object.

Representational thinking compre-



hends thinking as the grasping of that which lies before it. This thinking is readily transformed into logical, rational thinking. For rational thought, everything that is, is an object and, being an object, is amenable to subjugation by the will. For such thinking, Being is a mystery that is never revealed, even as a mystery. The mystery of Being can be apprehended only by a tranquil resoluteness that is in no way self-assertive. Such a resoluteness reveals that to which we humans belong. Such thinking does not argue or prove. It produces no ideas that are kept as possessions (or gifts or presents), nor does it result in "clarifying the issues" involved in some disputed subject. In fact, it is no inquiry at all; it is a silent form of conversation which sets up a world we could inhabit, but don't.

Handling, for example, brings out the boogeyman of formalism with which to threaten me. But he writes as though formalism were a broad, comprehensive category comprising everything that is difficult, unliked by the masses and "intellectual" (i.e., not pleasurable or entertaining, as narrative films are). His equation of the ratios narrative/formal, entertaining/intellectual and pleasurable/unpleasurable I find mistaken. There are pleasures that derive from forms other than the narrative. The exercise of intelligence itself affords pleasure – one that becomes more intense as the works which offer such pleasure become more rare.

Handling should take into account that there are formations and there are formalisms. The works of Duras or Syberberg (filmmakers I respect and have thought about a great deal) have nothing whatsoever to do with the cinema I was proposing. They hardly represent the surpassing of representational thinking. The cinema I advocated has similarities to Pound's poetry. In fact, to explain, I would make use of Pound's distinction between phonopoeia, melopoeia and logopoeia. Phonopoeia "trains the object (fixed or moving) onto the visual imagination," melopoeia "induces emotional correlation by the sound and rhythm of speech" while logopoeia "induces both the effects of stimulating the associations (intellectual or emotional) in relation to the actual words or groups of words employed" (*How To Read*, ch. 8). "The Cinema We Need" expresses acceptance, with reservations, of the first (phonopoeia), embraces wholeheartedly the second (melopoeia), and vehemently rejects the third (logocentrism). This is because I believe logocentrism results in representational thinking and that representational thinking eventuates in modern universities – factories for the production of plans for carrying out ideological programmes – and Auschwitz.

The crux of my attack on narrative concerns the link between historicism and realism, an association made through my quote from Pound's *Cantos*. It consists in the claim that histories and realistic narratives alike employ structures that depend on linear order and coherence and so cover over those gaps in our knowledge that represent a threat to the will to mastery.

The constitutive categories of narrative – linear temporality, identity, causality and freedom – are fictions produced by the will to mastery. From

them arise those dominant features of modern Western narratives – bourgeois individualism, organicism, humanism, progressivism – that are the hallmarks of bourgeois culture. To counter the will to mastery, I propose an openness to the contraries of experience to be achieved by an escape from representation. I propose "dialogism" or "polyglossia" which involves the use of the two or more simultaneously present "voices" which interact in a single cultural object. I advocate this because the linguistic diversity it entails may counter the impulse toward a homogeneous language – one expression of which is the narrative, of which Handling and Harcourt are so fond – since homogeneity of language is an important aspect of modernity. The "relativization" of language that would be a consequence of the development of forms possessing this characteristic might help break us out of that cycle of telling and retelling – the equivalent of Marx's "simple reproduction" in the cultural sphere – that is the history of modern narrative. Pound, I keep suggesting, has shown us the way.

I do not believe that what I have proposed as an alternative to realism is formalism but rather a sort of transcendentalism. Nowhere do I propose that the work of art should achieve that ontological autonomy that is a feature of truly formalist works. The closest I have come to that tradition is (a) to base my early films on very simple shapes (though even those films are more in the poetic than in the materialist vein of structuralism) and (b) to include in many of my later films remarks that the maker is the source of those errors and the confusions that haunt any work. Admittedly one could take the use of this latter device as implying that when a work of art achieves the status of an ontologically autonomous object, it transcends failure and becomes "perfectly beautiful." But one could also interpret its use as confession and self-criticism. Similarly, I have celebrated "the death of the author," because, as Foucault has pointed out, though in a different spirit, the removal of the author makes way for the transcendent.

It must be acknowledged, though, that Handling is constrained to argue that avant-garde cinema must remain a marginal practice. The reason for this is revealed in a comment he makes almost in passing: "Narrative, because it is so closely attached to pleasure, cannot simply be dismissed. It has to be subverted from within." One wishes that Handling had elaborated on this comment because it happens to be the reason most frequently given by British critics for dismissing the avant-garde and arguing for (guess what?) – the New Narrative.

It is utter nonsense to say that the avant-garde wants to promote unpleasure. Who, in the '60s, didn't go to avant-garde films to see naked people – more naked people than you could see even in Bergman's films?

