A SPECIAL SECTION ON CONFLICT OF INTERPRETATIONS: A SERIES OF ARTICLES ON RED RIVER BY HOWARD HAWKS.

SONG OF THE SHIRT BY THE FILM AND HISTORY PROJECT

CO HOEDEMAN AND THE ART OF THE ANIMATED FILM.

THE ORIGINS OF CINEMA VERITE: A SPECIAL DOSSIER ON THE DOCUMENTARY FILM WORK OF MICHEL BRAULT

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Editor: Ron Burnett

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Manuscripts are not returned and must be sent in triplicate, double spaced. Dépot Légale Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec et Bibliothèque Nationale du Canada.

Indexed in the International Index to Filin Periodicals (F.I.A.F.), Film and Literature Index (Albany) and The Alternative Press Index.

Single Issue $2.50, Subscription, $8.00 per year. (Foreign, including U.S. $10.) Institutional subscriptions are $1 2.00 (Foreign inc. U.S. $14.00)

Exclusive Distribution in the U.K. by The Motion Picture Bookshop, National Film Theatre, South Bank, London, SE1 8XT

SECOND CLASS REGISTRATION NUMBER 4104
ISSN 0704 016X

Volume 3, Number 2, Spring, 1980.

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Collaborators: Alison Beale is a correspondent for Cine-Tracts and is currently doing research on Harold Innis, Pierre Perrault, Claude Jutra and Guy Borremans work at the National Film Board and independently and are among the most famous filmmakers in Québec and Canada. Roberta Reeder is involved with the Semiotics Program at Brown University. Margaret Fete is at Ohio Wesleyan, Lawrence Benequist teaches at Keene State College, New Hampshire, Michael Silverman is associated with the Semiotics program at Brown University. Eugene Walz teaches at the University of Manitoba and is a member of the executive of the Film Studies Association of Canada.
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THE FILM AND HISTORY PROJECT AND THEIR ATTEMPT TO MAKE A RADICAL, FEMINIST FILM ON THE NEEDLE TRADE IN BRITAIN IN THE MID NINETEEN HUNDREDS.
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New address: Film Studies, University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ.
The Song of the Shirt was first presented at the Feminism and Cinema event at the Edinburgh Film Festival. It was produced in London by the Film and History Project and co-directed by Sue Clayton and Jonathan Curling. The film is about the history of dressmakers and seamstresses in the England of the 1830’s and 40’s and the reform movements and appeals to bourgeois conscience and philanthropy that addressed the problems of these “Distressed Needlewomen.” During this period, which saw the repeal of the Corn Laws and a shift in power from the aristocracy to merchant capitalists, thousands of single women whose labour had been integral to family agricultural and artisanal production moved into the cities to take up industrial and servant work. However, many of them became engaged in the production of clothing, a trade with the uncertain status of mass non-technical labour. The terms of employment ranged from independent dress-makers who began as apprentices, to “slop-house” workers who did the rougher sewing on a piece work basis as it was distributed to them by middle-men.
The media of the period, serialized novels, magazines, newspapers, cartoons and even songs, took up the case of these workers. The “slop-house” workers were a favourite of both the bourgeois and radical presses. They were horrified by the picture they saw of the single woman in this casually organized and over-supplied trade. Her independence and misery disturbed the hypocritical convention of the “protection of women” in the family and in the Law. Her person, as it was waged, starved and sexually active, disturbed the womanly ideal, the passive domestic consumer, that accompanied the rise of the bourgeoisie. She presented problems for the propaganda of social reformers and conservatives alike.

However, the film is not a piece of historical detective work, awarding the unknown figures their proper (and final) recognition. The presence of the seamstresses was acknowledged in certain ways: the film is concerned with the forms which that recognition took. The motivation for making the film lies partly in the persistence of comparatively bad working conditions for women in the garment trade. But in addition to its specific historical material, The Song of the Shirt also constitutes a confrontation with a problem-area which has arisen within the economic and cultural conditions of independent filmmaking in England, and within feminist film analyses and practices of the past few years.

On the basis of the concerns which have arisen from these areas, the suggestion is being put forward that filmic representation (paradigmatically of women, or of history) and film production, distribution and exhibition have a relationship which exists not only in after-the-fact exegesis of a film text whose only equal is the film critic who locates the film socially and historically. Instead, the relationships importantly referred to by these terms are those (a) between the audience and the film, and (b) between the audience and “history.”

A key feature of this argument is the centralized and monopolized international film industry, which means that the viewing of most films is part of “mass entertainment” or its marginal opposite, Art Cinema. Given this fact, the role of the audience is to consume and to perform a “suspension of disbelief.” Disbelief in the illusion, but also cynicism (and in much of the world, cultural estrangement) with respect to the rightful authority of its presentation must, supposedly, be laid aside, and as if they were the same. This temporary, “voluntary” forfeiting of reason for pleasure is frequently joked about in commercial film, and by its apologists, as though in a conspiracy among equals. But it is temporary only in one sense, because it is an attitude that is maintained by the repetition, at nearly every occasion of viewing, of the same exhibition practices. Film practice of this kind is part of the system of the social production of knowledge, which includes, as in the common-sense rationalization of the audience’s position, the construction of the relationships between producer and consumer, or exhibitor and audience, within which knowledge is categorized. Thus we have notions of “common-knowledge,” and so also “entertainment” and “history,” which are apparently arrived at not by struggle but by a consensus whose machinery is invisible. What can be argued though is that a common-sense approach to being a member of the audience, repeated and ritualized, is disguised as choice but rests on a partial knowledge by the audience of its own position. The Song of the Shirt treats this partial knowledge as directly analogous to the type of knowledge of the situation of the needlewomen possessed by the bourgeoisie; by the reforming parties, and by the women themselves.

In this film common-sense Victorian attitudes to class, to gender difference and sexuality are taken apart, through their representations, in such a way as to call into question attitudes of the present. In doing this work the filmmakers were faced by two areas of opportunity and constraint — the financial and organizational limitations placed on the production, film technique, research, and so on, but also the availability of some historical sources and at the same time a lack of records left by the women themselves. This was the material and circumstances at hand for treating the subject of how the ideology of “woman’s place” in one particular
time partnered the largely unremarked unequal relationship of women workers to capital. Within the framework of mass media production and consumption, audiences contribute to a common-sense version of themselves which is similarly related to the unequal relationship they have to all phases of media production.

If such an analogy is to be consciously taken up in the film it is important to note the problem posed by the film theory concerned with reading films, in terms of structural or intersubjective models developed from linguistic semiotics and psychoanalysis. The interrogation of the film text, its relationships to the constructed/conceiving viewing subject, and even the description of the film as at the conjuncture of a number of cultural and historic discourses, are formulations limited in a specific way. This is not because they are the projects of critics and theorists but because the political nature of representation is being handled (if not theorized) at the “viewing” end of the production process. Simply to say that meaning is constituted at the point of viewing detaches this point from the points of producing and distributing and can lead to a reformulation of the liberal gesture to audience free will and common sense. Production, distribution and exhibition must be considered together, especially where a critique is based on a dominant pattern in film practice.

The political nature of representation can be emphasized by the reformulation of a classic communications formula to read: "Who is representing what, and for whom?" If the priority in the question is not only representations in general (as if this were possible) but "who represents," as a question of gender or class, for example, the inequality of the audience to the film production, distribution and exhibition processes stands out as a factor that needs to be changed. To achieve a different relationship to the audience, the Film and History Workshop, in the process of research and production For The Song of the Shirt, has consulted and planned for screenings and discussions with specific constituencies, for example, feminist historians, educational associations and labour organizations.
This formulation of the problematic of the audience (as I understand it) and the filmmakers response to it must be seen as relating to four areas of recent film theoretical and practical work in England. First, debate at the 1979 Feminism and Cinema Event at Edinburgh centred on the relationship of theory to practice in representations of and for women (especially with respect to women’s sexuality) in the form of strategies for dealing with pleasure and narrative in “women’s” films. Filmmakers were also very concerned about appropriate production and distribution methods. Secondly, socialist and feminist historians in England, such as the History Workshop and the Feminist History Group have suggested both in terms of historical material and in the methodology of recovering “minority” history, how it is that political filmmaking can be concerned with the connection between ideology and historical representations. Thirdly, work on the spectator, the constructed viewing subject, is now challenged and expanded by the socially observed audience. Finally, the film has an integral relationship to the political and aesthetic strategies of independent filmmaking in England, in the face of the current state of English media production and consumption.

The Silent Sex

"Wth fingers weary and worn
Wth eyelids heavy and red,
A woman sat in unwomanly rags
Plying her needle and thread-
Stitch — Stitch — Stitch —
In poverty, hunger and dirt,
And still with a voice of dolorous pitch
Would that its tone would reach the rich
She sang the Song of the Shirt."

The Song of the Shirt, in black and white, runs for 135 minutes and has been constructed in three parts with a Postscript so that it can be screened in classrooms and similar situations which can allow discussions between or after the episodes. All three parts begin at the same point, a shot of one or two women in a London cafe in which there is a television visible to the right of the picture. On the T.V. screen there appear interviews with contemporary working women, with slop-house workers of the thirties and 1840's and voiceovers and titles reading from and presenting visually the texts of documents of the period about the working and health conditions of the workers. This device loosely frames the larger part of the period content of the film — its dramatized, reconstructed documentary and montage sections (using film, video, graphics, synchronized speech and voice-overs and music) — within a contemporary setting. But in the end such formal devices do not close off the historical material. While the cafe T.V. is zoomed in on at the opening of each section to take up the whole of the film-screen space, video screens and segments also appear within what are perceived of as film sections. In effect, there is no fixed correspondence between time period or theme, and any particular medium within the film.

To take the opening of part one for example: we see a woman sitting in the cafe and a video screen to the right with another woman’s “talking head” on it, speaking about her work as a waitress which she does because her husband is too humiliated to face the interrogations of Social Security: “No man’s going to like being told . . . that he’s suddenly got to start supporting a woman and a couple of kids.” As she says this the camera zooms in and the video screen, over which the credits and quotations and titles have been rolling right to left, enlarges to fill the film screen. The picture cuts to the woman who was talking on the video screen now walking through the garment district of London, and to reflections of these streets in shop windows. This is followed by a slow sequence beginning with reflections of these streets in shop
windows. This is followed by a slow sequence beginning with reflections in canal water and a bridge with the sign “Frog Lane Bridge,” over which a woman in Victorian dress walks. The original woman’s voice continues: “...cottage manufacture being ceased, if the girls cannot obtain places as servants, and but a small number can, they must remain at home idle or else leave home to seek other work.” The camera moves across period drawings of industrial canals, which cut to a grainy shot of girls climbing a canal bridge like the first one, but steeper, wearily carrying bundles of clothes. Within this shot the camera moves across to another screen with close-ups of the girls washing clothes and dipping their feet in the water. Further cuts and camera movements establish railway tracks, canal boats, a period cartoon of a lady leaning out of a railway carriage, and drawings of railway carriage interiors and of open railway carriages bearing frenzied looking workers. The camera comes to rest on a gentleman (an actor in period dress) in a train interior reading to us about the division of labour from Adam Smith’s The Wealth of Nations.

Within the first ten minutes of the film women appear in most of the scenes and types of scenes which will be repeated throughout the film. There are women in the cafe and the seamstresses who are mostly to be found seated around a table working together, though they are also seen at a commission of enquiry into their moral and physical health, and carrying work to and from their lodgings. The customers are represented by a series of scenes in a grand house, tableau-like, in which a girl is measured and fitted for a gown — these scenes also include the dressmaker and servants. The main scenarios are supplemented by political and satirical cartoons, sketches, and drawings, by the stills sequences which accompany the reading of a reformist novel A Woman’s Wrongs, and by an occasional further foray into the present with the actresses as historians and presenters. Unlike the male figures Jones and Mayhew (reformist writers), Morrison the Co-operative, Harney the Chartist, Ashley the arch conservative, and Cobden the Free-trader, no historically “real” women are named. The only exceptions are the titled ladies who sanctioned an “Association for the relief and protection of young persons employed in the dressmaking and millinery department in London,” and they appear in name only.

The contextualization of the narrative and historical film by the video is incomplete and in fact allows complex correspondences to be made between identities and time periods “inside” and “outside” the film. The effect is similar to having the actresses each play several roles and appear in modern and period dress at different times. This is not only a formal device, or one that refers in some general way to the question of identity — it is a device that points to the correspondence between individual names being unknown to history (as it has been recorded) and to blurring of distinct identities of individual women in the film. This correspondence is commented on when actresses change from historical subjects to historians from one scene to another, and when the use of video and film within the film questions the “drama” or “documentary” nature of the various sections. When the actress who plays one of the slop-house workers also plays the part of the tragic Anna (in the stills sequence) both the worker’s and our identification with the character(s) is comically and dramatically noted. However the effect is not Brechtian — if one accepts the characterization of Brechtian theatre as distancing.

Sex and Economy

The reason for this is that the film is concerned with what is present, not with what is absent from an ideology of woman’s place. It can come as a shock, to anyone used to sexual oppression in the guise of tolerance, or used to the titillation of T.V. costume dramas, to see how clearly Victorian documents and pictures link an ideology of sex to production and consumption, and to the fetishism of the female person. Lord Ashley, 1844:
“What is the ground on which the woman says she will no longer pay attention to her domestic duties or give the obedience which is owing to her husband? Because on her devolves the labour which should fall to his share and she throws out the taunt, ‘If I have the labour, I will also have the amusement.’ Where, Sir, under these conditions, are the obligations of domestic life. How can its obligations be fulfilled?”

This excerpt from a speech in parliament is just one piece of documentary evidence that illustrates the significance placed on woman’s work and sexuality, and the fear of women controlling these aspects of their lives. An element of “common sense,” that is the control of women’s work and sexuality by regulated domestic life, which is supposedly a-historical and “natural” can appear here as the subject of a film because it has been talked about and written about as a political issue, as much in Victorian England as in the Welfare State. The film uses the words of Conservatives like Ashley (who was concerned about decent living conditions for workers as contributing to a moral basis for class society), and contrasts them with Free-Traders like Cobden, who in his opposition to the Ten Hours Bill (limiting the working hours of women and children) was more concerned with the profit to be had from these workers, and with force as the social regulator. The status of the family was paid honour in lip service by both sides, but it was in fact debatable, and changeable as convenient.

In the documents and drawings of the period women appear as either innocent or guileful. For example, the seamstresses very often prostituted themselves to make a living, and since they were not allowed their children with them at their work, they left them with wet nurses in whose care they often died. These were personal tragedies. However their “moral laxity,” their living habits and diseases, which were very much determined by their working conditions, were regarded as transmissible in the work which they produced. Several parts of the film illustrate the imagined political economy of disease and sexuality that connected them to wealthy women, to whose seasonal whims they sacrificed their health.
In the film this economy is centred visually around the dressing of a young lady which appears in a sequence of dramatized scenes in which she stands in her drawers, petticoat and mob-cap and is measured, pinned and fitted to the accompaniment, sometimes, of only the sound of silk rustling. No one but the dressmaker moves. These stylized improvisations (no one speaks), the high camera angle and its distance from the scene (greater than in the scenes with the women sewing around a table), and the dim lighting, emphasize the deathly eroticism of the dress-fitting process. It culminates in the dress being carefully folded in tissue paper, which is the last scene of the film.

Throughout the film this episodic sequence is related to cartoon drawings of a debutante's Season (in which she wears out milliners and seamstresses on her way to a proposal), to a vignette about the origins of the term “pin money,” and to lectures about the responsibilities of upper class to working class women, which transfers the problem from the sphere of class relations to the woman’s individual conscience — her guilt about her comparative advantage and her own commodity status. The composition of several shots in the grand house echoes Tenniel's drawings, for example in the use of mirrors. Editing allows our attention to similarities between the composition of several scenes and one of his drawings in which a girl is admiring herself in a new dress, in a mirror in which we can see the expiring form of the seamstress. In both cases the mirrors reflect more than a reversed image. In another connection of the classes it is the dressmaker who brings to this house a copy of the novel A Woman’s Wrongs, which is concealed by a maid in the top of a dolls house, where it is found and read by the daughter (she of the dress-fitting) as the maids watch and listen.

The quoted words of the reformers and conservatives alike confirm the sexual hypocrisy which defined the laziness and reed (or gentility) of the decorative, appearing consumer, and the helplessness for sluttishness) of the producer. The interesting thing about the way these links are made in the film — from cartoons by Cruikshank, Lynch, et al, mainly published in Punch, to speeches about the emmigration of “surplus” women, and to the sickly sympathy for the seamstresses aroused through the publication of novels like A Woman’s Wrongs (featuring Anna, who starving and homeless “falls” in the arms of a student) is that they do not seek to diffuse the reality of the sex-economy connection. In some improvised scenes the slop-house women mockingly act out Anna’s seduction, which they have been reading, and in another banter Mayhew about the real reason for his wanting them to emigrate. It is important that in this scene, at the same time they are implying that they know full well why they are candidates for the colonies — “Like bleedin’ criminals” — that they also ask why it is that others are making the decisions about their lives: “Come to write more articles, have you, on the terrible conditions of the sweated trades?”

**Hysteria**

The changes which were coming about in the 1830’s meant extended leisure for some and extended work for others. Reactions to these conditions — “nervous” diseases, genuine illness due to working and living conditions, as well as political agitation, tended to be labelled hysteria, irrational frenzy, by the middle class press, and this hysteria was located in their bodies in the forms of unruly undomesticated sexuality and social diseases. It was not their conditions, but women and workers who were irrational. The materials — cartoons, pamphlets and speeches — which the filmmakers have used make reference to women’s hysteria, and also to hysteria in a more general sense, as for example in the reports of revolution in Europe in 1838. Sexual anarchy, mob rule and disease were connected, as in Lord Ashley’s appeals for sanitation measures during the Cholera epidemic, to lessen the risks of revolution. The logic with which equations such as his were made could not conceal the ideological nature of their commonsense assumptions.
In its treatment of this subject this film has to deal with the same problem as all "feminist" film — to know how to treat female sexuality without exploiting it. Recent responses have ranged from the refusal to show "naked women," to counterattacking pornography with anatomy. Fetishizing the heroine of a "feminist" film as her appearance is a danger which at Edinburgh was identified, for example, in a film with avant-garde techniques, Chantal Ackerman's Les Rendez-vous d'Anna, but is clearly also a tendency in films with a wider distribution and louder feminist claims, such as Girlfriends and Julia. The same problem is encountered, perhaps less duplicitously in Film Noir, American "women's films of the 1940's and 50's in which the excess of meaning, the woman's independence and sexuality transcends the confines of the story line and where, indeed, her "heroine" status always hangs in the balance. This excess of meaning is possible because of the difference between women's experience and its representation, but also a tension between kinds of signification in the film which may well be the products of opposing ideas. Fetishizing the heroine as her appearance also occurs because of specific practices in the production of the film — given that production goes on within a context of visual codes and social discourses. Since its encounter with the representation of women is both in terms of historical examples (and a trade which emphasized the appearance) and its own filmic devices, the material and tactics of The Song of the Shirt makes an important case.

A major part of the film's effect is the concentrated presentation of selected texts and cartoons, stressing this hysteria as something present in them, not below their surfaces. But in its handling of a sexual and political ideology and its negotiation of the representation of female sexuality, the film owes a great deal to the musical score. Like the visual sequences, it is composed of a few themes or "narratives," using some Victorian lyrics and tunes. It is a complex instrumental and voice composition, self-referential both in terms of repetition (which does not strictly follow the repetition of the various strands of "narrative"), and variation on a few main themes, lyrics and songs about Chartism, the Cholera epidemic, the Great Exhibition of 1851, and also about the slop-house workers (such as "The Song of the Shirt") have been used in such a way as to connect or counterpoint certain messages in the film. By slightly altering a normal range of tempo and pitch, but using an ensemble of piano, reed instruments, cello, clarinet, guitar and voice (with additional saxophone, trumpet and electric bass), the music plays just "off" the sounds of a Victorian musical evening at home. At times it is more opened out than this characterization suggests, but on the whole the music works by taking its cue from the hysteria of the original materials.
At several places in the film, but especially the end of part three, it involves fast tempo and the extreme pitch of a strident tenor, and a soprano singing beyond the usual range. The songs have distinctly pronounced lyrics, and they are songs of political protest. The satire and the sentimentality that can be heard in their words were features of the political campaigns of which they were a part. They are not an imposition or rationalization by the filmmakers. For example, during the dress-making scenes in the dim room, and the accompanying montage, there is a melancholy introduction to an obsessive lyric sung by two soprano voices in close nasal harmony: “Females work too hard I’m told, Stitch goes the needle.” It disappears desperately and abruptly off the soprano register — “Stitch goes the needle!” And a camera movement from the head to the respectable hem of a drawing of a lady, with the caption “As I Was,” and across and up the picture of her in a shorter skirt “As I Am,” is accompanied by the wheedling and unambiguous lyric:

“The pretty girls that roam about
Begin to raise their voices
They say they’re going to turn out
And ask for higher prices
They say that times are very hard
And for to work they’re willing
But what they charged you three pence for
They’ll charge you now a shilling.”

The displacement of discourse about social oppression from the mechanisms (relations) of that oppression to the bodies of the oppressed is located, and therefore can be revealed by the film, in the displacement of effects in language to the register of music. The analogy is to be found in Victorian representations, that is, in the drawings and music. Nevertheless, if the music and visual elements were to be given a formal documentary status “borrowed” from the category of historical material, their impact could remain closed off. Through the deconstructive, narrative and episodic elements of the film and the music this hysteria, or protest, is legitimated as it builds emotional and intellectual sympathy with the audience. The point is that if there is ambiguity in representations of women, it is there for a reason. Therefore we are not encouraged to patronize Victorian attitudes, but to engage with them.

II History

In contrast to the silent women, the male figures in the film are those who have spoken, written, and formed “history.” Especially in parts two and three of the film, we see and hear the reformers, free-traders, unionists and Chartists in competition with one another. They declare and quote, haranguing audiences in a present-day London street market, addressing blown-up drawings of skeletal tailors, and arguing with each other through the use of video screens set up on an area like a stage which is used elsewhere in the film as well. Even an uninformed viewer is able to get the gist of the debate and the alliances that were formed for mutual interest. It is clear too that the interests of women and men workers were not identical since women’s piece work undercut the prices charged by the male tailors. In fact, when it comes to these scenes of the film, which rely more on documentary evidence, women seem to be largely left out because there is little evidence of their participation in the labour movement at this time (see interview). What is interesting is the comparative distance from the male historical characters which one experiences. How much is it a question of the film technique taking a cue from the nature of the material, i.e. the fact that men are historically distinct and are understood through their own words rather than representations of their experience by others (though this idea ignores the illiterate working class man), and how much is it the reproduction by the film and by the viewer of the more sympathetic and “general” character of women, which has its filmic conventions?
The film tends to bring this problem to the foreground. As the story of Anna, written by Jones and Mayhew, is reaching its climax, Mayhew interrupts the composition:

Jones: “...And the flame of love this kindled was to bear through the bitter nights to come.”

Mayhew: “Jones, we cannot have them setting up house together. She must commit suicide — there you are — in the canal.”

Jones: “But that's undercutting the very point of my story. I had intended that he give up the benefits of his superior position, and they continue living together untainted by considerations of class and property.

Harney: “There are said to be 40,000 starving women in the clothes trade, Mr. Jones, most of them no doubt syphilitic old hags and not at all like your gracious heroine. I've yet to see the 40,000 young gentlemen that'll rescue them. Does your magazine offer them any help?”

Mayhew's and Jones' voices had been heard over a sequence of still photographs referring impressionistically to the story they were telling. As Mayhew interrupts we see the two authors standing in a garden by the canal composing, then debating the story. When Harney (a Chartist) interrupts them he is seen shouting down at them from a balcony over the garden. This short sequence moves from the absurd but sympathetic romance to the authors opposing but equally idealistic views of how to continue it, which reveal the ways in which they expect to influence their middle class readership. Harney's interruption points out a few of the realities of the situation, as well as his own disbelief in the usefulness of serials as a political weapon. He goes on to talk about the stamp taxes that restricted the radical presses (which nonetheless had not prevented the wide circulation of the Chartist papers) and the support for the movement to be gained by working class literacy, by the removal of the Stamp Act, and not by the mere sympathy of the middle class to a melodramatic story. So here the film is dealing explicitly with the politics of representation through arguments about it in the period concerned. The presence of this type of discourse within the film is verbal, certainly, but it owes its form of existence, i.e. the possibility of verbal encounters like those between Jones and Mayhew and Harney to the filmic treatment. Even further, the absence of women from the discussion is noted by a shot of them washing clothes on the other side of the canal.

The direction in which to move the argument now is not further into the layers of representation the film is able to handle, but into the arena where these are produced, the relationship of the audience to history.

III The Audience

A major problem which the film has to handle is the notion of ambiguity — visual and historical. That is, representations of women can be read in different ways, and so can events, as for example in present day judgements of the effectiveness of strategies taken by the reforming groups of the nineteenth century. The two kinds of ambiguity tend to defeat discursive treatments; representation can be less well handled in pure (i.e. linear) discourse, but so also discourse itself. The problem which has been encountered by oral historians and by feminists is that accounts of history, especially sought-out interviews with participants in
recent history, provide a version of events which is personal, oppositional, and does not even seek to be synthetic, analytical, authoritative or "historical." Therefore it is not only a problem of the production of facts but of the production of forms with which historians have to deal.

The film handles this problem in two ways, connecting the production of readings of the film to the production of history both within the text, as I have already discussed, but also in its production, distribution and exhibition processes. In the treatment of the sexual and political economy of women, within the text, the non-discursive does not have to mean the politically ambiguous. But the intended engagement of this film is also with a variety of audiences, who depending on their interest will produce correspondingly "interested" readings. Feminists, feminist historians, historians, school children, people interested in labour history and so on will produce readings affected by their existing knowledge of this period, by whether or not they see the film in episodes with an opportunity for discussion, by whether they see it repeatedly and so on. (The variables are not purely mechanical, nor are the results predictable.)

Even more importantly, the production and use of this film cannot stand apart from the project of the Independent Filmmakers Association, and from the movement to validate "Popular Memory." In other words, the relationships between the film and the audience and between the film audience and history are not singular. It is not a question of filling in missing historical information. More accurately, one must take the view that any society provides a limited space for communication, limited both physically and through direct political control. The women's movement, the oral historians, and the independent filmmakers (in England) have all been engaged with criticizing the results of this communicative restriction, but also with opening it out.

