

People wonder why there aren't many great Canadian films. It's as if they expect them to spring totally complete from nothing. We don't have a history of filmmaking in this country, no matter what anyone says. Any talent we had, left"
—NORMAN JEWISON

Jewison sees no history here because he sees history as American history; and since he finds none here he says history itself is missing. History is never missing; it's just waiting to be written, or rewritten, sometimes forcefully and willfully cut out against another writing. What Norman Jewison is at odds with is that he can never be a part of this writing because he never really engaged with this land and slowly and patiently learned what it might be. He can only politically and economically transform this country into America by using his borrowed factory forms of filmmaking to take us into a history, as opposed to imaginatively and creatively writing one here.

The beginnings at the NFB are forgotten; Norman McLaren is forgotten; Arthur Lipsett is forgotten... and (having sprung "totally complete from nothing") Snow, Shebib, Lefebvre and numerous others who shun homogeneous ways of creating. Then the re-writing begins; the films are anomalies in film history, and the filmmakers are marginalized. The "real" cinema is just beginning; a cinema whose shady roots take us back to God's country, under the burden of another history.

From Mounties and moose they dream of an eruption in the land that will spew the fruit of a duplicate Hollywood. But when the land opens, it bears up the terrible truth of a history caught in its own erection. Upon the screen that unfolds above the margin of the 49th they try to project a foreign history, an entertainment that covers over the dead of our birth. We lie between the earth, our shield, and the white screen which covers us. We lie with our dead, silent, underneath the weight of someone else's images. But we are not dead.

We are weakened by those who gather the twilight rays from the Hollywood Hills and bounce that light back around our north like an infinite reflection of what we would rather be.

We shun industry at the expense of art, and find it insidious that good films must turn huge profits. We grow nauseous hearing that our artistic films should follow the Hollywood industrial model that has crept into the minds of limelight ensnared south-flying Canada-geese minds stuck on artificial holly. Hollywood North is neither a lie nor a confession, it is an inflection.

The progeny of this unholy baptism are shadow films - declensions, films struck from a distant original, disciples of a god-like model, a how-to dutifully followed. However, a cinema can be constructed that does not concern itself with shadow play and following pied pipers, nor with filmmakers who momentarily fall out of line at each new road they might take only to be stricken by a great sense of loneliness and fear, subsequently racing to catch up with the group. This other cinema stays away from pied pipers as much as possible; it is off on its own adventure making discoveries and winning personal battles with itself. It avails itself of whatever it deems necessary - no need to eschew three point lighting, use of actors, a script, a story, etc., and no need to use these elements slavishly. It never ceases to be curious about the relationships it discovers and the new relationships that are suggested. It prefers neologisms to declensions.

It is here where we must take courage. We cannot take flight back to God's country - the hardships of our past prove these easy tales to be a chimera - Hollywood North is still and always has been too far north to be Hollywood and too far south to be akin to our tastes. This country is itself an experiment, and its films (films such as *A Tout Prendre*, *Avoir 16 Ans*, *Hart of London*, *Trapline*, *Scissere*, *A Trilogy*, *The Art of Worldly Wisdom*, *A Married Couple*, *Rat Life and Diet in North America* to suggest only a few titles) are coarse, wild, full of abandon, liveliness,

distinctiveness, strength, and sensitivity - and their marginalization in a marginalized country speaks more of the sycophancy of the Hollywood North rabble than it does of the "Canadian" filmmakers.

The desire for the American model of filmmaking displays a lack of integrity, it lacks seriousness. It rests on assumed and unquestioned premises, and sees things just so and not otherwise. To really become Canadian (unlike all the negative things we were taught Canadian connotes) we must become un-Canadian - not American or German or French but to unravel our sense of being and place - to become an experiment in living. But that is to ask mere Canadians to have courage, individualism, strength, create their own sense of purpose, being, and way of life, with a sense of community. Perhaps too much to ask for.

We are in a state of civil war. Nothing is more dear to a nation than its culture. A nation exists as a separate entity because it is aesthetically different. Those who live here and conspire against it commit the most grievous crime against their country. Our film culture exists in an historical relation to the U.S. dating back to 1896 as the expropriated to the expropriator. Too weak to fight, unable to counter the lobbying of Americans, Canadians chasing American dreams... where is the honourable politician that has the courage to fight for a Canada with its own culture rather than forsake it to the U.S., to fight against capitulation to U.S. lobby groups such as Jack Valenti and his band of decadents? To succumb to these decadents is to become decadent - worse, it means becoming a traitor. We shoot traitors, don't we?

Our hardship is perhaps greater than that of any other western nation. It is the hardship of complacency, being comfortable. Old sayings sometimes die hard bred in hardship of old time. But we must be vulnerable, take chances and

forceful positions, make statements, pronouncements, and open up to attacks on our convictions, and take action. Let's welcome refutation by bold, adventurous minds that love difficulty, experiment, and are unsatisfied with presuppositions as they now stand.