Unfortunately, the notion that the political importance of avant-garde cinema is that it foregoes "bourgeois" pleasures is one that has found currency. It is often used as Handling uses it in his article – and indeed as Wollen and Mulvey use it ("Interview with Mulvey", *Undercut*, no. 6) – to damn experimental films by consigning them to the margins. How much unpleasure

would any reasonable person seek out? Of course, I realize we were expected to seek out the "unpleasure" of watching avant-garde cinema (and the experience afforded by films like *Penthesilea* and *Riddles Of The Sphinx* and other "theory films" was really very, very unpleasant) as our political duty and to help us learn some film theoretical notions that would help us, the intellectuals, help the toiling masses. But even a saint's dedication would flag after a couple of viewings of *Penthesilea* (or the unbelievably wretched *The Bad Sister* whose "intellectual" substance is nearly as simplistic as its title). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that after a brief flirtation with the avant-garde, even the nose-to-the-grindstone British were off seeking some "pleasure" – something they believed would be provided, of course, by entertainment – i.e. narrative – movies. Of course, for "entertainment" they substituted "pleasure" in order to align themselves with psychoanalytic terminology – for, by gawd, thought even about sex has to be "serious," "difficult" and "political." The blatant nonsense once promulgated by British theorists and now become dated, has found its resting place in the courses on avant-garde offered by professors who only read about experimental cinema in *Screen* but never see experimental films. (I do want to add that this comment is not directed at Handling or Harcourt, who do see experimental movies.)

Quite simply, all this just states the darkness of the era: the era of liberalism. The personal has been snuffed out. The mysteries have been forgotten. We might as well buckle under and accept what has been imposed on us by technology since arguments advocating actions against that which results in the forgetting of the Divine and in the distorting of the human are to no avail.

I was quite surprised by "The Cinema We Need" when I wrote it; now, I feel vindicated. In "The Cinema We Need," I pointed out a relation between the cinematic form of the films on behalf

of which Harcourt and Handling have argued and the development of a hegemonic system technology which I take to be the means by which America has gained domination of our culture. I also argued that, because of the strength of the technical thinking, no other form of thinking is now available to us. That Harcourt and Handling both attempt to defend the sort of film they advocate by arguing that my comments on technology are *passéiste* indicates that they do see a relation between the form of cinema they praise and technology – unless, that is, they failed to notice the possibility of denying the connection between narrative and technology. Moreover, Harcourt implies and Handling states explicitly that we must accept that the supremacy of technical thought is the reality of our age, and that attempts on my part to remember other forms of thinking are simply an indulgence in a Romantic yearning for a past.

Handling may be right that the disease our society has contracted may be incurable, but I won't accept that claim without putting up any resistance. I don't think that anyone who values what we will lose as the American domination of Canada is consolidated should. I do think that Harcourt and Handling value our country and our culture. But if they don't want to lose them, they will have to rethink their views on technology. If, after this rethinking, they believe that it is too late to escape domination by technology, they should come out and admit that the battle for Canadian culture is lost.

*(The text has been edited from a larger manuscript – ed.)*

#### NOTES

1. There is a way out of this impasse, suggested by Althusser in *Reading Capital and For Marx*, and that would be to contrast the "relative insights" of ideology with the science of historical materialism. But most of the dialecticians whom I have been discussing seem to have rejected Althusser's ideas some time ago.

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# The shadow of Canadian cinema: Bruce Elder's immodest proposal

by Michael Dorland

*As individuals  
The men lost their identity; as groups,  
As gangs, they massed, divided,  
subdivided,  
Like numerals only.*

— E.J. Pratt, *Towards the Last Spike*

*"The problem is not writing stories set in Canada, but fully and painfully assuming all the difficulties of its identity."*

— Hubert Aquin

**La fatigue culturelle au Canada français**

It was the late French philosopher Michel Foucault who said that our time exists in the shadow cast by Hegel and all we have done since has been to futilely attempt to escape from that recognition. For Hegel, last of the Moderns, was the first to recognize the impossibility of thinking against the system of technique — and all art since Hegel has been a desperate flight from the iron laws of technological closure. Nowhere, perhaps, has this been more evidently the case than in 'questions of cinema.'

As Walter Benjamin grasped at the height of the first cinematic avant-garde, cinema (or, as one could add today, television) had this unique propensity: it was the first 'art form' that essentially managed to dispense with the artist in having shifted the locus of the work as a manifestation of an individual creation to within a collective system of production/distribution/consumption. In the resulting Hegelian 'inverted world' the loss of the individual artwork's 'aura' only meant that it was *the system itself* that had been auritized, and the heroic attempt to reinvest artistic notions into purely technological forms such as cinema was hopelessly retrograde, not to say mere idolatry. For cinema is post-Promethean in the sense that it is the capturing of light by the machine, and so the operative condition for its very existence was the generalization of the surrounding darkness.

If cinema was the art-form that aestheticized the social robotization of man, it also, as Benjamin suggested, dialectically implied the ethicization

of the social. For the cinema system in articulating simultaneously an aesthetic politic (the masses are beautiful) and a political aesthetic (the romance of technology) itself could never be a genuine (ethical) politics, only its simulacrum: that is to say, an imposture.

