

Trading on distinctions

"Culture... is the expression of an identifiable group of people under threat – economic threat. Those things that we consider culture to Americans are not culture at all. They are industrial."

– Stephen Roth

"The challenge of the future is to preserve and enhance the values that have distinguished public broadcasting since its inception – a belief in the importance of independent journalism, a sense of social responsibility and a commitment to the creative imagination."

– Pierre Juneau

Coming as it does in a climate of market-driven, conservative government policies, the Caplan-Sauvageau Report on Broadcasting reminds us of the virtues of well-reasoned, dispassionate initiatives, advanced in the public interest. It recognizes the crucial role of communications in Canada as the mainstay of our cultural fabric, and the central importance of broadcasting in assuring those communications.

As editors of *Cinema Canada*, we cannot read the report without reflecting, too, on the role of the magazine and its central position in assuring communication between the creators of our films and programs and the industry – both public and private – which provides the means for the creators to reach their public. The values to which Pierre Juneau refers and which distinguish public broadcasting – "independent journalism, a sense of social responsibility and a commitment to the creative imagination" – are the same values which have motivated our magazine over the years.

Like public broadcasting, *Cinema Canada* has long been published in a spirit of public service. Its original mandate was cultural, and it has grown in that typically Canadian way which mixes government funding (through the arts councils) with private funding through advertising. The magazine has adhered over the years to the notion that our culture does not exist in a vacuum but that industrial structures affect program content, and our ongoing concern has been the government policies which influence these structures, and the ability of the creators to find freedom within them.

The international trade press first became interested in Canada in the mid-'70s with the tax shelter boom, and each in its turn printed a special section on Canada, an initiative warmly received by the Canadian Film Development Corp. which routinely announced these special issues to the industry and encouraged participation. At *Cinema Canada*, we considered these initiatives a doubtful contribution to the healthy development of a Canadian cultural industry. In these publications the editorial copy flowed all too often from the advertiser's interest in the issue, and the foreign publisher was able to extract thousands of dollars of revenue while providing a sanitized and upbeat image of an industry which oftentimes had little to do with reality.

In those days, we did not stand outside of that process. As freelancers, we were the stringers for *Variety* for three years before it set up a Canadian office; we were in a position to judge the difference between the trade press as it was

run internationally and our efforts at *Cinema Canada* to maintain high standards of journalism removed from the commercial pressures of advertising.

By 1977, there was a serious effort on the part of the American Majors to set up a trade publication in Canada. Wanting to forestall that initiative, and realizing that more had to be done to follow business news, we founded *Trade News North*, the very name a send-up of the trade press we were to avoid becoming. *Trade News North* became the bi-monthly *CineMag* which, in turn, became an integral part of *Cinema Canada* when the bottom fell out of the tax shelter boom. Today, *Cinema Canada* is the only magazine we know of which combines cultural comment and criticism with business news and analysis.

Today, the second Canadian boom is, like the first, having a distorting effect on industry reporting and this is being felt at *Cinema Canada*. We are grouped together with "the trades" that suddenly seem to be popping up all over. People are assuming that editorial copy, too, is now for sale. Producers call asking how much they must pay to get on the cover. Others phone in bonafide news items and then ask for the advertising department as if to insure that we will take notice of the story. Other publishers brag about their "deals." One recently sold a series of back covers in color against a promise to deal editorially with each new camera the supplier would issue in the coming year.

The "trade press" as it is commonly perceived, is market-driven. It prints what the industry wants to hear and is willing to pay for. Eventually the copy becomes the reflection of what the industry thinks of itself, and readers begin to mistake this reflection for the reality.

Cinema Canada has always resisted these pressures. We have lost advertisers in so doing, and we have stood up against great pressure from government agencies to get on the band wagon and join the industry hype. By our independence we provoke a certain irritation at times, but we cannot see how the industry or its artists can be better served by any other attitude. Call it freedom of the press.

As Stephen Roth admits, what we call culture others call industry. If *Cinema Canada* is to contribute to the development of the culture in this country as reflected in our films and television programs, then we must refuse the label of "trade press," that archetypal American industrial form in which editorial is traded against advertising and everyone gets rich but no one gets better.

As the debate continues about the value of a public broadcasting system and the cost of it, members of the Canadian film and television community would do well to consider the quality of the press treatment they receive, both from the specialized press and in the daily papers. Juneau has commented that some members of parliament are wondering why they should fund a public broadcaster which acts as the government's critic.

As competition heats up, industry members may find themselves asking the same question. Why advertise in a magazine which offers no strokes in return? The answer can only be that a high standard of objective journalism and criticism is still the best and only defence against the encroachment of cultural imperialism from the United States; that the adoption of an American publishing model can only work against a distinctive Canadian press; and that there can be no communication between the creative forces in the industry, business and government if they are corrupted by the promise of profits that subverts the independence and sense of responsibility which the editors of *Cinema Canada* have always assumed to be the bedrock of Canadian cultural life.

