

In recent weeks, we have read ecstatic headlines about the sudden success of a number of Canadian films in the international market place. *Porky's* is breaking \$100 million, *Quest for Fire* has gone over \$25 million, and several others – *If You Could See What I Hear*, *Paradise*, *Visiting Hours*, *The Amateur* – are topping \$10 million.

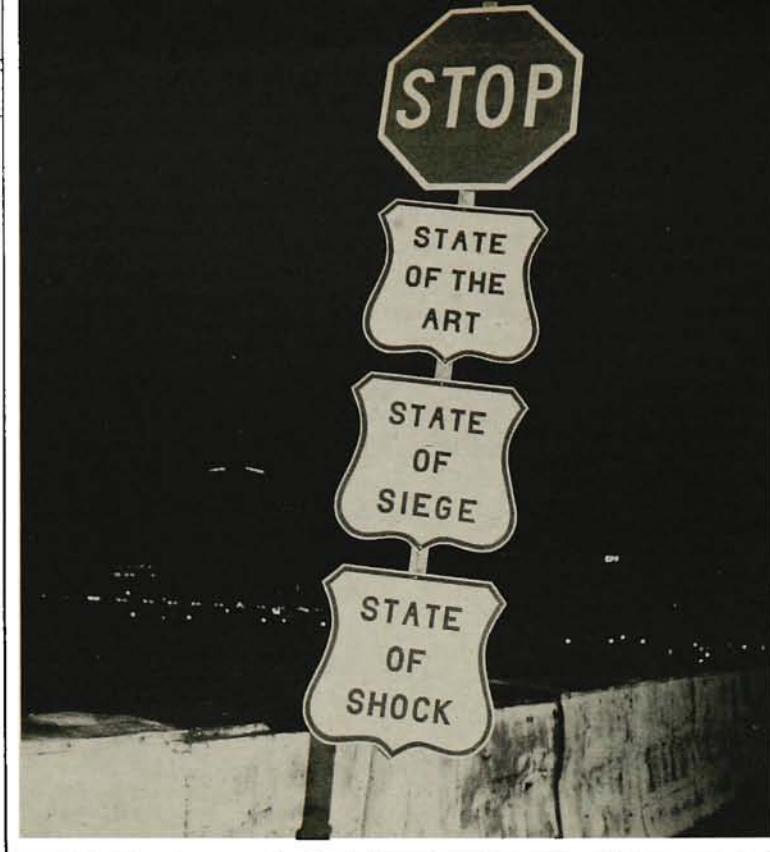
Of course, there is a lie in the preceding paragraph. It is found in the word "Canadian." *Porky's* is set in Florida, written and directed by an expatriate American, and produced with the help of an American, Melvin Simon. *Quest for Fire* is a Canadian-French co-production, with a French director, screenwriter, and composer. *If You Could See What I Hear* is a biography of an American pop singer which uses Canadian locations as Boston and New England. *Paradise*, a Canadian-Israeli co-production set in the Middle East, was written and directed by a Canadian who emigrated to sunny Southern California many years ago. *The Amateur* is about the CIA, and its director has never made a movie in Canada before. *Visiting Hours* is set in one of those classic 'unnamed American cities.'

This means that no Canadian movies have been hits. Furthermore, of the above films, only *Porky's* and *Quest for Fire* can legitimately be described as "hits" because, in these inflated times, with the cost of ad campaigns and prints running as high as \$6 million, big grosses don't go far. The reported \$15 million gross on *The Amateur* for instance will not cover the cost of the film and its campaign.

In an old issue of Cinema Canada, there is an interesting account of a conference in 1973, where one panelist suggested to Famous Players' president George Destounis that a lot of the American movies playing in Canadian theatres were just as bad as a lot of the Canadian films that weren't getting any screen time, and wouldn't it be nice if those Canadian films were to get that screen time. This is exactly what has happened. Aside from *Quest for Fire*, none of these films is particularly good. *Porky's* and *Paradise* are relentlessly stupid explorations of teen lust. *If You Could See What I Hear* is so mawkishly sweet and yet so aggressively obnoxious that the viewer doesn't know whether he should clasp the hero to his bosom or kick his teeth down his throat. *Visiting Hours* is a needlessly complicated slasher-on-the-loose horror movie.

So why are these movies so successful? Simple. They are hits for the same

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notes on a tax-sheltered cinema

by John Harkness

reason that almost any film is a hit these days. Marketing. In these times, there is nothing rarer than a true, word-of-mouth hit. *E.T. : The Extraterrestrial* qualifies, if only because Universal's campaign wasn't that good. *Arthur*, which did not pick up an audience until its fourth week, is the only other word-of-mouth hit in recent memory.