Cinema, in other words, is inherently one moment of a vaster propaganda system most obviously and primarily on behalf of modern technique, and secondly for all forms of group-activity (nation, industry, class, or filmmakers) and only somewhere far, far along the infinite combinations thereof, almost as an afterthought, reaching the level of the sub-category of the individual and his/her consciousness.

Bruce Elder — most recently and explicitly in an article entitled "The Cinema We Need" (*Canadian Forum*, February, 1985) — invites to seriously consider what it means to dwell within such a system, as individuals, but also as Canadians. And perhaps more importantly as Canadians to the extent that that level of generality is the only other thing we potentially share in common beyond being simply decentred individuals within the universal technical system. For, as a Canadian, Elder still believes in the possibility of there being other Canadians willing to participate in the questioning he has embarked upon both as a film-thinker and a filmmaker. Nor is this assumption utterly utopian to the extent that Canada itself has marked intellectual and artistic traditions of just this kind of questioning and also that, on paper at least, Canada remains a distinct geographical entity.

Whether Canada, except perhaps in the most abstract legal sense, constitutes a sovereign entity is, of course, another question altogether. Certainly it is one of the tensions of Canadian history, not to say its fundamental predicate, that Canada is, if not yet a nation, at least a North American entity existing alongside the other North American nations, the United States of America and the United States of Mexico. Vis-à-vis the other United States, Canada's existence is thus predicated upon some notion of similarity/difference that in the official discourse of the central Canadian state is political, economic, social, linguistic, and cultural. Yet despite the hundred-odd



rates of Canada's separate existence as a political entity, it has only been three years since Canada has come into being in the juridical sense of official sovereignty derived from internally generated, agreed-upon principles. Thus the following paradox: if the Canadian sense of self-consciousness is *formally* extremely new, the ordinary, naturalistic sense of *Canadian* difference has in the past century been profoundly compromised by the *American* similarity. The erosion of Canadian economic and social difference, along with the Americanization of political and cultural difference, means that now, more than ever before, it devolves upon the Canadian cultural project (as manifested by the Canadian artistic and intellectual imagination) to bear the entire burden of not only reviving, but enlarging what is left of the sense of Canadian difference. As Elder put it in "The Cinema We Need": "The task of achieving some clarity about our cultural situation and of developing the means to deal with the present cultural crisis is an urgent one — I believe the most important one now demanded of Canadians..." For a time that urgently calls for manifestations of the Canadian imagination is, at the very least, a time for manifestos — and a manifesto is, as Bart Testa argues, what Elder has written in "The Cinema We Need."

One could say that the most incandescent moments of the Canadian past — in which emerges what it means most fully to be Canadian (with all the agony and tension that implies) — are constituted by its manifestos: W.L. MacKenzie, the 1837 *patriotes*, the Canada First manifesto, George Grant's *Lament For A Nation* (or its predecessor, Goldwin Smith's *Canada and the Canadian Question*), the Regina Manifesto, *Refus global*, the Waffle Manifesto, Expo '67, or the FLQ Manifesto.

Curiously, (English) Canadian cinema has never produced a manifesto, at least until now, and one might well wonder: why not? For a manifesto is the cry of an imagination in search of a practice, often the precondition for that practice itself. (Not that a manifesto alone is a sufficient condition for an artistic practice, but it is at least a necessary condition and it is precisely this kind of articulation of its own

necessity that Canadian cinema has never had, with the one exception, Elder would argue since he has produced most of it, of the Canadian avant-garde cinema.)

As both Testa and Piers Handling note, one has to go back to Grierson in Canadian film history to find anything resembling theoretical principles, and there's the rub. For if Grierson was the founder of a distinct Canadian cinematic realism (and not merely just another colonial administrator), how does one account for the fact that the debate as to the nature of that realism rages on 40 years later (and continues in these pages)? Now it may well be as Testa sharply observes that "Canadian critics have been passing a decade praising mediocre Canadian feature films using the tools of an outworn auteurism while standing knee-deep in the ruins of a realist theoretical scaffolding" — in which case the realism debate is not only a false debate but a dead one. Or it may be that the debate is not so much one between "realists" (Peter Harcourt and Handling) and a "paranoid" (as Harcourt characterizes Elder) as between three kinds of realists: the social realism of Harcourt, the political realism of Handling and the abstract ethical realism of Elder. And what is being argued over is far less a question of realism *in* Canadian cinema than it is the perplexing reality of Canada itself: its bureaucratic infallibility in the case of Harcourt, something similar but with a politically critical pedagogy in the case of Handling, and whether or not Canada can be conceptualized in the case of Elder. Testa is right to discern behind the debate a politics struggling to express itself, though one could specify in the form of three strategies: a cultural pragmatics for Harcourt, a culturally subversive entryism for Handling, and a cultural ideology for Elder. In other words, within the arc of Canadian cultural nationalism three political prescriptions for Canadian cinema: liberal (Harcourt), social-democratic (Handling) and radical (Elder).

