

## Rotten to the soft core

The recent hysteria surrounding the \$30 million First Choice-Playboy deal reveals, once again, how entrapped Canadians are when it comes to understanding the impact of media upon society. Yet it was a Canadian, Marshall McLuhan, who noted in *Understanding Media* that "the 'content' of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium." In the case of the Playboy uproar, the preoccupation with mammarys blinds us to the fact that, when it comes to cultural policy, Canada is a country without balls.

With its confusedly repressive calls for censorship and amendment of the criminal code definition of obscenity, the Playboy furore has only served to obscure the far more grave implications of the advent of pay-TV in this country. To expect the government (in the form of either Francis Fox or the CRTC) to intervene against First Choice is to be blithely oblivious to the fact that the present situation has itself been brought about by the DOC and the CRTC. The entire question of Canadian content in broadcasting – of which the Playboy deal is but another example – has always been as an irrelevant after-thought, as the CRTC itself suggests in its sudden discovery that Canadians have not been sufficiently exposed to Canadian content in the first place.

For years now, the DOC and the CRTC have applied different definitions of Canadian content. For a time, this allowed the DOC to call the shots on Canadian program production because of the importance of the capital cost allowance. But that page is turned. Unable to bring the CRTC definition into line, the Minister of Communications has stood by and seen film after film – *Porky's the Next Day*, *Space Hunter*, *Skullduggery* – being churned out by Americans to conform to the CRTC Canadian content definition. Today pay-TV is providing the big bucks... and calling the shots.

While the DOC proceeded with its on-going, leisurely theoretical development of a National Broadcast Strategy and an integrated Film Policy, the CRTC forged ahead, like a Canadian Pacific or the airwaves, and in its legislative decision of March 1982, laid the foundations for yet another National Dream, namely, Canadian pay-TV.

Long before Applebert thought to dismantle the CBC and the NFB – outmoded public-sector manifestations out of tune with the tasks of the electronic revolution – the CRTC, in its licensing wisdom, did an end-run around those once-respected public bodies. Pay-TV was to provide a competitive Canadian model which in CRTC chairman John Meisel's words "would permit the evolution of a new kind of system reflecting our North American presence... and our... unique Canadian character." In the changing structures of broadcasting in this country, pay-TV was the government-approved solution to the inability to regain control of the theatrical feature film market abandoned to the Americans. Instead, Canadian pay-TV would provide a Canadian-controlled East-West exhibition system to run South-North programming. Of course, at some time between now and post-1986 or whenever, it will have generated enough capital to be able to pour some back into Canadian production. Canadian content, and production, has always been secondary: it mattered far more that Canadian pay-TV would not be government-funded but, being Canadian-owned, could stand as a monument to the creative energies of the Canadian entrepreneur.

As Lew Lehman of the Director's Guild of Canada remarked before the CRTC the advent of pay-TV (for Toronto alone) will represent a programming increase of one-million-plus hours per year. Even allowing for repetition, that is an enormous bloc of time to fill. (And as First Choice has defensively pointed out, scantily-clad Canadian Playboy productions will only constitute 2% of its programming time.)

In the new frontier of pay-TV programming, there is room for real Canadian content, and the CRTC, in its unhurried manner, has finally grasped that its ability to regulate that content falls short; and that a new CRTC definition is necessary. Never fear, it will take the Commission a year to investigate the subject (already under reconsideration at the CRTC since 1979). While the conventional private networks and the CBC will be called upon to respond to the new definitions as early as 1984, when their licenses come up for renewal, the pay networks will have another two years in which to fill the war-chest of resistance to government interference with the free market.

The point is that monster is here – here and now. Thanks to DOC, the CRTC, established money from Toronto and Montreal, and the U.S. military who got Anik C up for us, we can watch the Playboy Channel in the comfort of our homes. And while we launch yet another debate on Canadian content, let us remember that it took the sight of an American breast to remind us, in Francis Fox's apt wording, that Canada is a country in "branch pants."

## Ruddy good example

There is something about the macho image of the Australian which has translated itself into Australian film policy. The country enjoys thumbing its nose at the Americans, as Peter Weir did when he turned down a chance

to direct an American version of "The Thornbirds." And doesn't that Quantas poster of the koala bear with shades, sitting in a director's chair, ask laconically, "L.A. ? Who needs L.A. ?"

