

REVERB

Competing with Conventional Cable

I both agree and disagree with the letter Kirwan Cox wrote in response to my article on what I called closed-circuit TV in Saskatchewan and what he calls Pay-TV. I agree that emphasis should be placed on the degree to which our system will rely on American programming – heavily in some areas – and that is a disadvantage.

But Mr. Cox's last sentence is pretty ferocious. "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." I'd like to ferociously disagree with that sentence.

I sympathize with its purpose: to go out into the world and change it. So the sentence roars, makes a simple uncluttered point, and tells people who's good and who's bad.

It's not such an attractive sentence though, if you're on the wrong end of it and have to play the part of the villain, and while in one way I dislike attacking nationalist fervor, because it's a rare and valuable commodity and I like it. I find it necessary in this case, because it obliterates other important ideals.

In order to create its simple sense of evil (disgrace, catastrophe), the sentence simplifies the situation in Saskatchewan. In fact, the sentence has no interest in clarity (unlike most of the letter), just in winning. One inaccuracy is to use the term Pay-TV, since that sounds like the one-channel, American-feature-film package so much talked about. And we will have *one* channel like that, and the programming on it will be American. As well, we'll have two other channels (down from three in my earlier article): a children's channel, a general interest channel. On these two we can rent programs from whatever source is available. It is our stated intention to maximize Canadian programming on these two channels. I can't say what percentage of Canadian programming that will mean because, as you'll see at the end of this letter, we haven't been able to finalize contracts yet. But it's not just a Pay-TV system, and the term "sell out" might better apply to conventional cable, its licensor, and even the Canadian public that seems to want the service enough to pay for it.

But why a premium movie American channel at all? Well, we're going into the marketplace and will compete with conventional cable. Our projections say the premium channel is a major selling point and without it we'd likely not be viable. Do away with the channel and we do away with ourselves. Will the commercial nature of our venture destroy our ideals? I don't know. I'd like to live in a better world, but un-

fortunately I live in the world that includes the CRTC.

The most important point in response to Kirwan Cox's sentence is this. The encouragement of Canadian-wide programming, or Canadian feature films, is an excellent goal, worth the fighting for, and I've liked Kirwan Cox's articles, and **Cinema Canada**, for keeping me informed on what's happening on that front. But it's not the only ideal we're working for in Saskatchewan. We think the goal of television without commercials is worth fighting for, and regional and local programming, and the challenge to business monopoly of the media, and, most important, local and public control of a media outlet. The fight, like all good fights, is to have people take more control over their own lives. You can't reduce all that to a *sellout* to the United States without distorting a worthwhile battle, and one that presumably would strengthen the sense of Canadian identity.

And if the co-ops here were to disappear tomorrow, and the Saskatchewan option go down with them, what are the odds that Pay-TV would be introduced creatively into Canada? It's hard for us here to see the CRTC as anything but a regulator of business, whose main chore it is to keep the competitors from killing each other, or from appearing in too bad a light before the Canadian public.

I also want to correct one mistake in Mr. Cox's letter. I didn't discredit Madame Sauvé's 15% national levy, and in fact made no comment on the amount.

Readers might like an update on what's happening in Saskatchewan. The CRTC made a decision to change the conventional cable headends from Outram, Saskatchewan, to Tolstoi, Manitoba. The sole real difference of that decision will be to enable Saskatchewan to receive three rather than two commercial American networks. Thus does the CRTC obey its mandate on a Canadian broadcasting system.

And Kirwan Cox may not have to worry about Saskatchewan queering the pitch on Pay-TV. The provincial government is having second and third and fourth thoughts about closed-circuit TV; it wonders whether we're viable – and it hasn't guaranteed a loan for the co-ops; conventional cable will likely be on stream in two or three months. The CRTC granted North Battleford the right to sign a contract with Sask. Tel. that gave the common carrier hardware ownership up to the houses, and after some further sparring the CRTC has approved a contract between North Battleford and Sask. Tel., one that reserves the mid hand for provincial use. So, at the very least, we'll soon have every rotten quiz show and soap and a whole new battalion of advertising logging that clean Saskatchewan air.

Don Kerr
Saskatoon

Having the Last Word

Don Kerr's letter really shows the depth of the "Canadian dilemma". I sympathize with his position because we agree on the ends, but we don't agree on the means. I won't defend the cable system in Canada, or the CRTC decisions which have wrought that system. However, whether an American movie channel is called Pay-TV or closed-circuit TV or premium TV and whether it is privately or publicly owned, federally or provincially regulated, it must be opposed ferociously.