Except that, in the case of Harcourt-Handling, their cinematic politics only repeat the two dead-end subordinations (to state and marketplace) in which Canadian cultural discourse has been fatally entrapped, as Arthur Kroker recently analyzed in his "Spitting on the TV: Insubordinating Canadian broadcasting." And Elder's is less a politics than it is an ethics because — and this for the first time — it grounds the possibility of a Canadian cinema in a conception of Justice (the Good) that is normative (and so prescriptive) only to the degree that it considers the existence of Canada (and so of Canadian culture) a manifestation of the Good.

Now Canadian cinema has (so far) been nothing if not political to the extent that the Canadian cultural project has itself been politically bounded, and this has been both the source of its few strengths as well as its limitations: its utter dependency upon a state-defined politics on the one hand, and a market-defined economics on the other, and the accurate perception of it by the public as propaganda (which has only reinforced that public's desire to escape Canadian propaganda by throwing itself into the welcoming arms of the largest propaganda ma-

chine in the contemporary world). In the context, then, of the disappearing Canadian public, a state-apparatus whose commitment to Canadian cultural 'objectives' has always been ambiguous, and a marketplace whose commitment to American culture is its *raison-d'être*, what is left of Canadian cinema? If Harcourt can still remain vaguely hopeful, Handling for his part is pretty much ready to sign the death certificate and promptly revive the corpse in the form of an "image industry." (And explicitly for the likes of a Robin Wood, Canadian cinema never amounted to anything much in the first place, so nothing's been lost – as nothing was there.)

Only Elder, it seems, would disagree – vehemently and radically so. First, by wrenching away the state-monopoly on a cultural politics, he anchors the Canadian cultural project in the concept of the nation itself. For Elder, the very fact of being Canadian, of being able to think about Canada, posits a metaphysics of Canadian culture that is neither cramped nor defensive, but immense and at least at ease in its difference. Secondly Elder, because he is comfortable within Canadian metaphysical traditions therein encounters that bedrock of the Canadian mind that is a profoundly ethical critique of the American technological universe.<sup>1</sup> Thirdly, on the bases of that critique which stems from the assumption that Canada offers *different* face to the universal technological system (which means that the American appropriation is only a trope and not the thing itself), he absolutizes the Canadian critique of American modernity into a conception of cinema from within (as opposed to against or, in the case of importing U.S. culture, from without) the technological closure. Righting the Hegelian inverted world, the Elderian concept of Absolute Cinema presents the phenomenological dissection of the will-to-technique that results from the encounter of a spectator's consciousness with the unfolding (or coming into presence) of the cinematic system. Unlike American art's endless celebrations of the disappearing subject, Canadian art (as I read Elder) is a manifestation of the appearing subject-object as the dialectic between place, person, and mind. His is a realism in which Canada is not a perpetual becoming or vanishing, but an integer. Nor is the analysis he is making based either on his own behalf or to promote the kinds of films he himself makes, but only as one Canadian mind thinking about what Canadian cinema already has the capacity to be. For modest Canadians, it's an extraordinarily immodest claim – were it not that it is no different from the literary claims made by a Hugh MacLennan in his epic conception of Canada, or the painterly claims of a Paul-Emile Borduas, for it is nothing less than the Canadian imagination manifesting itself.

If, as the debate here shows, there are other ways to 'read' Elder, including Elder's own reading of himself, perhaps the least that should be said for now might be, in a paraphrase of Rimbaud: "Allons, messieurs, mesdames les cinéastes (les professeurs, les gouvernants...), encore un effort, car c'est de votre Canada qu'il s'agit."

(1) Arthur Kroker, *Technology and the Canadian Mind*: Grant / McLuhan / Innis, Montreal, 1984, and New York, 1985.



by Geoff Pevere

Naturally, perhaps, Canadian film criticism (that is, criticism of and about Canadian cinema, and not criticism written in Canada about movies made elsewhere) tends to the prescriptive mode. What Canadian cinema should be, in other words, is a more frequently addressed matter than what it is.

Ostensible distinguishing marks and mannerisms notwithstanding, the frequency of the use of the prescriptive mode by Canadian film critics suggests certain fundamental and common assumptions. Basically, they are: first, that there is something identifiable as Canadian Film, and thus an object of criticism which exists. Second, that this object, Canadian Film, is qualitatively and observably distinct from other, similar objects borne of similar aesthetic (as cinema) and cultural (Canadian, American or whatever) concerns or standards of definition. Third, that the objects Canadian Film or Cinema, is somehow beneficial and necessary to someone. It performs a function that is somehow edifying, enlightening, nourishing and stimulating to someone or some group of someones (presumably, in this case, Canadians). In a word, it is worth having around.