The independent film movement in England has the same problem as elsewhere, that independent film has effectively been marginalized with the label "alternative" in its relationship to commercial cinema, which increasingly since the war is American, and which, partly due to television, has many fewer outlets. Following the initiative of groups like Cinema Action which have worked by consultation with their film subjects and with practices like discussion at screenings, the Independent Filmmakers Association has in recent years, been able to advocate by the means of shifting from an alternative to an oppositional stand, and by refusing its own marginalization (as Art Cinema, for example) to refuse also the marginalization of political movements, ideas and modes of representation. This development is also to a large extent the responsibility of women within the I.F.A., and the issues of representation, especially of women's daily life and history as they have been treated in films such as Women of the Rhonda and The Nightcleaners. More generally, the women's movement practice of consciousness raising suggested the need to develop screening "spaces" which did not duplicate the sealed cocoon of the film theatre. The Song of the Shirt shows the influence which the concern for representation of women's experience has had on the treatment of "popular" history, urging it out of sentimental, humanist, or party-labelled margins.

The work which this has included has involved setting up film production co-ops and distribution outlets, with a stress on collective work and a certain degree of regional autonomy. Most recently the I.F.A. has been involved in negotiations over the terms on which its members will contract production grants with the British Film Institute — to include such specifications as a collective (i.e. non-hierarchical and non-authorial) mode of production, beginning with the proposal of hourly wages for workers in independent film (an enormous departure from their artisanal "alternative" status), and the guarantee from the outset of sufficient funds for publicity and distribution. (The I.F.A has also acted as a lobby against the domination of Britain’s fourth television channel by the commercial Independent Television.)
This is not to suggest that there exists among English independent filmmakers a consensus about how to approach their political work, but the existence of this strategy represents a carefully worked out position, which is meaningful, regardless of its success in the face of the monoliths of communications. It is the background against which the production of The Song of the Shirt has taken place, therefore the relationship of the film to its potential audiences needs to be seen in this light.

The relationship is open-ended, or to be more precise, it is defined by the character of the audience and the circumstances of each screening, and by the expectations of that audience and those of the filmmakers, as represented in the film. My experience with screenings of the film to date suggests that the filmmakers are right to hope for situations in which the audience is engaged in some way with the historical period represented by the film, and indeed these are being worked towards in association with teachers and others. Nonetheless this ideal situation is not the only one in which the film has impact. In order to have the film accepted sometimes means that at screenings the filmmakers have been caught between emphasizing the historical and polemic (which tends, falsely, to suggest a linear argument in the film) or emphasizing the issues of representation (which tends, equally falsely, to suggest the lack of any argument.) Only in the sense of a film as both a text and a text (literally) in circulation can any message the film has about the history and politics of representation make corresponding and legitimate sense. To the occasional surprise of the filmmakers, audiences have been very receptive to this idea as it affects the issues in the film in which they have the most interest.

IV Conclusion

The Song of the Shirt engages, in addition to its subject matter, with the history of filmmaking practices and theories mentioned at the beginning of this article. The point which I have wanted to stress most is the necessary unity of the film’s subject with all the aspects of the film practice that present it. Therefore I have not stressed certain other features, in particular the labour history, largely because this writing is not conceived of as a catalogue or review. In particular, this film is only part of a project and it is false to take it out of that context. It is in this light, and not with the film as an example of correctness that I would suggest a couple of implications for film practice.

One of these, which was raised earlier, was the problem identified at the Edinburgh Festival, of the fetishizing of the feminist film heroine. There are a number of reasons why this is possible, but the one which stands out corresponds most closely to Marx’s definition of the commodity fetish. Fetishizing a feminist heroine is not a visual or narrative sleight-of-hand, but a practice which works because among other factors, the “feminist” element (not a group but a tendency) in the market can be sold a symbol of itself as a substitute for an experience. But it is insufficient to suggest that all of the practices which have built up around representations of women, and those such as the camera’s habitual voyeurism with respect to the female body, can be deconstructed by the removal of filmmaking from this commercial sphere, since cultural practices are not isolated in such a way. Furthermore, avant-garde film, which has dealt with the formalism of images of the female has not usually concerned itself other than visually, with the conventions of meaning with which it plays. There is some hope in increased opportunities to present women in a greater variety of roles and visual contexts, but sheer pluralism needs to be checked by movements for more democratic control of the media and by making encounters with the visual media rather less passive experiences than they have been to date. In addition, some work, like The Song of the Shirt will be able to show the economic and social reasons for phenomena like the fetishism of the female, which are so transparent and so easily ignored. One discovers through this film that such work is possible.
The second implication is similar but more general. The work which has been done on the audience in the last few years largely owes its development to feminist film theory's encounter with psychoanalysis. This work is visible in The Song of the Shirt (the flow of identities, the mirrors, etc.) but both within the film and in similar film distribution and exhibition practices, it has also gained a sharper political edge which now connects the politics of representation in the imaginative and social realms. In other words, the connection is active — it has moved from analysing the position of the viewing subject in relation to film, to altering that relationship through the re-construction of film practice.

Notes


2. This reformulation was suggested by Sylvia Harvey at an introduction to the Film at a screening in October, 1979.


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AN INTERVIEW WITH JONATHAN CURLING AND SUE CLAYTON

This interview with Sue Clayton and Jonathan Curling, co-directors of the Song of the Shirt, took place six months after they had begun to distribute the film. The discussion reflects the ways that their experience with audiences altered or confirmed the validity of their distribution practice. They also comment on the position of independent film generally in Britain, and on the formation and politics of the Independent Filmmakers Association.

Alison Beale conducted the interview for Cine-Tracts.

Alison Beale:

Why did you choose this subject?

Sue Clayton:

Originally the film was going to be about the relationship of women to the Welfare State, looked at historically. We chose the sewing women partly because of the large number of texts that were available about them, but also because it seemed too obvious to look at factory women getting new-status jobs in the North, and besides it was also more interesting to look at a group of women where you couldn’t just talk about middle class paranoia in the face of their economic status.

Jonathan Curling:

The reason that we were doing work on history at all was that we’d been asked by audiences to whom we showed our videotape about the history of the Welfare state today. We did the work on the video-tape from September, 1976 through to December, 1976 and went on distributing it while we were finishing the historical research on the film.

Alison Beale:

Who were the audiences for the videotape?

Sue Clayton:

There was Women’s Aid; there were two or three Women’s Aid conferences and groups, and women’s cultural groups; and there was a conference on popular culture and cultural struggle, and educational places. The other reason why we started to look at the 1840’s was that in school and in history classes it’s always taught as a period of philanthropy. You’re always told that there was an industrial revolution which created a lot of hardship, and that the philanthropists realised how unfair everything was. We’d already seen that certain aspects of Welfare State legislation must have begun at that time. The amount of legislation that was passed in the 1840’s was absolutely colossal, and it was mainly in relation to state control of different aspects of people’s social lives.
Alison Beale: When were you aware that the material you wanted to deal with might have implications for representations of women?

Sue Clayton: The video-tape was about the way contemporary texts on the Welfare State, including advertising and public health material, present an idealization of motherhood and the family — about the way women were presented with ideal images of motherhood and then dirty, scruffy, realist images of real women. Certain kinds of documentary realism are dangerous from the beginning, so that was why we were quite happy in a sense to look at the way women were represented in the 1840’s, and we didn’t instantly start looking for women’s own material although when we did we found there wasn’t any anyway.

Alison Beale: You mean there wasn’t anything about their organized labour history?

Sue Clayton: We found the labour history very late. In a sense we hadn’t exactly been looking for it, because we’d always been interested in how that history was represented elsewhere or within the women’s own voice.

Jonathan Curling: Working in film it’s almost impossible not to be influenced by French work or to be influenced by Screen. We were quite influenced by Foucault, I think, in doing work on the way women were being constructed in a certain position, and perhaps also inversely in the way men are constructed in relation to women.

Alison Beale: In film?

Jonathan Curling: Well, not just in film but also within state institutions. The labour history movement is just beginning to look at the construction of middle class women in particular periods, and to do this by looking at the relationship between classes instead of elaborating the particular labour history of a single group, which, it seems to me, is what such work has done in this country until recently. The contradictions which this work has revealed are in the film. For example it has been established that it was in the interest of the male artisans to exclude women from the unions and prevent what they saw as the undercutting of their wages by female slop-labour. There’s another element which comes from the analysis of the middle class of the way the family is seen to be formed at a particular point and women become dependent on men in the middle class. It is being suggested that the model of the middle class family was imposed by the state apparatuses, by philanthropy, by private charity on the working class. The two elements do interlock crucially at a certain moment, in that the model of the family can be seized by the male artisans to actually justify their position. It depends on the particular position the audience is coming from whether this comes across or not, but it does come out in discussion.

Alison Beale: The labour history and the problems that Jonathan mentioned do seem to come out more in a situation where people are already well informed about these issues. I think that for me at least, the problems of representation were more immediately accessible. The film is obviously of interest to women’s groups, to people doing labour history and to History Workshop sort of work. But in terms of specific groups of people at the point of production, how much were they involved, literally, or is this a theoretical question?

Sue Clayton: It’s both but they are obviously related. A lot of the labour history
work and research was done by the Feminist History Group. To a reasonable extent it was work that they had been doing already and which we found out about. We discussed it with them because we didn’t know the area. Two of their meetings, two years apart, were completely devoted to looking at film material. So at two different stages, while the film was still being made, they actually spent time looking at the material and commenting on it. But with about five individuals within that group we’ve had extensive ongoing relationships. We would listen to them talk and then mull over what it might be interesting to do in relation to what they were doing. Then there were the links with education, with film education, and the relationship to women’s movement more generally. I think that it was because we were all involved in other groups and meetings and campaigns that we could relate to what we were doing, but I think that the most literal connection was with the historians. From Dec. ’76 to Aug. ’79 when the film was finished there never really was a pre-production or production period. In fact, different scenes were shot and then later they were qualified. We put the stuff on video only about two years after we started making the film. A year after we had begun the film we talked to Barbie Taylor of the Feminist History Group and suddenly we had section two. Originally this had been three minutes and then it grew to thirty-three minutes.

Jonathan Curling:
There’s also very definitely a sense in which we didn’t engage with them in the pre-production or the production work. During that process we never engaged with them about the politics of aesthetics, for example. They looked at the material in the way that it was cut together, and supported it, but there was never really an argument about it. And in a sense that is what is now going on. Our imaginary construction of them supporting the particular forms of representation which we were presenting to them is now an ongoing argument to a much greater extent than just the film. It’s one that is going on within history generally at the moment — the problem of epistemology, of forming particular practices, etc. There was a point in ’75-’76 for example when a lot of people were doing work on the welfare state because it was seen to be becoming hegemonic in the way it was influencing the way that people were living. Now it’s very interesting that over the course of the film we actually cut out a character who in a sense represented a particular Malthusian position.

Sue Clayton:
He was seen as the bureaucrat with the nice petit-bourgeois or bourgeois family at home. And he was always intervening between the philanthropic position and the free-trading position, because Malthusianism’s obviously had aspects of both. And he just got completely... 

Jonathan Curling:
Got completely chopped out of the film. The political conjuncture was changing while we were making the film and that figure became redundant. It posed huge problems in the structure of the film.

Sue Clayton:
Because of the swing to the right, because of the Tory government and its policies, its now very difficult to pursue an argument that is actually critical of the Welfare State at a time when all political groupings are actually defending it.

Alison Beale:
I’d like you to describe what was happening, as film students or in relation to the I.F.A. in terms of what sort of work people wanted to do at that point and what sort of circumstances there were for production. Obviously this formulation of the audience is not exclusive to the Film and History Project, so where does it arise, what sort of circumstances does that take place in?
At that point in '76-'77 various groups were participating and militating in the I.F.A. This included a lot of people who would still tend to be seen as primarily theorists, as well as people running workshops, people who were into making single films... newsreels and all sorts of things. It was a very, very vibrant body at the time. It was extremely interesting. There was an interesting conference in 1977 and a report about it for Screen which Fran MacLean and I wrote. The idea of working with audiences was expressed in different ways, coming out of the I.F.A. On the one hand it was being expressed in a paper by Claire Johnston and Marion Dain around a concept of what was then called social practice, and it was just beginning to have a certain presence at that time within the domain of theory.

Are you saying, though, that it was a theoretical point?

No, I'm saying there's a double movement, and that it's coming out of the practice of the London Women's Film Group as well as all these women who were part of that and of people like Cinema Action, who had been working with a particular notion of cinema as a social practice.

I think you need to explain why those people were in the I.F.A. in the first place, before you explain the effects. There were people in the I.F.A. who wouldn’t necessarily have been interested in all this, or who’d been unable to make films before, for instance the women’s film group and certain of the others. The London Women's Film Group were using film as a way to move forward politically. They had used photography or whatever else before then and turned to film. There also were people whose work was very much modelled on the idea of campaigning political newsreels, and there was Cinema Action making socialist films for the miners and so on, as well as the avant-garde London Filmmakers Co-op. Then there were a lot of people who would see themselves as being presumably influenced by Godard, and all kinds of film students and people interested in recent film history. I would have thought that what they all had in common was an understanding of the way the state was controlling what funds were available, and they all saw the viability of such an association because there were so many groups. They saw the possibility of building up some kind of practice and exhibition that would cross some of those boundaries. And because of this, as well the political climate in which gays, women etc., were more active in cultural fields than before, it meant that they all had a particular concern with audiences. And so, on the one hand, you had people specifying what an audience actually is and so on, and on the other hand there was the notion of people literally constructing an audience by taking their films to venues that we thought should become interested in film. To grasp all that, I think we should explain why it is that the I.F.A. has occurred in Britain, and why that group of filmmakers was operating in that manner...

I'd like you to talk about the state — why you identify the state rather than commercial cinema as the problem.
Jonathan Curling:

...the point about the state support for British film is that it's always been conceived around commerce and commercial interests. All the legislation in the late '40's, from the embargo on American films to the formation of the national film finance corporation, the construction of the Eady levy, all these, have been mechanisms for the support of commercial cinema, and by and large they have been sidetracked by the American majors through the means of subsidiaries set up in this country precisely for that purpose. The experimental film fund of the production board of the British Film Institute which was set up in the early 50's had a minute budget right though until the early 70's. But by and large the money only really began to be increased substantially in about 1973, which is why you then get the formation of the I.F.A. Independent cinema before then had been going, I suppose, in two main forms. One form was based on an idea of complete independence like the Co-op and to a certain extent like Cinema Action — people working freelance on the fringes of industry and then taking their funds out. There was another form going on which was people working on Arts Council documentaries...The major element in that argument with the state apparatuses, is the audience...The state was advocating a particular kind of cinema and marginalizing the sort of cinema which was working with audiences outside of that context, in a non-theatrical way. State-supported cinema is oriented around cinema exhibition, it intervenes in commercial and art-house cinema institutions. It wants to take on aesthetic strategies, intervening in the aesthetics of documentary. That in a sense produces a conflict with a notion of political cinema which is working with audiences in a different format, outside of that ready-made circuit. And the two obviously overlap, there is a way in which people doing that written theoretical work are being affected by these developments of aesthetic ideas. The two are not completely distinct.

Alison Beale:

That gets to be a problem, in fact.

Jonathan Curling:

Well, it gets to be the interesting problem for independent cinema. I think that is precisely why it is interesting as a cultural phenomenon.

Alison Beale:

...in some ways you are trying to occupy the same distribution and exhibition space that the “state” wishes to occupy, and to use state funding to do so.

Jonathan Curling:

Yes, that’s right.

Sue Clayton:

...you could simply argue that the B.F.I. ought to start making sure that all independent films whether financed by them or not, get to festivals, get around, get publicity, get a kind of treatment that they give their own films.

Jonathan Curling:

One has a confusion because one has to engage in one discourse which is directed at funding institutions and all the bodies you have to deal with, and there’s another level on which one is thinking and talking one’s own discourse within the I.F.A. In that history I gave earlier I actually internalized what were basically tactical arguments.

Sue Clayton:

One of them is worth mentioning, which is to say that if you were a film-maker in another country you’d be on an Art film budget of a million. That’s the argument you would take to the B.F.I., but it
presupposes this category of people who are filmmakers.

Jonathan Curling:
I’d like to say a little about the strategies that we had to engage in in getting the film funded. A notion of constituency or community is actually acceptable within the discourse of funding institutions, particularly the Regional Arts Associations which have a history of funding community video and different sorts of community development projects. We were able to get money from the Greater London Arts Association for two reasons. One, it was about London, and two, it was educational, and therefore engaged with a constituency which they recognize.

Jonathan Curling:
I also want to make a few comments about why it is that cultural practice has got a particular place within theory in the realm of film. In music, and in theatre performance it is completely different. Film is repeatable. Even in photography — which is very interestingly just now being theorized extensively — the notion of product and performance is different. There’s a way in which in theatre and in musical practice a notion of performance is built into the practice and therefore in a sense the audience is already constructed and theorized in the practice of a particular group. The reason why it has to be theorized in film is precisely because of the presence of theory as an institution in its own right, as informing and conditioning selection procedures in film funding and so on . . . you really have to engage very concretely and substantially with how the different institutions construct their notions of the audience — that’s why it has been such a crucial concept in everything that’s been done in film in the last five years.

Sue Clayton:
In the article on authorship that we did for Screen the author is identified possibly as scriptwriter, but certainly as director, and that for us has been a joke from beginning to end, because what we’ve been is producers and distributors as well. The arrangement with The Other Cinema distribution is that we go along with the bookings. We’re producers and we’re also promoters, and we have to promote the general concerns of the I.F.A. as well as our practice with specific audiences. Everything is potential about independent cinema. You claim that there is a potential audience, you claim there’s a potential film that will get potential distribution in potential cinemas. The word potential isn’t being used to mean the opposite of actual or real, because there have been films and filmmakers traveling about the country. But another level it’s potential to the extent that use is the quality which actuates it. Not necessarily use by institutions, but use by other discourses, inasmuch as the people who have taken up the film most intensely have quite often been people for whom the film has a particular use. For example, an Open University director showed it to a group of academics to intervene in the way those academics write their programme scripts. And the film was shown in History Workshop conference on realism where most of the people in the room would probably have preferred a socialist realist type of approach. There is a sense in which one is always having to speak on behalf of the film in order to validate our practice, but on the other hand these moments of actuation, how the film is used in different ways, the way it’s programmed at conferences, etc., are very positive.

Jonathan Curling:
With talking to audiences, in engaging with the way that one talks about the film, we have to engage with the way they want to talk about the film. They have implicit in the way they want to discuss it some notion of what cultural practice is, and it’s certainly not the same as what the British Film Institute would say. At an Open Univer-
sity screening a guy said to us “You’ve made a film which is anarchic and which destroys history. Why haven’t you put anything in its place?” One has two options in responding to that. One can either claim not to have meant to be destructive, or you can agree and say that you don’t want to put anything in History’s place. Either you enter his terrain, his discourse, which is an old one, or you use a tactical remark to undercut his ground and make him face his contradictions.

Sue Clayton:

What we originally thought was, wouldn’t it be great to have a film theory course plus a woman’s history course, plus a sociology course, all together watching the film, and then we’d achieve all these wonderful cross-overs of interest. But I think we’ve realized that there are things so specific to cinema and that aren’t different according to constituency, that we have to re-think what particular interests people have and not necessarily assume that they can be tied down to a particular area. Not just ourselves but a lot of people are trying to make it clear that there isn’t just one reading in a film that can be passed on to people, and that discussion does not only reiterate imperfect or oppositional readings of the film. For example, we had a letter from one teacher who teaches one or two-hour a week part and full time students in a South London Polytechnic. It comes across that they were actually constructing readings that went beyond most definition one would have of what a film actually means to an audience. She says: “...one person (male) suggested that the film was ‘about’ how the working classes in fact used texts — literary, political, etc., and contrary to anti-Chartist propaganda were in fact highly literate and politically sophisticated. Several of the mature students (women from the local housing estates, violently disagreed with this, arguing that where the working class women were presented in relation to reading they had found it completely implausible. After an exchange over whether or not the working classes had been literate, another female student asserted that she thought this was the wrong approach to the film. There were clearly more things going on, and most importantly, the film seemed to challenge the idea of a truth of history... We followed up this line of argument very productively, with all of them trying to say what the various strands were in the presentation of women’s work — the political talks, the ‘fashion’ texts, the fictional narrative.” I get the impression that in the discussion they were getting away from the idea that what they saw to be happening was entirely determined by what we’d intended those things to do.

Alison Beale:

You make an analogy between the circulation of the film as a text and the circulation — the production, exhibition and distribution — of the texts which became the historical material that you’ve used in the film. I think the analogy is in fact validated by the audiences who see it, as witnessed in their reactions, as you’re describing them, far more than by your own explanation which is based on a theoretical premise. Because what you don’t get is a repetition of your own explanation, which after all is analytical, but discussion of specific points which the film raises, but which don’t treat film as closed off, necessarily.

On another point, some people have protested that in presenting some ambiguous representations of women, the film itself is therefore ambiguous politically, or not sufficiently polemical about women’s working conditions.

Sue Clayton:

At a screening for an all-female audience, the film was seen as
making a polemical refusal to show women working, because in the right context showing fashion, showing the product, could show the work relating to the diseases the women get from doing the work, and relating other things to that spectrum. That doesn’t deny that people still might feel that “work” is absent in the film, but for us it was more important to relate female labour to production and consumption.

Jonathan Curling:

The film is about how classes are inscribed around a particular commodity, it is about class relations. That is in a sense a polemical position about the terms of analysis both of film and of economics and history. Just to extend that analysis a bit further (and I’ve talked about this a lot with audiences) the way particular things support each other within that process — for example, the way that philanthropy needs as its support the notion of the woman or the labour who is a deserving case, essentially innocent. And some people have produced interesting readings about how the novel A Woman’s Wrongs works in the film — how it is a political tract about the operations of the state and philanthropy, making quite clear those operations to the class to which those magazines (in which it was serialized) would be circulated.

Sue Clayton:

We started off with a notion of “constituency” representing certain interests and areas from which it is clear that our own ideas had come. But we weren’t able to anticipate how the film would be more generally accessible, not just in terms of bookings, but the extent and the way it would be received by people who aren’t necessarily self-described feminists, historians or whatever. Audiences are not tightly sealed-off compartments, and I think one of the things we’ve come to terms with is the way the film is a film; it is a text, it is a commodity and that it works like a lot of other films. Although at the moment we are strategically concerned with the uniqueness of the distribution project and the way the film was made, it clearly has a relation to other cinema at various levels and not just to independent cinema, and that gives it a place outside of very restrictive specific contexts. The term “interest” is meant in the widest possible way. For example the Tailors and Garment Workers Union are looking at the film very soon and whatever use they might find for the film is a completely open question at the moment.
NOTES

1. Thomas Malthus was the author of the Essay on the Principle of Population, 1798, which was revised as Summary View of the Principle of Population, 1830. In his writing he goes into the principles of giving relief on the basis of the state rather than the parish, and the deserving and the undeserving poor. His position was that of a Free-Trader, modified from the position of Adam Smith.


5. “A railroad on which no one rides, which is consequently not used up, not consumed, is only a potential railroad and not a real one. Without production, no consumption, on the other hand, without consumption, no production, since production would then be without a purpose.” Marx, Grundrisse.


BIBLIOGRAPHY

Note: these articles, books and essays are only the more pertinent to my essay of available material on feminist and independent cinema in Britain,

Anne Cottringer, “Representation and Feminist Film Practice,” British Film Institute Catalogue of Production, 1977-78.
Editor's Note: The following are a series of position papers on The Song of the Shirt. They are the result of a long series of discussions one of which was taped. We would have preferred to present the transcript of that encounter to our readers but it did not adequately synthesize our feelings on the film so we decided to ‘write’ a group of individual pieces that would more fully represent our different points of view. We also apologize to many of our readers who have not had a chance to see the film. It is available through The Museum of Modern Art, Circulating Film Program, (212) 956-4204. If you have any difficulties in getting the film drop us a line and we will try and help you out. Ron Burnett.

Hart Cohen: I would like to introduce the discussion by offering some fairly spontaneous impressions and arguments in relation to my viewing of The Song of the Shirt. I'll start by asking what the film tries to do — what are its goals and does it accomplish them (broadly speaking)?

At a general level the goal of the film seems or appears to be largely pedagogical — to be used as a vehicle for teaching its audience about historical realities — in particular a conjunction of political, economic, and specifically sexual characteristics of a historical period. Broadly speaking the film located itself within this genre (i.e., pedagogical historiography) although the film itself was uneasy about these very categories. A secondary or rather second goal therefore immediately intrudes on the first: the concern for a means to distance the historical-as-film . . . . a search for ways to acknowledge the process of representing history as real events that happened in the past and the simultaneous impossibility of doing so . . . . and still, the concrete need to speak, through selection, a history; one that is concerned with the conjunction of woman and class — servitude and exploitation. But what is this film teaching precisely?

There is the knowledge — research that has been executed about the period in question. This knowledge could be taken from the very books that are used in the film. It seems unlikely, then, that the film's motive was simply to make this research more accessible. The historical material is not all that easily assimilated. Also, the books used and the book itself become a crucial focus in the film. The book is presented as a mediator of history — true — but is also presented as an actor emphasizing its male character (as narrator) while the women are talked about; simultaneously the subject of the film and the object of discourse. Further in relation to this focus is the difficult relation between narrative and history which inevitably addresses the question of the representational as an ideological component. This question is constantly displaced in the film by either an historicist reduction: “This is the way the past was”; or a metaphoric reduction: “This is the way the past never could have been.”

This is the site of a struggle within the film, but is also responded to by the film. For example, the parallelling of a reading of a novel with its satirical reenactment effectively shifting the voice, role, and position of the reader both inside and outside the film. There is constant movement from slide to video to film and back to stills in the attempt to deconstruct and reconstruct while deferring any ultimate conciliation between the two.

A further question may be posed in relation to the film's pedagogy: What is the information value of the film? And does the film allow a context to emerge in which the information can be perceived and worked upon? Does the contemplative tone promote active reflection in the viewer? What is the film's concern with viewing in general? What does the political argument in the film have to do with the modalities of the visible which it offers to us?
Does the film desire its audience to be somewhere?

Any film pedagogic in nature desires its audience to be somewhere. When “desire” is articulated within the narrative, however, (as in The Song of the Shirt), it is raised to a term of narrative structure; to the axis of pleasure, the edge of which is continually played upon by the film with the viewer in mind. The film puts forth an argument, an intervention in a discourse, and thereby positions or desires a position for its viewers. By using a discursive practice (and its attendant reader relationships) as the object/vehicle for demonstrating its argument, however the film evades any easy reduction to didacticism. Its best moments are those that intervene not just in history, but in its representation — distancing less by the obviousness of reconstruction, music, rhythm, than by the presentation of discourse as connected to institution and its location within history’s story about this period.