LETTERS

David versus Goliath

Joyce Nelson has failed in her attempts to identify the culprits responsible for the decline of CBC Television ("Losing it on TV," *Cinema Canada* No. 133). As usual John Diefenbaker, greedy visionless private broadcasters, profit, competition and commercialism are all blamed for the current CBC predicament.

If she could turn the historic clock back she's telling us that TV utopia would consist of a system whereby:

1. CBC was regulator and our only national voice.
2. CBC would never be involved with commercials.

3. Private TV would never become big enough to compete with CBC.

4. New technology would not be introduced until the CBC was ready! (We should have sent Joyce instead of the RCMP to tear down the once illegal satellite dishes).

Nelson neglects to mention how we should deal with the real Canadian competition ... NBC, ABC, CBS, PBS, HBO, USA Network, Arts & Entertainment Network, Nashville Network, CNN, etc., etc., etc. except to slow down technology introduction.

We need a "single system" defense to fight this onslaught, led by determined government policy that will encourage both CBC and the private sector. Whether advertisers, or taxes pay for increased output is immaterial.

What hurts the most is the Canadian tendency to snipe at our productive sectors, creating an artificial battle zone

between Parliament – CRTC – CBC and private interests.

In one of Nelson's analogies she refers to the human body as a single system, whose various functions do not compete against each other. Our single system of CBC, CTV, TSN, MuchMusic, Global, Independents, Superchannel and the local cable companies is the "single system" in competition with the U.S. giants. We'd be shooting ourselves in our own foot if we pay serious attention to Nelson's historical perspective.

Nelson, in her defense of Public Broadcasting, has not offered a solution by throwing her misguided missiles. I for one think it essential that Canada should properly fund the Public System and use every other ingenious Canadian financial support mechanism to create high quality Canadian production. One billion dollars a year is now spent by advertisers, which is about

equal to our total Parliamentary CBC allotment. Add Telefilm, NFB, and the massive private capital being invested in development of our "single system" programs, and we'll have a good chance to give the Canadian public what they want and maybe even what they need.

Every Canadian deems it to be his inalienable right to watch everything produced in the U.S.A. The CBC, by itself, would offer Canadians a very unbalanced single system competition to these giants. Collectively we Canadians combined are still in a David vs. Goliath battle. Remember, David won. With a little unity of purpose in our single system, maybe we can put some ammunition in our slingshot. It might help if we first identify the real enemy.

Wendell G. Wilks

Capital Independent Television Corp.
Nepean

A well-read brew

I have just received your invoice for a subscription renewal. Please allow me to take this opportunity to share some thoughts with you.

Primo. I want to congratulate you on the excellent level your magazine has achieved over the last couple of years. Excellent cross-country coverage, in-depth interviews and as always timely editorials. Not to mention Michael Bergman's talmudic business advice and Michael Dorland's wonderfully belated discovery of Canadian belatedness. Also the juicy and sometimes moving personal stuff. Robert Lantos' crocodile tears, Ted Kotcheff's pious Hollywoodisms, Norman Jewison's typically Canadian cautiousness about Canadian films, Peter Pearson's defensive boosterism.

At any rate, a well-read brew. But also a conscious attempt at creating a Canadian forum and bringing into it films and filmmakers (e.g., Peter Ustinov's *Russia*) that enlarge our so often parochial views of film in this country.

However, there is one quibble. Your reviews. And I quote.

Cinema Canada #122. "Gray has infused this plot line with an intricate blend of witty irony, self-parodying nostalgia, sincere emotion and a mythologizing ethos that is matched visually, moment by moment, with such painstaking care that the whole work seems charged with a transcendent honesty."

No kidding. It may have been honest, but it didn't work. The much-vaunted chroma-key 'performance' simply became an alienating theatrical device that obscured the undoubtedly real feelings Gray was trying to convey. But your critic as is so often the case never seems to get past the mirror of her own good intentions.

Cinema Canada #124. The review begins with "One feels the characters are not just movie images, they are truly human, exposing their ugly sides as often as the beautiful, their weaknesses as well as their strengths" and ends with "Nevertheless...it is a special film. For the most part it has shied away from the Hollywood gloss that would have destroyed it and has achieved an uncommon ability to make the viewer both joyfully and painfully conscious of his own humanity, that element which is the only true 'universal.'"

Bergman, Fellini, Bresson? Wrong, Bayo. And believe me, if you had seen this turkey as I did, *alone* in a downtown theatre, you would have savoured the full irony of that 'painfully conscious.'

Cinema Canada #129. "In itself a marvelously economic and effective crystallization of the film's harmony-through-disparity ideology, Mann pushes this perfect moment of narrative closure right through the other side back into the open..."

What can I say? I guess you had to be there.

Where do you get these people and what do they do on weekends? Must every review woefully bemoan the state of Canadian industry or alternately wax inarticulate over well-meant but unsuccessful efforts? If there is a problem with the industry it would also seem to

carry over into its critical department. The sophomoric streak just sets one's teeth on edge.