So far, these are elementary assumptions for most or all film criticism, but the prescriptive mode makes its distinguishing detour here. While most forms of nationalist film criticism imply the values stated above, fewer suggest, as our criticism frequently does, first, that there is something definitely lacking in a particular national cinema that impedes it in realizing its ideal and necessary form and function; a lack resulting from factors imposed either from outside (economic starvation, cultural imperialism, governmental indifference, etc.) or festering from inside (psychological retardation, cultural immaturity or myopia, overfed middle-class indifference) the national organism.

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## The rites (and wrongs) of the elder or The cinema we got: the critics we need

Finally, that this is a lack worth repairing.

And, furthermore, for the culturally crippled Canadian Cinema, that there are strategies and means available for making the repairs, and that these will, if carefully and rigorously administered, bring Canadian cinema closer to its ideal state. There are, according to this set of assumptions, workable blueprints for the reconstruction and sustained health and well-being of Canadian Cinema – or so the prescriptive mode implies.

But finally, the most significant and essential assumption shared by prescriptive Canadian film critics is also the least apparent and discussed, which is not surprising, given that it is also the most relative, contentious and abstract of this set of assumptions: that there is, in fact, a perfect state, condition and context for the object Canadian Film: a set of idealized environmental, political and ideological circumstances under which the object will flourish and nourish according to the relative standards of what this ideal Canadian Cinema is or must be. The reasoning is tautological but essential to the practice of prescriptive criticism, for there can be no healing measures applied to the organism until a standard of perfect health is established. All medicine implies a cure, but no cure is absolute. Like doctors, critics have varying standards of perfection. Unspoken and implicit as it is, this relativity of standards for the perfect Canadian Cinema is in fact the most fundamental and far-reaching determinant of the prescriptive mode. It directs all critical speculation, interpretation and even perception towards a particular end or set of standards which define an individual critic's conception of the perfect Canadian Cinema. Moreover, the prescriptive mode customarily submerges these standards, making implicit the ideological determinants in the explicit plans for the perfect Canadian Cinema. The critic's value system must be deductively retrieved by sifting through the apparent to the implied. By whatever means the critic's value system is sleuthed by the student of such things, it is an object worth sniffing out. Notions and standards of perfection, particularly as they shape or

influence cultural or political discourse, are valuable gauges of ideological self-definition, idealized portraits or reflections of how we might appear, were it not for the smudged and cracked looking-glass we've got – the cinema that stands between us and the cinema we want or, in the urgent prescriptive message of Bruce Elder, the cinema we need.

Before embarking upon an examination of the specific terms and implications of Elder's audacious, if eccentric, prescriptive blueprint for a national cinema (*Canadian Forum*, February 1985), it might be useful to briefly examine some of the conditions which have bred, fed and sustained the predominance of the prescriptive mode in Canadian film criticism. Basically, the practice of formulating strategies for a better Canadian cinema assumes that a better Canadian Cinema is necessary and will somehow be better for Canadians because, even more basically, there is believed to be a distinct, direct and discernible cause-and-effect relationship between cultural products and their consumers. Culture is viewed as a necessary agent in the process of social and political self-definition, and national identity remains a salient issue in the various debates over Canadian culture. Culture can increase our determination and potential to act upon and understand the environment we live in because it delineates our position in relation to that environment. It shows us who and where we are. In Canada, where most of the cultural products consumed are imported from other political and cultural contexts, the situation is regarded as urgent and particularly pronounced. Given the assumed direct relationship between culture and consumers in prescriptive criticism, the Canadian cultural predicament retards both our individual and social potential for personal and national self-recognition, growth and determination. Thus, while critics may not agree on the precise nature and form of the cinema we need, there is little quibbling over the fact that we need a cinema. Apparent motivations and determinations may differ (ranging, right to left, from cultural jingoism, to the practical drive to economic self-sufficiency, to the mobilization of strategies to sub-

vert the discourse of foreign cultural oppression), but the common end remains. We need a cinema, the prescriptive critic tells us, and we need our own.

According to Bruce Elder, the cinema we need probably isn't the cinema most of us want, if most of us want one at all. An example of prescriptive criticism so hypothetical and utopian it does not even touch ground long enough to identify any specific examples of the cinema we have, Elder's article addresses a multitude of issues and possible answers to the central and driving dilemma of prescriptive film criticism: how to get there from here, or, how to make the cinema we need out of the cinema we've got. According to Elder, the central problem facing contemporary Canadian cinema is nothing so common – and presumably repairable – as a condition of cultural retardation imposed by economic and ideological domination of the Yankee media monolith. In Elder's view, what corrupts the cinema we've got is nothing less than the ailment of an age: a materialistic, goal-oriented, technocratic mode of thinking that distracts human endeavour and contemplation from the desired and lamented realm of the immediate, multiple and experiential, to a future-fixed, selective and spiritually barren piecemeal existence. That, in Elder's view, is wrong. By thinking in linear terms of causally-related events, we are missing out on the blissful barrage of multitudinous impressions that comprise the everyday organism's experience of the here-and-now.