If the film appears to desire a position for its viewer, I believe it is because the pre-texts of the film are not fully appreciated — that the viewer is already positioned within dominant discursive practices including film and history. When the film produces dominant historiography, its content undermines dominant history; when the film abstracts its own visibility, its historical model is undermined — and history reverberates in the minds of the present, in the presence of the film.

And what of the dominant discursive practice of film: As I suggest the film both does and does not desire its constituency; creates and deconstructs it, projects it where it has once been perhaps. But if the film does not appear to desire you, it should not then be rejected out of hand.

What is this film about? Contemplation, reflection, a meta-discursive intervention in the representation of history; a filmic depiction of women’s working context and reality in 19th century England; a presentation of imagistic reflections of women that lose their toehold in the hands of men; the plight of women and the coptation of their struggle; history — what happened, a view of what happened, viewing how what happened was viewed and its consequences for a specific class/sex conjuncture that echoes in contemporary contexts.

George Mitchell: The puzzling thing about this film is that its very specific historical frame leads one to expect it to document-the-times. It does locate itself in a particular era focuses on a particular segment of the working class and their exploiters even though it moves forward and backward in time somewhat. Indeed, by confining itself to a pre-photographic historical period it limits its visual documentary sources to graphics, cartoons and similar materials. The film is not really interested in documenting these times and I think that the manner in which it uses graphic demonstrates this. Many of the historical references in the film, references to Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations, to Chartism and to other texts and movements important to the period are presented in the film in a highly impressionistic fashion, so that only those who already know their meaning can place them in the viewing of the film. Even then their inclusion is often unclear, at least on the first viewing. Ironically, this is a film which really needs other texts, other mediators.

The way that the film uses graphics — in a decorative ornamental manner — is similar to the way it includes famous historical texts, reform documents, historical figures. Graphics are used extensively in the film presumably to illustrate working class conditions. The problem is that these graphics were designed to be looked at and read, a process which consumes many seconds, possibly more than a minute. This is the nature of this particular form. Blown up and projected, cut up by camera placement, and held only for a moment they lose their original content, their information, their poignancy, their force. The Song of the Shirt decontextualizes the graphics that it uses and places them in a barely comprehensible flow of images. I’m not arguing for fro the inviability of a source — merely for its comprehensibility. Let me give a specific example. One Cruickshank cartoon used in the film —a cartoon reproduced in Brian Inglis' Poverty and the Industrial Revolution —
shows a greedy merchant turning the crank of a huge meat grinder. Up one side of the apparatus march hapless seamstresses. Once on top of the machine, under an arch labeled profits, march bags of money which the merchant eyes greedily. Out of the other side flow cheap dresses which fall down a chute into a retail establishment. On the other side of a curtain hiding this scene from public view women line up before a counter grabbing for the bargain priced merchandise. The cartoon is titled, Tremendous Sacrifice. In the film this cartoon is broken up and flashed on the screen in such a way that the meaning, whether one considers it as evidence of the horror of being in the needle trades or of reformist attitudes towards women in these trades, is totally lost. Its fragmentary and impressionistic inclusion is paralleled by the way in which historical figures, movements, and texts are continually referred to and utilized by the film.

Its also important to point out the The Song of the Shirt while nominally about 19th century needlewomen and their bourgeois exploiters is a very different film from North American feminist oriented documentaries currently circulating; films like Harlan County, U.S.A., Babies and Banners, and Union Maids. While The Song of the Shirt gives us ample 19th century graphics illustrating conditions in and around the needle trades, and offers fictionalized scenes of various aspects of work in this area, the end results are strangely uninformative — especially considering that the film runs well over two hours. Either the filmmakers were not interested in this kind of documentation or had other concerns, concerns which worked at cross purposes to the documentary aspect of the film to the degree that its usefulness in the teaching or re-evaluating of 19th century labour history is highly questionable. Its very hard to see what an audience unschooled in the period covered by the film would be able to get out of it — its presentation of historical material is so fragmentary, elusive, suggestive and arcane. There are some scenes of great length showing particular aspects of a seamstresses trade but even these are never properly contextualized. I am thinking of the scene of a fitting room session held in the home of a wealthy woman. This scene is very interesting and moving in its own way — but given its length we have consider what is left out about the conditions of women working in the needle trades. We don’t learn very much about their working conditions, working hours, family life etc..... Why was this particular phase of the production process chosen for such extensive aesthetic treatment and all the other aspects ommitted? I think that the major reason is that the film is not so much interested in documenting this area of women’s work as it is in trying to construct a theoretical statement about film. And what emerges is a very complex, mosaic-like assemblage that has to be deciphered, studied, seen, reseen to be understood. I find it quite paradoxical that such an academic and specialized work could be thought of as having interest for any but a highly specialized audience.

Ron Burnett: Though I feel fairly critical about this film there is one important qualification that I should make. The film is an important attempt to create a self-reflexive documentary statement that incorporates, both an intense awareness of itself as a medium, as a film, and equally an important understanding of the problems of historical reconstruction, of how to use history to make statements about history. The profound sense of experimentation that went into the creation of this film makes it important to see; but that experimentation, which is exciting, does not absolve the film of some very fundamental errors precisely at the level of the representational devices that it uses to communicate its message.

The Song of the Shirt tries to incorporate and synthesize a wide variety of approaches to the problem of historical reconstruction through the cinema. Film has the power at one and the same time of making history come alive through reconstruction and of creating the illusion that the devices of re-creation, of the reconstitution of the historical, are transparent and need not be known, need not be a part of the subject matter of the film.

The Song of the Shirt confronts this with the following:
It tries to create, a.) a self-reflexive and radical statement about history in general, b.) a self-reflexive statement about the way history is represented and written, c.) a self-reflexive statement about the way film constructs and creates historical representations,
d.) a self-reflexive statement in general about film itself as a mode of representation,
e.) a self-reflexive statement about the way that women are represented in film,
f.) a radical and self-reflexive statement about the way that women were oppressed in the needle trade in the 19th century,
g.) a critique of the political and class structure of that period, including all the legal institutions, and the capitalist economic infrastructure,
h.) a critique of the media of the time and the way that they dealt with the plight of the women in the needle trade,
i.) an intensely self-aware examination of the mores of the bourgeoisie of the time as well as a look at their literature, their fiction,

This list could be expanded and at first sight it portrays a vast and interesting mosaic of concerns. There is an important critique of the way that the past is understood both through popular memory and through the visual and written documents that have been handed down from that period. But this inventory also reveals some fundamental problems. Does the reconstruction effectively offer me a series of premises upon which I can begin my own analysis of the period? Not really, because there was not one moment during which I was allowed to speculate about the point of view that the film held. I was given that point of view in precisely the same fashion that a traditional documentary presents a window upon the subject that it is examining. Except this time the point of view was absent because of a surfeit of information, a desire to say too much, an over-extended and undone concern for the self-reflexive. Because of this the film becomes a film about distance, about the distance that I should keep from the screen so as not to be captured by it, about the distance that I must keep from my own misconceptions about history, about the falsity of historical reconstruction, etc. But it is precisely because I have to distance myself from so much that I also have to build something, build an image or at least be allowed the space to build an understanding of the logic for my own distancing. But in this film the self-consciousness is so extreme that the territory the film is setting out to examine is evacuated.

Let me take a specific example to explain the above point. A seamstress arrives in front of a window to sell her wares. She is downcast and depressed; she is also an actress (we are made aware of this by the way that she distances herself from the role) reconstructing the moment of exploitation for us. As she sells her wares the woman buying them plays the role of the classic middle level boss, not wealthy enough herself but living in the image and desire for wealth. This is a momentary vignette. Gesture is crucial. It is difficult not to get caught up with the reproduction of the standard documentary image of the poor as essentially helpless. But thankfully, that image is being critiqued by the film. Simultaneously there is an obvious foregrounding of the set, of the setting, an unmaking of the transparency of the devices of historical reconstruction. As well, there is an analysis of exploitation as the seamstress gets far less money than she should and screams at the boss. As if that is not already enough, an attempt is made to explain this scene through its linkage with a series of ideological statements that have come before it. There is more, because we are after all dealing with the general condition of these women and there is therefore a need to contextualize my viewing in terms of the rest of the film. Is all of this possible in one scene of a film? Perhaps, but it seems to me that visual representations cannot be read like a text and one therefore has to be very careful with the multiplicity of levels that are presented. There must be time and room for thought about all the levels. This is particularly the case for political films. Paradoxically the film assumes a position, a voice, that is very absolute, through which and around which it is very difficult to intervene. The authors of the film are as absent as in the most traditional of documentaries and as authoritative and paternalistic. A political film must reveal the premises that guide its politics and position and this can only be done if the authority of the film reveals herself or himself to the audience and tries to set up a genuine dialogue.

Another point. As important as the critique of history is in this film, another history is of course being ‘written’ by it. Through the multi-layered collage effect of the film little time is given over to the terms of that writing, to the categories and choices that were
made, to the process that was gone through to arrive at the points that they are making. This is perhaps because they don’t understand that film also has its own specific exigencies and that however self-reflexive one is those pressures of the representational process cannot be totally destroyed in one film. As this film moves inexorably towards the level of meta-meta-critique it gets increasingly distant from the more crucial points of the labour history that it is supposedly re-writing not because the desire is not there but because it is just impossible to deal with all the things that it is trying to deal with. The film does point out some important things about the way history distorts and particularly the history of women, but these important ideas are lost, decontextualized by the format of the film. Thus while it is looking for a new language with which to speak it ceases to speak at all and as a result its political position, the position that it takes, most importantly in relation to women seems not to exist at all.

Martha Burnett: I want to add a few things to the scene which has been mentioned — the scene where the needlewomen approach an open window to pick up more work and sell the work that they have done, only to find that there is none at the time. The kind of work that the women were engaged in was and is still called, piecework. From a historical point of view and from the point of view of the film this is an important scene. In the garment industry today women doing piecework are the lowest paid and the ones with the worst working conditions. One should have been made to understand that this scene functions both in the present and the past because many women (especially immigrant women) in our culture find themselves in exactly the same situation that those in the 19th century found themselves. Here the reference to the contemporary situation is too indirect. It is obscured by an overemphasis on the encounter as reconstruction. The situation seems to reflect back more upon itself than upon the moment it is examining. Piecework was part of the “distressed” needlewomen’s “trade,” and in the context of the 1830’s and 1840’s this was a carefully worked out (in the sense of labour, profit, and monopoly capital) exploitative work situation, in that it consisted of doing bits of work for someone who then turned it over to someone else for further work or finishing, who then sold it to someone, etc. Thus the scene might well have been a more productive one both in terms of labour history and women and the present. Why does the film not deal with this more fully and more completely? There seems to be no balance struck between concern for the period and concern for a self-conscious appraisal for the way that the period has been depicted. For me this disrupts the political effectiveness of the film.

I would also like to add something about my emotional experience of the film, and the kinds of things that I have been feeling in retrospect. The film deals with a period which particularly interests me with regard to women, women and work, women and class struggle, women and culture, and the development of industry and culture. Before viewing the film I had wondered about the direction that the film would take — where it would go, how it would proceed, what questions would be raised, how these questions would be answered, how history would be communicated, and how “herstory” (however cliched a term) would filmically be written or represented. I was relatively enthused by some of the earlier scenes, but then found it difficult to accept the way that the ideas were being communicated, (this would imply a critique of the very pace which seems to be so self-consciously worked out, as Alison Beale mentions in her article on the film) although I should mention that one scene really impressed me, and I consider it to be the best, most self-reflexive scene in the film — this is the scene about the history of the term “pin money.”

I thought there would be more instances like this one in the film, but I never found a scene after that with precisely the same degree and combination of consideration, direction and effect. A little girl and her governess sit and sew in a bourgeois living room. They appear to be simply stitching the time away, passing the afternoon elegantly dressed, in a somewhat instructive (in terms of the little girl, her socialization, her learning to “sew”) and barely productive manner. While they sew, the woman begins to ask the little girl a series of questions. Slowly, almost chant-like. The little girl responds, stiffly, as though she has been prompted (which she has, because she is after all, an “actress”) yet innocently because she is so very small. The questions develop the historical,
cultural, almost anthropological background to what came to be understood by the term “pin money” — its definition, in terms of women and patriarchy. The physical arrangement of the woman and the little girl is carefully set up to emphasize the stuffy and claustrophobic Victorian living room. The two sit in their bulky, layered clothing, looking as though they would have trouble getting up. The woman—mother’s tone of voice is both sweet, obvious and patronizing all at once. The little girl is simultaneously play-acting and part of a larger, more meaningful feminist moment. The resolution of the agonizingly slow and deliberately long “lesson” becomes almost triumphant... “And this is what we mean by ‘pin money’...” What I did find in many scenes after this one was that something or other, filmically, or as a consequence of the way the directors chose to work out a given idea, worked against those scenes standing as a re-working of previously accepted anti-woman, anti-working class ideas about history, and did not reach out as completed introductory concepts as well. Perhaps the only other exception would be a scene where the needlewomen are reading a serialized novel, commenting upon it and finally making a mockery of it.

Another example of something that worked “against” communication would be in the use of graphics. They were concrete, powerful, but at the same time I felt that they had been appropriated and re-represented, used in what may have been a new and important context, but which became de-contextualized in relation to what surrounded them or what was said as voice-over commentary or narration. At a certain point, they ceased to be concrete or powerful in the sense in which I believe we were meant to see them. This refers to the impact the graphics might have had in the bourgeois press of the time, and the degree to which the film’s spectators must decode the contradictions and ironies both within the film and as historical documents.

I would like to specify four areas of the film which appear problematic to me: the question of representation of men in the film, including the representation of an author of a serialized romantic novel, whom we never see (but who is nevertheless “seen” through his novel, and the attention paid to it, etc.); the actual novel (the choice of the particular novel in terms of its being “popularly” accessible via newspapers, and thus widely read, supposedly crossing class barriers in this regard); the pace and tone of the scenes which involve bourgeois women; and finally, the total image of all the women being represented in the film. To add to this, I found the epilogue difficult to understand. Perhaps this was because as a viewer I had failed somewhat to become immersed in the pace and tone of the film. The epilogue is exemplary of this pace and tone, but I failed to understand its relation to the film as a whole, however ironic a statement it is making and however much it is a conclusion to an intermittent series of narrative sequences.

Near the beginning of the film there is a scene which warrants further discussion. It begins in a relatively hazy way, and appears to be setting itself up as a basic introductory scene. We see two television monitors, the camera then moves from right to left, from one monitor to the other. Finally the camera seems to move in, and as I recall, what it appears to move into is somewhat out of focus, very grey, and one begins to realize that this is a moving train, and what comes into focus is a man sitting on the train reading aloud from a tract. At this point in the scene, I can remember asking, how does the spectator situate herself/himself in relation to it? It seems the only way one can is in a “cold” way, that is, one doesn’t quite understand what is happening, but there has been a transitional move of the camera, and a voice does begin to speak, which draws the spectator in, and obliges her/him to listen carefully in order to figure out what is happening. One realizes that the man on the train, whose voice it is we hear, is in period costume, and what he is saying/reading appears to be serious, and has a context of sorts, (though still abstract to a degree) given what has been said and understood of the film so far. The manner in which the spectator is being asked to enter the scene is not nearly as direct as the more traditionally introductory and quite symbolic scene which takes place earlier on a bridge, when
we move back in time from the present to the period under consideration. In this instance of the man on the train, the relationship which develops (or is required) is a questionable, traditional relationship of spectator to screen within the fictional film form. The point here is that the spectator is placed in a bind because it is very hard to be continuously aware of the self-conscious way in which the film was made, and the self-conscious way the spectator must situate herself/himself in relation to this particular scene, and the film as a whole. The film does put the spectator into all sorts of binds, which is contradictory, given that the film was produced with the idea of a widespread and diverse audience, to be made up of workers, feminists, historians, etc... all of whom are supposed to make specific use of it.

Phil Vitone: For me there is a fundamental problem with the film in that it lacks integrity in terms of its structure as related to the intentions of its authors. That is, the theoretical interests of the authors exceeded and overwhelmed their expressive abilities in film. An awareness of modes of representation, of the ideological effects of such representation when in the form of historical reconstruction does not provide a framework for a film, but rather generates ideas which must themselves be represented. Put another way, knowledge of filmic devices and the desire to expose them does not make a filmmaker, just as knowledge of music does not necessarily mean skilled performance. Filmmaking mediates expression in terms of its exigencies.

The authors seemed, in the final analysis, to be pre-occupied with the demonstration of those constraints inherent to general forms of media use while remaining unaware of those imposed on the audience’s understanding by their own practice. On one level, the film reveals the same sort of partisan narrowness that it un masks in bourgeois reformism in total ignorance of the limitations of its own approach. The film is therefore open to charges of being reductive, self-interested and theoreticist. In other words, the film is seen to be laden with its own absurd cliches; personal, aesthetic, and representational devices which conceal deeper interests in much the same manner as the novels it deconstructs. How else can the varied choices of figures, background, music, be understood? The authors seem to feel that deconstruction is something which can eventually go back to a sort of zero equivalence point. In film, every deconstruction is a construction of something else, including the deconstruction of deconstruction (ad infinitum), revealing personal choices and positions primarily and only secondarily evidence of a phenomenon. Their desire seemed to be still a question of letting the facts speak for themselves.

What then, are the film’s deeper interests? It seems to me that they reside in a pedagogical effort which attempts to reveal for its viewers the ideological function of representation and historical reconstruction. This is the film’s second level of constraint which it imposes upon the audience: there is no interest in revealing the author’s own position, how it has been attained. The audience receives the same sort of explanatory voice as any historical reconstruction or pedagogical text provides, albeit at a more sophisticated level. Though the film reveals awareness of the problems posed by any reconstruction (including its own), it is unaware of the construction of its explanation: a problem not a position is revealed to the audience. Paradoxically the film constructs its critical position vis-à-vis historical reconstruction in the same way that the objects of its analysis (historical reconstructions) constructed their critical positions vis-à-vis society, i.e., with a distant authoritative tone and no implication of its own practice. It seems to be that this is a problem which arises when the role of the theorist takes precedence over that of the filmmaker; where the argument made takes precedence over the dynamics of the medium used to express it.
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A Special Dossier on one of the Founders of Cinéma-Vérité in Quebec and Canada.
Michel Brault, filmmaker
by Pierre Perrault

Michel Brault is a filmmaker.

What does that mean? For this can easily appear to be the most banal thing in the world in an era when, even here in an under-privileged Québec, filmmakers abound and don't necessarily have much in common. That's why I will add to my affirmation, in order to give it more weight, that Michel Brault Is a filmmaker in the same way as one is a Québécois from birth you might say, and by choice. To be a filmmaker is not just a job for him but also an enterprise. The films knocking about in his head don't often or always resemble those films which aim at making dreaming easier. He threw himself into his career as into a conquest. Not for the laurel wreaths of show business but to break the ground of a secular silence, to invent behaviours, to propose a soul to a culture besieged from all parts by the cultural imperialisms which sell film and paper without taking responsibility for the future of dreams. Not to be admired by the people of this land but to admire them. Not to teach but to learn. Not to be loved but to love.

His is a strange combative cinema trying to liberate the silence occupied by the words of others. He understood... he thought he understood... he felt, guessed that we desperately needed pictures of ourselves precisely inasmuch as we were inundated, overwhelmed by the pictures of others. Our collective soul, so long a prisoner to the triumphalism of eurachistic conferences, could only sustain its dissidence through the sins of others, the revolts of others, in the landscapes of orange groves and sunshine marketed by others. This great body, both collective and silent, was traversed, transpierced by all sorts of currents without managing to set free its own deep tides. We were kept, not without caution, ignorant of snow. Michel understood that his camera had to implicate the snow, had to involve the river, had to foment a new and bothersome geography. He had nothing to say about palm trees. So that our pent up soul could at last escape from its clandestinity and speak out, brutishly and simply, its joualistic pretensions to the rest of the world just as the rest of the world had always done. So that Québec, instead of consuming pictures, could at last find its desires.

To so set your camera to the face of the world is hardly a banal, indifferent gesture. It is a demonstration. We learned of our existence when we quit seeing ourselves through the eyes of others, when we quit understanding ourselves in the Durham Reports. When, one fine day, very much like Herménégilde Chiasson, we wrote our first Report on the State of My Illusions through which we began to take ourselves as we were, that is to say tragically. Finally, one day we took stock of our absence. Finally, one day we came to know our alliances. And in this language which for so long humiliated us, we invested our pretensions. Everything remains to be done, but in this manner something has begun.

And I would even go so far as to claim that the wonderful and secret outburst of a new, sparkling, vivifying theatre in the last few years, a theatre almost without subsidies, a theatre of small cafés, of restaurants, almost improvised, this must be attributed to the reconquest of a language which appeared to be possible to us, which appeared inhabitable. And suddenly and all at once, in our own eyes, we became believable. The cinema, a certain cinema, it seems to me had a hand in this. We have finally become Les Enfants de Chénier (Chénier's Children).

And in this honour, Michel Brault has made films all his life.

And all his life he had made films because he has understood that maybe life is not a movie. So as to not make the cinema innocent. So as to hold it responsible for something.

And he has done everything in the cinema.
But even if we said everything he's done in movies, we would still not have said anything. And I want to try, as a friend, clumsily, not to retell but to make you feel my admiration for this man who doesn't know what to do with my admiration. He has always easily debunked the admiration showered upon him and turned it onto the object of his filmmaking. But one must also examine various approaches and their merits so as not to overlook any and so as not to fall too easily into all the styles which besiege an artist. Nothing is more sensitive, more susceptible to style than an artist. And style doesn't really care about the existence of a little pride bathing its feet in the water of the St. Lawrence. Who will be responsible for a river which will keep on flowing?

Let me first speak of his **filming eye** (oeil cinéant) as Henri Pichette said in his prefaces to *Pour la suite du monde*. The glass eye which he shoulders. The glass eye that walks, sails, rides, rolls, and slithers. One immediately thinks of a centaur. A spirited horse, prancing on all fours, demanding its share of intelligence. Like a centaur, and in order to multiply tenfold his humanity, Michel extends the eye and the ear and transforms all that falls within perception into indelible memory. And what is this eye? An eye that hears faces, and an ear that sees words. Like a new organ which the human body had not foreseen, he carries this new eye that extends and multiplies tenfold our vision of the world on his shoulder. Strange mutation of a man amongst men. He despises tripods that immobilize the gaze, that impose behaviour, that prevent movement. He ejects tripods as they are incapable of getting alongside, of following along. On the contrary, his camera moves with him, it follows, precedes, meets, greets, hurries, lingers at the pace of the man himself. It allows him to cease being a distant observer and to become an actor, present, involved, tied up with a situation. A camera will be able to hook a porpoise after having set its line somewhat aside from literature. This is truly the adventure to which his camera invites us. This camera which is at one with him and which isn't afraid of getting its feet wet. That is why he so easily, so unartificially, gives us certainty rather than illusion. And we become more than spectators suddenly surrounded to our great astonishment by a picture of ourselves. He has made us worthy of being filmed. He put the epic of the porpoise hunt within everybody's reach, making our lives just as big as we thought them to be small. He has become the master of boastfulness, rousing us from our forgetfulness. And I won't forget my surprise, or his, when for the first time we saw those pictures of ourselves. And in the name of a certain cinema, in the name of all, and in my own name, I thank him for having dragged us from our own oblivion. Instead of disorienting us the way another cinema does as it tries so hard to make people forget their snow and their sand and their human condition in the world, he orients us with all the tenderness of motherhood. I shall never forget the miracle of that camera which made me see what I could hardly imagine and which impelled me along a path I consider to be infinitely precious and liberating.

I guess I should say how he gets hold of a landscape and of its inhabitants in order to render them unto memory, how he devours the weather in order to express its shades. At just the right moment he is exultant, he discusses, gets nearer, moves away, listens, becoming an accomplice, an ally, and a contemporary. Like someone searching for the key to an enigma. The secret of his happiness to be shared. In fact, he makes men and landscapes outdo themselves, for therein lies their truth. I'll never forget that day when a howling so'wester blew, when we left on a cold dawn to mark out the porpoise lines and to rediscover, after 38 years, the old traces of our ancestors. On the dock of the cove, Grand-Louis was jubilant, shouting out and promising us the **return of the savages**. For a long time, in the clay of the sandbanks at the foot of the ramparts of ice still clinging to the palissades, we waited for the right tide. Then Abel, old Abel, the **unbreakable man**, gave the departure signal, and two dories from the island, decked out with strong oars, white as gulls, sleek as their flight, slipped out into the sea breaking against their hulls. And with great oarstrokes, the boats set out to open sea, without paying the slightest attention to us for they had a rendez-vous with the low tides of March, the seas which are the lowest. We had at our disposal a good fresh water duck hunting dory and a motor. But the sea commands! We floated between the brine and fresh water in our flat-bottomed craft which had been designed for lake St-Pierre. Impossible to break way, to escape the shoreline. The sea threw itself against us, seeking to prevent the fishing expedition of these strangers which we were. And it was the first day of fishing, the one we wanted to film, the one likely to give rise to all the exclamations. And the sea was dropping more and more, thereby hindering all our efforts. I wanted to take the oars now that the motor was churning over the seabed. Nothing could be done. An oar broke under the strain. Bad luck befell us. Our strangeness was poorly received.
Meanwhile, two great white dories were visible. They moved further and further out and dropped anchor at open sea, at the very spot where old Abel had ordered, in the middle of nowhere, and there they waited for the sea to pull back and deliver the fishing ground which had been rediscovered by lining up land and sea marks, by what somebody had once said about a steeple and the corner of a barn, about the cape and the northern land... etc. And that's where the old master fisherman claimed to recognize the frayed remains of the writhes planted 38 years ago and to be able to reconstitute on the basis of this sparse evidence the impeccable and skillful outline beyond which the porpoise would not allow itself to be caught in the nets of this incredible wickerwork. It was a science of the sea, of the currents, of the porpoise, of the sparling, of the capelin, of the tide and of the moon... for everything runs according to the moon... which was set into play once again and which the old remembered but which the young did not. Again it was necessary to rely on the old traces.

We looked a bit stupid in our clothing, with all our equipment, sitting in a beached dory. We were about to lose forever this reunion of the Ile-aux-Coudres and its epic. For life doesn't start over again just to satisfy the whims and bunglings of a camera that won't run at sea. To tell the truth, I'd given up; I was hoping for something else and was going to give up films for good.