They are after all reviewing the end result of all the work of all the people and institutions that you so zealously cover (and thereby give credence to) elsewhere in your magazine.

Don't get me wrong. I don't necessarily disagree with your reviewer's opinions but I think they do not always do justice to the fine balance evident in both your coverage as well as your editorials and interviews and to its ultimate aims.

All this being said I am happy to enclose my cheque.

Dani Hausmann
Montreal

The trouble with Dorland

Some months ago, I wrote a letter to *Cinema Canada* about associate editor Michael Dorland's commentary on **Lamentations: A Monument To A Dead World**. Dorland's commentary (as I remarked at the time) was everything an artist can realistically expect – that is to say, judicious, thoughtful and given over to grappling with the issues the artist raises for consideration. However, I also stated that I detected in his review evidence of a pattern of thinking that characterizes many confusions, conceptual muddles and errors in judgement. I described that mode of thought as an "exclusionary" one, since it "establishes distinctions among things (or features) and effectively chooses among them by ranking them in a hierarchy." More tersely, I noted it depended on establishing false dichotomies and polarities.

Dorland's recent contribution to the debate on the state of Canadian cinema/the state of the critical discussion of Canadian cinema, entitled, "The Shame and the Glory: Notes pour une recherche sur un cinéma désincarné," exhibits the same pattern of thought. Right in the title is evidence of the same mode of thought – not just in the English/French dichotomy between title and subtitle (which after all, accurately reflects the theme of the conference and probably (also) the state of our country) but in the main title, "The Shame and the Glory" itself. To anyone who doubts that Dorland has a tendency to think in terms of oppositions, and in terms of a "good" and a "bad" object in every pair of opposites, I'd point out that the first indication he does is right there in the first five words he puts on the page.

A significant instance of this polarizing appears midway through the article. Its implications are momentous, Dorland, alluding to different Canadian discourses on cinema, comments:

"Considering that (Peter) Morris is an intellectual and (Jean-Pierre) Lefebvre a technological artisan (*sic*) one could, for example, polarize the two along the theory/practice dichotomy."

Here again is that all-too-familiar strategy of Dorland's writing – the attempt to analyze by schematizing (sorting tendencies according to tables of opposites). But that is not all that is troubling – even offensive – about Dorland's

comment, for behind his comments are conceptions of the artist and the intellectual that are, to say the least, presumptuous. Note the choice of the term "technological artisan;" it is hardly innocent of assumptions. Surely in Lefebvre's case, "filmmaker" or even "artist" would be a more appropriate term. Implicit in Dorland's claim that there is a dichotomous relation between artists (or filmmakers) and intellectuals is a very vexing view of the artist. Are not many artists intellectuals?

Was Ezra Pound not better read and a more profound thinker than most of the "intellectuals" (read "academics") of his day – or, even most English professors of our own time, who can't get through *The Cantos* without the help of a pony? Isn't artmaking an activity that has theoretical implications? Don't many works of art (especially more recent works) actually make theoretical assertions? Isn't *Man With A Movie Camera*, for example, a theory of cinema stated on film – and, as a theoretical work about film on film, involved in exploring paradoxes of the sort (that intellectual) Bertrand Russell showed arose from self-reference? One wonders what Dorland hopes to achieve by stating that Peter Morris and Jean-Pierre Lefebvre could be **polarized** (his term, note!) "along the theory/practice **dichotomy**" (emphasis added).

This is troubling enough! But Dorland's mode of thought leads him into more troubled waters. Dorland has hung the entire article on a "dichotomy" between national cinema (as feminine) and state cinema (as masculine). Dorland is explicit about what he means by this masculine/feminine dichotomy! "the feminine" he associates with life/play/art, "the masculine" with function/order/technique. Thus after the initial step of constructing a false polarity (I shall demonstrate its falsity forthwith), he takes his usual second step, that of attaching values to each of the pair of opposites – labelling one good, the other bad. Predictably, he suggests that national cinema is to be preferred to state cinema, because it exhibits the "feminine" qualities (as it comes from "life/play/art") while state cinema exhibits "masculine," authoritarian features.

There are good reasons to doubt Dorland's schematization. For one thing, it assumes an American/liberal view of the proper relationship between state and culture. According to this view, state involvement in culture inevitably degenerates into an authoritarian relationship. American-type liberalism holds that ideally the state should never become an instrument used to express the interests of a national group. (Liberals often point out that that is exactly what Hitler did; he used the German state to carry out the interests of the "Aryan nation." This historical example is supposed to manifest the tendency of political practices which are based on the attempt to implement the conception of "the nation-state" to degenerate into fascism.) Nor, they contend, should the state become too intimately involved in developing forms of national expression; rather it should restrict itself to assuring a certain minimal standard of distributive justice, and that is all.