A cinema that reproduces the wonder and richness of the now, in all its sensual, ambiguous and rhythmic splendour, a cinema that rejects narrative – for narrative, with its structured reification of the dominance and legitimacy of cause-and-effect relations, and its basis in representative arts, which push events, *a priori* and by definition, into the past, is the concrete foundation on which the edifice of technocratic, selective thinking is built and sustained; a cinema that, through the use of such staple avant-garde strategies as stasis, repetition, rhythm and minimalism, emphasizes the temporality of its own unfolding and the material basis of its own formulation, a cinema that emphasizes its here-and-now-ness, is the cinema we need. Or do we?

It is a provocative and peculiar formulation certainly, which is made even more enticing and baffling by Elder's customizing of terminology (wherein technology becomes "technique" and olfactory experience becomes, nicely, "givenness"), frequent flights of messianic rhetorical fancy ("This association of the rhythmicity of the process by which events come to presentness in experience with the physicality and rhythmicity of bodily processes means that the rhythmic form of a work of art can, by uniting the pulse of the body with patterns inherent in emergent events (event phenomena), unite the mind and the body"),<sup>1</sup> and a tendency to employ value-packed phrases such as "good policy",<sup>2</sup> "a just society",<sup>3</sup> "the gift of things"<sup>4</sup> and, frequently, "values"<sup>5</sup> itself – without letting us in on what these terms mean to him, thus disguising relative and culturally determined concepts as absolutes or givens. And just who are "we", any-

way? What unites me, you, or us, as readers, to Elder? To whom the writer might be speaking is an issue left unresolved, and since the article suggests that what we need might be protracted epics of scratched emulsion, the "we" of the needy (not to mention the why of the need) is a constituency that must be delineated and identified. Personally, I don't think we includes me or the guy who manages the Mac's Milk on the corner.

Another curious (if less portentous) premise of the piece is the suggestion that irreparable damage has been done by the Peter Harcourt/Piers Handling school of film criticism, which apparently advocates the use of certain strategies of self-reflexiveness culled from avant-garde film practice in commercial narrative Canadian cinema, presumably for the purpose of assembling a cinematic mode that is more dialectical, intellectually involving and politically provocative than conventional illusionist/realist/representative Hollywood practice. Like "technique", Elder is against this. Yet his specific objections, on closer scrutiny, are either unfounded, off-base, or reactionary.

Having, I think, a passing familiarity with the work of both critics, I recall coming across no rallying to the cause of a "New Narrative" cinema in either of Handling or Harcourt's expansive writings on Canadian cinema. A hybrid of avant-garde and classical styles that employs the self-reflexive mechanisms of the former to undermine the reactionary hegemony of the latter, Elder's dreaded New Narrative "vandalizes",<sup>6</sup> "commercializes"<sup>7</sup> and "hijacks"<sup>8</sup> conventions of avant-garde cinema, a process which, claims Elder, not only robs the alternative cinema of its unique capacity for autotelicity – emphasizing nowness over then-ness – but also serves to preserve the reactionary ideological function of mainstream cinema: since the mechanisms of illusionism presumably overwhelm the strategies of autotelicity, the New Narrative only saps the avant-garde of its uniquely self-reflexive and subversive character, it, in doing so, ultimately serves the oppressive ends of dominant cinema, since it coopts conventions of the avant-garde in order to drain them of their potential to subvert.

This, the crux of Elder's biscuit, introduces enough theoretical and political gristle to chew on for 10 involved and likely unwieldy academic discussions, but I shall restrict myself to a brief survey and response to the most pertinent, pungent and contentious of the points just raised.

Elder maintains that narrative, in and of itself, is reactionary and serves existing systems of power and social relations because it is representative, and any representative forms of discourse freeze and isolate time and experience into a presumably safe, pre-interpreted, unambiguous and unalterable past. Narrative cinema limits experience in terms of the already-happened and thus the beyond-intervention. It creates a false and perennial continuum of pastness that blocks the future and blurs the present by relegating all experience into a safely distanced and untouchable past. Whatever the specific form of address, Elder claims that all narrative forms, by definition, speak in past tense. This is, I think, true to a certain extent.

Dominant forms of culture wouldn't be dominant if they did not function as part of those apparatuses which serve to support and preserve social and power relations the way they are. If not all narrative, then certainly most commercial movies, and all forms of popular culture, generally and by definition, police the possibility of social criticism by presenting endlessly re-gurgitated idealized representations of things as they are. Not by presenting or showing us how good things could be, but by showing us how great they are. Dominant pop culture reifies and legitimates things as they are by condoning, through representation, certain value systems and modes of behaviour and by condemning, through exclusion or exaggeration, other value systems or modes of behaviour not permissible according to the arbitrary but guarded parameters of the normal. And in suggesting that things are okay as they are, dominant pop culture forms nullify the need, or even a recognition of its possibility, for radical social change.