Indeed, it is hard to think of a picture in recent months that was more brilliantly marketed than *Porky's*. Its clever graphics and mid-run shifts in advertising copy told adult viewers that the grossest movie ever released by a Major was okay for them to see; they might be a little embarrassed, but no deaths. By way of contrast, *Quest for Fire* has to rank as a marketing failure. Twentieth Century-Fox (who did so well by *Porky's*) waited too long before putting *Quest* into wide release and never varied the rather crowded print graphic (United Artists made the same mistake with *Raging Bull*).

What has been proven by the recent successes is not that Canadian movies can hold their own on the American market, but that you can market any sort of crap with a pretty enough package.

The question one must ask is how this happened – how did Canadian movies become "Canadian" movies, and what were the factors that destroyed what was once one of the most distinctive cinemas in the world, only to replace it with a quasi-American branchplant?

The commercial reasons have been raked over the coals too many times – both in this magazine and in others – and the idea that greedy, rapacious and unscrupulous producers set out intentionally to strangle the struggling young cineastes is a touch too paranoid. It is true that no one sets out to make a bad picture. After all, Alexis Kanner, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, still believes that *Kings and Desperate Men* is a good picture.

Where we can fault the scores of producers who entered the industry with the coming of the tax shelter is in the area of national and aesthetic allegiance, not in that of commercial acumen.

The World According to Garth

The essential difference between the old-guard defenders of the Canadian cinema (Sandra Gathercole, Kirwan Cox, Gerald Pratley, etc.) and the new breed, born of the tax shelter, was not merely their conflicting aims. The two groups were not even speaking the same language; the former was obsessed (like good Canadians) with issues of cultural identity and artistic truth, and the latter much more interested in tax shelters and breaking into the international market. Had the newcomers been willing to listen to the old guard, we might have had a cinema similar to that of Australia today. Instead, mutual ignorance prompted brokers and lawyers to base their actions on a set of false

assumptions, forgetting several key factors.

The first feeling you get from people like Garth Drabinsky is that movies, as culture, are not important. This is not an attack on Drabinsky, but one need only listen to him talk about the importance to Canadian culture of the Toronto Theatre Festival (which he serves as chairman) and then look at the movies he makes, which tend to be set in all-Canadian locales like New York, Seattle and Washington. As the American humorist Fran Lebowitz has remarked, if movies were an art form, would they be shown in places that sell jujubes and Orange Crush?

A failure to believe in movies as a cultural product is a failure to believe in movies at all, because the best movies of any country are an expression of that nation's soul, be it the corrosive madness of *Mean Streets*, the gentle whimsy of *Jules et Jim* or the mad sexual-political maelstrom of *The Conformist*. Or even the singularly unlyrical depression of *Wedding in White* or the tract-home sterility of *Nobody Waved Goodbye*.

A disbelief in the potential of Canadian cinema led directly to a belief in the necessity of cracking the "international market," for which we should say, "the American market." There are a couple of fallacies here. First, and most important, no foreign-produced cinema has ever broken into the American market on any sustained basis. Various national cinemas have had brief moments of glory – the French and Italians in the early Sixties, the Czechs in the late Sixties, the Germans and the Australians in the Seventies. But all of them have had the limited success that comes to the art cinema. The top grossing Australian film by the end of 1981 was *Breaker Morant*, which had the advantage of being the film that replaced the ill-starred *Heaven's Gate* at New York's Cinema I. It returned \$5 million in rentals to its distributors. The top-grossing French film of all time is *La Cage aux folles*, which had a huge built-in subcultural audience, yet was still sufficiently conventional to cross-over to straight audiences. Next in line is *Last Tango in Paris*, which had the double advantage of being an extremely daring film in a period that was willing to accept daring films, and of starring Marlon Brando, fresh from his Oscar for *The Godfather*.

With those rare exceptions, the foreign film in America is a specialized film for specialized audiences, for the simple reason that Americans make the best American movies in the world. Why on earth would they want to buy American movies from someone else? They have the firmest grasp of film narrative (after all, they practically invented it) and the

actory system to support their needs. When Twentieth Century-Fox, for instance, began to pick up a number of Canadian films, the reason was not esthetic but economic - by and large, Canadian films were cheaper to buy than American films were to make.

The problem with using the Americans as a model was that Canadian producers attempted to mimic an industry that had been in existence for seventy years, yet they had neither the know-how nor the production infrastructure in place. It was like trying to compete with Ford by building cars in your basement.