It is not a matter of putting our stories, or our lives on the screen and in that way finding our culture or our cinema. It is not lost. It is a matter of proscribing a more vibrant and healthy set of relationships amongst sounds and images that build towards a future of our own making. A prescription not sent by witch doctors (foreign or domestic) that would gobble us up but a brew always changing mixed with our blood so that we are indistinguishable from it. One that fears no recriminations, nor makes apology for what it is - but before this we need major changes.

So many people are writing about Canadian stories - but few seem to know what a Canadian cinematographic story is, or could be. Most critics and audiences today talk about characters, and the Canadian identity, or lack of it (or that it is the perpetual search for an identity that is our identity). We have heard all the arguments about this search for an identity; this is the search of an individual. Only those willing to embrace another's dogma have stopped searching. But what does this have to do with films and sound-image relationships? You have to start at home, with yourself, with your life and your relationships, with sounds and images that must sing and dance around your being.

Making films is looking, listening, feeling the world around you, knowing the equipment and people you work with, engaging yourself with awe, wonder and a sense of curiosity, possibilities, and excitement over all the ways in which film can be used, by all the places to which a camera can be brought, by all the relationships amongst images and sounds... in effect, capturing and organizing on film the relation-

by GARY BERONICK

Art Country

ship between one's experiences and the formal possibilities offered by the medium. Neither experience nor form is as homogeneous as the Hollywood style would have us believe.

We have given birth to possibilities in Canada only to let them be bugged up by the ghost of a nasty uncle. We need to bridge the gap between the film artists who began in the 60's and 70's, filmmakers such as Gilles Carle, Gilles Groulx, Claude Jutra, Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, Jacques Leduc, Jack Chambers, Michael Snow, Bruce Elder, Joyce Wieland, Al Razutis, Don Owen, Don Shebib, Allan King and a new generation of filmmakers such as Barbara Sternberg, Brenda Longfellow, Patricia Gruben, Peter Mettler, Richard Kerr, Phil Hoffman, Bruce McDonald, Mike Hoolboom, Colin Brunton, Atom Egoyan, Bill MacGillvray, Ed Ackerman, Ellie Epp, Patricia Rozema, Chris Gallagher, Steve Sanguedolce, Lea Pool and many, many others who are serious about film not Hollywood, money, God, television, and prescriptive ways of making films.

This means getting rid of all the trash that rose

up in the sea of money that appeared in the late 70's - people who knew nothing and still know nothing about film. People for whom density means the thickness of their pocket books, compost programs, or their own thick-headed skulls. Their only film to date has been a form of pollutant, like those that cross our skies, a form of unchecked waste, often coming from south of the border, leaving their slimy film on our lakes and screens. Many of them still have a large hand in the making of films in this country. Let us not forget that their form of pedagogy has always been pederasty.

We must be done with the old prescriptions. We have trusted the witch doctors and the know-nothings with our cultural body for far too long. It is time to turn, like other sciences, to experiment and experience in order to begin to find cures. One's history is marked in this body, the cultural and physical body that speaks its own proper history. We have filmmakers who are now responding to and with the body, against the illusions, selfdelusions, and "elsewheres" (heaven and Hollywood). And it

is these filmmakers who need our support and encouragement.

As a country that participates in the world, we need a chance to write about it, its life, forces, mysteries, from where we see and hear it. That place is here - above the border that cuts us from another perspective. Then we will have succeeded in creating an art of Canada. But we have to believe in ourselves as artists creating a country, not a temporary home (from Europe, from Hollywood, from God) but a home that is a work of art. We must believe we are building a work of art here - not to represent Canada, but a work of art which is Canada itself.

The origins of Canadian cinema will come to meet us from the future... when we begin to think on it, to cut furrows into the compost body politic. Art has often grown stronger in the compost of decaying bodies (19th century Europe provided many striking example) when design begins to cut into soiled thoughts and industry learns to stand back and watch something grow.

The choice is between death and the future,

between God/Hollywood and the present we make to ourselves. Most everyone arrives at some point in their lives (some very close to the end) to thoughts about their future, of the generations to come, of themselves 500 or 1000 years from now, of their place in this unfolded/unfolding history. As the past has presented us with a culture to tell us who we were then, so it is left to us; we become the messenger that carries the present to the future.

In every new beginning a new myth enters to explain the light that creates reason out of chaos. It is time to take a stab in the dark at Canadian light, to take up the torch, create dialogue as vibrant as our films, to replace those musty arguments by tired whipping boys of dead and borrowed ideas, to think of life again, to turn our thoughts to those millions of Canadians lined up along the Canada-U.S. border and the generations more on top of whom we stand. It is time to turn our heads northward and take up the Canadian shield and upon this frame wrap our screens and begin projecting into the future. The rest is history...