But there are ways of countering these effects. Popular culture may be ubiquitous, but it is not monolithic. Elder's return-to-zero, outright rejection of narrative simply ignores the problem of ideological hegemony and pop culture, but it doesn't confront it. Quite simply, once these status quo support systems, which must go unnoticed to succeed, are recognized and named, they are no longer transparent and thus their power to perpetuate is neutralized. Therefore, Elder's conception of a monolithic, impregnable system of "pastness" in dominant culture is insufficient, for the system *can* be challenged and altered. Elder forgets the third party in the process of ideological formulation by popular culture: the consumer. While the cultural apparatus may be fixed in time in terms of production and ideological usefulness, the consumer or spectator is not. S/he can use her or his position as subject-in-the-present to analyse and criticize the object-in-the-past position of culture artifacts. Meaning may be encoded in pop culture products, but it is not entombed there. The shifting context of consumption, in terms of both environment and ideology, and the relative perspective of the consumer means that the pastness of the artifact is always subjected to the presentness of its consumption. No movie is an island either.

Besides, does not all social discourse, by definition and design, isolate and objectify experience? All communal interaction depends on systems of shared symbols and codes which objectify and isolate experience so it can be traded among the constituents of those communities. And is this not because, without a system of mutually shared and recognized symbols, there would be no social interaction? Language is the basis of community, and it is representative by nature.

There is no community, no larger consciousness, no sense of temporal continuity or social connectedness without language and similar representative modes of discourse. Without them, we are left only with the unnamed and unnamable subjective sensory impressions that constitute our visceral experience – the very level of consciousness Elder posits as the

model for "the cinema we need." Adrift in the realm of the senses: it makes for an attractive image, if a romantic and apolitical one, but that's what Elder's conception of the cinema of subjective here-and-now-ness amounts to: by positing the ideal cinema as one which puts us in touch with the pre-linguistic, purely sensory realm of visceral response, Elder is hearkening back to the mystic (he even speaks, wistfully, of the "ancients"<sup>9</sup>); yearning, like some post-psychedelic hybrid of Merlin and Leary, for a pre-Jungian reinstatement of art into the realm of the subconscious, the magical and the ineffable.

The cinema we need, we are told, is a cinema separate from and unsullied by the grime and corruption of everyday discourse and popular taste. It is a cinema that depends upon mystery and superstition, a notion of art as something irrational, unexplainable, spiritual and exalted – something magic. It is a perspective that posits art as natural and given, rather than as the product of particular social and historical forces, and artists as divine mediums of messages dispatched somewhere from the black cauldron of the subconscious, and accessible only to them, rather than producers of historically determined cultural artifacts. It is a view that seeks to establish a hierarchy of knowledge and privilege that exploits mystification as a necessary means of maintaining an imbalance of power between the exalted few that produce and comprehend art, and the greater masses that do not. And, while we're at it, just what the fuck is "art" anyway?

And this attitude, I daresay, is a damned sight more reactionary than a veritable slew of decadent, past-fixed, narrative trash movies. Suggesting art must be liberated from language and the representative impulse in order for it to play a subversive rather than supportive social role in relation to dominant ideology may sound like a trumpet call to radical action, but what's really afoot here is the reactionary romantic impulse to return the production of culture to the realm of the mystic, to take it out of the realm of shared social experience and discourse (and thus politics), and return it safely to the tomb of sanctified privilege where it belongs. Rather than a more political cinema, in the sense of a cinema that addresses, in both form and content, the hegemony of dominant power structures, the cinema Elder says we need is not political at all. Apparently, it is above such things. It is thus, in my view, a useless cinema – and no less status quo than its Hollywood counterpart.

Perhaps prescribing what we should have is, in and of itself, a retrograde rather than a progressive activity for Canadian cinema. Certainly Elder's prescriptions, which call for nothing less than a romantic reinstatement of art to the antiquated realm of the mystical and its retrieval from social discourse, cannot be practical in terms of mapping a path to a "better" cinema through an understanding of the one we, as Canadians, have. While few examples of prescriptive criticism for Canadian cinema have retreated quite so far from practical political and cultural considerations as Elder's has, most do imply a similar withdrawal from an analysis of what we've got in

order to consider what we need. In fact, if there's a crisis facing Canadian cinema at the moment, it's a failure in film criticism as much as it is the films criticised. Why can't we deal with what we've got?

As mentioned, prescriptive criticism usually assumes a dismissal, on qualitative grounds, of the cinema we have. Disheartened with the likes of what we've got, like *The Surrogate*, *Heavenly Bodies* and *Rock and Rule*, critics will indulge in reveries of what we might or should have. Usually, this critical utopianism implicitly or explicitly posits the achievements of national cinemas more consistent, pervasive and respected than ours as models for development. (The phenomenal success, in the past decade, of Australian cinema, which we once regarded fondly as a bedfellow in cultural retardation, has only sharpened the edges of our own sense of inferiority.) There is no single reason for this cycle of self-fulfilling critical self-flagellation, but it seems generally to spring from factors more commonly cited to bemoan Canadian filmgoers than critics, i.e., the state of cultural schizophrenia caused by the cumulative effects of the unhindered consumption of someone else's systems of self-definition. And like those audiences for whom the standard of quality, familiarity and even intelligibility\* has been firmly established by the American model, Canadian critics, when dealing with Canadian films, do so under the long shadow of Hollywood. Thus, our own films are invariably found to be "lacking" or "inept", "embarrassing" or "amateurish." Instead of being evaluated on their own terms or even in the context of a broader but culturally integrated area of enquiry like "Canadian Cinema," Canadian films are routinely hauled by Canadian critics onto the Hollywood chopping block and there condemned to death for failing to measure

