

REVERB

Scripts Thin, Scripts Fat

Regularly I hear that directors and producers are unhappy about the lack of scripts being done by Canadian writers. I hear there are no good scripts being done in Canada. I hear that producers and directors are virtually turning over rocks looking for film scripts.

From writers I hear that there are no producers in Canada – or, if there are a few, they do not have business addresses, home addresses, or available telephone numbers. Writers tell me there isn't any way to get a script to producers and, even if you could manage that, the producers wouldn't read it and wouldn't send it back; they would merely file it in File 13 (wastepaper basket) and things would continue not to happen.

I have scripts, but at the price of decent duplication in this town, I can hardly afford to pay 35 cents a page and then mail the script to an address I don't even have yet, to be unread by a man I don't know, and thrown in a wastepaper basket I shall never see.

I am sure producers and directors will scream at the suggestion they are not available, and do not read scripts, and I am sure they will all protest vehemently and say they do not now nor have they ever thrown scripts into File 13.

Similarly, writers are protesting the statement there are no decent scripts in Canada.

We have scripts. We just don't have any way of getting them to the people who might be able to DO something with them.

Scripts thin, scripts fat, scripts new, scripts old, westerns, adventure, historical, hysterical, comical, dramatic, sexual, women's lib, male lib, caustic, loving, searing, gentle, developed, semi-developed, underdeveloped, outlined. Scripts modern, scripts historically inaccurate, scripts with messages, scripts without messages, scripts with children, without children, with dogs, without dogs, with trampoline acts, with jugglers, with nudity, with taste, with nuns, without nuns, scripts where the hero rides off into the sunset leaving the hero to munch grass, scripts where the hero rides off into the moonlight leaving the horse to weep – you name it, we've got them, 99.9% of which will never see the light of day! In boxes, bags, filing cabinets, basements, attics, bedrooms, old trunks, suitcases, glass jars in the cellar... we've got them.

Maybe we should get together some time?

Cam Hubert
Nanaimo

Of Sales and Apologies

I recently picked up issue number 31 (an increasing number of bookstores down here seem to be carrying **Cinema Canada**, by the way, and it seems to be selling) to find that I had made at least two omissions in my listing of Canadian award winners at the American Film Festival in New York last spring. I'd like to take the opportunity of apologizing to the filmmakers affected – I know it hurts.

With eight or nine films being shown at any one time, it is obviously not possible to see everything. Except in the case of films I already knew about, I had to rely on the festival catalog to pick out which were Canadian productions. Tony Douglas's film was listed under the name of the U.S. distributor and unfortunately I missed it. Again, my apologies...

With regard to **Secretariat, Big Red's Last Race**, I don't even have that excuse. Martin Harbury may be interested to know, however, that on the same day that I picked up my copy of the magazine his film was being shown on one of the local television stations here. I'm glad he agrees with me about the importance of the festival.

Continued best of luck to you with **Cinema Canada**.

Sincerely,

Ben Achtenberg
Jamaica Plain, Mass.

"No" to this Drivel

Unfortunately upon reading the two issues which have been received I am insulted and very annoyed by the whining and self-pitying attitude taken by the magazine and the writers. As an independent filmmaker myself, I will not support this drivel. It stands to reason that if the filmmakers whom you represent want to become at all successful at their professions, they will have to put their energies to much better use than sitting around bemoaning their sorrowful plight.

Randolph Cheveldave

A Mellow Correction

I have mellowed in attitude over the years towards seeing my surname misspelled by others, i.e., Taylor instead of

Taylor (as in fact it was in the end credits of **Death Weekend**) but, as the actual production sound mixer for that film, I'm sure you will understand that I must now draw the line of protest upon finding my full name spelled Dan Goldberg, as was the reported sound mixer in your recent review of that production.

No doubt the error was unintentional or that your reviewer was supplied with erroneous information but correction would certainly be appreciated and your publishing of this letter would suffice nicely for that purpose.