Cinema Canada takes a mid-winter pause from its concentration on the Canadian situation to consider the Australians, their film structures and their films. Obviously, they have not been as successful as the Canadians have in breaking into the North American market; witness the year-end Variety list with a total Canadian box-office in the top 50 films of \$97 million. But what the Australians have accomplished is a remarkable critical success. And, for once, critical acclaim, followed by a showering of Australian films in the art houses across the country, created in its turn a popular demand.

In the four articles comprising the special Australian section, we try to describe the elements of the situation which set the Australians apart, and to evaluate the results of their filmmaking over the last decade. The information contained in the overview of feature filmmaking comes from the annual reports of the Australian Film Commission and the various government studies cited therein, and from interviews with Joseph Skrzynski, Patricia Lovell, Fred Schepisi, David Stratton and Michael Rubbo. An especial thanks goes to Rubbo who, fresh from four months in Sydney, was able to update and confirm various conclusions.

As the Aussies have followed the Canadian lead for many years, it is perhaps time to turn the situation about – in the light of their good example.

## LETTERS

### Quatro in charge

We wish to correct an error in the article on the Atlantic Film and Video Festival (Coming Together) in your Nov./Dec. issue, which states that *Christopher Pratt – his Art and his Poetry* was made by Charlotte O'Dea and produced by Avalon Cable in St. John's.

*Christopher Pratt – His Art and his Poetry* was produced by Quatro Productions of St. John's and directed by Charlotte O'Dea, with the co-operation of Avalon Cablevision.

Quatro Productions' four producers are – Charlotte O'Dea, Carmel Flanagan, Regina Power and Doreen Ayre.

Besides winning the award for Best Video Production in the Second Atlantic Film and Video Festival, *Christopher Pratt – His Art and his Poetry* received a Bronze Award for Documentary, in the 1982 New York Film and Video Festival.

**Doreen Ayre**  
Quatro Productions

### Clever Design

Two friends of mine and I recently made a 150-mile round trip into the city to see Claude Jutra's film *By Design*. After viewing it, we all concurred that we had neither wasted our time, money, or gas in going. Among us, we covered all the bases of what was good about the film – we liked the writing, acting, directing, wardrobe, music, design, etc.

Therefore, I was amazed to read Philip Szporer's assessment of the film in your January edition. I even wonder if we saw the same movie.

The most salient attitude in his review – mentioned repeatedly, under different guises – is that he didn't like the "structure and tone" of the work. He finds fault with "rapid shifts in mood," the opening cut from a tracking shot to a static interior shot, the contrast "between soft visuals and hard," and the like. I'm an avid student of film and cannot say I felt jarred by the visuals at all. Philo-

sophical argument about aesthetics aside, the point here is that Mr. Szporer totally confused the grammar with the literature. While he was looking for adverbial clauses, the story slipped past him.

It was a love story, Mr. Szporer. A journey into a subject which rarely gets any notice: women, their feelings, and relationships with other women. It was also about male-female relationships, only from the woman's point of view, for a change.

The reviewer asserted that "Any attentiveness to character or subject is spare." Baloney. I can think of instance after instance after instance of subtle characterization in the work – Helen eating junk food, because her partner craves it; Angie crying in the car after leaving Helen to face a sexual encounter she really couldn't cope with; the two agreeing to bring up a child together in the first place; the quiet companionship of a Sunday afternoon; jealousies; considerations for one another; intimacy; understanding.

Characterization ran rampant through the film. It was a remarkable essay about love and how women feel about it – never mind sexual proclivities. It said a great deal about how women would like to be loved by men as well. Most remarkable is the fact that the film was made by a man. Claude Jutra did indeed know where he wanted to go with the film, contrary to what Mr. Szporer states.

Mr. Szporer, continuing his unenlightened review of *By Design*, maintained that "The essence of femininity is seen as a wall of blown up photos of breasts." Nix. The pictures do not comment on femininity. They comment on Terry, the man who took them and plastered his wall with them.

Twice, the reviewer bemoans lack of "intensity" in the film. *By Design* has plenty of intensity. That's why it had to be a comedy in the first place.

I say let's see more films of the calibre of *By Design*, and fewer reviews of the calibre of Mr. Szporer's.

**Patricia Rivera**  
Maberly, Ont.