

BOOKREVIEWS

TECHNOLOGY & THE CANADIAN MIND: INNIS/McLUHAN/GRANT

by Arthur Kroker
New World Perspectives
(Montreal)
1984, pp. 144,
ISBN 0-920393-00-4, \$6.95

Arthur Kroker's *Technology And The Canadian Mind* is a timely and welcome arrival in the developing critique of technological experience. It is a dense work, brilliantly compact and profound. It is also highly readable: full of delightful moments of insight and passages where the prose, for its sheer elegance, stops one in one's tracks to linger and re-read.

Kroker's thesis is that "Canada's principal contribution to North American thought consists of a highly original, comprehensive, and eloquent discourse on technology," a discourse which can be seen in dialectical terms through a careful study of its three emblematic figures: Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, and George Grant. It is Kroker's dialectical reading of these three perspectives that makes his contribution so valuable.

Placing Grant and McLuhan as "bipolar opposites on the question of technology," Kroker first explores and elaborates the perspective of technological dependency inherent in Grant's thinking: "an angle of vision on the technological experience which focusses on technology as the locus of human domination." He then turns to an examination of McLuhan's opposing perspective of technological humanism, which "seeks to renew technique from within by releasing the creative possibilities inherent in the technological experience." And, finally, Kroker articulates "a third perspective... which mediates technological humanism and technological dependency." This perspective, the necessary dialectical third term, is found in the technological realism of Harold Innis, "the thinker who... always insisted on keeping the tension alive between the opposing tendencies to domination and emancipation in technological society."

This quite original thesis is worked through in close, careful study of the central texts in each man's work. Kroker, in three major chapters, thoroughly explores each perspective on its own terms. In so doing, he offers us clear guideposts for charting our own way through technology as "the grammar of capitalism." As Kroker puts it: "In rethinking the meaning of Innis, McLuhan and Grant as the nodal points of the Canadian discourse we are also confronted with a more personal, and immediate, choice among lament, utopia, and political struggle as responses to the contemporary human condition."

There is no doubt that Kroker is intimately familiar with all three perspectives from the inside, so to speak. And that's what makes *Technology And The Canadian Mind* such a pleasure to read. We encounter a mind that has fully integrated these differing discourses and can speak from a new level of synthesis. One sign of this assuredness is Kroker's clear and incisive discussion of what he calls "Grant's Compromise" and "McLuhan's Blindspots." He quite fascinatingly interweaves the

political/religious affiliations of both Grant and McLuhan within their respective philosophies; or rather, one should say, Kroker unravels these subtle interconnections, exposing the heretofore hidden warp and woof of the larger tapestries so that we see and understand the political limitations in both. This also prepares us to read Innis from a more fully informed, politicized position. "Innis is the Canadian thinker who has broken generations of silence imposed by official ideology on the victims of technical dependency and class struggle in actual Canadian history."

Another sign of Kroker's thorough grounding in all three perspectives is his decision to use three different works of art to introduce and illuminate each of the three major chapters. "Technological Dependency: George Grant as the Nietzsche of the New World" begins with a lengthy and beautifully written reflection on a painting by Alex Colville: "To Prince Edward Island" - the famous work in which a woman in a boat looks

out, through binoculars, directly at the viewer. Analyzing this painting (reproduced in the text) in terms of its "sense of inner dread and anxiety", its "perfect deadness of vision", its "looking with no possibility of response," Kroker then moves smoothly into his central discussion of the tragic vision of George Grant. It is a device that not only reveals the splendid confidence of this author but also quite helpfully provides a kind of visual metaphor or resonant key to the ensuing discussion on Grant.

Similarly, the chapter on McLuhan contains references to Georges Seurat, in particular the painting "A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte" wherein traditional perspective is reversed and the viewer becomes the vanishing point. For the chapter on Innis, Kroker examines an eerie, haunting mask by prairie artist Don Proch: "Manitoba Mining Mask," in which the devastation of the landscape by technology is depicted upon the face. As Kroker observes, "Proch implies that

technological experience, understood as a complex and multidimensional social process, also traps us in its own way of seeing, and interpreting, machine culture." Again, this is a lovely way to bring us to the thinking of Harold Innis: "It was Innis' particular genius to make us see *from within* the bias of technology..."