Another aspect of the American cinema that the new producers failed to take into consideration was that the American film industry is virtually alone in its attempt to combine critical success with a box office hit. In France, no one applies the same standards to a new film by François Truffaut and the latest from Philippe de Broca. The same distinction is observed in Italy between an Alberto Lattuada on the commercial level and a Bernardo Bertolucci on the artistic. A Warren Beatty, who consistently tries for both the big box office success and the big commercial smash, is an almost purely American phenomenon.

The third problem with imitating the Hollywood model was that Hollywood itself is an industry in turmoil, chaos and collapse. The studio system, where the producer was king and randomly assigned writers, directors, and actors to projects, is long dead. What is left is a welter of conflicting interests, where a director with one hit can demand \$36 million for his projected epic on the lint in his own navel, stars battle openly with directors, and the agent has reduced the art of filmmaking into the art of the deal. While numerous fascinating and even great films have been produced by his system (if indeed it is a system), the greatest American films of the past few years - *Taxi Driver*, *Raging Bull*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Thief*, *Pennies from Heaven*, *Cutter's Way* - are darkly corrosive works that are at war with the very mythology that produced them. Watching the spectacle of Hollywood's interminable war with itself is akin to watching a wounded animal gnawing at its own entrails.

Fourth and finally, Hollywood has maintained its commercial and artistic hegemony over the world cinema because it is one of the most voracious and culturally imperialistic industries in the world. It absorbs talent the way a black hole absorbs light. In the Twenties they snapped up Lubitsch and Murnau. In the Thirties, the massive wave of German emigrants fled Hitler and gave birth to the *film noir*. In more recent times, Roger Corman's New World Pictures signed Werner Herzog to make *Fitzcarraldo*, Milos Forman and Ivan Passer came from Czechoslovakia, and the big three of the Australian cinema - Peter Weir, Bruce Beresford and Fred Schepisi - have all made their first American films. Thus, if the Canadian producers developed commercially successful directors, the odds are that after a hit or two, Hollywood would beckon, leaving the producers with the job of creating new directors from scratch.

Finally, Canada was not in the position of France or Germany, which could make dumb movies for home consumption and class for the world export market, because our dumb movies come from south of the border.

Boy Meets Girl in Winnipeg. Who Cares?

While attempting to match the Americans in the creation of entertaining, critically successful box office hits, the new producers of Canadian films like *Running, It Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time*, *Gas* and *Prom Night* were accused of selling out Canadian culture, of betraying the Canadian cinema. It is easy to accuse the makers of pseudo-entertaining films like this of being anti-Canadian, but again, this is too simple.

What has really happened here is that the average young Canadian lawyer who drives a Mercedes, wears Cardin suits and a Rolex watch while vacationing in Bermuda probably does not perceive any difference between himself

that are place-specific for no apparent reason - *Thief* in Chicago, *Blow Out* in Philadelphia - gain a level of realism simply by being set in a specific place.

Can anyone identify the setting of *Prom Night*, *Terror Train*, *Visiting Hours*, *Happy Birthday to Me*, *Gas*, *Cries in the Night*, *Pinball Summer*, *Nothing Personal*, *High Ballin'*, *The Last Chase*, *ad infinitum, ad nauseum*? By believing that no one could possibly be interested in specifically Canadian stories, the producers managed to rob the Canadian cinema of its most distinctive aspect, which is its extremely dense sense of place.

The Quebec cinema has maintained it, of course, as have rare tax shelter productions like Gilles Carle's *Les Plouf-*

substantive subtexts. They are ultimately films about nothing.

The destruction of the Canadian settings establishes another problem, perhaps even more serious.

Funny, You Don't Look Canadian

Each country's cinema has its own distinctive cinematic look. This is dictated by the light, by the training of its cinematographers, the types of cameras and film-stock used, and the background and intent of its directors.

However consciously illiterate a filmmaker may be, subconsciously he is prepared to recognize and accept that which is alien. Or, as is more often the case, to reject it. One of the reasons that foreign films have become hits among the American intelligentsia since the Fifties is that they provide an insight into issues, problems and aspects of human relationships that the American cinema was not dealing with. Another, is that they looked different from the Hollywood style that has become all too familiar. If one looks at movie reviews from the Fifties, one finds critics who wouldn't know a pan from a dolly waxing rhapsodically over the starkness of Bergman's image, or the lyric camera of the early Truffaut.