In fact, I at least had hipboots that allowed me to walk some ways out to sea. I resolved to go out and share with them this unforgettable moment which I would be unable to memorize. And I knew that I would retell it at my convenience but without ever doing more than retelling it, without being able to tell the wind in men's faces, the exuberance of discovery. Reduced to my simple human memory, I was brought back once again to the temptation of fiction.

So I resolved to walk out to sea and to abandon Michel Brault and Marcel Carrière who was also aboard our craft, to their unhappy fates, for unlike me they were not wearing boots that would have allowed them to cross the small channel which separated the fishermen from the shore when the sea was down. And it was cold. This was March. The island was still as white as a white sheet of heavy snow. And the sea continued to make a fuss, to curl, to shout out, to froth beneath the ever more imperious wind which sent waves of enormous ice castles full of arms and legs, of sight holes and of machicolations, crashing down upon the sandbanks. What was to be done? Out at sea, already men in hipboots were wading through the brown water, hands raised to the sky, jumping about to avoid the waves which came toward them, and seeking out with their toes the stumps that would allow them to reconstitute the great exploit of the fish hunt. The underwater trap had an entrance of 7 acres 20 paces, an enormous circuit like a palissade made up of more than 3000 writhes, each man hoping to find the first one. 3000 stumps! A rather unusual wickerwork laid out across the sandbanks of an island for the purpose of catching the whiteness of a porpoise and of starting the exploit over again.

Once a heroic enterprise.

Now an epic memory.

But was this memory not indispensable if we were to name a river pushed back into oblivion by other peoples' pictures?

So, having nothing better to do, I abandoned Michel and Marcel to the gusting sou'wester and to their unfortunate dory held prisoner by the clay of the sandbanks. The sea is going down but it is not yet at its lowest point. I take off in pursuit of it, splashing through the puddles, slipping on strips of seaweed, bogging down in the mud beds etched into the thick, sticky clay by the ice. I soon arrive at the little channel. Will my boots get me across? I step forward ever so carefully. The sea draws me out. In the distance, I see the dories and the men spreading out. There is still one foot of water. On the dories, the perches decorated with boughs look like prows. A few men brandish poles in their haste to establish the first marker. I want to get there in time. I hurry. The water rises and my legs feel the cold through the boots. The wind lashes at my face. In this shelterless landscape, it is now colder than the entire winter. Water, as is its wont, manages to seep into my boots. The cold burns the skin. Cold burn. Too late to go back. I forge ahead. Finally, on the other side, one boot is half full and the other somewhat damp. I don't even take the time to bale out. I move on. To keep warm. The sea is getting lower. The water skis along. The seaweeds gesticulate. I arrive. I call out to hail them. They can't hear me. Someone spots me. He shouts back. I see his cry but can't hear it. The wind makes us mute; it...
sweeps the slightest sound away. I finally join them. A few inches of water remain around impatient boots. My feet are numb. The cold causes flesh to swell. There isn’t enough room for me in my boots. Everyone is shouting. No other words are possible, here, except shouting out loud. No one has yet found anything. The other dory is on the sandbank. Below the shinning sun upon the shimmering water, it is almost invisible, surrounded by minute men. The first marker has yet to be set in place. And what is a marker in this immensity, at this distance? Could it even be seen? The hunt is a mile in diameter, three miles around, some say five. It’s an enormous basket to catch a fish in the sea. All about me, the men stamp their feet to escape the cold and find the stump. Someone shouts out. He pulls off his glove, plunges his hand into the water to pull up the stump. All he finds is a stone. The water still withdraws from the sea bed. This is a dry land walk except for he who has filled his boots with water. Ears redden. Noses drip. The wind steals somebody’s hat. Old Abel gives out an order. He speaks like a rock. He thinks he’s a legend. And he’s right. He calls upon his memories to find the stump. He compares various remarks in passing, looks towards various seamarks, discusses with the steeple. As for Grand-Louis, he’s hopping mad. He imitates the old gestures. He’s not looking, he’s memorizing. On the huge table of sand and clay, amidst the strips of seaweed waving like banners, he summons the porpoise, and its whiteness, and the spears, and the jubilant blood. He eats salted seaweed to identify with the sea. To pay hommage to the sandbanks. He officiates. He recalls the sacrificial ceremony. To the young who had not seen, gathered around for his speech, he promises the sea and the world. He takes pity on them. I see and hear with all my strength. But how can I report on it tomorrow, how can I summon the world to this spectacle, to this privilege? Sad to be the only witness, I too seek out the stump which will hail new times.

That’s when I catch a glimpse of Leopold, or someone else, gesturing broadly to the ground. As one might greet a neighbour, a friend. I turn around to see. Michel and Marcel, equipped with camera and tape recorder, head on to the wind, come closer to us, their eyes streaming and their smiles as broad as those of conquerors. They have come in time. In full exclamation, Grand-Louis gets carried away just for them. He lets them share the waiting, the surprise, the discovery. He anticipates. He memorizes. He confuses past and present. And Michel and Marcel film and record despite their feet wet right up to their teeth. They crossed the little channel bootless. Just to be there. To memorize, to film despite the objections of the wind, the wind which tries to rob Grand-Louis’ exclamations when finally someone removes the sand and clay from the first stump, and then another. Old Abel orders as he takes his bearings, the wind seizing our voices, jumbling our words, blowing out the lanterns, shaking up the boughs of the first markers. That wind would like to robe us of the great moment when the sea’s memory, after 38 years, renders unto old Abel, the master fisherman, the beginnings of a trace which will allow him to carry out the fish hunt until a porpoise has been snared for the continuation of the world (Pour la suite du monde).

And that day, after the tide, when we took a little draught with the island’s porpoise fishermen in old Abel’s kitchen, our feet sore and swollen by the cold which refuses to let itself be warmed even by the heat of a wood stove (but the draught of white wine with sugar and hot water will eventually thaw us out), not only had we filmed yet another sequence, but also, the more importantly, we had gone out to meet the landscape and the people, in the exasperation of the wind and the hugeness of the sandbanks, maids the ice fallen into grandiloquence. We had made love to a landscape of the greatest importance. Such that Michel and Marcel were from that moment onwards treated by everyone as islanders and porpoise fishermen, worthy of the draught that is stirred with the finger, worthy of “une ponce a porter une pétaque.”

This is how Michel understands his job as filmmaker: to meet people at their own level... and the landscape wherever something is happening. To film is not merely to watch an event but most of all to join it, to somehow live it. It’s not enough just to get your feet wet, you also have to get the camera to betray itself... to set out a porpoise net... to prefer people to film. That's why he speaks with the landscapes, damned circumstance, precedes events, in order to give birth to life itself, to express it with words from the soul as with gestures of denunciation. He forces the slightest dock to talk of ships; the dockworker to indicate the weight of the day, the lumberjack to celebrate the wood, nightfall to contemplate fatigue, the sea to answer for its tide, the cold to show the ice around an island still held captive by its ramparts, the writhes of a porpoise hunt to speak the sea better and otherwise than words. Are not the writhes reflected in the seascape a language which the filming eye (œil cinéant) understands, its feet waterlogged.
And he speaks all the languages that are to be spoken. For to film, for him, is to live life as a privilege of memory.

Furthermore, I would like to indicate the disarming youth of his presence in a film crew. Nothing leaves him indifferent. He partakes of all preoccupations. For hours on end, he can measure the hidden past of an iceberg. He still astounds me with all the questions he can ask at the slightest occurrence. I suspect that one day he took a Nagra apart just to be able to talk about it knowledgeably. He’s interested in all types of machines. He loves to lose himself in various mechanisms, to contradict them, to make them expose themselves, to scold them, to improve them, to reproach them their faults. He refuses to give in to their limitations. He outdoes the engineers of these machines. He forces them to become aware of the cameramage’s (this word is in French original = cameraman or man-camera) shoulder, to understand that a camera walks, that it must breathe, that it has a heart. He causes the tool to fit the hand. He humanizes the object. Legend has it (and there’s no legend without fire) that his demands contributed to the Eclair camera which has become that instrument of direct cinema without which it is impossible to film a porpoise hunt off the Ile-aux-Coudres and to remember people.

And yet he filmed Pour la suite du monde before the appearance of the Eclair, the celebrated soundproof camera that would have allowed for his desired approach. Nothing excites Michel Brault more than the impossible. He forced the Ariflex to do the impossible, to do what it could not do. I can see him, just off the island in a dory on the sandbanks, his feet in the water, assuming every posture imaginable, wrapping his coffee-grinder camera up in a borrowed woollen shirt to keep it from grinding its own gears. Or else filming from behind a glazed door as though he were praying to old Abel. And our signals to one another so that we could find out what was going on. But he always went beyond the instrument, thereby forcing the designers to catch up with him. For he wanted a certain result, he wanted to get close to the people and to their words, as naturally as possible, without all the heavy equipment in use at the time, he wanted to make the camera disappear in order to reaffirm a certain familiarity. He wanted to replace the instrument, to instill his presence and his fervour within the machine. It was a makeshift filming expedition composed of all sorts of bits and pieces; it was the crossing of the little channel, bottomless, at March’s high tide.

Such that one day the camera ceased being an obstacle and instead of restraining the cameraman, it extended him. To turn the cameraman into a new man, a man endowed with a remarkable memory, a piercing look, an attentive ear, but most of all, a man amongst men. A sort of centaur. A new biology.

For in his eyes, everything was possible.

And when I see Michel Brault holding his camera and smiling naively on the cover of Gilles Marsolais’ book about direct cinema, I can't help but think that he’s in his element... because it is in great part thanks to him that this type of cinema (which is an important to me as the poetry of flesh and blood... a poetry beyond words but at the very heart of verbal invention, in that place from which language springs forth...) saw the light of day, so to speak, before term. But a lot of catching up remains to be done.

I am not about to sing the praises of direct cinema which will surely one day find its place within poetry if not within filmmaking, but it is necessary to understand its importance in order to even begin to measure the importance of a filmmaker like Michel Brault. I can only say that the fiction of movie-movies seeks first and foremost to gratify the eye of what are called film viewers (that is to say people who view images), to gratify the eye of those who look, contemplate, see... and who ask only not to believe that which is before their very eyes.

On the other hand, above all else, direct cinema looks. It is the cinema of seeing and hearing rather than of showing. It is more interested in the person represented than in the representation; more interested in the living person than in the film viewer.

It is above all an instrument of knowledge.
Perhaps we need a cinema in which the silent people of the world speak in their own lives, in which life is not rendered by professionals. Of course, and this in no way contradicts my basic tenet, Michel Brault has excelled in all the roughest and all the most sophisticated forms of cinematography. I continue nonetheless to believe that his most original contribution lies in the field of direct cinema. I would even go so far as to add that he has perhaps altered his view of fiction film through the use of the cavalier methods he had invented and used in direct cinema.

Rather than read books which would burden our memories with distant mythologies, he has chosen to read life itself on the banks of an as yet unknown river. It is as a liberation.

But having said that I have still said nothing.

In ending, I would like to speak of that which is never seen on a movie screen and to bear witness to the rough-drafted, untimely, overly naive, cumbersome, erratic, familiar Michel Brault, the daily and warm Michel who instilled in almost all recent Québec cinema his indefatigable enthusiasm.

One could go so far as to say that he watches other peoples’ movies with the same *filming eye* (œil cinéant) he uses in his own filmmaking. The eye of admiration, of curiosity, of tenderness. An eye which seeks out and discovers beauty everywhere. Even if sometimes it requires a lot of good will. Even if sometimes you have to go beyond the clumsiness, the long pauses, the secrets to finally arrive at the heart of something unaware of its own existence.

He goes, so to speak, straight to the heart.

He thereby encourages talent which had not recognized itself; he thereby stimulates, provokes, and elicits, not filmmaking, but a taste for loving with a camera or otherwise.

An admirable eye which has understood that beauty is everywhere and most of all in the soul of he who looks. In a disposition of the soul. At another time, one would have spoken of charity or generosity. And he knows how to look in order to discover, to uncover beauty wherever he goes and in the films of other people. One could say that he ads his gaze to the gaze of a film in order to help us see. To reassure another filmmaker about himself. To reveal to him his own discoveries. To invent him for his own eyes. To give him reason to continue until he outdoes himself. To have already outdone him.

The admiration which Michel Brault has so freely given out around him has perhaps facilitated the birth of a cinema which had no godmother, of a cinema which claims to shun commercial success in order to serve the speech of the living rather than the dreams of the film viewer.

In ending, I would like to say a few words about a film which has not, to the best of my knowledge, received much attention, which Michel Brault made in collaboration with André Gladu and which he photographed. This movie went by unnoticed because it doesn't fling itself at the viewer. I saw it by chance at the International Film Festival of Lille. I was a member of the jury. A film cure. It cost me an entire week of movies to see one infinitely discreet film. The other jury members thought nothing of it... except Jacqueline Pierreux of Belgium, as if small countries did not needlessly valorize parades, bands, and flashiness. In fact, nothing could be further from what is usually called cinema than this almost pictureless little movie. And therein lies the most amazing thing. For, to tell the truth, picture lovers are frequently blind to that which does not grab the eye. I wasn't told that this film amazed anyone. The single, lengthy shot of one man speaking slowly about another man who long ago had borne the same name didn't impress the critics. As though they had not wanted to see another image; an interior, secret, intense, unforgettable image. An image, so to speak, of the soul. But at the movies everything happens as if viewers and critics checked their souls at the door. They have so often heard the old refrain that a picture is worth a thousand words, which is not totally false but also not so true. Admen who aim neither at the head nor at the heart have understood this. Such that no one seemed to see behind the image that thing which was other than an image, other than appearance.
And yet, this film speaks as marvellously of old age as Georges Dufaux’ film, *Au bout de mon âge*, which I am also angered to see go by without sufficient notice. In fact, it is one of the most beautiful things it has been my good fortune to see at the movies... or elsewhere. But how can you tell the story of something as momentous as a man meeting death and repudiating it. The film by Brault and Gladu does not quite speak about death which lies before old age but about the life which lies just beyond, so close that one can not even recognize it. An old man no longer inhabits anything but his memory, which lessens him. In fact, one would have to say that he no longer recognizes himself except in memories and old photographs, that old age has evacuated him from himself. How to rehabilitate the memory which surges in the vacillating man; the memory which a man, deprived of all else, brandishes as his sole justification. By insisting, Brault and Gladu’s film looks at the old evicted man with love. It sees him seeing his own disappearance. It listens to him and follows him along the path which denudes him of the body of the crime is already no longer there. The soul entirely evacuated except for the vacillating memory which surfaces from time to time. Painfully, discreetly, without asking any questions, the camera insists. It lets him come forth. It waits for memory to accomplish its pious task. The man speaks. With difficulty, slowly, labouriously. One can feel speech itself abandoning him. It seems as though even memory were vanishing in the sorrow. That he even regrets his half-forgotten memories. He articulates, and chews out his words. With great effort. And yet, he reveals himself fully. One can see that he doesn't get along with himself. He has forgotten nothing precious and that in itself is already a wonder. Memory is faithful like an already aged, slowed wife who still knows how to lay out a table cloth, set places, and cook lovingly.

And he speaks of song... of his epic. He sings also to illustrate his meaning without wanting us to recognize him in this song which shivers and trembles like a fracture. And he explains. He explains the song and the singer. The movie is called *Votre histoire, ça va être une chanson* (Your story is going to be a song), and he tells his story which is going to be a film. He tells of how a neighbour used to turn the slightest into a song and how he would sing the song whenever he could. He tells that he used to sing and that that expresses him entirely. Simple night-time singer. Neither Bob Dylan nor Elvis Presley, but so much more. Not a showman or a movie man, but a man amongst men of his time and of his village, a man of his culture, a man who used to sing the song which told the story of the village and of the village people. This is how he affirms his right to speak. But today he refuses to recognize himself in he who speaks of him, in he who remembers him. It is entirely contained in his own memory and nowhere else. And Michel's camera contemplates this laborious memory. It frequently appears as though his memory were escaping him. That his story is coming apart, that he's lost the track, that he's forgotten what he wants to say. He almost manages to disinterest us. How can one become caught up in the aimlessness of his regret. He continues to speak, to legendize. He can't manage to entertain us. But the camera insists. Never takes its eyes off him. Dares not make a move. Holds its breath. It's as though he were about to become extinct. His eyes wander off elsewhere. In the distance. Nowhere. Someone has guessed the approach of something. And suddenly, the slow discourse telling of its life, observing a mysterious and unexpected logic, quite suddenly, maliciously, brightens, gathers together all the loose ends and reveals both pathetically and discreetly, the drama of ageing, the difficulty of losing one's charm, one's talent, the banality of no longer being anything but the memory of oneself, of no longer singing during the night. And in closing, he says, more or less: When you’re old, there's not enough wind from above... and too much from below. And then we retroactively understand the meaning of the slow discourses of a tattered soul and of the respectful attitude of a camera which refuses to distract us with tricks when set before a man about whom neither Greek tragedy nor classical theatre have ever spoken.

And it seems to me that this man is more important to other men than all of fiction film’s crazy little hotshots on the Riviera, all its mental cases on probation which it offers to people in order to distract them from their souls. And I thank Michel Brault and André Gladu for this film which will never know commercial success but which speaks to me tenderly of song and of old age. And it is because of this quality, of this interiority, of this ability to listen to and to see a man so profoundly, so intensely, and to reveal him to me directly, that I can say of Michel Brault that he is a filmmaker.

Translated by Paul Attallah
INTERVIEW WITH MICHEL BRAULT

Q: In 1950, at the University of Montreal, you undertook, in collaboration with Jacques Giraldeau and Raymond-Marie Léger, a film adaptation of Albert Camus' *L'Etranger*. Can we point to this as the first project of a career that would become one of the most impressive in the history of Québec cinema?

A: I'll leave the first part of that question to your own interpretation. As to a beginning, I'm sure that it was a departure of sorts... I would have to put the dates in order to see if I did not film with Claude Jutra prior to this. The real beginning can be traced to the time when I was in residence at Sean-Jean College. I can tell you the following anecdote, which you may find amusing. I had a friend, named Guy Touchette, who did photography. I myself did not, and I admired him enormously. One day, I followed him during his shooting; he photographed the halls, the chapel, the parlour, the classes. When he was in a corridor, in order to get depth of field, he closed his diaphragm to the maximum, which meant he had to compensate with a long exposure, about 30 seconds. The corridor, which ran beside the chapel, was poorly lit. During the exposure, a priest in his cassock crossed the end of the corridor, and I immediately said: "Oh shit, your shot is ruined." He answered: "No, it isn't ruined, because black does not make an impression, it's light which makes an impression." That was a shock of sorts for me; I suddenly understood that photography was the action of light upon a film. I think that experience must have had an effect on my future life.

From that moment on, the beginnings of my interest for photography, and later for the cinema — as light, as the effect of light, and all that follows from that — was born. I feel it is important to have this understanding of the real essence of the medium, of photography and the cinema. The basic technique is this marvellous phenomenon of the effect of light upon silver salt. Now that there is a silver shortage, people are considering experimenting with the use of something other than silver salt. They are not yet on the right track; there is nothing which gives as much subtlety as silver salt in the reproduction of images.

Now, the second phase of my interest in the cinema was somewhat longer and more drawn-out. It was the arrival of Claude Jutra at the same college. I had known Claude before, when I was at Stanislas, where I had begun my classical education over a threeyeer period. I left rhetoric at the Collège St. Jean to study philosophy, first at the Collège Sainte-Croix, then at the University of Montreal, for my last year of philosophy, which, incidentally, I failed.

Q: Through a lack of interest?

A: Yes, through a lack of interest in philosophy, but also through laziness. Today I am probably a bit of a philosopher, but not in an academic sense, and not in the sense in which it is studied in college. It really was too difficult for me. I was a poor student at any rate.

Q: And so this project of adapting *L'Etranger* caused you to become known, even at the NFB?

A: Right, that linked up our aspirations with a concrete project: a summer job at the NFB for all three of us: Raymond-Marie Léger, Jacques Giraldeau and myself. First, we asked permission from Albert Camus, as we needed to transpose the sand of North Africa to the snow here. We reached an agreement on this, and invited backers. We had a friend, François Péladeau, I think, who studied with us, but who worked for Canada Press in the evenings and on weekends. I don't know if it was intended as a joke, but he sent the news over the Canadian Press teletype machines. It was through this that the NFB got wind of the project. In those days, for students to think of making a feature film was an event. It was the era of *Curé de campagne* and *Un homme et son pêché*. That students would get into this, at that time, was a minor happening. Our only experience with film-making was the 100 feet paid for by AGEUM, 100 feet that were filmed on the initiative of the students every year, and it was I who did that filming.

Q: Has this footage been preserved?

A: Sure, it should have been. Who would have that? You would have to ask Jacques Parent.
And then we received a letter from the NFB inviting us to an interview for a summer job. Jacques Giraldeau has remained there ever since: there was one occasion when he left the NFB to found Studio 7, a film production company, mainly for television films, with whom I collaborated at the time of “Petites Médianances.” And Raymond-Marie has also remained in the field — in fact he stayed at the NFB for some 15 years — and has since then never left the public film sector. But me — after three months at the NFB I left. We were sent to three different departments: Raymond-Marie was in translation, I think, Jacques Giraldeau in directing, and I was put in the camera department.

At that time, the camera department was very anglophone, even, I would say, Francophobe. The only Francophone cameraman was Jean Roy, but he had just been sent to the Arctic for 18 months to film Au pays des jours sans fin. And I arrived, and was the only Francophone in the department. I was an assistant, the latest assistant to arrive, and it was not at all enjoyable. So I spent my days in the library, reading books on the cinema. I had had my first taste of films with Claude Jutra, in the years before this, the years of Dement du Lac Jean-jeunes, Mouvement perpétuel — these are absolutely marvellous memories, of vacations, of being young. We worked on film, doing fade-ins, fade-outs, with different sorts of tints, and then we would project them; we worked at his place in the country, on the shore of the tiny Beaudette river. We had our studio in a little cabin at the end of the garden, and we projected onto a screen among the trees, at night. Those were beautiful years for me. For me, who had left a somewhat strict and severe family, this represented very much of a vacation. The Jutra family was much more open to all kinds of points of view. Doctor Jutra collected paintings, Madame Jutra was a very stimulating woman. I'll never forget those years. They were, for me, years of a cinematic awakening. Claude and I would test each other on our memory of dates in the history of the cinema. So when I arrived at the NFB, I continued the kind of education I had begun with Claude. In the beginning, I learned everything from Claude. Claude had started somewhat before me: he was lucky enough to have a father who bought him a camera, and that allowed him to get going a few years before I did. Thanks to him, though, I was able to learn the basic principles of the camera, and the technical background necessary for making films, things I have never forgotten, and which, unfortunately, in my opinion, very few film-makers still know today. Together, we experimented and discovered the principles of film-making. We would go to the Cinémathèque or the Bibliothèque de Montréal and borrow films, any films — we knew them all — we even borrowed war films, and I remember that we often saw tanks with their tracks going backwards, and wondered why, and it was through that that we came to understand stroboscopy and the decomposition of movement.

To get back to my period at the NFB, a period of three months, my contract wasn't renewed at the end of the summer, and I was dismissed from the camera department. The camera department was not very pleasant. I remember a poster somewhere in that department which said: "Before you ask, the answer is no." All the work I have done since for the NFB has been precisely to fight against that kind of mentality... there was a high degree of corporatism, a corporatist mentality — that is, to be a cameraman was to hold a secret. It was somewhat like the old shipbuilders who would hole themselves up in their attics to make models based on their ship designs. At the NFB, a cameraman pretended to have a secret. They have this mentality. There's a famous story which Jean Palardy tells: he was shooting with a cameraman, and they were on a mountain in order to film a landscape. And the cameraman, I won’t mention his name, it isn’t necessary, took what we call a "bullshit glass," which is a contrast lens. He looked at the landscape and said: "We can’t shoot it today." So Palardy said: "I can see it with my eyes, surely you can film it with the camera." So the cameraman told him: "No, too much U.V. in the air." Too much ultra-violet in the air. Then Palardy said: "Listen, we've climbed up the mountain. I'm not going to go back down and come up another day. Let me do it. I'll take the responsibility." The cameraman answered: "OK." And right there, he made this assistant write, on the camera report: “Shot under cameraman's protest.” Palardy, having already been a cameraman, filmed the shot himself. A few weeks later the rushes arrived, and the film was black; he said: "What happened?" The cameraman answered: "You forgot to open the shutter." In fact, the cameraman had closed the shutter, saying that in order to make the shot he had to check... But there are very few cameras like that with a variable shutter, and he, to get even, had closed it, so Palardy, who was not used to those cameras, didn't think of opening the shutter, which meant the shot was black... This is an example to show you the mentality in those days.
A few weeks later, Claude Jutra arrived at the NFB. First of all, he had a very disastrous experience with his film on young people and music. He had an Anglophone cameraman. It was hell for him; he told me about it. I myself was not yet a cameraman at this point, and the difficulties he had were quite unnerving. It was the same cameraman, in fact, who had played the trick on Palardy. And when he was asked to film Fernand Dansereau's Les mains nettes, Claude requested that I be the cameraman. He was taking a risk, since this was my first studio film. I had only done Claude Jutra's Pierrot des bois and Petites Médisances with Jacques Giraldeau.

Q: Along with Claude Sylvestre, you founded a film society: Cinéma 16. What were the motives and circumstances which incited you to this kind of activity at this time? What importance did film societies have in those days?

A: I don't recall the exact circumstances, but I remember that there weren't very many cinemas in Montreal. This was during Duplessis' reign. Censorship was very strict. The only place where one could see films was the University of Montreal Ciné-Club, which was run by Jacques Giraldeau. There was also the Saturday Night Cinema which was run by Jean Gélinas. And that was the big event of the week. It was the beginning. Saturday evenings, we went to films at the university. We then founded another film society, called Cinéma 16. It began, I think, in the college across from the St. Joseph's oratory, and after a year was moved to Saint-Laurent, with the Abbé Sénécal, who was also into films. And I still remember the time we brought in Renoir's Une partie de campagne, based on a story by Maupassant... We had sent the film to the censors, and they had forbidden its being shown. Claude Sylvestre and I decided to show it anyway... In the end, we were very nervous, but went through with it. We took our chances with the censors. During the film, a guy arrived. I was running the projector, and Claude was sitting up front. So this guy arrived during the screening, and asked me: "Sir, who's running this film society?" I told him: "The guy sitting up front." Then he said: "Fine, I don't want to disturb him, I'll wait." I sweated out the rest of the film. I said to myself: "It's the censor's men come to get us." After the film, I sent him to see Claude. He turned out to be the inspector for Ville St. Laurent who had come to inspect our entertainment taxes. But I had been shaking nevertheless.

Q: How did it function, your film society? Were there discussions?

