

# REVERB

## Inalienable Right to Sell Out

I would like to compliment Don Kerr for his lucid piece on the Pay-TV situation in Saskatchewan. However, I think the problem is more complex than he explained in his informative article.

I must skip over the questionable licensing practices of the CRTC in this case. I think the issue was political and the CRTC felt the co-ops were under provincial control and the private companies were licensed to balance provincial and federal power.

The basic stated objective of the Saskatchewan co-ops and government is highly laudable. They want more and better local programming. I think Saskatchewan's case is very strong, and it could expect national support from many people if it weren't for the fact that Saskatchewan has sold out its Pay-TV system to New York before it is set up.

Saskatchewan has arrived at the same conclusion regarding Pay-TV as the private enterprise cable consortium Pay Television Network Ltd., and they are adopting the same methods. Namely, the co-ops plan to attract subscribers with American movies and then slip them some community and other Canadian programming on the side. The Sask. system goes even further than PTN by offering several American channels, while PTN didn't dare suggest more than one — at least at the start.

The extent of American domination of Saskatchewan's Pay-TV system was made clear in Leo Courville's Pay-TV Report for Sask Tel dated July 21, 1976. It is clear that the Canadian content of all six channels will be less than 50%, and the movie channels will be almost exclusively American. Furthermore, I understand that the provincial government has already signed a contract with Telemation Program Services in New York to supply these movies. This same group (a subsidiary of Home Box Office and Time Inc.), also provided much of the information for Courville's report.

It would seem that the same people who fight heart and soul against CBC-NFB visiting firemen (who are a legitimate problem), find nothing wrong with turning over their regional Pay-TV system to travelling salesmen from New York.

Also, Don Kerr refers to the provincial levy which will raise production funds that may reach \$700,000 in five years. What will the production budgets be like in the first few years? The viewers will have the choice between first run Hollywood movies and a community channel with a total annual budget of less than \$200,000 for the entire province. Some choice! Even the 15% national levy Madame Sauvé once mentioned is discredited as hopelessly inadequate. PTN raised their ante to 25% at the CRTC hearings. Finally, I wonder how much money will be spent buying Hollywood movies,

compared to the amount spent on community production?

While the Saskatchewan government exercises every Canadian's inalienable right to sell out to the United States, Premier Blakeney is quoted in the *Toronto Star* as saying, "Canada must develop a distinct economy and culture separate from the United States or else the country's future is in jeopardy" (Sept. 1, 1977). However, no rhetoric can hide the fact that Saskatchewan's sell-out of its proposed Pay-TV system is worse than a disgrace, it's a catastrophe.

**Kirwan Cox**  
Toronto, Ont.

## Fetchingly Surreal

To start off equal, Doug, I too have made an unusual effort to see Canadian films. To sit through them at all costs, not to fall asleep with the filmmaker right in the same room (as was almost the case when Michael Snow screened his newest feature, with an absurdly long title and an even more absurd 4 hours of experimental camera work, for a group of film students at York University in 1975). Even to the point of standing half frozen in a movie theatre lineup on one of Ottawa's bitterest winter nights to see **The Far Shore**. And I was richly rewarded in that case when I left the theatre feeling warm and happy that such a fine film should be a Canadian one yet.

I mean, it got a little corny during the last 20 minutes... the classic Hollywood-style Mountie chasing his man through the underbrush was a little much and came at a time when they should have been rolling credits. And perhaps the story of Thomson's life was romanticised, spruced up as it were. But unless you have it in for romantics, canvas art, Tom Thomson and the Canadian North all at the same time, I don't see how you could have been so completely disappointed with Wieland's piece. And if you *are* negative on all those things, don't ever show up at one of my parties! I can't be bothered with a critic who plants himself outside of everything and then tries to "criticize" anything from a supposedly "objective" point of view. His point of view is being on the outside.

I also get impatient with what I call the dutiful Social Worker syndrome. People who can't stand to see a foot of celluloid wasted on mere entertainment, a little fantasy or a rose-tinted world for the benefit of office-wear audiences. If it isn't an outright documentary on the shabby way in which society treats Queen Street bums, they say, then at least the film has to have some redeeming social value. But they don't want us to get caught up in the fetching surreal beauty of all that northern scenery, or dwell on the

erotic possibilities of a cool, secluded lake in the middle of nowhere/Ontario... doesn't say anything. Well, maybe not to you...