However, the run-of-the-mill film watcher, trained in his early years to accept the all-American gloss of MGM or the gritty realism of Warner Brothers, tends to sniff suspiciously at the sight of something that looks different. Indeed, one of the most commercially dangerous trends in the American cinema is the use of foreign cinematographers and/or art directors by directors like Paul Schrader (Ferdinando Scarfiootto), Warren Beatty (Vittorio Storaro), Coppola (Storaro), Terence Malick (Nestor Almendros) and the absorption of European styles by directors like Walter Hill (*The Driver*) and Michael Mann (*Thief*), because the American viewer will tend to reject it. One could almost claim that *Reds* failed commercially because it looked like a foreign movie, whereas Coppola, a director much more conscious of visual style than Beatty, could get away with *Apocalypse Now* using Storaro because he was in control of those elements.

Thus, what has seldom been recognized by the Canadian producers is that there is a distinctive cinematographic style in Canada. Ontario light tends to be somewhat drab. Our cinematographers, trained largely in documentary, tend to a slightly darker palette. Also, as we do not have a feature tradition, our lighting style tends to blend people into the scenery. The high-key star lighting that lifts and gives dimension to the American hero (or heroine) is not a traditional element of a cinema whose most masterful films - those of Shebib, Spry, Arcand, early Fruet, Allan King, André Forcier, Jean-Pierre Lefebvre - tend towards a non-heroic, perhaps even an anti-heroic stance.

As a colonized nation, where much of the Western settlement was government sponsored, and whose heroes tend to be part of a collective and often to be losers (the Jesuit Martyrs, the Metis under Riel and Dumont, the Cameron Highlanders at Dieppe), there is a distrust of an individualistic star system. It is significant that the two most successful movies ever made in this country, *Porky's* and *Meatballs*, feature collective heroes rather than individual. Thus, our cinematographers do not tend to light stars out from the group. This relates to the sense



● In his original role, Steven Lack on Montreal's Main

and his young American counterpart on Wall Street. Their belief in an "international" (i.e. American) style of cinema was no doubt legitimate.

By way of comparison, had Barry Levinson taken the script for *Diner* to a group of investors in Baltimore, the response doubtless would have been, "Are you kidding? Who wants to see a movie about a bunch of guys hanging out in Baltimore?"

The internationalism of the new producers was actually the narrowest sort of parochialism, a belief that no one would actually want to see a movie set in Toronto (or Vancouver, or Montreal or Halifax). What they failed to recognize is that so many of the best American movies are place-specific. Martin Scorsese's films are resolutely set in New York, as are Woody Allen's. The Dirty Harry films and *Bullitt* are pure San Francisco. Could *Death Wish* happen anywhere but New York? Even films

fe, Robin Spry's *Suzanne*, Don Owen's *Partners*, Allan King's *Who Has Seen the Wind* and *The Silence of the North*, Silvio Narrizano's *Why Shoot the Teacher*, Zale Dalen's *The Hounds of Notre Dame*, and Allen Eastman's *A Sweeter Song*.

Most of the films created under the shelter, however, seem like movies from nowhere. One need only think of George Mendeluk's *Stone Cold Dead*, which intercuts the Yonge Street strip with New York's Times Square Tenderloin, creating a sense of spatial disorientation eerier than the oddest science fiction. Or even of a lovely film like Don Shebib's *Heartaches*; though the director uses his Toronto setting very intelligently, he feels compelled to have his characters handle American money.

Finally, by making films that are set in no place in particular, they are also no place in general. And by being in no place in general, the films lack any

of place in the best Canadian films, and one of the most striking things about Don Shebib's *Goin' Down the Road*, Paul Lynch's *The Hard Part Begins*, Ted Kotcheff's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, or William Fruet's *Wedding in White* is the way in which characters fit into their environments.

The corollary of this is that to be successful in the American market, the films cannot look Canadian. It is significant that many of the most commercially successful Canadian films have used either foreign born directors (Bob Clark, Paul Lynch, Ivan Reitman) or foreign born cinematographers (John Coquillon, Anthony Richmond, Billy Williams, Reg Morris). Garth Drabinsky has never used a Canadian cinematographer. Bob Clark almost never.

So our producers have attempted to sidestep the problem of an intrinsically Canadian cinema not merely by using foreign settings, but by employing foreign born creative personnel. But this is the point at which two further problems arise.

Whose Movie Is It, Anyway?