A: Oh yes! For example, we showed Menotti's Le médium and asked Jean Valerand to come and present it and discuss it afterwards. We tried mainly to program unusual films, films one would never see here; that you had to go to New York to see. Any film fanatic will tell you that, in those days, one went to New York every year to bathe in films. We formed a little group: Hubert Aquin, Louis-Georges Carrier, Jacques Perrault, Marc Brière, Claude Jutra and myself. We would go every year, during the Easter vacation, and rent a room in a dingy New York hotel for the weekend. A room for two where five of us would sleep. And once there, we started at 11 am, we bought Cue and made up a detailed schedule. We had 10 or 15 minutes between each film, sometimes a half hour to get there when it was across town. We began at 10 in the morning and finished at 2 or 3 am. I remember a screening on 49th with Claude. It was a double-bill. The first was Les chemins de la vie by Nicolai Ekk, absolutely extraordinary, and the second, an Israeli film called Smiling Through Tears. Les chemins de la vie starts, and Claude falls asleep. I started nudging him hard with my elbow. I told him: "Claude wake up, this is unbelievable, fantastic!" And Claude kept on sleeping. The other film starts, and I fall asleep. Claude wakes up and starts nudging me in turn: "Michel, I'm watching one of the masterpieces of the cinema." And I've never seen Smiling Through Tears. Claude assured me that it was a great film, at that point the most beautiful he had ever seen. I would very much like to see that film today.

Q: Between 1953 and 1955, you worked on two television series: "Petites médisances" and "Images on boîte." Did this, your first major work as a cameraman, give a particular orientation to your approach to film?

A: No. I don't think so. There are other elements, such as Cartier-Bresson's attitude towards photography, for example. The discovery of light with the help of magazines like Vogue or Bazard, and great photographers such as Richard Avedon, Irving Penn. With these
magazines, what influenced me was obviously not the subject, which was fashion,... it was above all the light, or the discovery of light, a simplification of lighting in comparison with the classical period which was ending in the 1950's, and which was a very artificial lighting, the kind one found at the NFB, and which they tried to teach me, and which I worked to forget as much as possible because it was too academic, too contrived. It didn't correspond to any reality, whereas the fashion photographers had begun to discover, themselves, natural lighting, the soft light which comes in through a side window, heavily influenced by studio photographs from the beginning of the century. They reproduced this type of work in studios, and it influenced and fascinated me. In making "Petites médisances," I learned to manipulate the camera, and what's more, with Jacques Giraldeau at Studio 7, there were no traditions. We were just beginning and had no precedents. There was no one to tell us what to do. So we could invent everything. It is clear that, at that level, the liberty we had was quite exhilarating. Given that our means were not that great, we tried things that were fairly daring, such as, for example, using very little light, since in any case we did not have much money to pay for it. So one had to force the cameras, the lenses and the film stock to give more. Already, at this point, I began to be fascinated by reality, life, the documentary. In those days, we were quite mischievous and carefree, and we stole people's images. We made these humorous little programs at the world's expense. We observed people through telephoto lenses. That changed rapidly — and fortunately, I might add. I understood that it was a dead-end to observe people as a voyeur. We quickly opted for the wide-angle, which brought us closer to people, and forced us to change our attitude. We had to learn how to introduce ourselves into a situation, a conversation. And, as a result, be involved with those we were filming. Filming the world from up close is not like filming for television. It was the only possible road in our quest for truth.

Q: You arrived at the NFB in 1956. What was your role in the emergence of the French group at the Board with regard to the birth of direct cinéma?

A: I feel I played a certain role by wanting to resist the dominance of literature. Film projects at that time were considered in function of their literary quality. I considered this to be in contradiction with the NFB's documentary mission, and so we submitted a project containing a single phrase: "We want to make a film on a wrestling program at the Forum on Wednesday evening." The content would come to us in the process of shooting. With Roland Barthes, who was passing through Montreal, and whom we had met by accident, we learned to shake off our prejudices, and it was in this way that we made the film. We discovered the world of the wrestlers and their fans while filming them; without judging them, but rather in paying homage to them. Since that evening I've very much admired these artists of the spectacle.

Transforming the NFB often meant doing so under-handedly. For example, Les raquetteurs was to have been a four-minute film, in 35 mm, shot without sound for the "Coup d'oeil" series. I no longer remember how, but I was able to get away with much more film than was allotted to me. We filmed all through the weekend, though I should have made it in a few hours. Later, when the rushes were shown to Grant McLean, the director of French-English production, who was an Anglophone, he told us: "No, this isn't a film, we'll send it to the library." Again, clandestinely, Gilles Groulx edited the film in the evenings. Finally we won. The film was finished, and for me it was determinant in what happened to me. It was because of this film that Jean Rouch invited me to France to film Chronique d'un été So, you see what would have happened if we had accepted the production director's verdict.

Q: What, in your opinion, was the greatest change brought about by this new approach to filmmaking?

A: Probably that certain demands were made on staged cinema (cinéma de mise en scène). Direct cinema has forced that cinema to go beyond itself, to move a little closer to reality, to life — although I have the impression that a tendency which distances itself, in an equally conscious way, from life, seeking to reach a level of abstraction and grasp another truth, at another level, is also valuable. But this experience with a realist cinema was necessary...

Technology in 1960 did not allow us to make films without drawing upon literature, without using commentaries. The cameras wouldn't let you film peasants in synch, in their fields; so
you had to reorganize things, to set up these huge sound-recording devices. You always had to be connected to the 110 current in the house. We wanted, as Renoir said, to take the camera among the flowers. This whole transformation is linked to the evolution of technology, of equipment. Take, for example, Pierre Perrault, up until 1958, in that beautiful series "Au pays de Neufve-France," he had no choice, he had to write a commentary. The film, on the building of a jail, is a masterpiece in my opinion. Le Jean Richard is a film that was made with a silent image and commentary. So it is a literary creation on Pierre's part, but based on the language of the people in that region. Today, we give them their voice, it's them who speak. This happened beginning in 1960. It's this achievement we wanted to attain through a transformation of the equipment.

Q: Would direct cinema in Québec have survived if Jean Rouch hadn't come looking for you? Did this international recognition encourage a greater openness on the part of the NFB, with regard to your work; and, on a more personal level, was the experience of working in France important for you?

A: OK, the first part of your question! Was direct cinema known when Jean sought me out? There was no direct cinema, it didn't exist. There were only tendencies.

Q: Sure! But still, there had been Les raquetteurs.

A: No, that wasn't really direct cinema, Les raquetteurs. The coming of direct cinema dates really only from 1964, with the arrival of the synchronous portable camera with tape recorder: the Eclair and the Nagra. Everything that came before was only tentative precursors, the period of the battle for direct cinema. On Les raquetteurs, the entire sound track was done in the studio. It is not direct cinema. I think it's misleading to say that Les raquetteurs is direct cinema. There is one shot in raquetteurs which is direct cinema. The one where you see Maurice (Carrière) in the shot, he puts down a portable taperecorder, which is a remote recorder, i.e., not synchronized. But this shot was forced to be synchronized avant la lettre: the moment where the mayor gives the keys to the city to the American club. All the rest shows the desire to capture life as it unfolds, but we weren't successful yet, that only happened in other films. In any case, with Pour la suite du monde, we began to achieve it. The fact of going on the boat among the fishermen and recording Alexis, Thomas and Léopold talking about porpoises, that was for us one of the first experiments in direct cinema.

Q: But, this work in France...

A: This work has an enormous influence on me all the same. Because that was the explosion, the battle continued. The battle against the old cameras, with new camera makers like Coutant and Kudelski for the Nagra. And there, we were really happy, you see, really at home. Very often we would go to Mr. Coutant's workshop, and get him to do this or that. Not only were cameras being made, but the film also had to be made more sensitive. We had that here, long before they did. I can't say enough about the important part played by people like Jose Ména of the Mont-Royal laboratories, and others I don't know. José Ména agreed to experiment with developing baths for developing 400 ASA, and then 800 ASA films. So we were doing things that no other country had done. It was these efforts that made it possible to make films freed from technical constraints, and enabled us to go anywhere, thanks to the high sensitivity of the film.

From a salary point of view, I suffered, because at the NFB, that went against principles, against the advice which the veterans, who were often my bosses, gave us, and that reflected itself in my salary increases. But I didn't give a damn, because that wasn't important at that point. I might have had more money for raising my children, but all in all we didn't live that badly. That material freedom is, nevertheless, necessary... and I think my wife has the great merit of having shared these difficulties at the beginning. She has a marvellous temperament, she didn't confront me with financial demands that would have meant... all this can't be said often enough: the family environment affects one's work.

Q: You mentioned the bosses at the NFB. What did lighting mean for them?
A: There were safe formulas for lighting... The lighting system I was taught was very conserva-
tive: "key light," as it is called, "fill" and "back light." When you followed that, you
couldn't go wrong. You were sure to have the blessings of the higher-ups. I fought against
that, it disgusted me, I didn't follow it. So, in fact, I didn't have the blessings of the higher-
ups, and my salary was lower. It was probably thanks to my family, to the environment I had
at home, that I was able to do this and take risks. Still, even today, when I make a film with a
director, that director must take the risk with me. It is a kind of agreement I make from the
outset, because, in order to do something outstanding, you must always experiment. If you
stick to conventions, to playing it safe, you will never do anything. Take, for example, filming
with a wide aperture; lenses always work better with a wide aperture, but that is risky,
because you have a very narrow range for focussing, and if you go to one side, your shot is
blurred. There is nothing worse than going to see the rushes and finding out you have a
blurred shot when the cost may be as high as 10 or 15 thousand dollars per day... That's
really walking a fine line. If you film at f5.6 or f:8, there is less risk because you have a high
depth of field. From the point of view of light, you piss off the actors, but you're sure yourself
of not going wrong. This has been extremely important in the evolution of the cinema, and
from the point of view of sound and image, that's what you hope to achieve, a greater
liberty, so as to be able to touch, not The Truth, but a certain truth, a certain number of
truths. Because Truth, you cannot pretend that documentary cinema can attain it any more
than any other cinema.

Q: The Perrault-Brault team allowed for the making of landmark films in the evolution of direct
cinema; today, with the passage of time, how would you situate Pour la suite du monde in
the history of Québec cinema, and, more specifically, in the relationship direct
cinema/fiction cinema?

A: I would myself prefer not to situate the things I have done, as a whole. What's more, I think
that it is the task of those whose job it is to write histories, to analyse or to criticize, to
situate these things. I would myself be hard put to do that. In the first place, to do that one
has to compare, and that is a little embarrassing for me. I don't think I will answer that part
of the question.

Q: But the direct-fiction relationship...

A: The relationship is not a wide one. If so, it was that for me, it made me discover certain
things. How can I explain this?... It made me discover that life was not necessarily the way
it had been represented up until that point. It is not so simple, it is very complex. And the
manner of expressing one's self, of speaking, the very way in which one existed came
across in a number of little signs in the language and behaviour of people. I discovered that
in working with direct cinema. I noticed that traditional, fiction films had until then been
quite far from that subtlety; I found it was still too much an offshoot of the theater. I think
that, thanks to direct cinema, from the moment when the camera was liberated from all its
technical constraints, that one saw things on the screen one had never seen before. Take
the forge sequence in Pour la suite du monde, where the father and son are having it out
with one another, all this mixed in with the making of a harpoon. A mixture of life, anvil
blows, and then a discussion. A coming together of gesture and speech. Leopold's mind,
which is divided, interested both in the making of the harpoon and in discussing the origins
of fishing with his father. The complexity of this situation has always fascinated me,
enabled me to understand so many things about the dramatical construction of the inter-
relationship between father and son.

Q: Can direct be as much of a mystification as fiction?

A: Absolutely. It's very dangerous. It's not so much the falseness of what is in the image, but
the omissions one makes while filming. The effect that the camera has on a life situation. It
disturbs the situation because the people one is filming always acquire a certain idea of the
image they should be projecting. So there is an element of theater. One can never tell the
truth completely. It is unattainable, one can only evoke it, and it is the spectator who should
continue the process in both cases, in direct as in fiction. I think a film-maker working in
direct cinema has a great deal of responsibility, since he must understand this
phenomenon and try to restore what is believed to be reality through a lot of cross-checking.
Nor is it a question of reinventing... you have to make abstractions, from your intentions, your fascinations, your romanticism, from your tendency to be over-harsh. And it is because of this, also, that you should not go too fast. One shouldn’t always begin filming immediately. Sometimes things must be left to sort themselves out. You must be very attentive; that’s very important. In documentary, just as in fiction, one is always making auteur films; whether one likes it or not, there is always mediation, even in documentary...

As for myself, I will admit that I am inclined to return to making fiction films. I am beginning more and more to feel the limitations of direct cinema. I am beginning to feel that each time I film a situation, even if it is out of the ordinary, some little thing is missing. There is a dimension lacking, that I never succeed in filming or getting across to the audience. That is starting to bother me. I have the desire, at times, to be able to touch another dimension, through other means. I think the fiction film can succeed in doing this, while direct cinema has its limits. From the moment when you accept as a rule not to ask people to repeat for you a gesture or a phrase that you witnessed and thought extraordinary, from that moment on you have decided that the ethic of documentary, of direct cinema, is not to stage things. You are thus limited by all that escapes you. You can predict things, but by the time you are ready to film, with the camera running and the sound in the right place, and the lights on, that moment has often passed. There is an accumulation of moments like that, in all the films I have made within direct cinema, with the result that in the end I have been discouraged from going further. I acknowledge the limits of direct cinema, but I think they should be mentioned.

Q: In the speech you delivered upon receiving the Victor Morin prize, you said this: "My films are scrupulously made with the gestures and words of others." In relation to this, could you talk about your experience as a script-writer? What are, in your opinion, the qualities of a good script-writer?

A: Ah, there are so many sides to that question. To begin with, my own experience as a script-writer is different from that of a script-writer in another cinema. My work was first as a documentarist, as a direct film maker. It was by accident that I happened to write a screenplay.

Q: With Les Ordres?

A: You could almost say that for Les Ordres I put on a documentarist's hat. I began with documents, with the words of others, I had people tell me what they had gone through, and I tried to recreate the impression they gave me of moments they had experienced. But it is not documentary, and all those who say that Les Ordres is a fictional documentary, it's like saying a circle can be squared. It's absolutely impossible. Documentary is documentary, fiction is fiction. As far as I'm concerned, you can’t mix the two. At the risk of sounding fanatical about this, I don't think one can, within a single film, mix fiction and reality. So a script, then — I think it would above all else tell a story. One shouldn’t forget that cinema is a spectacle. When you make films costing half-millions and millions, there’s only one way, you have to accept that it’s a spectacle, and to think of the public. You must accept that the audience has not yet arrived at that point where you would like the cinema to be.

Q: Does autobiographical film-making interest you?

A: No, not at all. I wouldn’t say there is nothing autobiographical in the films I make, because clearly you are always in touch with your experiences, and it’s always easier to direct things you feel, that you can seize upon very easily. But the truly autobiographical film does not interest me.

Q: Was Les bons débarras, by Francis Mankiewicz, important for you? Was the will to experiment with something, to force the technique, a constant preoccupation of yours in the film?

A: No, not exactly in that way. Les bons débarras, when I read the script, the distress I felt, it was because I told myself: "Here is a script with a style, and it will only become a very good film if we do our work right." Because Réjean Ducharme made it his work, and it was very well thought out as a film. He is a great screenwriter. The distress I had at that moment lay
in finding a style for the images, since all that was written had to be translated into images, and one could cross over into a flat, foolishly concrete representation, while in Réjean Ducharme's work there was a certain distance, a certain interpretation, a certain vision of people and things, that is called style. I said to myself: "You can't do that just by plucking the camera in front of actors performing, you have to find a style and a passion" —and how did I do it? I can't explain. Only the viewer can say today if I succeeded. I myself can't say, because I am incapable of judging myself. But I did my best, in any case. It's that fascination or anguish I felt which probably produced the result.

I think you should always, with each script and each director, empty yourself and begin at zero, and invent a new way of expressing yourself.

Q: Nevertheless, both Les bons débarras and Le temps d'une chasse share something, and it isn't the same screenwriter.

A: What matters to me is what the director wants. I try to share the director's vision. If you compare that with Entre tu et vous, you will notice that it's completely different. If you compare Kamouraska, it's equally different. If you compare Les Ordres with Kamouraska, it's also totally different. One is heavily saturated with colour, and the other isn't.

Q: Still, certain people, when they mention Michel Brault as a cameraman on a film, insist there is a preponderance of Michel Brault.

A: Well, that's a defect. I should pay attention to that, to what you call a preponderance. I try to work against that, because it isn't a very good thing. The photography should not be too obvious... I nevertheless have tried... It's because of this that I originally said no to Francis when he asked me to do Le temps d'une chasse. He was on his first film, and I was afraid of influencing him too much and having too great a preponderance. You see, what is important in a film is a point of view, and it can't be everybody's point of view. If it's the point of view of everyone, it's nothing. It must be a vision on which everyone collaborates. Each one shouldn't be doing his own little number.

Q: What, then, is your relationship, as a cameraman, with actors?

A: There, I think I have a role to play. I myself feel that the cameraman is the first spectator. It's because of this that I insist so much on framing the shots, I don't understand why there should be someone who does the lighting and another the framing. It's as if in painting there was one who held the brushes and another to decide the colours. When I frame, when I look in my viewer, I am the number one spectator, and given that I see things in isolation, I am somewhat privileged, I already see what will happen on the screen. So it's my responsibility to tell the director if I occasionally feel things aren't working with the actor's performance. I don't know if the director working with me appreciates it. but I play that role.

Q: Do you address the actors directly?

A: No. Never, never. That should never come from two sources, because the actors will be completely lost. Besides, I understand very well the great solitude and anguish the actor feels when he hears the clapboard. There are directors who say "Start" and others who say "Action." Just these two words, one or the other, are terrifying for the actor, because he must create life in a situation that isn't life, because — I don't know if you've been on a set, when the scene is finished, things start to move, everybody puts things in order, the property person gets his things, puts them in their place, the sound ambience is completely different, it's terrifying... and all of a sudden things are silent: "Quiet, we're filming." Sound, camera, take 20, action! What a terrorist procedure!

And right there, you have to come alive, you have to be real, authentic, attentive, profound... it's terrifying. And I feel that, I understand it very well. I always try to contribute to making the actor feel as little as possible that he's in a frightening situation. It's the on-set atmosphere which makes an actor give all he's capable of giving at times as a point of reference, an accomplice of the actors. I feel they understand that everything they do passes through the lens, they feel I'm scrutinizing them with my viewer. Sometimes they come to me to ask how it was, and at those times, I'm a little uneasy, since I don't want to
The cinema is no longer the great popular entertainment it was. Television has attracted millions of spectators, which the cinema has lost. Is there a solution, or a number of solutions, for saving the cinema?

A: I ask myself if I am interested in saving the cinema. I don't see making films for the sake of films; if the viewer prefers watching television, I'll go along. Maybe one day it will be said that it was a golden age. I really don't know how to answer that. It's true that it is fascinating, the big screen, but it's perhaps egotistical... Essentially, films are for the viewers, and it's up to them to decide how they're going to watch them. And if they decide that they no longer want to see a certain type of film, what can we do about it? I tend, on the contrary, to accept this and try to adapt to the spectators' verdict. In the last few years, I've worked a lot for television, and it's quite fascinating to think that in one evening, a million, a million and a half viewers see a film. It's really amazing. It's a struggle between the content and the container. What is to be said and what is to be seen.

Q: Do young directors and cameramen have the same opportunities to express themselves that you did? I'm thinking mainly of the experiences you had at the NFB.

A: Today we've reached a level of saturation such that there seem to be fewer innovations today than there were in those days. For that reason, I'd say that what we had to do was easy. It was enough to identify the obstacles, and all that was left was to overcome them, to break through the restraints and the closed doors. It was quite easy and exciting, whereas today it is very difficult to work. Even so, all things considered, Québec is one of the biggest producers of films in the world. If you want to compare it with the American cinema, you have to multiply by forty, and with the French cinema, by ten. In other words, when we make one good film a year here, you would expect ten good ones in France, and forty good ones in the United States.

Q: Over the last few years, in collaboration with André Gladu, you produced and directed "Le son des français d'amérique." Why such a series? What preoccupations were at the origin of this project?

A: You see, when I made l'Acadie, l'Acadie with Pierre (Perrault), I said to myself "I can't imagine anyone having missed this, not being able to film it." I noticed how many situations like that, throughout our history, had been lived by people in an extremely painful way, and how one never hears about them. There have been a lot of situations like that, which one never hears recounted, and which are never documented for the sake of history. When André considered making this series of films on the different types of traditional Francophone music in America, I noticed that such a thing had not been done. Also, we wanted to give that series a dimension above and beyond the musical one. We tried to get across the historical, economic, social and political context. We tried to show why it was that these people have continued to want to sing, to make music, and also to get together with their instruments in order to survive. In making this series, we testified to the richness of the world, and as a result have been struggling against cultural imperialisisms, the bulldozers of the melting pot. When a person is named, when a music is named, it is more difficult to make it disappear; I believe the world is beautiful only in the abundance of its manifestations. The series was made also to "Make heard those whose voices have been lost" and make seen those whose gestures are disappearing.

Q: You are currently giving, I believe, a course on ethnographic film at the University of Montreal. Is this a recent preoccupation for you?

A: Yes, it's something of an accident. It was to replace Rouch. I've given this course for four years now, and I find it interesting because it forces me, each year, to reflect. I've learned a lot through teaching, all the more in that it's an important discipline. All teachers say it: by teaching, you learn a lot yourself. This course forced me to do research, to collect material, articles that I probably would never have seen otherwise... I'm fairly lazy, by nature.

Q: The Syndicat National du Cinéma was founded in 1969. You were its first president. What was the historical conjuncture which caused film technicians to band together in a union?
What role did you play?

A: It's very simple. Before 1969, there were very few features made there, and it was even rarer for a foreign company to come here to film. Then, in 1969, a company came to make a film here, and it was the occasion for an American union, IATSE, to move in. As a result, we had to intervene rapidly. That is why we formed a union. If we hadn't negotiated a first contract with those producers, the American union would probably be implanted here. Obviously we would have quickly gotten rid of it, because we wouldn't have put up with it for very long, but that would have brought about divisive and embarrassing fights that would have gone on forever. Also, this type of union brought with it a Hollywood style of relationships between producers and technicians, which we didn't want. I think we managed to preserve a Québécois way of dealing with labour relations in the cinema.

Q: You are a member of this technicians' union, but also a producer and director. How do you reconcile what appears at first sight to be a conflict of interests?

A: It's not a problem, since when I'm a producer, I'm a producer, I understand it clearly, I don't try to play both sides... I think I fulfill the function of producer very well. A producer should not undertake a film in an atmosphere of hostility. There are certain things to work out, material conditions to be guaranteed, etc.... But once they're dealt with, they're dealt with. Everyone should co-operate so that the film is made under the most harmonious conditions possible. Given that I'm quite familiar with all aspects of filmmaking, I would say that it's easier for me to play my role better. The least mystifying thing in all this are the figures. It's mathematical, clear and simple. As Mayor Jones says: "The plaster you spend can't be saved." A good production begins with good management.

Q: How do you explain the founding of a rival union, the APC?

A: On that, I prefer as much as possible not to say anything, it's painful. There was a group which left us, and I myself was deeply hurt.

Q: What is your attitude towards coproductions, which are now very popular here?

A: Coproductions... I can honestly say that they don't bother me. I think we should regard them as a challenge. From the moment when you feel that what you have to say or do is of value, you don't have to let yourself be affected by outside demands. I feel you can succeed in working with foreign investment only after the coproducer accepts that you exist as a creator. From that moment on, if foreign doors are opened, all the better.

Q: But the majority of coproductions filmed here are products conceived for the most part elsewhere, at the level of scripting, direction, distribution, etc.

A: Yes, I know, but I haven't been involved in any of those projects. I've worked on films, like Kamouraska, which were co-produced, but I didn't suffer from that at all. The foreign producer understood... Claude (Jutra) may have suffered, but you would have to ask him about that. I, as a director, would not at all mind co-producing a film with the Italians. When the Americans went to co-produce with Fellini or Bertolucci, they worked with Bertolucci as an Italian, and not as an American, and those people fought strongly against the unsound intentions of their foreign co-producer. I would be ready to do that and would put up a fight.

Q: In as much as the project originates here...

A: Yes, of course. I would probably not film a script that had been written elsewhere. Although... I say that, but, if it was a good script... I don't know. One shouldn't be fanatical to the extreme about Québécois projects. I see this as a fear which will disappear the day Québec becomes sovereign.

Q: But, is the problem of inflation which these coproductions create within the Québec film industry not a serious danger?

A: That's a fault of the producers. It's not the coproduction system itself which creates this situation, but, I think, the fact that the producers have given in. I should point out that there
is a lot of commotion about this now, given all the money which is floating around. There is terrible inflation, due to the irresponsibility of certain businessmen who have made themselves producers. But one should take account of this, because our technicians often find themselves working on English or American productions, and it's we who suffer the consequences. I can do nothing about it, since you can't prevent people from working and end the mobility which exists between one country and another. So, instead of going on against coproductions, we should find ways of defending ourselves. Producers should accept their responsibilities and say: "Listen, we're going to adapt to the methods used here." It takes short-sightedness to pay double salaries because it's an American film, and then six months later, when the producer finds himself with his own productions, he will have created a precedent.

Q: Has financing been a major problem for you?

A: No, though I should mention that I have not had many experiences with private financing. There was one: Les Ordres; and all the other films I've made were done with public funds, funds belonging to society. Whether at the NFB, for Radio-Canada, with the help of the SDICC of the Institut Québécois du cinéma; I have depended upon the confidence the people have placed in me for their cinema... in advance. It's a 100% subsidized cinema. For Les Ordres, I was helped by a guy, Guy Caron, who liked my script and told me: "Listen, I'm interested in getting together the money to make this." He was paid his commission and at the end of six months he had collected the necessary money. I had no problems. I'm not saying I won't have any, since the next film might cost more than Les Ordres, which only cost $250,000.

Q: What do you think of the role that the state, either federal or provincial, is currently playing?

A: To begin with, I think we're spoiled here in Québec. We have to sources of funding, even three or four; if one of them won't help us, we go see another. Who knows how many people have had their script refused at the NFB, then crossed the street to the SDICC or the Institut and received their money. We are over-subsidized. I even think we should be a little stricter to improve the scripts. I feel it's quite easy to make a film here.

Q: In our cinema, two extreme notions are confronting each other: auteur cinema and commercial cinema. Are a concern for creativity and the search for a public compatible?