The idea that we solve our cultural or social problems by importing yet more American programming (only to pay for better Canadian programming, of course) is a mistake. This logic has brought the CBC to the point where its president says the network must be "Canadianized", and I won't mention CTV or the promises of performance it gave to the Board of Broadcast Governors. We cannot afford this "solution" to the problem of a small TV market again.

Finally, I didn't mean to say Don Kerr discredited Madame Sauvé's 15% levy for Canadian production. I meant to say that that figure was discredited as 'too low' by groups and individuals too numerous to list.

Kirwan Cox
Toronto

Who Created the Impact?

To confirm my telephone statement of this morning, much as I respect and admire Mr. Stephen Chesley, he *did not found Impact Magazine* as stated in **Cinema Canada**, (Number 42, page 25).

The magazine was solely my idea, founded by myself and Mr. Malcolm Bennett. Mr. Chesley purchased our share interest in a company created to publish it long after it was founded. In no way did he originate or "found" the magazine.

I expect **Cinema Canada** to publish a retraction of the claim that he did.

Ian A. Stuart
President
Summerhill Media Limited

Mr. Chesley replies:

While I will allow that Mr. Stuart is correct on one or two points, for the most part he seems to carry a different definition of "founder" than I do.

He was there, along with Mr. Bennett, before I came on the scene, and he did participate in registering the name *Impact* and

in deciding that a magazine should be given out in the theatres. However, that is all. It was I who drew up the editorial contents, departments, etc. It was I who established the editorial philosophy, worked with the designers I chose to create the visual treatment, recruited and trained the staff and was editor of all contents published. That, to me, is 'founding' a magazine.

Just coming up with an idea is not sufficient (in fact, there were precedents for a movie theatre magazine in the U.S. and England) and in fact, long before the offices or anything else about the magazine were established, Mr. Stuart and Mr. Bennett had removed themselves from any active participation.

Stephen Chesley

Let's Hear It for the Canada Council

Dear Connie:

It was nice meeting you at the Canadian Film Awards on November 20th. I'm sorry I couldn't speak with you further, but I'll stop by next time I'm in town. I do have one small problem, which you may be able to assist me with.

Over the past three years the Canada Council has been extremely supportive of my cinematic endeavors, and I had thought that I would make that public in the event of our winning at the 1977 C.F.A. My reason was that the council offers a much needed and little praised "assistance to artists plan" and I had hoped to support them the way they did me. Unfortunately, not being completely sober, and forgetful at the best of times, I completely neglected to voice my appreciation publicly. I would therefore like to thank the Council for their support, in this letter, and state that I wouldn't have made many films without them. I sincerely hope they will continue to receive support from the federal government in their capacity as an arts funding organization, especially as they are instrumental in developing cinema in Canada, from the ground up.

If you were able to publish this letter (or excerpts) it would be appreciated.

P. Borsos
Vancouver

Hungarian Please!

My first *Cinema Canada* issue delighted me so I could kiss you.

Trade News North: Instant fame!
You included my name!

But its true Magyar spelling did miss you.

New Subscriber,
Linda Kupecek
Calgary

P.S. *Trade News North* is terrific.

The following letter, concerning the Canadian Student Film Festival was received by Cinema Canada for publication. Ed.

Mr. Serge Losique
Director, Canadian Student Film Festival
c/o Conservatory of Cinematographic Art

Dear Mr. Losique,

I attended the 1977 Canadian Student Film Festival in Montreal as a competitor, and enjoyed myself greatly. However, there were aspects of the festival which troubled me, and I will mention them to you because the festival is important to me and to all Canadian student filmmakers, and because I sincerely desire the festival to attain the highest possible standards in its execution and judgement.

First I will say that the actual screenings of the films, the pre-festival reception for the filmmakers and jurors, the festival programs, and the concluding award ceremony were exciting and smoothly executed, thanks largely to the efforts of the festival coordinator, André Guimond. The festival proceeded almost without a hitch, and it gave me great pleasure to attend.