Our big-name producers do not see a great deal of difference between themselves and the Americans. Their films consistently prove two things. First, that they believe they are American. Second, that they are wrong. A classic example of this is the Bob Cooper/Ron Cohen production of *Running*, directed and written by Steven Stern. A thirty-ish Michael Douglas decides to concentrate on his running and make it as an Olympic marathoner, proving to his estranged wife that he is not a total failure. He heads off, makes the Olympic team and runs the marathon in Montreal. In mid-race, however, he falls over and is injured. If you are an American producer, the rest is simple. He rises from his pain, grits his teeth, and charges back out, manfully passing his hated rival and finishing fourth, not winning, but proving his spirit. Rocky-esque. A real crowd pleaser.

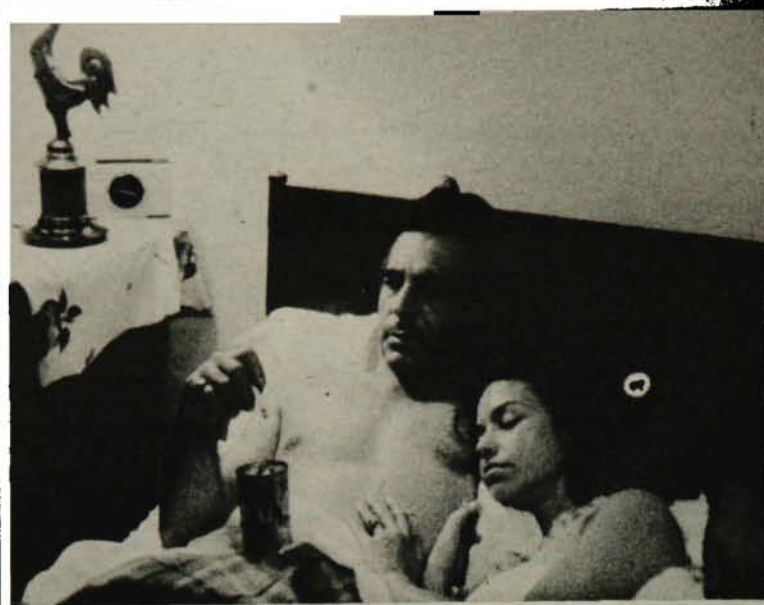
In the actual movie, he gets up, grits his teeth, and staggers into the stadium dead last, as wife Susan Anspach stands there, smiling through the tears. This writer saw the picture at the Bay Cinema in New York, and at the end the audience walked out looking puzzled, as if to say "What the hell...? Last! We sat there for two hours to see this turkey finish last?"

When the producers took control, the attempts at American movies were not Xeroxes of American hits (*Middle Age Crazy* of 10, *Paradise of Blue Lagoon*, *Prom Night of Halloween*, *Running of Rocky*), but carbon copies, fainter, slightly smudged, lacking the clarity of the originals and the motivating artistic force behind them.

This can be attributed to three factors. The absence of strong directorial personality behind the camera, the fact that we are attempting to reproduce foreign genres in the belief that they will sell, and the fact that the genres that we do do well are not the trashy American genres that others have perfected over the years.

So much of filmmaking is about power. Who has the biggest percentage, who has final cut, and who makes the best deal all have seemed more important than the script.

In the tax shelter cinema, the producer, having gotten the money together, feels that he should be in control. Yes, but... His control should be financial. What the best producer does is to bring to-



● Paul Lynch's country entertainers in *The Hard Part Begins*



● A harrowing view of small town Ontario: *Wedding in White*

● Duddy lusting after cash as he serves his apprenticeship



gether the best talents available to do a particular story and let them make the movie. Why hire the talent if you do not believe it can do the job? Control the purse strings, offer suggestions, certainly. But exactly what does a Toronto lawyer know about writing dialogue on the set of a comedy (that tidbit comes from an A.D. who saw it happen)? If the script needed rewriting, why was he being shot?

The tax shelter producers tended to make mistakes on every level imaginable, as far as talent was concerned. They hired directors totally unsuited to the material they were supposed to shape. What was Les Rose, who has a fine hand with gritty downtown realism, in films like *Three Card Monte* and *Title Shot*, doing on dumb, food-fight comedies like *Gas* and *Hog Wild*? Why was Paul Almond, whose specialty is intricate, Bergmanesque psychodrama, doing an international spy thriller? Alvin Rakoff proved himself, in quick succession, incapable of handling disaster movies (*City on Fire*), horror (*Death Ship*) and comedy (*Dirty Tricks*). George Mihalka, suddenly a hot young director because of the Quebec success of *Scandale*, directed *Pinball Summer* and *My Bloody Valentine*, two of the worst movies ever made.