A: Certainly they're compatible. I think one forgets the need for a public more easily than the concern for creativity. We are creators, we Québécois, and often don't think enough about the public. We sometimes reach extraordinary heights of creativity, often with very good ideas, with flashy and impressive direction, but the public is left far behind. I'm sure that the Québécois cinema has not yet really found its public. It's very difficult for a film-maker here, since the public is already used to something else, and since you can't physically or geographically detach or distance Québec from the U.S. American spectacles fill our television and cinema screens through the distribution monopolies. Unless we establish a truly radical quota system, the problem won't be solved. In any case, the effects will not be felt until a few years later. You can't prevent people from having seen what they have already seen. And since they have already seen so many American films, they are used to them, you have to take them as they are and accept this historical fact. However, there is one quite astonishing thing which I think I've discovered. For several years now, I've looked at the admissions for American films in Canadian cinemas, and I've been amazed to see how low they are, except for a few big successes like Apocalypse Now... they're far behind the number of admissions for Ordres. The ticket sales for Les Ordres were some $500,000. There are very few American films which make half that. They're always around $100,000, and that's over the whole of Canada. I can't get over it. Which brings me to say that, quality being equal, the Québécois film is privileged in Québec, even though we've always thought the contrary. To put in another way, take an American film as good as Les bons débarras, or, even better, Mourir à tue-tête, since it's a fairly difficult film, and which has had wide distribution in Canada. Take an American film of this order, and I'm sure that Mourir à tue-tête did better than it, quality being equal, in Québec. It's astonishing, we tend to forget this.

Q: At the beginning of the fifties, you did some work as a critic, notably for the magazine
Découpages. What is the function of criticism? What do you think of what is happening in Québec criticism today?

A: ... That was nothing to do with the fact that I wrote some criticism. I didn't know what I was doing in those days. I didn't reflect very much upon my role. In retrospect, what inspired me at that time was probably discovering something positive rather than something negative. Today, each time I don't like a film, and meet someone who likes it, I feel like keeping quiet and saying: "Frankly, it's amazing that you like that, so say it." I don't see what role I am to play, trying to make someone understand that he shouldn't have liked such and such a film. Unless it's a question of an utterly scandalous film, I don't see why one should be interested in putting down a film... I think it's better to pass over it in silence. It would seem to be better for criticism never to speak without measure, just enough to discover what is positive about a film. That's how I see it. I find critics somewhat distant from the cinema that is happening. One might say they are afraid of meeting film-makers, of speaking with them, being near them. Often they are not very well informed about certain techniques... Recently I've found them to be somewhat fawning with regard to Bons débarras.

Q: What is the role of Québec cinema, and what are its means, outside of Québec?

A: I think Québec is among those countries which should be known about. I don't see a specific role for Québec... no more than for Switzerland, or for Belgium. One has a tendency only to recognize the clichés, and that is because of advertizing, which, I might add, is always deceiving. When you see the films by young Swiss film-makers, you discover a Switzerland completely different from the one you knew: the Switzerland of banks, mountains, cheese and chocolate. Switzerland takes on a new dimension when you see the films that Swiss film-makers are making with such intensity and interest. I expect the same thing from Québec cinema. People abroad imagine that Québec is General De Gaulle's "Vive le Québec libre"... I would like them to have another dimension, to be able to see Pour la suite du monde or Ce temps d'une chasse or Les bons débarras and Kamouraska.

Q: As for your projects... you're currently working on a script. Can you tell us a little about it?

A: I prefer not to talk about current projects, since each time I talk about one I am stuck for 2 or 3 weeks afterwards. I have the impression of emptying myself, if I talk to you about it intensely. I will be a little self-satisfied for a short time, but will no longer be stimulated — such a project should come out, not as an interview, but as a script, a film.

Q: It's a fiction script you're working on...

A: Yes, I'm going to make two films... I have two projects for fiction films, which, incidentally, will be made the same way. I'm tempted by the thought of making a historical film, and I can tell you at this point that it will be based on records from that period, from a diary. The other film will be based on an investigation, like I did for Les Ordres. People will tell me experiences they've lived through, and on the basis of their accounts, I'll make this second film.

Q: You won't give in and tell us...

A: No, that would make me very uneasy...

Q: Thank-you.

INTERVIEW RECORDED ON TAPE IN MARCH, 1980, by PIERRE JUTRAS, and revised by MICHEL BRAULT.

(Translated by Will Straw)
In Québec, Michel Brault is certainly the most attentive, the most versatile, the most prolific, the most constant of filmmakers

by Claude Jutra

As a cameraman, his story is legendary. A short 10-minute film Les raquetteurs showed the entire world that a new era had dawned: the era of cinéma-vérité. A few years later, a masterpiece, Pour la suite du monde, marks the apogee of the form. Both these films were team efforts but it was Michel Brault’s camera, with its lightness, its ubiquity, its visual acuity, which made them possible. Suddenly, the cameraman’s name climbed up the credit list until it found itself above the title, beside the words: "Directed by..." During those years of innovation and glory at the NFB, from amidst a team that was numerous, brilliant, audacious, and free, Michel Brault always stood out amongst the best.

Obviously, the cinéma-vérité in question coincided with a sudden technological evolution: the 16mm camera had been perfected, film and sound equipment had been lightened, sound and image could now be synchronized, black-and-white and colour film stock was becoming increasingly sensitive... But none of these instruments was magical; you had to know how to use them. Brault has always had an acute understanding of technique and equipment. The telephoto for intimate scenes or for when the camera is too noisy. Wide-angle to insinuate the camera amongst the people and to make it participate in the event. As for light, wherever he was, he knew so well (and so mysteriously) how to interpret it such that one might have said that he had invented it, with the master’s touch. When there wasn’t enough, a single light bulb, carefully placed, worked miracles.

That's for the image. But what about movement, or rather the mobility of Brault's camera. Whereas other peoples’ cameras were still tied to the all too necessary tripod, his was off on a hike... on foot. In that type of cinema, two legs are better than three. For this so-called light camera is damned heavy when you have to carry it on your shoulder for hours, when you have to perpetually refocus, when you have to constantly alter the diaphragm (to compensate for light changes), and especially if you want to unashamedly give yourself over to the joys of creativity. And things become even more complicated when you want not only to film but also to move around. The human gait can make framing an intolerably jarring experience. Michel Brault, athlete and dancer, could eliminate the rolling, the pitching, the highs and the lows, the lurches which we all unconsciously but inexorably set into motion when we walk. He slipped into crowds, between objects, he climbed hills, braked on descents, and often, moving backwards, he would step over obstacles without ever once allowing his right eye to leave the viewfinder, and, miraculously, without ever falling into a hole. So what can one now say about his immobility, about his strength in maintaining a nicely framed close-up for minutes on end without shaking.

But the gaze is the most important thing. It must first of all be selective. It is by choosing what he will photograph that the direct cinema cameraman takes the most determinant decisions vis-à-vis the film’s content. And yet, to be aware of the infinite possibilities which crop up, he has also to be incredibly attentive. He has to have a clear understanding of the event he’s filming in order to immediately zero in on the most significant, the most important aspect. But the most exquisite gift, is the gift of anticipation. Frequently, in a scene filmed by Michel, the camera looks away, with no apparent reason, to another space. And right away, in that place, at that moment, something unexpected happens. Michel had foreseen it through some unknown instinct. Some will say that whatever it was happened there because that’s where the camera was pointed. Perhaps. It would certainly be an extraordinary collaboration, both tacit and unconscious, between the cameraman and his subject.
It is both convenient and reassuring to label someone a specialist. For a while, Michel Brault was the "specialist" of direct cinema, of the sneak scene and of natural lighting. It was difficult to imagine him in a studio, "creating" some sort of "artistic" lighting, atop a dolly, filming "actors" in a planned scene. We now know that he is also one of the world's greatest (chef opérateur) camera directors (head cameramen). In his work as in his life, Michel sets himself very simple rules based on unquestionable data and impregnable logic. And he applies his rules monastically without deviating from them. Here is a simplified view of his technique for lighting sets. For all "ambiant" light. Behind the camera, he sets up a wall of light: several rows of very bright bulbs, evenly spaced out and diffused by a sheet or large span of plastic. This constitutes an illuminated backdrop so that every nook and cranny of the décor will at least be visible. Then he installs the key lights. His golden rule is that each spotlight must correspond to a true light source which would be part of the décor. He insists that things be lit exactly as they would be in the real world. When he arrives on a set, his first question is: "Where would the light come from if this were for real?" Often, he "justifies" his lighting by adding light sources within the image: a window, a lamp, etc... He frequently has the décor altered so that it will correspond to this principle. And when lamps are visible on screen, he makes it his duty to reproduce exactly the type of light they radiate. I have seen him light a scene in which the only light source was a candle. He absolutely had to use two sportlights. All the shadows were therefore cast twice. But you could only see one candle. That was all he needed. He asked a stage-designer to add a second candle. On the other hand, he will never but never use phoney back lighting just to highlight hair or to outline a silhouette. It's just not part of his aesthetic.

As described herein, such a technique might strike one as dull and restrictive: realism at all costs, without imagination. On the contrary, however, it is a question of rigour; a self-imposed moral rule; it's the effort owed the film viewer to ensure that the promised illusion be produced. But from then on, everything becomes a mystery. Michel's images are breathtaking beautiful, and nobody knows how or why.

One day, he replaced a cameraman after two days of filming. For the sake of continuity, he was asked to reshoot the scenes that had already been filmed. Same décor, same actors, same stage direction, same cameras... And his images were as extraordinary, as magical, as the previous cameraman's had been boring. You could call him a magician or a sorcerer who commands the obedience of the elements. The camera is his wand. It tames the sun and recomposes light according to his taste; it glorifies the most humble objects, it captures the cold of winter, it records happiness or solitude.

Michel is a cameraman whose contribution is so important as to be equal to that of a film auteur. But he's not just that. When he wants to, he can also be a film director. And a script writer, while we're at it. He makes up a story and puts it down on paper. He works out the stage direction. He directs the actors. Beginning with La fleur de l'âge and continuing with Entre la mer et l'eau douce, he reached the apogee of his career with Les ordres. An astounding undertaking. Never has a dissident position been so clearly enunciated in Québec cinema or indeed in Canadian cinema. He attacked the ruling regime head on by denouncing its War Measures Act as immoral, unjustified, and shameful. We all know how much trouble Michel had getting the film started. We all know the patience and determination which sustained him during his long wait. Finally, this work is quite unique. For its form, first of all. Once again Michel found the opportunity to untangle for himself the two types of cinema between which he situates himself. The actors address the camera directly. They identify themselves by their real names, as though answering an inquisitor. This unusual stylistic device separates the real from the imaginary, but in a way contrary to what we might expect. The real actors define themselves as makers of illusion (a lie), whereas the story they're telling is immediately true, since it happened in real life. This also implies that we're all incriminated in this affair, the characters, the actors, ourselves, the viewer... all susceptible to arbitrary punishment.

From then on, the author rejects effects in order to abide by the facts. He is so careful not to manipulate the facts that he sometimes eases the horror just to be sure it hasn't been exaggerated. And the horror is sufficiently disgusting on its own. He speaks of justice rather than of scandal. He discussed instead of ranting. He would rather convince than frighten. He doesn't want reason to give in to violence. At the heart of the crisis, he adopts the controlled stance of the strategist rather than the stance of the panicky victim. He wants to formulate his
passion with lucidity and precision rather than with melodramatic effect. In so doing, he takes a
great risk. The risk that we won't pay attention, that we'll lose interest. That does sometimes
happen. But when he does make a mark, it is deep and lasting. These are not passing emotions
which a sigh can efface upon leaving the movie theatre. This film will last. For Québec, it marks
a moment in the history of cinema. For the cinema, it marks a moment in the history of Québec.

And yet, this film has not been sufficiently seen in Québec. Or elsewhere. The fact is well-
known. That only goes to show how necessary it is to make many more like it. On the other
hand, some critics did delight in it. Books were written, many articles... And Michel did receive
the Grand Prize at the Cannes Film Festival. For a year, Michel Brault was officially recognized
as the world's greatest filmmaker. That's something which Québec has also not sufficiently
noticed, which doesn't change the fact that Michel is indeed a prophet in his own country. His
name is quietly becoming the symbol not only of artistic distinction, but also of an attitude, of a
conviction, of a moral stance.

His political convictions are well-known. We should, however, also speak of his social
commitment. We should especially not forget that he was the founder of the first film workers'
union in Québec. For him, the artist is a worker in the socialist sense of the word. Innovating
once again, he shaped this now indispensable instrument of ours: an exclusively Québécois
union, exclusively French-speaking, free of all Canadian, American, or other ties. It began one
night with a directors' meeting at the cinémathèque. The discussion was getting nowhere. The
one action which was indispensable for solving the problems of the moment was so obvious
that no one dared mention it. It was Michel who raised his hand: "I propose the formation of a
Québécois film union." General outburst of laughter. A few wisecracks. "Who are you going to
bargain with: Arthur Rank himself?" That night, Michel got together a list of names. A few days
later, the union was born. A turning point in the evolution of our industry. Michel was the first
president. And he remained so for many years.

And he goes on. He's now diversifying. He has become a producer. Contracts. Well-ordered
and adhered to budgets, columns of numbers, computer print-outs... these are his new
playthings. He produces a television series which is a long Québec chronicle.

Regularly, he brings his invaluable visual contribution to our best feature films. And he who
has never been to university, manages to get in to it through the stage door: he teaches. He
reconnects with the new generations. He closes the circle. He is there. He radiates.

Having said all this, however, the main thing remains. The very essence of Michel Brault is
to be Québécois. This is the passion which underlines his every action, his every work. He will
always have a country to explore, to name, to sing.

(Translated by Paul Attallah)
The moral eye
by Guy Borremans

It was Michel Brault who taught me that a shot angle can have a moral value. Throughout my twenty-four-year career, I have been haunted by the idea set forth by Michel Brault that the camera is a third person and that it is immoral to use a close-up or a hidden camera to film human beings. Having accepted this dogma, I was no longer able to shoot a single shot without hearing Brault's voice echo in me.

He is, in my opinion, the man who has most allied form, that is to say light, and the hidden content of things. Just the other day I was watching Francis Mankiewicz' Les bons débarras (Good Riddance), and even though I thought it contained Brault's worst photography, I nonetheless recognized the man who pushes to the limit. The man who hooks light onto his subject and unhooks it at that moment of intensify when the images either blinds or disappears.

Brault's style is in fact so personal and uses reality so forcefully that it must fit poorly with a careful mise-en-scène. Besides, this film seems to have called on the services of more than one cameraman.

But let's get back to Michel as I perceived him.

I once accused Brault of being an aristocrat; I think the feeling came from a certain sense of unease with the "neatness" of everything he does — his films, his photography seemed to me to be too neat, too short, and almost correlative of a "bourgeois," somewhat puritan view of things; but I've since changed my mind. It was during the golden age; we had achieved everything that could be done with 5.7mm lens. I understood that a choice still had to be made: that movies and creativity still belonged to whoever pushed the button, whatever Kodak may have thought.

In my eyes, Brault had not suffered enough. I know how ridiculous that is. I think I envied him. I remembered the first time I met him at Benoît de Tonnancourt's in 1956. His slightest remark on one of my shots could either destroy me or exalt me. Oddly enough, I never managed to break down the barrier which seemed to exist between us, though I would have loved to dearly.

And it was Brault again who made a camera work like no one else had ever dared. So much so that I remembered one of his films in which it never settles on anything. He had surely reached one of the limits of this form. Yet each of his experiments marked me, ricocheted on my eyes, filled me with ease. I would have liked him to know but was always afraid to tell him face to face. Something about his competitive spirit, his unselfconsciousness prevented me. It was while we were filming Pour la suite du monde and La France révisité that we confronted one another over one of those stupid problems that the National Film Board creates so easily. The damned Board's bureaucracy, Hubert Aquin's infinitely fertile creativity, the intermittent electricity strikes in France, as well as my own immaturity, it must be said, conspired to have us make a film in France, side by side, without ever being together. At the time, I thought it impossible to cohabitate at the level of images and perceptions of France in the 1960's. It nonetheless produced a somewhat bizarre film, La France révisée, which was far from being one of his best. As for myself, I was beginning to love and to hate Hubert Aquin and to enter into open rebellion against the NFB.

I also remember our "flairs" at the time. Michel would leap with joy when watching some rushes if a luminous source struck an object at an acute angle thereby creating a moving and ghostly image — or when an Arri "S" lens mount was rotated during filming, thereby creating a sort of optical effect which allowed in-camera editing — much to the displeasure of Denis Gilson and other bis-shots of the NFB "Camera Department" (in English in original).

What always struck me about Michel, and what was always a great lesson to all of us, was Michel's unbelievable autonomy with the camera. Brault was a one man orchestra — lovingly and respectfully stuck on reality — who always invented cinema, with the camera in his hands, hundred foot roll per hundred foot roll. And always but always in BLACK AND WHITE.
Many people remember that cinema fondly. A craftsman's cinema in which every shot was thought out and finicked over — in which the long take (plan-séquence) was a happy accident — in which "reality," "truth" were the supreme masters. We found out since then why cinema vérité was renamed direct cinema. It is, however, the rare honesty of a man like Michel Brault which allowed for this undertaking and, paradoxically, it was his desire to get ever closer (to reality) which made us understand just how eternally elastic reality is: a soft wall into which the camera plunges, contrary to Magritte's locomotive.

(Translated by Paul Attallah)

Editor's Note:
The following section on Michel Brault is printed with the permission of La Cinémathèque Québécoise. It originally appeared in Copie Zéro no. 5 and has been translated by Paul Attallah and Will Straw. There are a number of films and individuals mentioned in the dossier whom some of our readers will not have had access to. Many of the films are available through the National Film Board of Canada. Michel Brault has been making documentary films since the early 1950's and is well known in France and Québec. He is one of the founders of cinema vérité in Québec and has had a profound influence on the documentary film movement. Along with Pierre Perrault and Claude Jutra he is perhaps one of the most important filmmakers who has ever come out of Québec. We would be glad to supplement any of the information in this section. Should any of our readers want to use Brault's films in conjunction with the dossier we have printed the section up separately and can make them available at bulk rates. R.B.
Film Reader

An annual of film scholarship

Film Reader 4

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CONFLICT OF INTERPRETATIONS
A SPECIAL SECTION ON
RED RIVER BY HOWARD HAWKS
“The Chisolm Trail” — Ten million cattle and one million horses had been driven its length from Texas to waiting markets; its end was the end of a splendid chapter in the history of the cattle industry, the end of an economic system and the end of the cowboy as a craftsman and gentleman. Thereafter he was merely an employee of a “corporation operating for profit.” (Douglas Branch. The Cowboy and his Interpreters, New York, 1926.)

The following articles are the result of a seminar on “Semiotics and Film” held at Brown University in 1978 for faculty from various parts of the United States and Canada. Inspired by the work done on Young Mr. Lincoln by the editors of Cahiers du Cinema, some of the members of the seminar decided to collaborate on a similar project, and chose as their subject Howard Hawks’ Red River (1947). While some of the original members of the group were unable to complete the project, their contributions to the discussions were invaluable. The group included Lawrence Benequist, Margaret Fete, William Fowkes, James Hauser, and Michael Silverman.

Initially we divided the film into lexia, or blocks of signification, on the basis of Roland Barthes’ analysis in S/Z. Like Barthes, we arranged them in the order in which they appeared in the film, and we thought about setting up a network of inter-related codes. Each lexia would be interpreted in terms of the codes operating simultaneously. Although we abandoned the simultaneous interpretation of codes, the identifying of the lexia was an important part of our critical process. (N.B. The pattern of the lexia can be seen in the middle column of the chart at the end of the Benequist article.) We were forced to decide which were the determining moments in the film and we based our discussion of our eventual critical models on them. However, an issue of The Drama Review (September, 1978 — Analysis issue) devoted to different modes of criticism of the same work provided us with a new perspective on our project. We decided to test different critical models on Red River to show how the imposition of different models elicits different kinds of information about the same text and different interpretations of it. No hierarchy of models was intended. Instead we found that each model provided fruitful in-
sights. It foregrounded certain aspects while other aspects remained latent, but which could become relevant if another critical model were applied.

The concept behind this project becomes particularly important in light of what is occurring in various fields today. Metacriticism, or the analysis and questioning of critical models, has recently produced some interesting works. Michel Foucault and Yuri Lotman have examined various cultural models as sign systems or epistemes, each of which imposes a grid upon the object of study. This model both limits and provides insights into the various kinds of information about the subject which another model would not provide. Thomas Kuhn has exhaustively studied the relative nature of various scientific models. The structuralist model as employed in anthropology and literature is now being attacked for its suppression of certain aspects of the analysed material which the metacritics feel are relevant and should be part of the overall “critical” model. In Movies and Methods Bill Nichols provides an anthology of articles representing a vast spectrum of models of film criticism, and Brian Henderson in his A Critique of Film Theory shows the advantages and disadvantages of the critical strategies of Eisenstein, Bazin, and Metz. While we might agree that any model is limited as to the problems it examines and the facets of the material it is examining, the positive aspect of models must also be emphasized. Through their very focusing and highlighting of only certain aspects of a work, we are able to get a clearer understanding of the role and relationship of these aspects to the work as a whole. By isolating certain problems and asking a directed set of questions, the model allows us to then examine them in more depth.

Red River is a rich and complex work, and we have learned a lot about the nature of a work of art and the nature of criticism through our work on this film. In his study on the Western, John Cawelti has given a general overview of possible models in examining the Western, including the Marxian, Freudian, and Game-theory approach. In our study we are experimenting with what happens when various models are applied to the same filmic text. While we hope this will provide a number of different ways of looking at this particular film, we also would like to suggest this as a possible approach by others who would like to do a similar examination of other films and other genres.

Notes

1. See, for example: Raymond Firth, Symbols: Public and Private (Ithaca, 1973); Clifford Geertz, Interpretation of Cultures (N.Y., 1973) and Malcolm Crick, Explorations in Language and Meaning (N.Y., 1976) on anthropological models; Jonathan Culler, Structuralist Poetics (Ithaca, 1975) and Robert Scholes, Structuralism in Literature (New Haven, 1974) on structuralism in literature, Jacques Barzun, Clio and the Doctors (Chicago, 1974) on models in historiography; Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago, 1970) on scientific models, Michel Foucault, The Order of Things (N.Y., 1973) and Yuri Lotman, Analysis of the Poetic Text (Ann Arbor, 1976), on the general role of models in culture and epistemology.
Before reading the articles analysing *Red River* it would be useful to make a brief summary of the major differences between the story on which the film is based and the film itself. The story appeared in serial form in December, 1946 and January, 1947 in *Saturday Evening Post* and was written by Borden Chase, one of the screenwriters for the film. The comparison will highlight the different motifs and themes in each work.

The titles of the works immediately points up a difference. The film is called “Red River” while the story is entitled “The Chisholm Trail.” The film’s title emphasizes the symbolic value of the river, a crossing point in one’s life which signifies a major change. In the beginning of the film Dunson and Groot come to the Red River just after he has made his decision to leave the group and found his own ranch. In the written tale only the Rio Grande is mentioned as the place near where Duson stops to finally settle down. The crossing of the Red River in the middle of the written narrative, then, becomes just another exciting episode. In the film as they come to the Red River, there is a close-up of Matt and Dunson. Matt says they had a smaller herd the last time they crossed, and Dunson says, “Yes, two cows and a bull.” This becomes a symbolic moment in their lives, and the beautiful passage of the river crossing takes on mythic meaning.

In Chase’s story, beneath the title in bold letters is written: “A hard and lawless cattle king, in a hard and lawless country.” This immediately removes the ambiguity and complexity of Dunson’s character. In the film he firmly believes he is acting according to law, even if it is his own. His flaw is that for him abstract law is above human need and sympathy. In the story he knows no law.

Another major difference is that in the story we learn that Dunson is from England. At several points his behavior is explained in these terms. For example, when Teeler complains about the bad food, Dunson refuses to listen to him. Teeler says, “What is it you want?” Dunson replies, “The obedience I learned as a boy aboard a British man-o-war.”

The difference between contract and compact is not as clear in the story. As Robert Sklar points out, Dunson justifies his leaving the wagon train by the fact he has not signed a contract. Nothing to this effect occurs in the story. Dunson just leaves because he wants to settle on his own land. Moreover, it was Hawks who inserted the scene into the film where much is made of the men signing the contract. Dunson makes it clear that no one need sign, but once they have, they must make the whole drive. The only place where he says something similar in the story is when Cherry wants to join his men, and Dunson tells him, “One thing more. A man who signs for this drive finishes the drive. No quitting along the way.”

When Dunson is faced with Don Diego’s men in the story and they tell him he is trying to take over another man’s land, he provides no justification, just shoots. In the film he says since Don Diego took it away illegally from the Indians, he has the same right to the property as Don Diego. This takes place after another incident which Hawks inserted into the film and which becomes an important theme of the film. Dunson draws the symbol of the brand in the sand which he will use at his ranch. It has two lines for the Red River and a “D” for Dunson. He says to Matt, “I'll put an 'M' on it when you earn it.” And Matt does earn it. This marks the beginning of an initiation ritual, and Matt learns the ways of the cowboy from Dunson. But ironically it is Matt who must initiate Dunson into certain truths about mercy and comradeship.

The role of Groot is minimal in Chase’s story. We first hear of him after the drive has begun. He is the cook, only appearing intermittently throughout the text. In the story he is Dunson’s sidekick, and acts as an important commentary on the actions of both Dunson and Matt.
The role of women is entirely different in the two works. One of the major themes of the film is that Dunson has rejected the only woman in his life, and thereby has rejected the emotional, human side of himself. When Matt will marry Tess at the end she fulfills the role Fen was not allowed to. In Chase’s story the character of Fen does not exist. Tess is somewhat different in the story and film. In the latter she is a Hawksian woman in the sense that she is independent and tough, but not nasty and cynical as she is in the story. In the story she is totally cynical at the beginning and will marry whoever has the most money. She is more or less the property of Clark Donegal, who shoots any man who gets near her. We see her early in Chase’s story, in a bar in Memphis, where Matt stops in on his way back to the ranch after the war. She becomes part of an extensive subplot in which we watch her change from a hard woman to one who realizes love is more important than wealth. Although she has contracted to marry Dunson for the empire he will give her, she runs to warn Matt that he should leave Abilene before Dunson arrives. She says, “I love you... I’ve found that love is giving, not taking.” At the end of the film she plays the important role intercessor between the two men. In the story the reconciliation takes place strictly between the men themselves.

