

cont. from p. 5

problematic exactly because it has the weakness that all American (liberal) theories have; to wit, it is based on a negative rather than a positive conception of freedom and considers the individual as pre-existing the state (hence the term "imposed" when describing the state culture), when in fact individual and state are involved in a mutually creative process. The second part is no proof at all but merely a citing of an authority. But it is in the third part that the weaknesses of Dorland's position become glaring.

Before identifying them, I want to make a point that should not need to be made, but in the present reactionary climate is absolutely necessary. In the next section, I shall discuss Dorland's commentary on what he cites as Professor Armitage's commentary on a film by Joyce Wieland. When I question Dorland's commentary on Professor Armitage's, I am questioning exactly that: I am not raising questions about the value of Wieland's film itself. To state my conviction on the matter clearly, Wieland is an important filmmaker. But the belief that Wieland's films are worthwhile does not imply the belief that all accounts of Wieland's importance are worthwhile. Nor conversely does the statement that a particular account of Wieland's importance is unfounded imply that all claims about Wieland's importance are worthwhile. Not conversely does the statement that a particular account of Wieland's importance is unfounded imply that all claims about Wieland's importance are unfounded.

Dorland begins this section of the work by citing a remark he claims Professor Armitage made at the Conference, that "Wieland has consistently and consciously sought out the feminine precisely as a terrain that has remained unexplored by her male counterparts." Dorland himself ups the stakes of Wieland's feminist wager when he interprets professor Armitage's analysis as implying "that Wieland's place among the Big Five of the Canadian experimental avant-garde (with Snow, Rimmer, Razutis and Elder) is primordial and, indeed, constitutive."

What comes next in Dorland's commentary, one surmises, is to be taken as proof, since it follows immediately after

the claim and is introduced by a colon. It is what he presents as professor Armitage's catalogue of the strategies she says Wieland developed in the early sixties: "all of the devices of the structural avant-garde as well as the fragmentation of the body, the play of images against reflecting surfaces, the invention of cinematic languages (one is astonished to think that Armitage actually used the term "language" to refer to the ensemble of strategies that include those she lists and others) which emphasized diffusion, distortion, condensation, fragmentation, loss of perspective, and so on."

This is a truly fascinating statement. Even an abbreviated catalogue of the problems associated with it would include the following:

1) The list of strategies Professor Armitage is said to have claimed Wieland developed is very interesting. It includes "fragmentation of the body, the play of images against reflecting surfaces, the invention of cinematic languages (sic) which emphasized diffusion, distortion, condensation, fragmentation, loss of perspective, and so on." In sum, a veritable catalogue of the strategies Brakhage pressed into service in the late fifties. In fact, the list Professor Armitage is said to have offered is a list of the *key* characteristics of the lyrical film, which, as every film student knows, Brakhage began developing when making *The Wonder Ring*, which he brought to a fully developed form in *White Eye* (1957) and which he has continued to work with, on and off, since. What's (still) more, the lyrical film dominated avant-garde filmmaking from about 1959 almost to the end of the sixties. What's more, Brakhage "assembled" the stylistic features of the lyrical film out of strategies that had existed, piecemeal, since the forties. Just consider how many of the strategies Professor Armitage is said to have claimed that Wieland "developed" are used in Marie Menken's *Visual Variations on Noguchi* (1945), Sidney Peterson's *The Cage* (1949) and Maya Deren's *At Land* (1944).

The strategies Dorland tells us Armitage claimed Wieland developed, were invented a decade to a decade and a half before Wieland began making films. (Wieland first worked in film around 1957 or 1958 making the collaboratively produced *Tea In The Garden*

and, with Michael Snow, *Assault In The Park* (1959). Since Dorland is using Armitage's claims to buttress his arguments about the "primordial and, indeed, constitutive role" played by a woman's cinema, questions of priority such as those on which I have dwelt are crucial. The arguments Dorland, and Dorland says Armitage, make about priority do not hold up.

2) Brakhage's films, the salient characteristics of which are included in Armitage's list have been reviled by feminists. Brakhage is frequently cited as the apotheosis of patriarchy. These denunciations seem to me silly, but at the same time, I'm amazed to see a description of the attributes of Brakhage's cinema being said, mistakenly, to have been originated by a woman and then celebrated as truly progressive feminist strategies (actually the basis of a feminine *écriture*). To put the problem in a nutshell, the same group of features are condemned (by one group of feminists) as patriarchal when they are believed to have been originated by a male filmmaker and celebrated (admittedly by another group of feminists) when they are believed to be originated by a female filmmaker. Strange!

3) The comment that Wieland developed all the features of the structural avant-garde in the early 1960s is simply preposterous. Are we to believe that Kubelka (who had been making films since 1954) played no role in the creation of these strategies? Nor Breer (who too had been making films since 1954)? Nor Warhol? Nor the graphic filmmakers of the 1920s? But perhaps Professor Armitage means simply that Wieland, unaware of the work of other avant-garde filmmakers, re-invented strategies other filmmakers had developed a decade earlier. Wouldn't this, though, affect the claim that Wieland's role was "primordial and, indeed, constitutive"? Furthermore, in what is likely the most famous article ever written on any area of cinema, P. Adams Sitney catalogued the list of features which structural films tended to possess. It included the use of fixed camera positions, flicker effects, loop printing and rephotography off the screen. Now where in Wieland's films up to and including *Water Sark* are these features to be found?