The fact that Mihalka and Rakoff have each made more films under the tax shelter than major talents like Allan King, Robin Spry, Don Owen, Peter Pearson, Claude Jutra, and Zale Dalen is a sure indicator that producers essentially don't want troublesome directors who are likely to attempt to impose a personal vision on the film at hand.

"But we can't hire those guys," scream the producers. "They don't make any money!" This seems valid, until you look at the grosses for *Dirty Tricks*, *Final Assignment*, *City on Fire* and *Gas*. For a moment, put yourself in the position of that mythical orthodontist from Blossom, Saskatchewan. You've just sunk \$5 grand into a picture that you are going to write off on your taxes. You'd like to have the next *Star Wars*, but you're pretty sure you don't. Would you rather lose that money on *City on Fire* or *Goin' Down the Road*? *Gas* or *Alligator Shoes*, *Welcome to Blood City* or *The Silence of the North*?

One gets the feeling that investors seldom got to see either a copy of the script or a screening of the director's previous films. Would you have put cash into an Alvin Rakoff film if you'd seen *City on Fire*? Not very likely.

Because the producers refused to hire strong directors, and misassigned those that they did, very few careers had a chance to develop, and not a single major director has emerged from the tax shelter. Every major director, whether judged by his stature commercially or aesthetically, was making films before the tax shelter. David Cronenberg, Gilles Carle, Robin Spry, Claude Jutra, Denys Arcand, Francis Mankiewicz, Don Shebib, Allan King, Paul Almond, Bob Clark, Harvey Hart, Daryl Duke, John Trent, Eric Till, William Fruet, Paul Lynch, Jean-Claude Labrecque, Don Owen, Peter Pearson, André Forcier and Jean-Pierre Lefebvre which virtually constitutes a definition of the worthwhile Canadian feature industry - all made films prior to the tax shelter.

Even more intriguing is that when a producer has a really good film to his credit, he has a strong, intelligent director somewhere on the scene. Garth

abinsky's best film is *The Silent Part* (Daryl Duke). Lantos and Roth's best picture is *Suzanne* (Robin Spry). Film International has two good ones, *The Brood* and *Scanners* (David Cronenberg). The most successful films – both Astral and Dal Productions are a product, God help us, of single directorial visions – *Porky's* (Bob Clark) and *Satballs* (Ivan Reitman). It is not at all surprising that the most consistently good pictures in this country come from Canada, because their directorial roster – Gilles Carle, Louis Malle, and Jean-Claude Lauzon – could hold its own anywhere. It is also no accident that both John Kemeny and Denis Héroux both have long backgrounds in production; Kemeny produced for over twenty years at the NFB, in Hollywood (*White Hot Fever*) and here at home (*Duddy Ravitz*), while Héroux was the director of a terrible director, admittedly, but still director) of over a dozen features. By their experience, they are among the best producers who can even approach the level of expertise required of a Hollywood or French producer.

More irritating than misassigning directors, is the tax shelter producers' way of stunting or destroying directorial careers. *Partners* is one of the strangest and most interesting films ever made on the relationship between Canada and the United States. Don Owen has not made a film since. Paul Lynch made two films which captured with precision and feeling the sense of the itinerant, second-class entertainer. Both *The Hard Part Begins* and *Blood and Guts* understand cheap hotels and comfortable busses and the travelling players who occupy them. Lynch now directs and horror films. William Fruet's *Wedding in White* is simply the best portrayal of life in a small Ontario town ever made. This is the man who wrote the script for *Goin' Down the Road*. Is anybody really looking forward to *Death Bite*, or another screening of *Tries in the Night*?

The absence of script sense on the part of producers compounds the problems. Bill Gray, who wrote the scripts for *The Changeling* and *Prom Night*, may be the best-known non-directing screenwriter in Canada. Yet, as Andrew Dowler noted in his Cinema Canada review of *Prom Night*, both films have an interesting structural flaw. In neither film is the central character ever threatened by the malevolent killer who haunts each picture. George C. Scott is not the target of *The Changeling's* murderous ghost and Jamie Lee Curtis is the sister of the mad killer in *Prom Night*. Curtis' boyfriend is threatened, but that is hardly the same thing.

This off-center quality is exactly what happens when we try to imitate the American genre film. It has been suggested that it is okay for us to make trash, because in the past, hotbeds of trash have given birth to fine artists. This is true. Out of *Black Mask* magazine came Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. From the Hollywood assembly lines came fine directors like Raoul Walsh and Michael Curtiz. Out of Coran's schlock machines at New World and AIP we got Francis Coppola, Martin Scorsese and Jonathan Demme.