The relationship between Matt and Cherry is more developed in Chase’s story. While there are hints that their rivalry will explode in the film, it never does, due to Hawks’ desire to remove any major role of John Ireland in the film after Ireland tried to take Joanne Dru away from him. In the story the initial tension between Matt & Cherry finally culminates in their rivalry over Tess. Cherry kills Donegal, and when Matt sends Tess away, Cherry goes with her, knowing how much Matt cares for her. Then he learns he will only have him if he is rich, he decides to steal the herd from Matt. Instead Dunson arrives. Tess’ love for Matt is shown indirectly when she saves Dunson’s life as she pushes Cherry’s elbow in his attempt to kill Dunson. Cherry is fatally wounded instead. In the film Cherry remains Matt’s friendly rival until the end. No relationship is ever formed between him and Tess. And Cherry tries to kill Dunson at the end out of his friendship for Matt.

In the film it is implicit that Matt takes over the herd because he has the interests of the group in mind. Dunson says it is a communal herd and they must go to where he is sure there is a railroad. He thus also, in his own mind, seems to be acting in the interests of the community. In the story this episode is interpreted slightly differently. Dunson sees the herd now as his own. Matt says, “I don’t figure it’s your herd. Not yours alone. It’s something that belongs to Texas — to every cattleman who’s starving at home while a market waits in the north.” Dunson answers, “That’s my herd.” Matt replies, “This herd belongs to the people of Texas.”

Another important difference is in the treatment of the businessmen in Abilene. In the film the dealer is almost a father figure, kindly, and not only does not try to cheat Matt, but gives him more than he ever dreamed of getting. In the story, however, Chase provides the following characterization:

Call them traders, if you will. Call them gamblers, profiteers, robber barons of another century, call them any name that suits your mind, but without them there would have been no railroad, no Abilene, no stockyards at the end of the rack... Rob, plunder and steal, yes, they did all of these things. And more. But they were there on the Kansas plain when the first great herd drifted up from Texas. And they laid their cash on the line.

The visual motif of the bracelet was introduced by Hawks and it became the symbol of the emotional side Dunson is trying to suppress. It was given to him by his mother, he gives it to Fen, and then to Matt, and it finally ends up with Tess. It is a unifying image and totally Chase’s story.

The end of each of the works is different. By the time Dunson gets to Matt, he has been fatally wounded by Cherry in a previous episode. As in the film, Matt also will not defend himself in the story. But here Dunson finally collapses, and the two are reconciled without the aid or interference of Tess. In the story, Dunson has the possibility of recovering in Abilene, but he chooses instead to make the trip back to Texas so he can die there. The close feeling Matt still carries for Dunson is expressed in an understated manner. Dunson asks them to drive faster, and Tess replies, “He won’t drive faster. He wants you to live.”

Notes
The Mythic Mode: Archetypal Criticism and Red River

by Roberta Reeder

General Theory

In the 1950s, under the influence of Northrop Frye, archetypal analysis became one of the most important modes of literary criticism. While Carl Jung had earlier studied archetypes and myths for their psychological value, Frye examined the process through which different cultural attitudes were conveyed in literary traditions through repeated patterns. Under the influence of these ideas, dissertations, symposiums, and articles were written expanding and refining this theory. In the 1960s when French Structuralism and the earlier work by the Prague Structuralists became popular, Frye’s method was considered one type in a general Structuralist approach.

One of the reasons this mode of criticism might be particularly fruitful in examining Hawks’ Red River is that the film marks an important development in the Western, when major myths and archetypes were being modified and re-examined to convey meanings that were different from those of the pre-WWII films. The concepts of both Jung and Frye will be applied for the insights they will provide into this film.

Generally this method examines a corpus of cultural artifacts, looking for repeated patterns which embody important values. Crosscultural symbolic structures may be found which provide data for establishing universals operating within human culture as a whole. Basic archetypes may be studied within the confines of a single culture, and their development and modification in different periods examined. But the method is not very meaningful if the end result is a mere catalogue. It becomes interesting when it asks such questions as why one mythic pattern has been selected rather than another; why a myth is interpreted in a particular way in a work or art and how this reflects changing values in a culture or in an individual artist; how the formal treatment of an archetype is integral to a specific interpretation of it, etc...

An archetype functions successfully if it has both readily accessible associations and the possibility of being modified to convey related but different ideas. An example is the death-resurrection pattern employed in late nineteenth-century Russian culture. Among the Russian peasants it manifested itself in the ritual of the burying of the god during Carnival, which guaranteed his resurrection in the form of a good harvest. At the same time Russian Symbolists from the upper classes used the same archetype, embodying it in various forms of apocalyptic imagery to convey their belief in the death of the rotting world around them and the resurrection of a beatific utopia to replace it.

Jung discussed the relationship between the archetype and the individual interpretation of it. He posits various levels of mind. On the conscious level logical reasoning takes place. The unconscious consists of two levels: 1) a reservoir of collective archetypes; 2) the personal unconscious in which the archetypes are given individual expression. When a situation occurs in a culture’s or individual’s experience, the universal archetypes become activated within the personal unconscious. Fairy tales are examples of the personal conscious giving expression to a collective archetype such as the guest. The same image, such as the snake, may embody different archetypes such as the temptation to evil or healing impurities. Both the animus, the conscious, rational part of the mind, and the anima, the unconscious, intuitive aspect, must operate in harmony in order for the individual or the culture to function successfully.

Frye’s theory of archetypes is interested in different problems. In his analysis of literature, Frye identifies certain generic patterns that are repeated. He uses different types of categorizations to convey how these patterns operate. In his theory of modes, fictions are defined according to the hero’s power of action. If the hero is divine, the story is a myth in the common sense of a story about a god. If superior in degree to other men and his environment, the mode is romance. The leader, the hero superior to other men but not his environment, belongs to the high mimetic, typical of epic and tragedy. If he is one of us, we are dealing with the low mimetic, and if interior, the hero belongs to the ironic mode. In turn Frye sets up four types of mythos — comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony. Conflict is the archetypal theme of romance; catastrophe the theme of tragedy; absence of heroism, a state of chaos and anarchy, is the archetypal theme of irony; and a newborn society is the archetypal theme of comedy. Within each mythos are further categories such as the human world, the animal world, and the mineral world. In myth we can have a sun-god; in romance we may have a person significantly associated with the sun. Thus basic archetypes undergo displacement in imagery as they move from one category to the next.
Myth and the Western

One of the major controversies implicit in discussions of the Old Western and the New Western of the post WWII period is whether the former embodied myths which have broken down and have been replaced by historical documentation of the real West, or whether they have been replaced by new myths representing new conceptualizations of human nature, of the relationship between man and his environment. In discussing Westerns in general, Jim Kitses refers to Frye's theory and concludes they incorporate “elements of displaced myth on a scale that can render them more prominent than in most art.” He emphasizes that there is no single myth inherent in the Western, but archetypal patterns derived from various myths are integrated into an overlaying historical theme. The same image may be interpreted differently depending on the myth chosen. In a version of the Primitivistic myth, for example, the Indian is the Noble Savage; in Civilization-Overcoming-Nature myths, however, he functions as a symbol of a hostile force to be overcome. The theoretical model Kitses proposes is that the Western is “a varied and flexible structure, a thematically fertile and ambiguous world of historical material shot through with archetypal elements which are themselves ever in flux.”

John Cawelti also discusses the relation between myth and the patterns associated with the Western. Myths are universal patterns such as the hero’s quest, which may be embodied in more specific formulas such as the Western which has specific settings, characters, and types of action. Like religious ritual in more homogeneous cultures, the Western reaffirms primary cultural values. But these values may change, and like Kitses, he emphasizes that within the convention of the formula innovations may occur which reflect the changing values. Although he does not discuss the problem explicitly, Cawelti does not see the New Western as a representation of historical reality. He says, “As the western has always done, these new formulas project the tensions and concerns of the present into the legendary past in order to seek in the imagination some kind of resolution or acceptance of conflicts of value and feeling which cannot be solved in the present” (italics mine).

Instead of seeing the New Western as a manifestation of the flexibility of the genre, many critics see it as a symptom of its demise. It is not new myths that are being conveyed through the formula, but documentary representations of the true West. Let us first examine this theoretical problem and then see how Red River resolves it.

Different underlying myths have been proposed for the Old Western. George Fenin and William Everson make an explicit comparison between the Western and the Olympian world; they see it as a “symbiotic relationship of Hellenic thought and Yankee dynamism”:

The cowboy on horseback shapes into the fabulous Centaurus, guardian of a newly acquired legend; the woman... becomes a sort of Minerva, dispensing wisdom, often moral principles... Marshal Wyatt Earp's exploits come strikingly close to the labors of Hercules... and the “Remember the Alamo!” reminds us of Thermopylae.

André Bazin suggests the Manichean myth of the opposition of powers of light and darkness integrated with the myth of the imposition of order on chaos. An interpretation of the Old Western often repeated is that of Peter Homans who sees the Puritan myth as basic: the hero manifests inner control, but his act of violence in overcoming the villain permits him to destroy while appearing to save. Others see the Western as embodying the myth of civilization overcoming nature, or on the contrary, civilized man moving to the unknownd thereby coming to know himself. James Folsom provides a more social interpretation, saying that the Western is an example of a myth about an alternative to America’s destiny to become a great capitalist power. These myths have most in common with Frye’s mythos of the romance. In these Westerns adventures occur in which the hero fulfills his task and overcomes the forces of darkness.

The horrors of war experienced during WWII is most often offered as a reason for the change in the Western. Laurence Kitchen says "It would be remarkable if American optimism, including an innocent belief in the western myth, had survived it. American art has been concerned ever since with personal, rather than national, identity and a desperate cynicism had
been recurrent... big battles had dwarfed the frontier skirmishes and drawn the western’s teeth."17 Whatever the reasons for the change, it is clear the values embodied in the Western underwent a dramatic transformation. Two basic patterns emerge: in one the heroes are marked by moral ambiguity, and violence becomes a typical mode of action; in the other the hero represents a set of positive moral values, but lives in a universe where the community is weak and corrupt, and he becomes a Don Quixote figure defending an outmoded way of life. Cawelti suggests a variation on these patterns, “Because society is violent and corrupt, the only solution lies in the private action of a good leader who is able to overcome the outlaw’s evil aggression and society’s own endemic violence and corruption by superior ruthlessness and power of his own.”18 In essence, then, the emphasis in the New Western, as French says, is not upon victory but losing, that to remain true to oneself will almost invariably result in defeat.19

The problem arises when critics analyse these New Westerns not as embodying new myths, but as destroying the old ones in the name of “truth” and “history.” Richard Whitehall says the passing of Sir Galahad is not to be regretted, for “he had begun to stagnate in his interminable myth.” John Barsness suggests that the Old Western cannot be judged by historical standards and cites Misfits (1961) as an example of the New Western which supposedly reflects what the West “was really like.” It is the very belief in the cowboy myth that causes the hero’s downfall. “The West he believes in is not dead but a phantom, which never existed in the minds of men like him... This is the first film to recognize an implicit need to treat the West in other than mythic pattern”20 (italics mine). Lewis Beale asserts that “We must remember the West was not settled by men one would be proud of, but by drifters, malcontents. This is the version that gives more with historical fact than the unblemished purity of a Ken Maynard.”21

What has happened in Frye’s terms is that the Tragic mythos, where the hero has different values from that of his environment, and the Ironic mythos where the hero is inferior to us have become the dominant modes. But certainly they are as much fictions as the Romance. They may interpret traditional mythic patterns differently and embody a different view of human nature from the Romance, but they are no more closer to reality. Like Mallory’s version of Camelot where he exposes the cracks in the armor and Chaucer’s transmogrification of the Trojan War, a mode is chosen which embody myths specifically interpreted to convey changing attitudes toward man’s nature and his relationship to his environment.

The arguments presented by Russian Formalists in the 1920s against folklorists who sought historical prototypes for heroes of the Russian epic are relevant here. A.P. Skafytymov’s book is devoted to the idea that any relation of a fictional mode to a historical prototype is usually minimal. The hero’s role and attributes within a given text are determined by the artistic function he performs rather than by the historical prototype he represents.22 Recent Soviet semiotics, particularly the works of Yuri Lotman, uses the concept of a model to convey the relationship between a work of art and what it signifies. “Art reproduces only certain aspects of reality. Reproduction is never complete. We learn what the artist considers to be the most important about the object.”23 Thus the model the New Western imposes on the “reality of the West” conveys what the filmmaker thinks is relevant about his subject. According to Sergey Eisenstein, there is no such thing as objective cinema. “In film, by selection of treatment, on the basis of montage, he recuts reality... this is what directing really is.”24 And even in documentary, such as the films of Dziga Vertov, the pieces of reality recorded on film are edited through montage in such a way as to express the attitudes of the filmmaker toward this reality.

Kitchen says the Western has written its own epitaph, and its day as a perpetrator of misinformation is over.25 But similar views on the tragedy were being espoused in regard to Euripides’ treatment of the genre. He was breaking many of the canons and embodying radically cynical views of the noble Greeks within the structure of the old myths. Somehow this view was supposed to be closer to historical fact. However, as Kitto points out, Euripides, was actually creating an un-Aristotelian tragedy conveying a different view of human nature. In his works society is seen as victims of irrational forces, whereas, in Euripides, the human race inflicts suffering upon itself through its follies and wickenes.26 His version of Greek history is not necessarily any closer to objective truth than that of his predecessors. Moreover, his modifications of the myths and of the genre did not mark the demise of tragedy, but rather showed its resiliency to change to meet the needs of the artist and his society.
We should also remember there was a development in the literary version of the Western analogous to the one in film. The heroes of dime novels, often former outlaws and as morally ambiguous as the New Western film heroes, were just as stereotyped as earlier heroes stemming from the Byronic myths, such as the Fenimore Cooper heroes, where the Myth of the Garden appears — the frontier as a garden where a closeness to nature bred simplicity and truthfulness.27

In his discussion of three of the great directors of the New Western, Mann, Boeticcher, and Pekcinpah, Kitses shows their films to be fictional embodiments of a vision of man, and not documentaries providing historical truths. Mann's works are the most mythic, where the hero is a scapegoat, a Job-like hero who does not deserve the violence of which he is the victim. However, Boeticcher's frontier also has little to do with historical fact. "The West is a world, the heroes confronted with existential choices wholly abstract... Nothing lasts, what matters is 'living the way a man should.'"28 While Peckinpah explodes the myths of the Old Western of the noble savage and noble white hero, he also is more interested in conveying his view of human nature through the Western formula than in presenting historical facts. In his films he says that we must recognize and creatively channel the irrational aspect of our nature or it will become distorted and destroy us. The New Western thus embodied myths different from that of the Old Western, conveying "the emotions, fears, and psychosis of modern man"29 but they are myths nevertheless. Perhaps the "real West" was neither gloriously noble nor vulgar and mean, but was as Fenin and Eversion suggest, "most Western communities were peaceful and monotonous, heroic only in their dedication to the building of a new empire."30

III Archetypal Patterns in Red River

Cawelti says that in the Western the culturally significant phenomenon is not the individual work, but the formula "by which more or less anonymous producers turn out individual novels or films."31 Yet the auteur theory stresses the uniqueness of a director like Hawks who conveys a set of thematic motifs and stylistic techniques that gives a special imprint to his work when he adopts a formula like the Western.32

Some critics concentrate only on Hawks' style in Red River and ignore any mythical or ideological content. Bazin says Hawks has made a genuine Western based on old spectacle themes "without distracting our attention with a social thesis." Barbara Bernstein says one should measure a Hawks film not by its profundity, but by its great action sequences (such as the stampede and the river crossing), for it is not for great ideas but for great experiences that we go to the movies. She sees herself as defending American films when she says, "If we can't see the beauty and profundity in a perfect action sequence, what do we love American movies for?"33

On the contrary, it is the ideas in Red River and the way Hawks employs archetypal patterns to convey them that make the film so important in the history of the Western. Cawelti correctly points out that this film is not yet typical of the New Western. It still embodies a rejection of violence and a concern for the welfare of others.34 Nevertheless it marks a major modification of the Western formula. For it is no longer in the mythos of Romance, but of Tragedy, despite its happy ending. It is about a man who is flawed in the Greek sense of the tragic hero, a man consumed by the need for Law rather than Mercy, who commits hubris by taking on the role of Lawmaker, and who nearly destroys himself and others through his obsession. He is thus different from both the hero of the New Western who is either better than the society which he is defending or, as in the Ironic mythos, worse than they are.

The basic, underlying themes in the film are typical of Hawks' works as a whole. Robin Wood presents them succinctly:

_Hawks' group always has a leader, but he is more a benevolent father-figure... than a dictator... When he becomes a dictator, as in Red River the group eschews him. He is always a natural leader, neither elected nor imposed, holding his position purely because he embodies the Hawksian maturity more completely than anybody else... Despite the presence of this leader-figure, one's chief impression is of a society without a government: the laws are natural laws that are learn through experience... not commandments imposed from on high._35
Another important interpretation is provided by Robert Sklar. He sees it as a film permeated by ideology reflecting the central issues of American economic expansion after World War II. "It is a film about the territorial expansion of one society by the usurpation of land from others, and the consequences arising therefrom." The relations among the group and the social compact that binds them together are for the common purpose of increasing their wealth in land and cattle. While this is one of the major themes, we will see other ideas as well conveyed through the way in which Hawks employs traditional archetypes.

The of the film, *Red River*, immediately brings to mind the traditional archetypal role of the river as a symbol of transition from one state to another. In folklore the bridge across a river represents the passage from maidenhood to matronhood in wedding laments, and from life to death in funeral laments. In *The Aeneid* Charon ferries Aeneas across the rivers of Acheron and the Styx as Aeneus goes to the Underworld to achieve insight into his destiny. Dante uses the same imagery in the *Inferno* to convey the protagonist's passage from darkness to enlightenment. In the film Dunson and Matt cross the river to found the great ranch, but it is when Dunson comes back to it that it marks the crossing into the trials he must endure and the truths he must learn before his journey is over. Like the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, he and his men face trials and tribulations in the desert before them. And like Moses, Dunson commits hubris by assuming he is the Law. Fate forgives him at the end as he himself learns lessons of forgiveness and mercy.

In the film Hawks often plays with our expectations of traditional conventions. The film begins as a typical epic, for as the titles tell us at the beginning, it is about an event important in the nation’s history, the first run on the Chisholm Trail. The film begins as a quest by Dunson, the noble hero, to found an empire and to find a trail which will get the cattle from Texas to the north so ranch owners can get paid and so people can eat. In the *Aeneid* there is no ambiguity about the role an emotional relationship may play in the epic hero's life. He must deny such a relationship if he is finally to achieve his task. While the long passage of Aeneas' farewell and Dido's suicide is profound and touching, there is no question that Aeneas must take heed of Mercury's warning that he has a "higher destiny" to fulfill. In lines 441-449 Dido's pleas for him to remain with her are compared to a wintry wind assailing a stalwart oak whose head is in the heavens and roots as deep as Hades. Reason overcomes emotion and the oak remains firm: "His great heart thrilled through and through with the pain of it; Resolute, though, was his mind; unavailingly rolled her tears." In *Red River*, however, the opposite is true. One of the main themes of the film is that the feminine principle is necessary to the accomplishment of the epic task. To convey this Hawks turns to the archetypal motif of the Double. This pattern was common in Euripidean tragedy and become dominant in nineteenth-century literature under the influence of E.T.A. Hoffmann. In Greek plays such as *The Bacchae* total suppression of either the emotional or rational side of man leads to destruction. In Hoffmann the pattern was mostly used to convey the tragedy of the artist who was thrust into an either/or situation — either he could heed his rational side and accept the comfort and security of a role in the bourgeois world, or he could heed his intuitive side and create great works at the price of insecurity and alienation from his society. Edgar Allan Poe developed this motif in his own stories, and Dostoyevsky employed it for conveying ideas of a more philosophical nature, of man torn between the absolute law of God and the man-made law of the Superman. In Jung this archetypal pattern is basic to his discussions. As mentioned earlier, the animus/anima relationship of the conscious and unconscious must work in harmony for the human being to function normally. If one or the other aspect is suppressed, energy is built up and a distorted version of this aspect acts in a destructive manner.

Without denying the role of the archetype of the Double for conveying the theme of empire,
we can also interpret it as a structure within which the traditional *macho* hero of the Western recognizes and accepts the anima side of his nature and becomes not less, but more complete a man. Thus the film is also questioning the nature of the hero stereotype in the Western formula. The film, then, on another level is the Double's path toward self-knowledge, and a reevaluation of the more traditional hero dominated by total reason and restraint, afraid that emotional expression is a symptom of weakness and vulnerability. And it is Duncan's surrogate son, Matt, who teaches him to have this new vision of himself and the other men in his group. Thus rejecting Fen, the anima side of his nature is suppressed, and his gift to her of the bracelet is a symbolic act in which Dunson gives Fen his anima side for safekeeping. But this talisman appears sooner than he expects when he sees it on the Indian's wrist whom he kills soon after Fen's wagon train has been attacked. It serves as a continual reminder throughout the film of the emotional side of himself he desires to suppress. His gift of the bracelet to Matt marks another symbolic gesture identifying Matt with his anima. Throughout the film Dunson tries to increasingly exercise his will over Matt, and although Matt seems passive and flexible, through constant pressure he finally rebels.

Matt's rebellion marks another reinterpretation of a conventional archetypal pattern, the initiation. Initiation rituals are one of the rites of passage from one state to the next and take on many forms. The initiation may be into a religious order, an occupational guild, or a secret society. The initiation in *Red River*, however, is analogous to the puberty rituals described by Van Gennep and Frazer, where the ritual marks the passage from boyhood to manhood. It usually consists of a trial period during which the subject must pass some tests. When Dunson first finds Matt he tells him of his dream to found a ranch. To brand the bull and the cow he creates a symbol with a D plus two lines for the Red River. Matt complains there is no “M” for Matthew, but Dunson says, “I'll put an M on it when you earn it.” “I'll earn it” is Matt's reply. And in the fourteen years that pass between this shot and the point where Matt returns from the Civil War, Matt has been initiated into the external exigencies of cowboy life — to ride, shoot, and brand. In this way the film is following the conventional treatment of the initiation pattern in the Western as French discusses it:

_The western assumes children have a lot to learn from elders and little to teach them... that a man must prove himself in a variety of rituals before he can take his place in adult society. Faced with a child, he feels obliged to pass on what he knows about life, which frequently comes down to matters of handling guns, women, cattle and drink._

But something important happens to this archetype in the film. For while Dunson may be able to teach Matt about shooting and branding, it is Matt who finally initiates Dunson into self-knowledge, and teaches him how to integrate the emotional anima side of his nature into his total personality. He does this at the risk of his life, for when Matt takes over the drive, Dunson tells him, “You’re soft, you should have killed me, because now I’m going to kill. Everyday you turn around “I'll be there;” and he does it in spite of the love and respect he has for this man. But Matt sees what Dunson does not despite his greater age and experience, that mercy and grace are higher values than the Law.

It is in their struggle that two other traditional archetypes become manifest, the Son-Overcomes-Father and takes his place, and its interpretation within the mythical pattern of Old Testament God of Law and New Testament God of mercy. Marsden explores the latter myth within the Western formula. Although he concludes his article with the idea that the Western hero was most successful as Sagebrush Savior when he combined the most useful qualities of the God of the Old Testament and Christ of the New, generally a loving and merciful Christ figure could not survive in the Great American Desert as portrayed in film. “The lawlessness of the frontier required a strong sense of divine justice untempered with mercy.” This can be interpreted as a carryover from the theme in Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales, when the Judge, in sentencing Leatherstocking for killing a deer, says, “Try to remember, Elizabeth, that the laws alone remove us from the condition of the savages.”

Sklar discusses this aspect of the film in terms of contract and compact. A contract is handed down from above and enforceable by law. A compact is a tacit community of shared goals enforceable by moral or social suasion. Dunson believes in contract. Dunson did not
sign anything, so he has the right by law to leave the wagon train, even though it is clear the group needs him and it is a violation of compact. When men show signs of weakness they break the contract by trying to leave, but Dunson kills them, in the name of the Law. He finally becomes victim to his own abstract rules. While the group is willing to exchange compact for contract and go to Abilene, an easier destination to reach than Missouri, Dunson is conservative, unwilling to take chances even if it means saving the morale and alleviating the exhaustion of the group.

It is at this point that the archetype of the father/son conflict is activated. Until then Matt consciously tries to avoid hearing what the men are saying about Dunson, and to avoid a direct confrontation on the issue. But when Dunson is about to kill men a second time for breaking the contract, Matt begins Dunson’s initiation into the knowledge of mercy and takes over his role as leader. Cronus ate his children to avert the oracle that he would be supplanted by one of his children, but Zeus overcomes him and punishes him. In Hyperion Keats employs this archetype to convey a idea similar to the theme in Red River. Hyperion is a Titan whose rule is based on brute force. He is overcome by the younger Apollo, who has “knowledge enormous” and whose power over song embodies the humanising influence of sympathy and suffering.44 In the film, however, Dunson accepts rather than rejects Matt’s humanising influence and in the end his insights into human nature leads to reconciliation rather than destruction.

Matt also must achieve individuation. While Sklar sees him as androgynous, perhaps instead he is achieving integration through the course of the film. While the anima side of him becomes clear in the contrast of his behavior to that of Dunson’s, he also has learned from Dunson the toughness that it takes to be a leader, and he passes the masculine initiation rites of being able to shoot and fight well. Millay’s seduction of him marks another passage in his development toward this end.

Millay has several things in common with female archetypes. Like Dante’s Beatrice and the Eternal Feminine figures of Romanticism and Symbolism, she provides man with a view of what he might become, but as in other artistic embodiments, she can only point to possibilities. The hero himself must freely choose to accept or reject them. Millay also resembles the female as Intercessor between the forgiver and those who need to be forgiven. It is she who finally reconciles father and son at the end, which will be discussed below.

Millay is interpreted as a typical Hawksian female, with the “masculine” virtues of honesty and courage which makes her acceptable to the hero.45 Millay can, indeed, shoot and smoke and endure hardships as well as the men. But perhaps toughness and a strong will are not masculine virtues, but the animus side of the female expressing itself. For woman just as man must integrate both sides of her personality. The passive woman ruled by emotion alone is no more positive in Jungian terms than the equally distorted version of the animus embodied by a male hero unwilling to accept his emotional side. Because of her complexity, Millay represents a new development in the female stereotype of the Western. Prostitutes in the Old Western are either totally bad or goldenhearted friends of the hero. But they never end up marrying him. Yet it is Millay who is very willing to exchange her role of whore for that of wife and Dunson tells Matt at the end to marry her. This ambiguity in female characters is developed much further in the New Western.