Historically these views have not found much support in Canada. (One

who did accept these views is Pierre Trudeau and they lie behind his advocacy of federalism and multiculturalism – as well as his contempt for the political process which was based on what, on philosophical grounds, he concluded, were the limitations proper to it.) The reason they have found little acceptance in Canada is that a rather more Hegelian conception of the state (and of freedom) has most often been favoured by Canadian thinkers. Hegel's conception of nation-state is far too rich to even define here. Suffice it to say that, on this view, the individual does not pre-exist the universal (the state) nor do groups of individuals generate it out of themselves as the liberal-contractarians would have it. Rather, this view holds that the individual and the universal are involved together in a process of mutual creation. The universal (a culture – the realm of Objective Spirit – for example) helps make the individual what he or she is. In fact, for the individual to realize him or herself fully (and one conception of freedom is the capacity to realize one's true nature), a strong culture must exist. A culture comes into being only when the universal has sufficient power to create a strong culture – and it is likely this power can be achieved only through the apparatus of the state. To pretend that this threatens the individual with encroachment by the universal is foolishness, since the individual only comes into being through the universal; the existence of the particular is always already mediated by that of the universal.

To put the matter otherwise, it can be cast as a problem with the conception of freedom that typifies American/liberal thought and which Dorland adopts. Dorland's conception of freedom is "being free from constraints." However this is an empty and formal conception of freedom. It is an entirely negative conception. For we can be free from constraints yet unable to accomplish anything at all. (And, in fact, in the absence of desires formed in social relations, we would not even be able to formulate goals, nor would we possess active wills). It is hard to see, in such circumstances, what it would mean to be free. Surely true freedom, for a human being, depends on the ability to realize one's potential. And the state may have a facilitating rather than a constraining role in this.

So Dorland's rather facile opposition of nation and state is much weaker than it first appears. But there is another, more fundamental problem with Dorland's position, specifically with his argument that nationalist and feminist concerns intersect. Dorland's argument for this imbrication of commitments consists of three parts:

1) The implication that, since the state is an imposed, masculine entity and the nation is feminine, therefore, concerns of the feminists and the nationalists overlap

2) The rhetorical (but logically worthless) strategy of petitioning to authority, by quoting Marchessault's quoting Foucault's assertion that feminist and nationalist concerns do overlap

3) Commentary on professor Armitage's commentary on a paradigmatic film by Joyce Wieland.

The first part of Dorland's proof is

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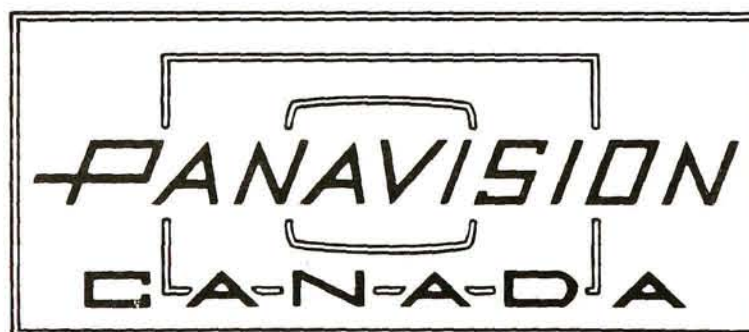
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problematic exactly because it has the weakness that all American (liberal) theories have; to wit, it is based on a negative rather than a positive conception of freedom and considers the individual as pre-existing the state (hence the term "imposed" when describing the state culture), when in fact individual and state are involved in a mutually creative process. The second part is no proof at all but merely a citing of an authority. But it is in the third part that the weaknesses of Dorland's position become glaring.

Before identifying them, I want to make a point that should not need to be made, but in the present reactionary climate is absolutely necessary. In the next section, I shall discuss Dorland's commentary on what he cites as Professor Armitage's commentary on a film by Joyce Wieland. When I question Dorland's commentary on Professor Armitage's, I am questioning exactly that: I am not raising questions about the value of Wieland's film itself. To state my conviction on the matter clearly, Wieland is an important filmmaker. But the belief that Wieland's films are worthwhile does not imply the belief that all accounts of Wieland's importance are worthwhile. Nor conversely does the statement that a particular account of Wieland's importance is unfounded imply that all claims about Wieland's importance are worthwhile. Not conversely does the statement that a particular account of Wieland's importance is unfounded imply that all claims about Wieland's importance are unfounded.

Dorland begins this section of the work by citing a remark he claims Professor Armitage made at the Conference, that "Wieland has consistently and consciously sought out the feminine precisely as a terrain that has remained unexplored by her male counterparts." Dorland himself ups the stakes of Wieland's feminist wager when he interprets professor Armitage's analysis as implying "that Wieland's place among the Big Five of the Canadian experimental avant-garde (with Snow, Rimmer, Razutis and Elder) is primordial and, indeed, constitutive."

What comes next in Dorland's commentary, one surmises, is to be taken as proof, since it follows immediately after

the claim and is introduced by a colon. It is what he presents as professor Armitage's catalogue of the strategies she says Wieland developed in the early sixties: "all of the devices of the structural avant-garde as well as the fragmentation of the body, the play of images against reflecting surfaces, the invention of cinematic languages (one is astonished to think that Armitage actually used the term "language" to refer to the ensemble of strategies that include those she lists and others) which emphasized diffusion, distortion, condensation, fragmentation, loss of perspective, and so on."