Paul Tayler

Right you are. Dan Goldberg was the sound editor. Ed.

Echoes from England

I'm a Canadian working in London, I love films and this is film-heaven. Italian, German, French, Swedish galore. Bertolucci, Fassbinder, Luis Bunuel, Herzog, Bergman, Syberberg, Fellini, Pasolini, Welles and so on. It's a pleasure to be away from the land beaten and swayed by waves of American Movie hype. But Warhol is everywhere.

Use the poem if you want.

Old Westerns

*the massive faces look at each other,
the guns shoot into his chest oh
he is dead, blood filling ponds,
ugh. My shirt is bleeding, the
whispering behind me is distracting
but I am alone and the buzzards
gather round my corpse,
my massive eyes shut.*

Ian Stephens

Message from Deep Throat?

Recently I ran into your magazine on the coffee table of a friend – she being a subscriber. I read bits and pieces of that issue and became curious. Curious about how Canadian filmmakers felt about themselves, the films they create and to what they credit their films' success or failure. Thus I asked to borrow a number of her back issues, which she allowed, and have spent several evenings reading them. Since then, I've come to the conclusion that Can-

adian filmmakers really don't know what to feel - about anything, in particular the films they make. They seem to want someone else to do that for them - like maybe a movie public with lots of money. I think too that Canadian filmmakers have got trapped in that national non-issue of "the search for identity". They don't seem to be finding it. Maybe they're looking in the wrong places.

EXAMPLE: You have published a number of pleas for some sort of government film policy. Why? What's it going to change? Certainly it will add more bureaucracy to the "industry", which, as we all know, is just what every industry needs. What else? Money? Ah... yes. Money to make more boring feature films like 90% of the ones we've made so far? And what will happen if the government says, "here's our film policy" - whatever that policy may be? Is that going to change the film "industry"? Are we suddenly going to wake up one sunny Tuesday morning and find our glorious films showing to packed houses in every nook and cranny of this country? Just because the government has sanctioned filmmaking in one form or another? Hardly. Sucking the governmental tit has yielded sour milk for most who've tried it in the past.

Until recently it was barely possible for myself and my friends to attend a Canadian film and not feel compelled to get drunk out of embarrassment afterward. **Rip-Off** and **Slipstream** were two which deserved and got great amounts of alcohol to post-mortize. But we have now found a way to overcome that whole situation. We are now highly selective about the Canadian films we see. In the past year, I've seen exactly one Canadian film - on purpose - and one other - accidentally.

Now, filmmakers, do not get discouraged. I am not saying that all your movies are horrid. I've seen several excellent proud Canadian products which deserved more credit and screenings than they were given or allowed.

This probably doesn't sound like constructive criticism and it's not meant to be. Your magazine has proven in almost every issue that a crowd of simpering ginks like our movie men should be left to wallow in their own envious juices - envious of the toys, the money and the talent that creates the films that we import from the south to pack our theatres. Most of their films are of questionable quality as well, but at least they are pleasant to look at and keep you awake in the dark. And you at Cinema Canada have to faithfully report the latest whinings from that crowd. Your job is not enviable. Is it fun?

In the dark,
Slipshaw Farrenhold

PS: I see that most of the folks who write to your magazine have some sort of institution or organization attached to their names. If this is necessary, you can choose between The Nocturnal Emission Standards

Council of Canada or the Committee to Punish Victor Juice. Otherwise I'm just a reader.

Mr. Jones Goes Unnoticed

In Gerald Pratley's column in your December/January issue there is an error which should be corrected.

Mr. Pratley states that, among others, Kirk Jones was brought in from London for the production of **Summer Rain**. Mr. Jones is a Canadian. He has been a major editor in this country for many years. Among his credits are **Face Off** and **Paperback Hero** as a feature film editor. He has also produced, edited and directed for the CBC on such series as *Quentin Durgens* and *The Whiteoaks of Jalna*. These credits in the independent industry came after many years with the National Film Board.