The first mishap was the unfortunate absence of two of the jurors - Michel Brault and Chuck Jones. Messrs. Brault and Jones were two of the three actual filmmakers on the seven-member jury (the third being Gilles Carle), and their absence no doubt disturbed the balance of the judging panel to a degree. Apart from this apparently insoluble problem was the fact that the existing jury, after the prizes had been awarded, did not distribute critiques of the competing films. I understand that comments have never been issued by the juries of past Canadian Student Film Festivals, but the adoption of this practice would greatly increase the value of the festival to the competitors. Each filmmaker would receive a list of the strengths and weaknesses of his film, in the opinions of discerning and knowledgeable jurors. This information would be of far more worth to the competitor than the mere knowledge that his film won or lost, and would certainly warrant the extra effort required to produce it. The festival is, after all, for the filmmakers.

The above criticism applies to the festival in general; the following comments pertain to the 1977 competition.

First, I was puzzled by the jury's ferment of the ambiguous "best entertainment film" award on Harriet Pacaud's **Live and Learn**. The category was a new one, an impromptu creation of the jury's, replacing the discarded "best experimental film" category. The \$500 prize went to Ms. Pacaud, for her film, which was entered in the documentary category (in itself an inexplicable occurrence, for **Live and Learn**, while a very good film, was not a documentary; it would have been more appropriately

placed in the experimental category, as would have Shan Wong's **My Pulse Wants to Become Song**, but that is a separate problem, and one that should also be dealt with in the future). My question is: what was meant by the jury by "best entertainment"? Were they suggesting that the Norman McLaren prizewinner, Sturla Gunnarsson's **A Day Much Like the Others**, failed to entertain them, or, at least, that the "best" film was not the most entertaining? Or were they making a patronizing comment on public taste? Or did they perhaps mean "funniest film", in which case they should have labelled the new category accordingly, for this viewer finds many sober films entertaining. The word entertainment is usually applied to all films, and not merely to those which offer an amusing diversion for their audiences. The "best entertainment" category was an unsatisfactory substitution for a legitimate category in a serious festival.

Second, the awards "best director" and "best fiction film" went to Rafal Zielinski and to his film **Vision House**. **Vision House**, according to Lois Siegel in her article "Brand Names and Bland Films," (*Cinema Canada* No. 42), was financed by the CBC and featured professional actors, photographed by a professional cameraman. The very acceptance of **Vision House** to the competition was in contravention of the festival rules, which state: "... No film will be accepted if professionals worked on it (cameraman, producer, professor...) ...". What could be more clear? Yet accepted it was, and doubly awarded it was. True, article 19 of the rules states: "19. Any case not covered by the present rules shall be settled by the Conservatory. The Conservatory's judgement shall be final...", but the case of **Vision House** was covered by the rules. There is, however, a catch-22, or, rather, a catch-... 18. The decisions made by the Preselection Committee and the Festival Jury are final, and will be communicated to the participants...". However, the inclusion of **Vision House** in the festival does not seem a sporting or ethical decision on the part of the preselection committee or the jury, in spite of their power to make it.

I certainly do not expect you, Mr. Losique, or anyone, to attempt to alter the rulings of the 1977 preselection committee or jury; that would be an impossible request. I write out of a sense of duty, as a participant in the 1977 festival and as a Canadian student filmmaker, to the maintenance of integrity and fairness in film competition. Filmmaking, although an exacting and strenuous occupation, is a sophisticated art form, whose devotees deserve honorable treatment in return for their hard labor and good faith in entering a festival such as the Canadian Student.

Respectfully yours,

Paul Vitols
Vancouver

Puzzling Omissions

Reading your reports in issue no. 42 about the festivals held in Toronto and Montreal, I could not help being puzzled by some omissions. First, did anyone know there was an international film festival held in Ottawa at the beginning of August? Second, in the humorous "Docu-drama: The Garden Path" relating to the World Film Festival, you talk about Franco Brusati and Emile de Antonio being in Montreal the week before the festival. Why were they there? You could at least mention the fact that the week before the World Festival was held, another one took place at Place des Arts in Montreal: "The Quebec Critics' First International Film Festival" from August 11 to 18.

I know this festival was intended for a French-speaking audience, but how could you ignore such an event? Franco Brusati was there and received a standing ovation after the showing of **Bread and Chocolate** of which you talk, incidentally, in your article. Emile de Antonio was there with his latest film, **Underground**. As a film critic for the French radio of Radio-Canada in Toronto, I covered the two festivals in Montreal and the one in Toronto. The Quebec Critics' festival was, in my opinion, the best in terms of overall quality: choice of films, quality of projection (respect of picture ratios, picture in focus) and organization (for instance, the daily public meeting with actors, directors and critics at the Place Desjardins).