This is a truly fascinating statement. Even an abbreviated catalogue of the problems associated with it would include the following:

1) The list of strategies Professor Armitage is said to have claimed Wieland developed is very interesting. It includes "fragmentation of the body, the play of images against reflecting surfaces, the invention of cinematic languages (sic) which emphasized diffusion, distortion, condensation, fragmentation, loss of perspective, and so on." In sum, a veritable catalogue of the strategies Brakhage pressed into service in the late fifties. In fact, the list Professor Armitage is said to have offered is a list of the *key* characteristics of the lyrical film, which, as every film student knows, Brakhage began developing when making *The Wonder Ring*, which he brought to a fully developed form in *White Eye* (1957) and which he has continued to work with, on and off, since. What's (still) more, the lyrical film dominated avant-garde filmmaking from about 1959 almost to the end of the sixties. What's more, Brakhage "assembled" the stylistic features of the lyrical film out of strategies that had existed, piecemeal, since the forties. Just consider how many of the strategies Professor Armitage is said to have claimed that Wieland "developed" are used in Marie Menken's *Visual Variations on Noguchi* (1945), Sidney Peterson's *The Cage* (1949) and Maya Deren's *At Land* (1944).

The strategies Dorland tells us Armitage claimed Wieland developed, were invented a decade to a decade and a half before Wieland began making films. (Wieland first worked in film around 1957 or 1958 making the collaboratively produced *Tea In The Garden*

and, with Michael Snow, *Assault In The Park* (1959). Since Dorland is using Armitage's claims to buttress his arguments about the "primordial and, indeed, constitutive role" played by a woman's cinema, questions of priority such as those on which I have dwelt are crucial. The arguments Dorland, and Dorland says Armitage, make about priority do not hold up.

2) Brakhage's films, the salient characteristics of which are included in Armitage's list have been reviled by feminists. Brakhage is frequently cited as the apotheosis of patriarchy. These denunciations seem to me silly, but at the same time, I'm amazed to see a description of the attributes of Brakhage's cinema being said, mistakenly, to have been originated by a woman and then celebrated as truly progressive feminist strategies (actually the basis of a feminine *écriture*). To put the problem in a nutshell, the same group of features are condemned (by one group of feminists) as patriarchal when they are believed to have been originated by a male filmmaker and celebrated (admittedly by another group of feminists) when they are believed to be originated by a female filmmaker. Strange!

3) The comment that Wieland developed all the features of the structural avant-garde in the early 1960s is simply preposterous. Are we to believe that Kubelka (who had been making films since 1954) played no role in the creation of these strategies? Nor Breer (who too had been making films since 1954)? Nor Warhol? Nor the graphic filmmakers of the 1920s? But perhaps Professor Armitage means simply that Wieland, unaware of the work of other avant-garde filmmakers, re-invented strategies other filmmakers had developed a decade earlier. Wouldn't this, though, affect the claim that Wieland's role was "primordial and, indeed, constitutive"? Furthermore, in what is likely the most famous article ever written on any area of cinema, P. Adams Sitney catalogued the list of features which structural films tended to possess. It included the use of fixed camera positions, flicker effects, loop printing and rephotography off the screen. Now where in Wieland's films up to and including *Water Sark* are these features to be found?

Well, if Dorland's portrayal of the dramatic struggle between opposites has a hero(ine) - feminism - or more

accurately feminism/nationalism - epitomized by Joyce Wieland, it must have a villain. It looks like the villain is patriarchal imperialism epitomized by (yours truly) Bruce Elder. Hence his comment, the "toppling of the male pantheon of Canadian avant-gardism was quietly sustained by Laurie McNiece's resituation of Bruce Elder among "the concerns of avant-garde filmmakers *elsewhere*" (Dorland's emphasis); that is to say, among the internationalizing and imperial traditions, whether classical or avant-gardist, of male disembodiment"

What evidence does Dorland educe to prove that my filmmaking belongs to the imperial tradition of male disembodiment? Well, he quotes from my writings, without saying a word about my filmmaking? But it is possible that my films espouse one set of commitments, my writings another; in fact, it is far from uncommon for artists to misdescribe (or mistheorize) their work.