To my knowledge, Mr. Jones was very active with the Directors Guild of Canada during the formative years of the Canadian film industry.

It seems sad to me that Mr. Pratley as an astute observer of the Canadian film scene has failed to be aware of Mr. Jones.

John Trent

G.P. regrets having misplaced Kirk Jones. He has listed Mr. Jones' name in enough credits to know better and very much regrets the error. Ed.

Belongs in Hollywood

In this article in issue number 32, Wojtek Gwiazda accuses me of "denying the existence of the real world" by describing my film **Mon âme** as "cutesy shots through tree branches of a child 'discovering' the world."

Mon âme explores that child's unique perception of the world and its more subtle qualities have obviously escaped Mr. Gwiazda's sensitive eye. Although it is very clear that Mr. Gwiazda is a film 'realist' to the nth degree, it is silly for him to take the position that a film may not be considered "decent" unless it depicts "a society showing signs of decay." He seems to feel that my choosing to explore a positive view of life is escapist and lacking in imagination. I disagree.

Equally absurd is the uniquely Canadian tendency to be critical of a film for being "in focus", shot in "35 mm", properly edited and containing "studio-style cine-

matography." I am not insulted by Mr. Gwiazda's implying that filmmakers such as myself belong in Hollywood. At least they are still making films here.

Mark Sobel,
Los Angeles

In Self-Defense

I want to defend myself and my unknown colleagues from Wojtek Gwiazda's scathing socially conscious scorn ("Technique Up; Imagination Down", October, 1976). First, I am not now nor ever have been a member of the upper middle class. Next, I'm fully aware that my "bound" "duty" is to lead the mass unconscious out of the Dark Ages, but my first task is to entertain. The "introspective personal voyages" I habitually embark on arrive at my own vision of the real world. Inevitably, a film is a world created by the filmmaker, however "realistic" it looks.

How is it possible to equate "imagination" with a precise, literal reflection of everyday reality, and "technique" with the filmmakers' personal worlds?

Thanks for the appellation "artist", albeit in quotes, but I'm a craftsman who might become an artist someday, W.G.'s misconception of my politics and morals notwithstanding.

Mel Kennedy

Don't Knock the NFB

Criticism of the National Film Board is something that we who work within the organization have always welcomed. Honest criticism helps us to formulate new policies and to improve our service to the public in Canada and abroad. It is our hope that Canadians will always continue to criticize and advise us.

However the type of criticism which appears in the December/January issue of **Cinema Canada** under the heading "How to get the Films" is of such a nature that it must be refuted. Rather than deal with specific instances of weaknesses or problems, which could be remedied, you prefer to launch a broadside attack on our distribution system in Canada. Much of what is stated in the article is unwarranted, unfair and fallacious in the extreme.

First of all it is a mistake to assume that all NFB libraries in Canada operate in an identical manner. Methods of distribution are frequently determined by varying types of demands, the size of the population to be served, the extent of an area to be covered, etc. Certain basic services and functions are expected of all our offices and libraries

but beyond that, local conditions and demands frequently dictate the kind of distribution available.

In addition to our regular "pre-booking" service most of our libraries now provide "self-serve" outlets which enable the public to have immediate access to many of the films distributed by the Board. Needless to say there are limits to these facilities and it is not always easy to obtain a specific title on the spot, but at least it is now possible for any individual or organization to obtain a film program without a moment's notice.

We realize only too well that there are limits to our "pre-booking" service but the fact that our library personnel handled well over 400,000 bookings last year indicates that they are doing something properly. The claim that "screwups are frequent" is more than a little confusing. The Board operates 27 film libraries across the country with an inventory in excess of 60,000 prints. In any operation of this size some booking mix-ups and misunderstandings are bound to arise from time to time. However, to state that they are frequent is too generalized to be meaningful and is certainly misleading.