However, all of those people came from an entirely different mode of production. If 30 directors are making a picture or two a year, the cream will rise to the top, and our Scorsese will emerge. But if 10 directors are making a picture every two or three years, it will not.

Perhaps more importantly, we have



● Vintage Shebib as Paul Bradley and Jane Eastwood reconcile



● Lack, less at ease, in Cronenberg's *Scanners*

● Blind dates and new friends in *Goin' Down the Road*



no real trash tradition in this country. Much of this comes from our stodgy, Presbyterian heritage. Much of it comes from a bankerly distrust of things that were fun. It is perfectly all right to promote a Margaret Atwood, because fine literature does so improve the mind. But movies? Trashy things. The lower classes like them, you know. This is the historical attitude that leads to reactions like Robert Fulford's offended-maiden-aunt shrieks at the bloody beauty of David Cronenberg's *Shivers*, and the disgust at the Ontario Censor Board with the kinky sexuality of Don Owen's *Partners* (with Hollis MacLaren in period drag telling her boyfriend, also in period drag, that he's going to find out what it's like to really get 'fucked by the Establishment').

By imitating American trash, we turn away from what we do well and attempt to follow trends in what other people do well.

John Grierson and a Nation of Realists

The problem with Canada is that we are a nation of realists. We love portraying our own landscape, whether it's Susannah Moodie setting down her diary, Margaret Atwood reinterpreting it, or all those paintings of pine trees and rocks.

Given the overwhelming reality of Canada, it is not surprising that our films do not look like the productions of Disneyland by the sea. California, home of the movie industry since 1913, is conducive to fantasy, and the American film industry might have been a very different beast had it remained under the lowering skies of Fort Lee, New Jersey. It is also not surprising that the genesis figure is that cold Scots documentarist, John Grierson. On the one hand, he created the structure that enabled an off-the-wall genius like Norman MacLaren to do his stuff. At the same time, he created a massive bureaucracy whose duty it was to reveal the soul of a nation. As Pat Ferns of Primedia once noted, what happened then was like what that happened in France after the Gaullists took power. They made sure that the news and informational services were controlled by the government, and let the leftists have the entertainment portion of the national television system, on the theory that entertainment is unimportant. Unfortunately, it is the entertainments of a people that reveal the nation, and in Canada, that job was forfeited to the Americans and the British.

Thus, when we came to creating entertainment, it was necessary to seek models from what we knew – which meant the realist tradition created by the National Film Board. With two exceptions, David Cronenberg and Gilles Carle, almost all our filmmakers tend toward the realist. There is even a group of filmmakers from the late Sixties that could be labelled "the Ontario realists" – Don Owen, Peter Pearson, Don Shebib, the early William Fruet, and, in the early Seventies, Paul Lynch. Add to that group Quebec anglophones like Frank Vitale, Alan Moyle (*Montreal Main*, *The Rubber Gun*) Robin Spry (who studied under Owen at the NFB) and a latter day version like Clay Borris, and you have the makings of a school.

The realists in Quebec tended more toward the political (Denys Arcand, especially, but also Claude Jutra, André Forcier, Jean-Pierre Lefebvre) and, in a sense, metaphysical-psychological (Paul Almond, Francis Mankiewicz, Gilles

Groulx, Michel Brault). Yet there is that palpable sense of being in a real place with real people. One is reminded of Michel Tremblay who, after his first great success with *Les belles soeurs*, was asked if he had attempted to say things that were universal. His response was that he was simply writing about the people that he knew.

Writing about people you know – or making films about them – is the easiest thing to do, on the surface, for all you need do is pray for interesting friends. Yet it is much harder to shape the forms that surround you than to jam together the forms and functions of old movie myths and to attempt something original with shopworn genres of old movies.

The young movie producer, who has just booked his latest horror-slasher picture onto the Marché at Cannes after finding no buyers at the American film market, sneers. But that stuff doesn't sell. No, it doesn't sell as well as *Star Wars*, and you don't get all the automatic buys from bloodthirsty markets like Hong Kong, but it is impossible to tell if that stuff sells because no Canadian film (for the moment we shall ignore *Meatballs* and the new group of Canadian "hits") has ever had the sort of national launching that is habitually accorded third-rate American films. *Les Plouffe* was marketed in English Canada with a cartoonish sketch and that kiss of death phrase "A Canadian classic" on the poster. That makes it sound like the sort of movie for which they drag innocent children out of classrooms to lock them in the theatre. *Ticket to Heaven* was stuck with that awful poster which was a wonderful graphic but gave you no idea of what the film was about. *Heartaches*, Don Shebib's best film since *Goin' Down the Road*, has yet to see American release, but in Ontario it suffered from an unfortunate colour scheme on the poster (pink and purple)

and a TV trailer that made it look less like a warm-hearted comedy than a female version of *Porky's*.