The statement that my films belong to the tradition of male disembodiment is obviously an important one in Dorland's argument for it indicates that my works exemplify the negative features of male Canadian cinema (remember the subtitle of his article, "Notes ... sur un cinéma désincarné"). It is also an astonishing accusation. After all, one of my films has been banned for portraying accusation. After all, one my films has been banned for portraying a male engaging in a solitary sexual act; another narrowly escaped being banned for the same crime. And, for many people, (I have been told again and again and again), the highlight of *Lamentations* is the sequence of the heterosexual lovemaking. Readers might recall that when Dorland reviewed *Lamentations* he referred to some of the imagery of nudes as worryingly close to pornographic. Now, he accuses me of being an agent of "the imperial tradition of male disembodiment." Something appears wrong; and what is wrong is that Dorland misrepresents works so as to fit them into his neat (but false) dichotomies. Readers might be interested in knowing that an interesting review of *Lamentations* that appeared in the *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* described *Lamentations* as a work that attempts to re-establish the connection

B O O K S H E L F

The 1968 edition of *The Producer's Masterguide* is an exhaustive store of production data covering the motion picture, television, commercial, cable and videotape industries in the U.S., Canada and the United Kingdom. Compiled by publisher Shmuel Bension, this hefty guide provides detailed and accurate information on every facet of production, and stands out as an authoritative reference source, invaluable to industry professionals (*Producer's Masterguide*, 611 Broadway, NYC, \$69.95 + \$4.95 shipping; in Canada U.S. \$85).

A comprehensive manual by Marcus Weise, *Videotape Operations*, provides practical instruction in the use of one-inch videotape recorders. It describes explicitly how to set up and op-

erate the equipment, and includes tips on careers in videotape. In *The Post Production Process*, Diana Weynand outlines a workable flow chart for the entire procedure from the shooting stage through final mix, with valuable suggestions for the guidance of the personnel involved (*Weynand Associates*, 6273 Callicott Ave., Woodland Hills, CA, \$34.95 and \$19.95).

The work of the cinematographer and his creative contribution to filmmaking are examined by Kris Malkiewicz in *Film Lighting*, a valuable text addressed to independent moviemakers and film students. Using extensive quotes from leading cameramen and experienced gaffers, the author discusses specific lighting problems in studio or on location, describes current

equipment and its utilization, and clarifies the techniques of image manipulation in both camera and laboratory (*Prentice-Hall, NYC, \$19.95*).

Michael Singer's well-researched annual guide, *Film Directors*, lists over 1,600 active U.S. and foreign directors. It includes a cross-indexed listing of their 15,000 films, vital statistics, home and/or agents' addresses, as well as stimulating interviews with six young directors (*Lone Eagle, Beverly Hills, CA, \$39.95 + \$5.50 handling*).

The first four volumes of *Motion Picture Guide*, covering A through K, are now in print. This 12-tome encyclopedia will include all English-language films since 1927 with full cast-&-credits, plot summaries, production data, and essays on the films' social, his-

toric and technical aspects. The essays are a distinctive feature of this major source of film documentation, expertly edited by Jay Robert Nash and Stanley Ralph Ross (*CineBooks, Chicago; Bouker, distributor, NYC, \$75/ea., \$750/set*).

Knowledgeably edited by Christopher Lyon and James Vinson, *International Dictionary of Films and Filmmakers* covers, in three published volumes, Films, Directors/Filmmakers, and Actors/Actresses. Individual entries offer a wealth of well-documented reference data, detailing the contribution to cinema art and technique of some 600 films, 500 directors and 700 performers. A 4th volume, currently in the works, deals with Writers and Production Artists (*St James, Chicago, \$50/ea.*).

with the body. At least the author of that article had the decency to cite examples from my films to support her claims

Dorland engages in misrepresentation once again when he uses an abridged quote from *"The Cinema We Need"* to suggest that I represent the imperial tradition of male disembodiment. After all the piece is

a) anti-imperialist. It asks what Canadian artists/filmmakers must do to combat the spread of the American empire of technology

b) dedicated to re-establishing the integrity of the body and the mind. After all that's what the comments on rhythm in the piece were all about.

Dorland committed one other misrepresentation to paper that is so obviously incorrect that it reveals the tawdriness of the motivation for the other misrepresentation in this article. Here is Dorland on the different strands that make-up the English-Canadian aesthetic theoretical current: "Anglo-American cinematic and aesthetic avant-gardism; American translations of French Metzian semiotics; American translations and re-theorizations of French feminism; and lastly, a weak theoretical reflection upon Canadian experimental filmmaking." What I find remarkable about this list is not Dorland's sudden (and unsupported) leap into the normative when he comes to mention the theoretical practice for which my writings have been "primordial and indeed, constitutive," nor even his condemnation of the only body of theoretical work that has been based on indigenous models (not a bad effort on the part of an imperialist, if I say so myself). What I find remarkable is that Dorland omits any mention of by far the largest strand that constitutes Canadian film theory and that is the retheorization of the auteur policy which valorizes humane artists who, speaking through the mass media, bring spiritual/nationalistic truths (appropriately watered down for masscult) to the people. This remains the majority practice in Canada. It became the centre of a debate that was carried on in the pages of this very magazine – a debate to which Dorland contributed. Now, Dorland enshrouds this practice with silence. Why? Any informed reader can guess.