Your article criticizes our catalogs and promotion bulletins and states that their content should be more descriptive and detailed. Again we must ask... how detailed? Theoretically, the promo material for a film could be so detailed that it would obviate the need for the film itself. Over the years the Board has been lauded for the quality and utility of its catalogs and information sheets. We recognize that there is still room for improvement and we are presently rethinking the style and format of our printed materials with the hope of making them more useful.

You suggest that NFB rate its films in terms of style and content and you note that EFLA does this in the U.S. Unlike EFLA the Board achieves almost half its distribution outside the educational milieu, so the rating yardsticks would have to measure style and content with many and very diverse audiences in mind.

The statement is made that distribution problems stem, in part, from a lack of commitment. When you claim that commitment is in short supply at the NFB you are taking a cheap shot at many dedicated and hardworking men and women who take a large measure of pride in the work they perform on behalf of the Canadian public.

Your remarks concerning NFB representatives are particularly objectionable. These officers are professionals in the true sense of the word and their contribution to the use and appreciation of Canadian film is immeasurable. Most of them have spent many years working in the towns and cities of Canada assisting community groups, schools, universities, etc. in the proper selection and application of film. It is very heartening to all of us to know that thousands of Canadian film users find NFB film officers to be efficient, approachable and very knowledgeable.

Finally it should be said that we are aware of certain inadequacies in our distribution system and we are striving constantly to remedy them. In our efforts to improve we not only welcome suggestions but actively solicit them. Your magazine could contribute very significantly in this respect and it is hoped that you will continue to expose our weaknesses as you or your readers see them. Our only request is that the criticism be constructive and factual. Regrettably, such was not the case in your last edition.

Thomas J. Bindon
Chief
Film Library Services

Mr. Bindon attacks my article on the basis of its being a slurred, generalized broadside with no specific criticisms. His answer, I would suggest, is filled with even more vague information. I am very happy indeed that the NFB got 400,000 bookings last year and that the information sheets have been lauded (we have been waiting three years to laud a new catalog) and that NFB representatives are professionals in their field. I wrote the article that has raised Mr. Bindon's ire from the perspective of a teacher and film user. I am well aware that I could walk out of the self-service library with a handful of films (in desperation, I often did it) but my specific criticism was that in some distribution centers across Canada, you cannot count on getting a particular film on a particular date - which is the name of the game if you are a serious film user. For reasons which I explained in my article, the National Film Board is unreliable, even when compared to commercial distributors, and heaven knows, they are bad enough.

If Mr. Bindon does not believe me, a film user, I would suggest that he cross over the corridor with the rose-colored windows connecting the "efficient, approachable distribution officers" with the production side and have a chat with some of the filmmakers. I, as a journalist, hear unending tales of woe and muffled cries of rage and frustration at how badly their films are being distributed, or in many cases not distributed.

Mr. Bindon asks for specific criticism and suggestions. At the risk of repeating myself, here they are again:

1) All NFB films should be evaluated by representatives of their respective intended audiences. These evaluations should specifically detail ways in which the films are of use and should be made public.

2) More information should be available on all current releases and this information should be available when the film is released (not one or two years later). Serious distributors have been known to issue study guides as a routine procedure.

3) One should be permitted to book a film up to one year in advance in order to be assured of having this film for a particular date.

I offer these suggestions in the best of faith but, if I may indulge in one more generality, I would like to take exception to the closing paragraph of Mr. Bindon's letter. The National Film Board in general and the distribution division in specific do not welcome criticism. We have here a very large, very isolated and scared organization whose reaction to attack is a corporate defense posture whose tone is beautifully exemplified in Mr. Bindon's letter. But recently the stakes have become very high. Rome is burning. The very existence of the National Film Board has been put to serious question and frankly, how many Canadians would bat an eyelid if the whole institution disappeared into a hole in the ground? I love the rotten place with all my heart and soul and I hope it wakes up before it is too late.

Ronald Blumer



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