Well, if Dorland's portrayal of the dramatic struggle between opposites has a hero(ine) - feminism - or more

accurately feminism/nationalism - epitomized by Joyce Wieland, it must have a villain. It looks like the villain is patriarchal imperialism epitomized by (yours truly) Bruce Elder. Hence his comment, the "toppling of the male pantheon of Canadian avant-gardism was quietly sustained by Laurie McNiece's resituation of Bruce Elder among "the concerns of avant-garde filmmakers elsewhere" (Dorland's emphasis); that is to say, among the internationalizing and imperial traditions, whether classical or avant-gardist, of male disembodiment"

What evidence does Dorland educe to prove that my filmmaking belongs to the imperial tradition of male disembodiment? Well, he quotes from my writings, without saying a word about my filmmaking? But it is possible that my films espouse one set of commitments, my writings another; in fact, it is far from uncommon for artists to misdescribe (or mistheorize) their work.

The statement that my films belong to the tradition of male disembodiment is obviously an important one in Dorland's argument for it indicates that my works exemplify the negative features of male Canadian cinema (remember the subtitle of his article, "Notes ... sur un cinéma désincarné"). It is also an astonishing accusation. After all, one of my films has been banned for portraying accusation. After all, one of my films has been banned for portraying a male engaging in a solitary sexual act; another narrowly escaped being banned for the same crime. And, for many people, (I have been told again and again and again), the highlight of *Lamentations* is the sequence of the heterosexual lovemaking. Readers might recall that when Dorland reviewed *Lamentations* he referred to some of the imagery of nudes as worryingly close to pornographic. Now, he accuses me of being an agent of "the imperial tradition of male disembodiment." Something appears wrong; and what is wrong is that Dorland misrepresents works so as to fit them into his neat (but false) dichotomies. Readers might be interested in knowing that an interesting review of *Lamentations* that appeared in the *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* described *Lamentations* as a work that attempts to re-establish the connection

B O O K S H E L F

The 1968 edition of *The Producer's Masterguide* is an exhaustive store of production data covering the motion picture, television, commercial, cable and videotape industries in the U.S., Canada and the United Kingdom. Compiled by publisher Shmuel Bension, this hefty guide provides detailed and accurate information on every facet of production, and stands out as an authoritative reference source, invaluable to industry professionals (*Producer's Masterguide*, 611 Broadway, NYC, \$69.95 + \$4.95 shipping; in Canada U.S. \$85).

A comprehensive manual by Marcus Weise, *Videotape Operations*, provides practical instruction in the use of one-inch videotape recorders. It describes explicitly how to set up and op-

erate the equipment, and includes tips on careers in videotape. In *The Post Production Process*, Diana Weynand outlines a workable flow chart for the entire procedure from the shooting stage through final mix, with valuable suggestions for the guidance of the personnel involved (*Weynand Associates*, 6273 Callicott Ave., Woodland Hills, CA, \$34.95 and \$19.95).

The work of the cinematographer and his creative contribution to filmmaking are examined by Kris Malkiewicz in *Film Lighting*, a valuable text addressed to independent moviemakers and film students. Using extensive quotes from leading cameramen and experienced gaffers, the author discusses specific lighting problems in studio or on location, describes current

equipment and its utilization, and clarifies the techniques of image manipulation in both camera and laboratory (*Prentice-Hall, NYC, \$19.95*).

Michael Singer's well-researched annual guide, *Film Directors*, lists over 1,600 active U.S. and foreign directors. It includes a cross-indexed listing of their 15,000 films, vital statistics, home and/or agents' addresses, as well as stimulating interviews with six young directors (*Lone Eagle, Beverly Hills, CA, \$39.95 + \$5.50 handling*).

The first four volumes of *Motion Picture Guide*, covering A through K, are now in print. This 12-tome encyclopedia will include all English-language films since 1927 with full cast-&-credits, plot summaries, production data, and essays on the films' social, his-

toric and technical aspects. The essays are a distinctive feature of this major source of film documentation, expertly edited by Jay Robert Nash and Stanley Ralph Ross (*CineBooks, Chicago; Bowker, distributor, NYC, \$75/ea., \$750/set*).

Knowledgeably edited by Christopher Lyon and James Vinson, *International Dictionary of Films and Filmmakers* covers, in three published volumes, Films, Directors/Filmmakers, and Actors/Actresses. Individual entries offer a wealth of well-documented reference data, detailing the contribution to cinema art and technique of some 600 films, 500 directors and 700 performers. A 4th volume, currently in the works, deals with Writers and Production Artists (*St James, Chicago, \$50/ea.*).