up. Our producers, directors and awards-show presenters routinely resort to the euphemism "international" or "universal" as both goal and a standard of achievement for Canadian movies to aspire. But there's really only one border worth crossing for these "universalists", and it's the same one that's proven more difficult for Canadian than American movies to cross.

Dismissed and abandoned, Canadian cinema is left largely forgotten, or consciously put out of mind. Much is written about the horrendous and crass results of the c.c.a.-spawned boom of the late '70s, when tax shelter incentives stimulated film production on a scale this country had never seen before or since. The problem was the films were dreck of the lowest order, usually third-generation rip-offs of formula American genres such as police thrillers, teen comedies or teen slash-em-ups. Most were never deemed fit for distribution and, until pay TV, with its gaping, 24-hour-a-day appetite for product, came along in 1982, most were never seen. This period has become nothing less than the Cultural Revolution of Canadian film history. (This despite the humiliating fact that *Meatballs* and *Porky's*, Canada's most lucrative commercial exports of all time, were produced during this period.) It's rarely discussed, and never with any seriousness toward the films and always in an incendiary tone. Fault is usually found, and always somewhere else.

Yet, if the emphasis of Canadian film criticism shifted from the prescriptive and the evaluative to the descriptive and the analytical; if all film texts, from the *Heavenly Bodies's* to the *Grey Fox's*, were treated objectively as texts worthy of analysis (because all cultural texts, from the crass to the vanguard, convey vital messages of cultural and ideological self-defini-

tion), and were given equal due, Canadian Cinema might finally yield that elusive motherlode of self-identity sought by the prospectors of Canadian culture since Confederation. What we are, what we would like to be, what we aren't - the means for discussing these matters of cultural identity are as firmly encoded in *Death Ship* and *Running Brave* as they are in those rare English-Canadian\* features that do measure up to the arbitrary evaluative standards of "international" or "universal" appeal. Pop culture, all of it, high or low, crass or class, is an equally valid indicator of the cultural context which produces it, of the ideological temper of the times. The refusal or inability of Canadian film critics to adapt a non-evaluative, descriptive and analytical mode of criticism has merely perpetuated the colonization of the Canadian collective consciousness (if such a beast exist). Like the average weekend moviegoer, the critic in Canada has undergone a process of cultural dislocation, resulting from the adoption of imported critical standards that can only be self-defeating in a country where these standards cannot deal adequately with the cultural products that country produces: of course *Heavenly Bodies* sucks, we can all agree on that. But what does it tell us about our culture, our priorities, our values, ideals, and aspirations?

Concomitant to this negative of the evaluative and prescriptive mode as a necessary progression in the understanding of Canadian popular culture is a re-evaluation of what constitutes a national cinema. Here, as elsewhere, the cues have been borrowed from other contexts and applied back home, where the definitions can't be as safely or securely applied. To insist, particularly in English Canada, that the national cinema is comprised of theatrical features, is to further tighten the cycle of critical self-strangulation by limiting

the scope of analysis to a small, and particularly destitute, area of cultural activity, in Canada. Most of the film production activity in this country is dispersed to other media, such as broadcast and pay television. Unless the concept of national cinema is broadened sufficiently to encompass these vital and comparably flourishing areas of activity in film-related production, and the traditional cultural elitism elevating film from "lesser" forms of visual media is dismissed for the culturally stagnant attitude it is, Canadian popular culture, and Canadians' understanding of what it is and what it means - and ability to direct its future based on this knowledge - will continue to yield nothing but a sense of cultural embarrassment, impotence and retardation. And that, I'm sure, we don't need.

#### NOTES

(1) Elder, R. Bruce, "The Cinema We Need" *Canadian Forum* LXIV/746, February 1985, pp. 32-35.

(2) *Ibid*, p. 32

(3) *Ibid*, p. 32

(4) *Ibid*, p. 33

(5) *Ibid*, p. 33

(6) *Ibid*, p. 34

(7) *Ibid*, p. 34

(8) *Ibid*, p. 34

(9) *Ibid*, p. 33

\* Earlier this year, I taught an introductory course in film studies at Carleton University. It was illuminating, if dismaying, to discover that, in a course that included Godard, Bergman and Welles, it was the Canadian section of the course that proved a major stumper to students. Canadian films were the most "foreign" films, in terms of familiarity, presented all year.

\* In Quebec, as usual, as always, things are different. Most of the points urgently addressed here are either moot or non-existent there.

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