Once again, I know you deal with an English-speaking audience. Nevertheless, it would have been only fair to mention the existence of that festival.

I hate to report the other festival held in Montreal at the famous Outremont repertory cinema in October. A festival which travelled to three other cities in Quebec: Trois-Rivières, Sherbrooke and Quebec City. Just imagine Bill Marshall showing international films in Toronto, London, Hamilton, Sudbury, St-Catherines...

Okay, I am dreaming... Let's go back to reality.

I am not putting down Serge Losique's festival or Bill Marshall's. They were important and great events. But you chose to ignore the others because they were intended for a French-speaking audience.

For information's sake, for cinema's sake, this is not nice.

Serge Denko
Toronto

An attentive reader of Cinema Canada would know that all the above festivals were reported on in the Summer 1977 issue.

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 **Cinema
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Erratum

*In the last issue of Cinema Canada, two paragraphs were omitted by error from the review of **Who Has Seen the Wind** by Katherine Gilday. This error altered the internal logic of the review, and weakened it considerably, for which we apologize. Below, the absent paragraphs are printed, along with the paragraphs which lead in and lead out from that section. The original review was printed on p. 40 of issue 43.*

The most we had a right to expect was that a first-rate creative imagination would actually improve the book, sear away the comic and sentimental evasions, heal the split between Mitchell's knowledge that a boy must grow into a man and his emotional commitment to childhood innocence, between his sense of nature as a beneficent mother and his knowledge that the natural processes wear an unremittingly alien face to the human mind. The least we had a right to expect was a competent transcription of Brian's dilemma of growth, certainly on the most obvious, visually accessible level of the clearcut opposition between town and prairie forces.

Instead, what we get is a series of random incidents in the life of an eight-year-old boy, unilluminated by any larger framework of significance. The book's characters and plot elements appear in hopelessly fragmented versions of their original selves, the only apparent criterion for their inclusion being their ability to prime the pump of stock emotional responses. Thus, for example, St. Sammy, the hermit-mystic who plays a vital thematic role in the novel, functions in the film as little more than a cute-crazy comic local. The school principal's philosophical conversations with the shoemaker are fraudulent without the anchoring context of Mitchell's inquiry into the grounds of consciousness. A sub-plot that has Miss Thompson, the teacher, involved with Digby and another more "colonized" member of the town establishment is handled so perfunctorily that her final choice of Digby is motiveless to the point of indecency. Meanwhile, the upswellings of the over-ripe musical score labor to convince us of the heavy meanings the script never succeeds in delivering.

Where Brian is coming from, and where he is going, are equally unclear. That's partially because the most crucial stage of the boy's life, the pre-school period of his wild and sweet innocence that constitutes the bedrock of Mitchell's elegy, is omitted. The

Brian we get in this film is from the start already a socialized being, a cowed, tense, thoughtful child with no hint in his makeup of the unruly, anarchic joyful energies that supposedly once connected him to the world of the prairie. Along with this loss of one of the most fundamental aspects of the novel's logic goes, too, a tremendous opportunity to try to convey cinematically the unifying, magical consciousness of the child from the inside, as Mitchell tries to do in prose.

Removing the young child from the story is almost like removing the prairie itself. Except that for all the symbolic tension that director King and cinematographer Leiterman manage to create between the natural and human environments in the film, the prairie might as well have been omitted too. The intimacy and lush wilderness brings all distances near, familiarizes the alien - to such an extent that the prairie comes to seem a mere backyard extension of the town. What Mitchell's material needed anyway to counterbalance some of its sweetness was the correcting chill of clean, hard visuals, like those in **Why Shoot the Teacher** (which by the way is a vastly superior film on every count), conveying the unassimilable rawness of the prairie wilderness. In the context of this script, which gathers together the weakest, most cloying elements of both the realistic and the romantic strains in the novel, Leiterman's cinematography establishes an exterior setting that is highly oppressive in its confinement. Aside from a night sequence and a storm sequence that begin, at least, to approach, by the very nature of their content, the requisite sense of awe for the landscape, the prairie in this production wears a consistent pastoral golden glow that entirely subverts its meaning as the empire of the title's unseen wind.

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