But it did speak to me. I am, you see, exactly what you describe (accuse) the elite Toronto creative community to be. I live in the city by need, not choice. I was born in a city and have never been given the opportunity to get out and stay out. I have experienced the North briefly, and I have fantasized about it a great deal more. I love what it really is as much as what I think it to be in my mind on those interminable drives home through steamy rush hour traffic. I am a romantic and not ashamed or guilty about it. That is, I am not a closet nature freak. To imagine that life could be better Out There, more sensual, more pure, more artistic, does not startle me into glancing nervously around at the dozens of winos (Sudbury mining veterans, all of them, I'm sure!) littering College & Spadina.

If I won the million and were to make movies, *they* would not be the subject of my camera. No, I want either a reality I can learn something from, or a good double scoop of fantasy.

So what if the North, as portrayed by Wieland, isn't the real mosquito-swarmed, toe-stubbing North that you seem to have in your head (presumably as you speed along the parkway outside rush hours)? So what if the people never existed, if they never spoke in such a civilized way in Ontario half a century ago? I'm sure John Ford didn't go for accuracy in his many interesting portrayals of the Wild West; Bergman tried to pin down his country's social history in **The Virgin Spring**, but he didn't altogether succeed either ...

Wieland's "drooling, syrupy, self-indulgent Portrait of the Artist as a Young Suck" as you call it, was the first film that gave me a colorful insight into the life of one of Canada's best known artists — something I never got in school, even university where I studied visual arts — and which aroused my interest in our painters. I was inspired to take brush and paint to the woods myself and discover the quiet which generates ideas. I have never known another syrupy, self-indulgent film (like **Paperback Hero**) to have any of these effects on me. (By the way, I went to see this film with a man, maybe even a man's man, and though we laughed about the last scenes, we were both touched.)

If "the greatest strength of a narrative film is to offer intimate glimpses into the lives of complete strangers", then surely **The Far Shore**, which offers a lesson about the life of a great painter, is completely valid, quite apart from its cinematic beauty. Artists are usually greater strangers to us than any "normal" person. Even the ones we think we know.

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I agree that an "artist's redeeming worth is to get at some of the softness and warmth and love that hide in silence beneath the hard shells we have to assume every day" – and this is what the film is showing us. That Eulalie can find a way to express her true nature, although what a struggle it must have been in that social climate with that tight-ass husband! And that the husband does attempt a reconciliation of spirits with his wife although he can't even get close to her source.

In fact, the theme is one of a reconciliation that has always been a major struggle in this country – between the city, civilized counterpart of the Olde Country, and the North: it is so vast in Canada, almost an exotic temptation to city dwellers all over the world. This approach-avoidance conflict is a good place to start creating a "revitalized vision of ourselves".

Just wanted to let you know what I thought, and thanks for listening.

Ellen Dechesne

## Experimental Films, Ignored

Canadian Film Awards  
N.A. Taylor, Chairman  
175 Bloor Street East  
Toronto, Ontario

I have become very concerned that the Experimental Category for the Canadian Film Awards has been dropped, ignored and disregarded this year.

Does this mean that experimental films are not valid as authentic Canadian films or does this mean that the Canadian 'industry' is trying to discourage experimentation in filmmaking?

Are experimental films bad for Canada or do they indicate a negative direction in the 'art' of filmmaking? The awards entry from this year itself purports that the "... purpose is to stimulate artistic creativity...".

Perhaps experimental films are anti-Canadian content, if one would dare to define this phrase. I still don't understand it. Of course experimental films don't encourage foreign investment, but I personally find it very sad and quite disturbing that Canada, well known for its experimental films through the work of Norman McLaren, Michael Snow, David Rimmer..., refuses to recognize the fact that experimental films are being made within its boundaries.

The independent experimental filmmaker should not be ignored. He is not unimportant. Experimental film is film, and respectable people in the film industry should perhaps reconsider their 'bad' feelings towards certain types of filmmaking. Otherwise, the Canadian film industry should be viewed as running, jumping, and standing still.

Lois Siegel

Independent Experimental Filmmaker  
Montreal

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**Charles Champlin**  
L.A. Times CALENDAR  
November 28, 1976

"... Not only did that last reel include some of the most wildly exciting fight footage ever put on the screen, but it also provided an emotionally gratifying capstone to a picture that is truly an ode to the human spirit... And a final word must be said for James Crabe's incredible camera work—not only his stunning views of Philadelphia's historic monuments, but the squalor of the South Philadelphia slums, two breath-taking swoops up the broad steps of the Philadelphia Art Museum, a protracted run past swinging sides of beef in a meat-packing plant, and, of course, the virtuoso photography of the climactic bout... In many ways, ROCKY is a picture that should make movie history."

**Arthur Knight**  
The Hollywood Reporter  
November 5, 1976

Camera Operator Garrett Brown, inventor of the system, is seen using the STEADICAM stabilized camera system to film the dramatic fight sequence in ROCKY. James Crabe was Director of Photography.



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