So it goes, on and on, historical error following on misrepresentation, following on oversimplification. Dorland is capable of better commentary than this; in fact, it strikes me that he is now one of our very few useful writers on Canadian cinema. I fear, though, that he is al-

lowing unthinking allegiances (in this instance to "femino-nationalism") to substitute for analysis. I hope Dorland will recover from this debilitating condition and once again begin to really think about Canadian cinema. Goodness knows how much, in the middle of this most brutal of decades, when art is so much under attack – when recently a Toronto newspaper carried a headline about the banning from some Ontario schools of a play by the greatest poet in our language – we need thoughtful advocates for serious work.

Bruce Elder
Toronto

Michael Dorland replies

While it is undoubtedly gratifying for the writer to receive as detailed and thoughtful a commentary as is R. Bruce Elder's on my article (in *Cinema Canada* No. 132), Elder's remarks are certainly fraught with enough muddled thinking, logical howlers and conceptual misjudgments of their own that I hazard a response.

Elder seems to think he has grasped something of my "all-to (sic)-familiar" rhetorical strategy which, he says, consists of schematizing "false polarities" and within such a false (as opposed to true?) polarization, attributing values to one or other pole, such that the positive ("good") pole overrides the negative. This strategy, he says, is a) vexatious to the artist, b) characteristic of American liberalism, c) contemptuous of the Canadian Hegelian State, d) an "astounding accusation" against Bruce Elder's filmmaking, e) a misrepresentation of Canadian humane (film) auteurism, and f) unthinking femino-nationalism.

Taking these points in order:

a) *Vexing the artist*: "...it is possible," Elder admits, "that my films espouse one set of commitments; my writings another; in fact, it is far from uncommon for artists to misdescribe (or mistheorize) their work." Or even *misunderstand* their work. Indeed, as Harold Bloom has argued, literary tradition (and one might include filmmaking here) is nothing but misprison. That this could prove vexatious is irrelevant.

b) *American liberalism*: To the extent that the cultural practices of the Canadian state, where they are dignified with anything that might resemble theory, are clothed in the tattered garb of liberalism, a generous reading of Elder's objection might allow that there are minor differences between Amer-

ican and Canadian liberalism, the latter being more conservative. And these differences might, in turn, be contained within Marx's observation that history repeats, the first time as tragedy, the second as farce. However, Elder's musings about American contractarianism, complete with red herring invocation of the bogey of the 'Aryan nation,' allow him to invoke the chimera of the Hegelian State in Canada.

c) *The 'Hegelian' State*: As J. W. Dafoe, who knew what he was talking about, put it in 1922 – in Canada, there is no State, only "organized states within the state... not, as their philosophers claim, servants of the state cooperating in its service; their real desire is mastery of the state and the brooking of no opposition or rivalry" (in *Laurier: A Study in Canadian Politics*, Thomas Allen, Toronto, 1922, rptd, 1963, 43-44). Nonetheless, the theoretical difficulty of attempting to conceptualize the State in Canada has never dampened the energies of Canadian cultural nationalists, intellectuals or artists, though it does tend to fuel their lamentations.

d) *Bruce Elder's filmmaking* is dealt with in a). Elder imagines ("It looks like the villain is...Bruce Elder") himself or his films to be the object of a negative valorization in a system of false polarizations. Elder, of course, is at liberty to imagine anything he will. That Elder gets vexed by an article analyzing the Canadian cultural system of blocked, interlocked filmic discourses and how that blockage privileges imperializing disembodiment, when he himself points out that his films have been banned or threatened with censorship "for portraying a male engaging in a solitary sex act" seems more like the pot calling the kettle black.

e) *Canadian film auteurism*: Even stranger is that Elder now presents himself as a defender of the very tradition of spiritual truths watered down for masscult that he was at such pains to distance himself from in the debate around "The Cinema We Need" (*Cinema Canada* Nos. 120-121). As Elder mentions that I contributed to that debate, my contribution, among other things, consisted in noting that the seemingly insurmountable differences between Elder and his 'opponents' were ones of degree, not kind. In the context of the present article, there was enough to do in disentangling some of the dominant threads of Canadian 'imperializing disembodiment.' However, as an artistic liberalism watered down for masscult, Canadian auteurism does, I agree, leave room for the occasional hermetic text.

f) *femino-nationalism*: Here, in keeping with a rigorous Canadian dualism, there are two aspects, one particular, one general. Elder points out that (my rendering of) Kay Armatage's claims about innovation in Joyce Wieland's *Water Sark* are technically false: Armatage, simultaneously looking forwards (from 1964 on) and backwards (from 1986), had argued (according to Dorland) that various techniques employed by Wieland in the film, subsequently theorized as such-and-such a kind of filmmaking by so-and-so, can be viewed as antecedent. Wrong! objects Elder, also looking forwards and backwards, it wasn't **that** before, it was **this** before, i.e. 'not the before *she* says, but the before *I* say.' And this, Elder complains, is a "rhetorical (but logically worthless) strategy."