Once again, we return to marketing. You can sell people anything. You may not make a \$100 million selling them something like *Ticket to Heaven*, but you should be able to make \$20 million. The Canadian films are a different product, and marketing must be designed to handle that product. Pay-TV will not do the trick, because a film needs theatrical release (and will get a better price from pay-TV simply to get attention. What do Canadian television watchers think when all those unreleased tax shelter turkeys turn up on television? "Hey, Madge, here's something called *It Rained All Night the Day I Left* (the reader may substitute *Summer's Children*, *Stone Cold Dead*, *I Miss You Hugs and Kisses*, *City On Fire* or *Search and Destroy* at his or her own discretion) on Channel Nine." "Never heard of it, Harry. Let's watch *Headline Hunters* instead."

The marketing problem creates a catch-22 situation. The Americans know how to market these films, so that's the kind of films we'll make. The problem is that between the time a film hits and the time a Canadian producer can mount an imitator, shoot it, cut and get it into the theatres, a minimum of one, maybe two years has passed, leaving the producer with a product which is no longer in vogue, because there are...

No More Genres, No More Trends, And No More Stars

Once upon a time, people went to see Westerns, or horror movies, or Joan Crawford movies. Once upon a time there was a thing called a star. They had faces then, as one of them once said.

But there is not a single major star who has not had a major and spectacular flop in the past year or two – Jane Fonda,

Paul Newman, Clint Eastwood, Barbra Streisand – that mythical twelve-to-twenty-four year-old audience doesn't care about stars. (Where are the stars of *Star Wars*, *E.T.*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Poltergeist* and *Halloween*?) None of the stars of these monster hits have proven able to carry a film commercially on his own. Harrison Ford's efforts away from the Spielberg-Lucas extravaganzas have not made money, Carrie Fisher did not add a dollar to the grosses of the execrable *Under the Rainbow*, and just what does Mark Hamill do when he isn't playing Luke Skywalker?

The fact that *Porky's* and *Meatballs* have none of those proven box office names that producers like to bring in (They sure do line up in the old neighbourhood for Ava Gardner and George Kennedy) might have proven something to the local producers. Bill Murray, the then unproven refugee from Saturday Night Live, has had a career resembling a yo-yo – down with *Where the Buffalo Roam* and *Caddyshack*, up when reunited with Reitman for *Stripes*. Though Murray is a star, you cannot bank on him.

The names above the titles promise nothing.

The classical genres have become meaningless. In January of 1981, would anyone have predicted that there would not be a single horror movie blockbuster in 1982 – particularly with *The Thing* and *Cat People* slated for the summer? A short three summers ago, Newsweek was shouting that "Horror is hot!" Will Stephen Spielberg's *E.T.* inspire a dozen or so movies about cute aliens who befriend small children? No, because producers have finally come to the awareness – a realization reached by people in the music world many years ago – that their target audience is more fickle than Marguerite Gautier and has the attention span of a hyperactive three

year old. We're talking about people who can't remember what they had for breakfast, let alone what movie they saw last week. They like what everyone they know likes – hence the success of *Porky's*; it's about their idealized self-image far more than it is about the Fifties.

Finally, there are no trends. *Porky's* all may wind up bombing as badly as did that other adolescent sequel, *Grease 2*. Four big budget musicals are being released in a summer when everyone was ready to pronounce the musical dead.

Nothing can be predicted, nothing can be calculated. It is an era of post-industrial filmmaking where the studios have turned largely into distribution arms for independently created product. All you can do is make your picture and hope.

The answer for the Canadian cinema is simply to stop imitating the Americans. Not because it is intrinsically evil to spend tax money on quasi-American projects, or even because we must stop so as to allow the flourishing of the indigenous product. It is simply that we do not do it very well.

Had we continued, in 1975, to make the sort of product that our directors had proven they could do well, those films would have benefited from the increased budgets made possible by the tax shelter and from the growing expertise of our crews. Eventually we could have "cracked" the international market with Canadian films. Now that the energy of the tax shelter boom-years seems to have dissipated, perhaps we can return our talents to what they do best, and stop making films for marketing strategies, aimed at markets that are so unpredictable that even their domestic producers can not understand them or predict them.



● Fighting to keep Canadian cinema authentic, Gilles Carle's film version of *Les Plouffe*