The book jacket informs us that Arthur Kroker, besides being the founding editor of the *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, teaches in political science and the humanities at Concordia University in Montreal. This text seems to stand as a summation of those skills in the depth of its analysis, the breadth of its allusions and references, the gracefulness of its writing voice.

"...It's time for a new Copernican Revolution in thinking technology," writes Kroker. *Technology And The Canadian Mind* is a major, pivotal step in that Revolution.

Joyce Nelson ●

LETTERS

CBC cuts 'illogical'

(Letter addressed to CBC president Pierre Juneau)

The Canadian Film & Television Association/Association Canadienne de cinéma-télévision incorporating the membership of the Canadian Association of Motion Picture Producers represents some 160 member companies in the private sector across Canada. Our members have been responsible for producing the most viewed drama series *Adventures In Rainbow Country* (which, on one occasion according to Nielsen, attracted 4.635 million viewers), the award-winning feature film *The Grey Fox* and Canada's first Academy Award for drama for *Boys And Girls*. These and hundreds of other programs have been seen by millions of Canadians on the C.B.C. and around the world. Our membership also includes many of the service companies that provide film, sound and video facilities for C.B.C. production.

The CFTA/ACCT is gravely concerned about the serious damage which will certainly occur to the private sector production community if the C.B.C. freeze on the acquisition of privately produced programs occurs as announced earlier this month.

The CFTA/ACCT respects the goal of increased efficiency throughout the C.B.C. However, we fail to see how the C.B.C. cuts, as they affect the private sector production community, will enable the Corporation to be any more efficient.

Indeed, the main effect of this freeze will be to prevent the C.B.C. from taking advantage of the additional program funding available for independently produced programming.

It is an illogical and destructive policy for the C.B.C. to ignore the Telefilm Canada Broadcast Fund loans available to the private sector for Canadian television programs.

As well, the freeze runs directly

counter to the stated goals of the C.B.C. to encourage the increase in prime time Canadian content by utilizing the resources of the private sector. To achieve these goals CFTA/ACCT urges the immediate restoration, to 1984 levels, of funding for the acquisition of privately produced Canadian programming which the C.B.C. requires; it is counter productive to close the door on the private sector.

We ask that you review the decision at your earliest opportunity.

R. Stephen Ellis, president
Michael MacMillan,
vice-president, production
Samuel C. Jephcott,
executive director
Canadian Film & Television
Association
Toronto.

Consensus concerns

Re the Cine Mag item "Sky announces new responsible media group", (Cinema Canada No. 112), we'd like to make it clear that the Media People for Social Responsibility group was developed through a consensus decision by members of the Peter Watkins Support Group and concerned journalists and filmmakers.

It is important to the members of these groups that this message be put across because of the fact that this group process is vital to our approach. One of the main goals of this project is to provide an alternative to status-quo media approaches which lead to feelings of helplessness and lack of information for the "average citizen." We at the Peter Watkins Support Group and M.P.S.R. are concerned individuals acting collectively to change this situation. Our group activity is in itself an alternative approach to the pre-conceptions of the mainstream media.

For information about M.P.S.R., contact Cathy Gulkin (416) 925-6143 and

for information about the Peter Watkins Support Group, contact Denise Bowman (416) 653-2803.

Cathy Gulkin,
Laura Sky,
Denise Bowman,
Barbara Moffat,
Toronto

**Newsmakers,
please note**

You've read their names and maybe your own many times in the pages of **Cinema Canada**, but you've often wondered what the others look like... Well, so have we. That's why, **Cinema Canada** puts emphasis on the faces that make up Canada's program production/distribution industry. But don't wait for the news to happen first. Help us get a step ahead by sending along your photo to **Cinema Canada** now. That way, when you're in the news, we'll be ready to go with the story and your picture... while it is still news.