More generally, however, the worth of rhetorical strategies (and thus their logic) is that, like bodies or nations, they are occupations of space/time whose densities produce "culture." Within the space not already occupied by imperializing discourses without and, given the minimalism of the Canadian liberal state, within – that, is within the perfectly liberal fiction of abstract, legalized culture – Bruce Elder (or any producer) may, on the strength of rhetorical strategies, produce texts that conform to the criteria of the administrative discourse on culture. That the resulting 'culture' can only be lacking in density makes it, at best, precious and artificial; on average, complacently mediocre; and, at worst, illegitimate – less a culture than a police(y) zone.

That some femino-nationalists at Quebec City were raising questions transgressive of the protected confines of that 'culture' seems less a cause for anxious outcries than an instance of what Paul de Man, after Hegel, has called 'the law of differentiation.' For, as de Man explains,

The political in Hegel originates in the critical undoing of belief, the end of the current theodicy, the banishment of the defenders on faith from the affairs of the state, and the transformation of theology into the critical philosophy of right. The main monarch to be thus dethroned or desacralized is language...

Which brings us back to cultural discourse in this country: *two* languages, *two* sexes, etc. That Bruce Elder finds the idea troubling only inscribes him as part of the exclusionary strategy he claims to object to.

Michael Dorland
Montreal

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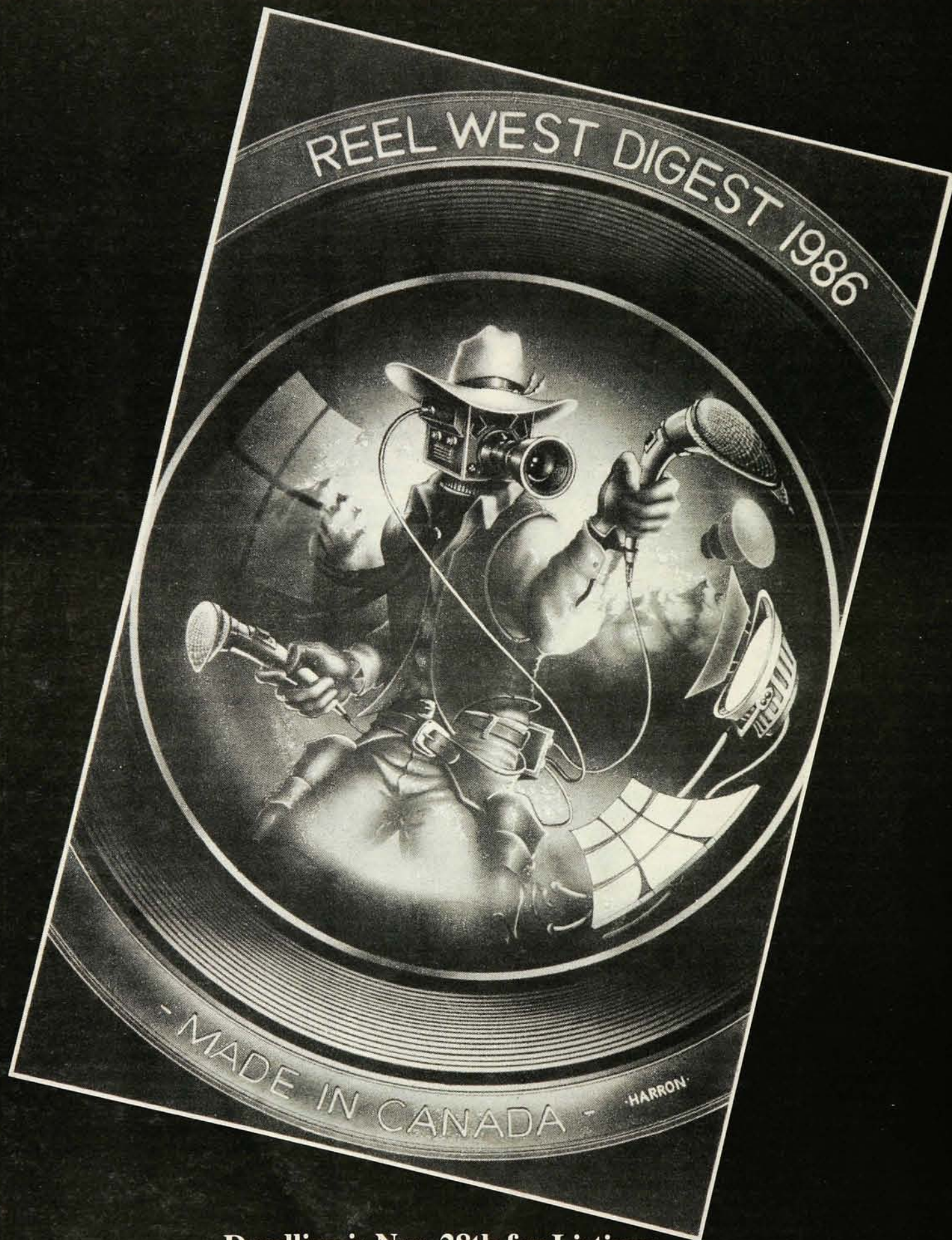
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