The pattern of fratricide, expressed mythically in the Cain and Abel story, and historically through the numerous stories of brother-killing in European chronicles, was originally going to be an important theme in Red River. However, extratextual reasons intervened and it was never allowed to play itself out. As Borden Chase tells it, Hawks punished John Ireland for trying to take Joanne Dru away from him. As a result the character of Cherry was drastically modified.

The tension between Matt and Cherry is apparent at their initial meeting, when Matt is reluctant to have Cherry join Dunson’s group. Their shooting match would normally function as a parallel to a later sequence where playful rivalry turns into a fatal play with death. Groot sets up the expectation of such a scene when he says, “Those two will spar some day.” But spar they never do. In general, Matt provides a challenge to Cherry, and when he is asked by Buster why he came along, he answers, “Because Matt turned me down.” An obvious point in the plot where the rivalry might have been expressed is over Millay, but Cherry is not allowed to show any interest in her whatsoever. By the end of the film Cherry defends rather than attacks Matt in
his attempt to kill Dunson before he reaches Matt.

Groot is more than a patriarchal figure reduced to comic relief, as Kitses suggests. He is more analogous to the tragic Chorus which sympathizes with the hero's suffering, but who tells him when he has erred. Like the Jester in Shakespearean tragedy, Groot is the only one whom the hero allows to tell him wherein his failure lies. It is he who at the end comments on the father-son archetypal conflict he has been watching and which is finally resolving itself, when he says, "For fourteen years I've been scared, but it's going to be all right."

Some critics find the ending a failure. Young Dunson should have invoked his own doom. In the original ending by Borden Chase, Dunson, fatally wounded by Cherry, tries to kill Matt, but is so weak he cannot hit him. Lowered into a wagon, he is driven across the Red River by Millay. Yet rather than interpreting this ending as a failure, perhaps we might see this as the final attempt by Hawks to modify archetypes and formulas. In classical tragedy and in the traditional Western the one who brings suffering upon the group is destroyed. But here the protagonist admit his flaw, and in admitting it he is reconciled not only to Matt, but to an aspect of himself which he has been repressing. His recognition of the need for Mercy as well as Law marks him as a hero different from his predecessors in the traditional Western formula. As French points out, however, this ending is sui generis and does not become typical of the New Western: "It was effective precisely because it worked against the true wishes of the spectator."

Thus Cawelti is wrong when he says the Western hero never achieves the magnitude of Achilles, "His failure makes us sad, but it does not forcibly bring us face to face with ourselves and our present life." Red River is treating themes that have been expressed by the greatest artists of the past, conveyed through archetypes interpreted in ways that best reflect the values and problems of a culture. Dunson achieves tragic stature through his suffering and his enlightenment. The god of the Old Testament learns mercy from the son of the New Testament, the anima is reconciled with the animus with the help of Millay as intercessor, whose act of love and devotion helps bring this about.


4. See, for example, Andrey Bely's St. Petersbg, Alexander Blok's poem “The Scythians,” and Valery Briusov's poem "The Huns."


10. Cawelti begins his discussion of myth and formula in the Western on p. 27 in The Six-Gun Mystique (Bowling Green, Ohio, n.d.).

11. Ibid., p.11.


15. See, for example, “The ‘Western’: Definition of the Myth” (Nation, November 18, 1961), p.404.


22. A.P. Skafyumov, Poetika i generis bylin (Moscow, 1924).


29. Martin Nussbaum, “Sociological Symbolism of the ‘Adult Western,’” *Social Forces* (Vol. 39), p. 27. He says the Western has taken on this new form as a revolt against rationalism and reason. “Even science is fast approaching the realization of human finitude... Thus, there is an end to rationalism and reason with our existentialist western hero,” p. 28.

30. Fenin and Everson, p. 10.


32. See Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (Bloomington and Ondon, 1976) on the auteur theory and for its application to Hawks.


38. For an extensive analysis of the archetypal binary opposition of masculine/feminine and its synthesis within different cultures, see V.V. Ivanov, “The Semiotic Theory of Carnival as the Inversion of Bipolar Opposites,” trans. R. Reeder and J. Rostinsky (to be published in *Semiotica*). He discusses this archetype as expressed in Melanesian cargo cults, Indian mythology, as the yin-yang concept in Chinese culture, in African twin mythologies, and in European Carnival.


40. French, p.69.


42. Cited in Henry Nash Smith, p. 63.

43. Sklar, p. 16.


48. French, p. 45.

Those interested in film portrayals of women have discussed Howard Hawk's women characters and argued their qualities, deficiencies, their significance or lack of it. Despite attempts to defend him, Hawk's vision diminishes and distorts women and this distortion calls into question the endurance and quality of his vision. His classic American western reveals an exploitation of woman characteristic of the American film industry in 1948 and unchanged since, as Molly Haskell has convincingly argued. A feminist critique of Hawks and the Western must focus upon the gynephobic treatment of women and the narrative weakness or disharmony of male-defined stories about non-adult male heroes. My critique tries to consciously argue the necessity for believable women, refutes pervasive maleness and by implication challenges the long tradition of male dominance in the film industry.

Our formal and collective analysis measures inescapably women's minimal and controlled presence in Red River. With measurable lexia and woman-focus, the feminist critique can challenge the fictive, denaturalized, and selective reality of the film and refuse Howard Hawk's vision, particularly as it presents women. After all, reality contains the feminine/woman everywhere; the value of the Red River example rests upon the slim presence of woman-referenced qualities, patently unreal! Our misfortune as spectators is that the film deceives us into believing that the qualities can inhabit improbable and unconvincing characters, Hawksian women and juvenile, even childish, men. The film effaces women yet ironically its narrative depends for closure upon a feminization of dominant males. My argument emphasizes the two women characters and criticizes the film's self-effacing patriarchal ideology, connected (not coincidentally) to its capitalist and imperialist ideology.

Robert Sklar writes: 'It's a film about the territorial expansion of one society by the usurpation of land from others, and the consequences arising therefrom, in the relations between men and women, in the relations between men and other men, in the social compact that binds people together for a common purpose.' The point is well-taken, but which people? With regard to women in the film, the purposes of expansion and usurpation may seem alien and this observation invites others about the un/commonness of purposes portrayed. Many groups, women included, are separated from the un/common purpose of dominance and expansion shared exclusively by those building the empire, that is, by the father and his heir. The Red River story advances in relation to the building of a cattle empire. The extended drive to market weds and consummates the purposes of the father, Tom Dunson, and the adopted son, Matthew Garth, by staging their conflict and resolving it. The struggle and eventual overthrow of the father (fallen from access to truth and power) creates dramatic intrigue; suspense exists because we wonder whether Matt will kill Dunson or whether Dunson will 'adopt' Matt. After a mutiny led by the son, the father's attempt to regain the privileged position of empire-
builder, master, father, and patriarch fails, or rather, it ends in adoption. Though this son is not forgotten through woman, he is acquired through the death of the woman Dunson loved; the bonding symbolizes and restores the patriarchal order. The bracelet Dunson gave Fran reappears on Matt's arm; the story traces a male-to-male enterprise, inscribed in female brackets, punctuated by fades.

Dunson and Matt pair with two minor women's roles. All four function to establish and maintain women's subordination, alienation, and separation from the purpose shared by the two men (the drive, the ranch, and business). Indians, Mexicans, Chicanos, the aging (Groot), and others acquired by the gun, whip, and rope are located outside or participate only tangentially in the enterprise, including the hired hands driving the cattle. The social and political order reflected in this hierarchy realizes the "American dream" of father, son, and those who can identify with them. The "horse opera" (Pauline Kael) of empire-building and marketing beef is not only about capitalism (Sklar) but about white patriarchy.

The weathered thematics of a father/son power struggle seem familiar bait for the feminist critique. The concept of feminization in Hawks freshens the debate but redeems women only indirectly through men. Like all studies of meager women characters it risks to continue critical dialogue, itself male-referenced. Yet two points merit attention with appropriate qualification: The legitimizing of the father/son relationship relies upon Tess Millay who mediates their differences. Second, though the feminization of extremely rigid maleness in the father by the son also perpetuates male focus, Matt infuses Dunson's authority with humanity. It has been suggested that Hawk's portrayals of women depended upon talented actresses to overcome the unconvincing women's roles accorded them. Two actresses and a few poorly written, poorly directed sequences cannot reverse the force of the Red River narrative. The film encloses us in patriarchal values, moderated but complete since even the feminine exists through the dominant male or as a function of him.

An examination of the women demonstrates their limitations and outlines the fear and hatred of women characteristic of Hawks' films, effaced or resolved as it is in Red River by Matt's feminization. The first woman Fran, not-quite-mate to Dunson (and thus not-quite-mother to Matt) predicts the plot of the father's fall before the empire has been formed and the drive undertaken. As Dunson leaves her at the first wagon-train, he defines her position with respect to the task; it's "no place for a woman" he mutters as he pushes her from him. She replies with sexual entreaties, a suggestion of her procreative prowess; "The sun only shines half the time, Tom.... You need what a woman can give you." With reasons firmly grounded in his obstinacy and blindness to the advantage, she pleads: "Change your mind for once in your life...you're wrong Tom." Her image shrinks in the distance and the narrative reconciles her absence for us in death.

The 'problem' of women recurs later with Tess Millay's entry; she restores the heterosexual potential for the future after the drive. Dunson describes a sex-circumscribed role for her in a proposition; "I thought I had a son, but I don't...I don't want one." He offers half of all he owns if she will have his son. This spirited, male-defined woman responds in kind for she shares with other Hawks-created women a liberal tendency left unnamed. For Matt, all the wagon-train people remain unnameable; he calls them a "bunch of gamblers and..." From the first shot when he pulls the arrow from her shoulder, her attraction to Matt (not Dunson) determines her place in the narrative and its direction. Her sexuality guarantees her place and contributes to the new order, the adoption of Matt. She aligns as the son's property, moving like the cattle, the men, and Groot to a new "father." A sexual object, a tool for the succession, narrative links relate her to the first woman. Dunson takes her to Matt, apparently influenced by his memory of Fran. During Tess' banter about Matt, the camera focuses on her figure as she stands and turns, striking a match seductively to attract Dunson's interest. Through his proposition he replaces Fran with her, momentarily, then as Tess strengthens her plea to accompany him with a reference to Fran, he completes it using Fran's image of "knives in her knees." A co-opting of Fran's image seals the scene in honour. As Fran's successor, Tess confirms woman's place as a possession. The fallen father cedes to her attraction for the son, now the
dominant male; this draws our attention away from the women. Tess survives in the male world on terms not unlike those which caused Fran's exit; Matt gains our attention, acquires a descendence through her, and surpasses the father to carry on the same tradition.

In a stereotypically feminine role as intercessor, first with Matt and then during the final father/son confrontation, Tess proposes a solution to conflict, the idea that Matt and Dunson love each other. A Hawks creation, the adoption resolution is absent from the text by Borden Chase. There, the reconciliation of the father and heir never occurs and the embittered father dies. Here, through Tess, the differences of father and son are mediated in a sequence that can be traced unquestionably to Hawks. This role infer a woman-identified value often stereotyped in American films. Simply stated, women characters can easily mediate between men without jeopardizing the male focus of the narrative; in Red River Tess is identified with Matt and the new patriarchy as a possession albeit an important one — like the herd and Groot.

Elsewhere in the male world of the cattle drive the men mouth proprietary references to women to rationalize going along on the drive. One man won’t join the drive because of his wife. Dan Lattimer relates a capitalist purpose to a romantic one — he wants to buy the old Chapman place and a pair of red shoes for his wife. Cherry joins Dunson's crew out of fascination with Matt's prowess with a gun, a woman-linked symbol for Cherry made explicit by image and word; “Only two things more beautiful than a good gun — a beautiful Swiss watch or a girl from anywhere. You ever had a good Swiss watch!” Ariving to announce the second wagon train, Buster suggests the sexual advantage of finding Tess and her companions; “Women! Women and coffee! I had some...I ate...I had some biscuits and beans... a whole wagon train of ’em.” Later to describe Tess he passes from the edible to the ridable, comparing her to a little filly he once owned. None of these proprietary designations tie Tess or women to the male enterprise, however, for longer than a moment.

Matt’s sexual awakening occurs after Tess' advances, since his obvious cynicism and disgust pique her attention. The Hawksian woman often pursues the man in an effort to enter the male world. Since Cherry and later Dunson take an interest in her, they prove her worth. This element of completion influences Matt who seems otherwise slow to respond, task-oriented, almost stoic. Clearly Matt’s attraction to Tess is linked to the continuation of the line, pleasing the father — though the narrative introduces and follows that concept in the voices of others, Dunson in particular. Sexual proprietorship, assuring the descendence, competition with other men, romance — Matt’s motivations vis-à-vis Tess correspond to his men’s vocabularies for women. She provides a term of exchange in the story of a gun-swapping western about a cattle drive. Her speech is portrayed as prattle that Matt must silence, first with a kiss, then with his hand, both as preludes to the deliberate and discrete fade marking coupling. Amid the male-referenced realities of this film, women occur almost never and values traditionally related to them disappear.

My second point turns around Matt, the real dominant male of the film, feminized not to the point of androgyny — our recent vocabulary and concept is anachronistic. The heir character moderates the father, feminizes his characteristics as patriarch, and rationalizes the minimal presence of women. As a narrative mechanism for resolution of the conflict, Montgomery Clift's portrayal of Matt proves the most interesting and vital aspect of the film's characterizations. His is a role worth playing, albeit male-focused: quiet leadership, competence, control — marked by moderation it would be possible to associate with women. From his first appearance as a boy leading a cow (the female necessary to begin the herd) Matt’s task-orientation defines itself in terms of controlled competition with the father. Willing to learn to handle a gun and the herd, Matt traces values of exchange, service, and subordination vis-à-vis Dunson; he lets Dunson brand his cow, learns to shoot his own pistol and to watch “their eyes” and rolls cigarettes and shares them. He listens and watches, “in waiting” he trains for his future role silently, while narrative devices and other characters suggest to the viewer that father/son paradigm. By night he re-
reflects on the drive, by day he acts. With the hired hands he shows a sense of justice, if not egalitarianism; his terms of exchange with others have male references typical of the period — guns, cigarettes, women — possessions all. A sense of community rules his part of the drive, he listens to the men and shows concern for them, a master’s concern. Accompanied by his even-hand, this social orientation precipitates the mutiny; he seizes the herd without an act of violence, leaving to Cherry and the others the shooting of Dunson (at this shot as in the final sequence in Abilene).

This controlled, indirect harmonization of power and violence corresponds to his sexuality which effaces clear heterosexuality in favour of a generalized physical appeal and interaction with men. In the scenes with Cherry and Dunson, especially, male interaction happens in terms of ideas, as well as objects (guns “for play,” cigarettes, coffee cups) and the fidelities of people (the men, Tess, Groot). His role suggests nuanced attractiveness, centered within the male group; his role there complements our impression that Tess seduces him. The womb-envious Dunson finds no successor in Matt sexually; his game is straight power and sexual male moderated to penetrate our reservations about the film.

The viewer of 1948 and to-day’s expects male dominance. If Red River’s success were gauged in spectator’s reactions, the cattle drive, the father/son power struggle, and Monty Clift would justify its existence. The only real reasons to include women in the film relate to the narrative imperatives of capitalist filmmaking; the public pays to see action, romance, a male-defined conflict, and stars (men who dominate and beautiful women who give in). To test these expectations risks the enterprise. Red River caught on slowly and never sold fully well. The remake with the journal crawl underscores a deficiency to which women were linked in Hawks’ mind. The Dunson-father dominance loses credibility rapidly to the feminized Matt-heir moderation; the cattle drive keeps all interest between the females in brackets, and during the night-day alternation between reflection and action. Hawks toys with violence between father and son, but resolution pervades the narrative; the drive’s success is assured, the adoption imminent, the romance sure to work out, the suspense moderate. Made for a time when women were being pressed into the domestic seclusion of post-war capitalist expansionism, into the periphery of male empires, into the silence of sexual oppression, into trivial roles in male-defined action/adventure films, Red River announces the 50’s. It effaces important differences among men and between men and women in favour of a father/son centering that individualizes imperialism. It sells gynephobia and white patriarchy — nothing new.
After World War II, Howard Hawks, who until then had directed his films within the structure of major studios, decided to form his own production company, Monterey Productions. His first film which was to be directed totally free of studio interference was *Red River*. Financing was difficult to obtain, however, and the production problems on location in Arizona practically doubled the costs of the film. The project was in trouble from the beginning with lawsuits from Howard Hughes for plagiarism, problems with United Artists who were to distribute the film and bad weather during production. Together these delays postponed the opening of *Red River* by almost a year. Howard Hawks first attempt at financial independence from the studios was a failure.

Thus, *Red River* is a failed capitalistic venture about a successful capitalist venture: the opening of the Chisholm Trail. Hawks has never publicly stated how he attempted to deal with the numerous setbacks which plagued the production. In an interview, Borden Chase (author of the original *Saturday Evening Post* story “The Chisholm Trail” which formed the basis for *Red River*) has said that Hawks had to compromise the ending of the film because of Hughes’ accusations of plagiarism from the film *The Outlaw*, and that Hawks original ending was far closer to the original.1

One of the most intriguing mysteries surrounding the creation of this film is the existence of two versions. One, apparently the earlier, is narrated by one Nadine Groot (Groot Nadine in Chase’s narrative), the cook on the drive (played by Walter Brennan). His rambling commentaries, replete with poor grammar and direct addresses to the audience, smack of the ruminations of an aged cowpoke at the turn of the century reminiscing from a shady porch about ancient, important, but partly forgotten events. Groot was present when the events he relates took place, and within the narrative he tells (or clarifies), actually makes decisions and judgments, and influences the outcome of events.

The other version has replaced Groot's oral commentary with a written text handwritten, in a neat hand, in a diary-like book entitled *Tales of Texas*. In the oral version, the cover for the *Tales of Texas* appears, but is supplanted by Brennan before any pages actually appear. In the written version, the pages turn and reveal a narrative told in the third person, without any attribution to a person in the narrative. Fewer in number but each being quantitatively longer, the written passages are more objective in tone and word choice. There is no individuality to the written text, merely a pose of historical aloofness. It creates the effect of one watching “true” events, literally enacted from the “pages of history”: Because it is told in the third person, from a more or less omniscient narrative stance, it resembles the original Borden Chase story far more than the orally narrated version.
Of the two versions Robert Sklar has written: "The story of Tom Dunson and his cattle drive seems straightforward enough, but Hawks obviously came to feel the plot needed more explanation than the shot continuity provided. At some point in post-production he added a voice-over narration, and as late as the dialogue continuity script those lines were to be spoken by Groot. The cutting continuity script, however, dated at the same time as the dialogue script, lists the shots of the Early Tales of Texas manuscript, the narrative backbone Hawks finally chose to use."

The series of decisions — first, to employ a narrative device, to have it the person of Groot, Tom Dunson's sidekick, then to scuttle that version and switch to a hand-written manuscript which seems to have been written as a first hand, eyewitness account but in actuality is not — these decisions were apparently Hawks.' And, it we cannot know his reasons, fortunately we are able to examine the results, for both versions are available. More important than Hawks' reasons is the fact that what exists, captured side by side, are two visions of narrativity — the first, history as myth, the second, myth as history. Hawks' shift in the narrative superstructure offers us a rare opportunity to study the movements and shifts of a director's vision of the relationship of his work to his perceived notions of how his society will (or should) respond to the filmed, staged, sequences of the film. These, the photographed sequences in which the events are enacted, are identical in both versions.

An opportunity to study the results of two finished and released products, which reflect two different versions of a director's vision, is rare. Of Meet John Doe, and the notorious five endings of which Capra speaks in his autobiography, only one ending survives; we read that Francis Ford Coppola filmed several endings of Apocalypse Now, but only one is available. Lamont Johnson's A Gunfight has two conclusions, offering the spectator a weird choice: in one, Kirk Douglas dies; in the other, Johnny Cash. However, Johnson seems to have decided to allow the viewer the privilege of deciding, the material for the decision being sequential, integrated portions of the narrative, one narrative. The act of deciding within one narrative experience breaks and suspends the inevitability of temporal narrativity, and thus bears a stronger relation to a dream sequence in a film which we learn is a dream, and not part of the 'waking' diegesis only afterwards, as for instance when the dreamers awake screaming at the conclusions of Carrie and Deliverance, when the hand reaches up from rubble and water, respectively.

The two versions of Red River offer an opportunity of a different order from a comparison of a director's re-make of a film which he had made previously. For example, Hitchcock's two versions of The Man Who Knew Too Much are separated by two decades, two countries, and many films, whereas Hawks' two versions were created practically simultaneously.

What follows is an attempt to show how different each version is, how oral and written commentary differ in their effect upon the staged diegetic sequences, and, finally, how Hawks has made two very different comments upon, and interpretations of, American capitalistic adventurism and nineteenth-century capitalistic expansion.

In an article in New Literary History, Michel Rio examined Roland Barthes' definition of the relation between the linguistic and the iconic; the functions of anchor and relay. The anchor function occurs in the case of, for instance, a painting's title, which situates the work, but which information is not necessary for at least a partial knowledge of the semic content of the painting. The second function, the relay, Rio says, places the image and language in a complementary relationship: language says what the image does not express. Rio examines finally the possibility of the linguistic message offering a 'double function of anchoring and or relay with respects to the image.' While Rio does not elaborate the latter formation, which I will call the hybrid formation, he suggests elsewhere that the anchor function and the relay function often exist side by side.

I would argue that virtually all relations of the linguistic to the iconic are hybrid, that invariably a title anchors and relays simultaneously, and that there are probably
no pure examples of either. The legend beneath a photograph of a dancer, for instance, is primarily an instance of anchoring, if, as Rio says, it offers the dancer's name; however, the name is no more an essential component of the photograph than the legend 'I am afraid' would be, which, according to Rio, is largely relay. That is we are dealing with a continuum on which a legend, a linguistic message, whether written or oral, may be more or less anchor or relay. In both cases, however, it seems clear that the message’s function has a "repressive" value. That is, language's function is to 'fix the always polysemic image's signifieds.' I would add that the above is true in cases of both anchorage and relay, and not only anchor, as Rio suggests; for to place the legend 'I am afraid' beneath a photo is to fix and direct the image's signifieds as surely as if we gave the image a name or location.

Of anchorage and relay, Barthes has said that anchorage is commonly found in press photographs and in advertisements; that is, still photographs. The function of relay is found in cartoons, comic strips, and in the dialogue in films —

While rare in the fixed image, this relay-text becomes very important in film, where dialogue functions not simply as elucidation but really does advance the action by setting out, in the sequence of messages, meanings that are not to be found in the image itself.¹

This raises the interesting question as to the function, in Barthe's terms, of an oral or written narrative frame, as in the two versions of Red River. It is not a purely relay function, for one could easily imagine the film without any framing apparatus. There is sufficient information (relay) in the dialogue within the diegetic level of the photographed sequences to assist virtually any viewer. What, then, is the nature and purpose of the framing apparatus? Is it to guide us towards a proper interpretation of the film text. Barthes states:

Of course, elsewhere than in advertising, the anchorage may be ideological and indeed this is its principal function; the text directs the reader.

the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others; by means of an often subtle dispatching, it remote-controls him toward a meaning chosen in advance. In all these cases of anchorage, language clearly has a function of elucidation, but this elucidation is selective, a metalanguage applied not to the totality of the iconic message but only to certain of its signs.²

The linguistic material in Red River is both written and oral, and because the film is a sound film (perhaps this is the only good reason), diegetic narrative material (that which functions as a relay) is oral. The only deviation from this is the Red River D brand which is inscribed in the earth on two occasions, and seen fleetingly on cattle at various times. It is safe to say, following Barthes, that all the framing apparatus, whether oral or written, is primarily anchorage in its function, with Walter Brennan's oral narration less anchorage and more relay than the written narration. This is true for several reasons: the oral nature of Brennan's narration matches the oral nature of the diegetic dialogue — both are in the same linguistic mode, which creates identification between the framed narration and the dialogue. Moreover, Brennan is privileged in the orally narrated version, for he doubly effects the narrative, both within the diegesis, as a persona in those events, and outside of it, as narrator of those events. In addition, his narrative is spotted with relay-like observations, upon the emotional states of the men, and so forth, which are absent from the written narration. Brennan, as Groot, was (and is), "there," which assists him greatly in his function as relay.

The employment of Barthe's and Rio's methodology of anchor and relay will be of assistance in approaching the problem of the two narrative versions of Red River, for it offers an analytical tool for describing the different functions of portions of the two
narratives. Both versions open with the same legend which crawls upward in letters which seem to be formed from mesas, the letters being the mesas's flat tops:

Among the annals of the great state of Texas may be found the story of the first drive on the famous Chisolm Trail. A story of one of the great cattle heroes of the world, of a man and a boy — Thomas Dunson and Matthew Garth, the story of the Red River D.

This autochtonic lettering suggests that the events of the film emerged, or will emerge, from the land itself. This identification of history with the spontaneous emergence of men and their desires is not a characteristic of Hawks as much as it is of John Ford. This intertitle anchors the entire film through its footnoting function, by informing us that the film is to be seen primarily as a document of historical interest. We also see that history, to Hawks, is inextricably bound up with human emotional conflicts and their resolution.

The concept of a "cattle hero" upon closer examination seems bizarre: "cattle baron" or "great cattle rancher" would seem more appropriate, until one sees that the film does in fact attempt to elevate Dunson to the level of hero, not only for the courageous completion of a drive against tremendous odds, but also because he is bringing beef — nourishment — to hungry millions. From the beginning, Dunson's ambitions are shown to be not only unselfish, but synonymous with the national purpose.

Thus, the entire film is placed in this context — anchored, as it were, by this metaframe. Its secondary function is to link the larger purposes of history with individual destiny: it is at once a story of a great hero, a story of a man and a boy, specifically named, and of the creation of a ranch. Four tales, the metaframe tells us, emerge from this film. This introduction poses as a historical reality-literal "annals" — and also holds out the literal existence of a record of the first drive on the Chisolm Trail, although it is unlikely that such a record exists.

The crawl fades out, and the shot which succeeds it is a close-up of a leather-bound book with a makeshift binding, with Early Tales of Texas scrawled across it, as if a survivor of the drive had kept a record of this historically momentous event (a re-affirmation of history as "created" by the average man, the diary itself a demonstration of the significance of the individual, and his importance in shaping national destiny). The cover shifts the anchorage from broad ideological considerations to the literal existence of the manifestation of these concepts, of which the film narrative will be the final, most literal, most real manifestation.

It is at this point that the narrative frame differs, creating two versions of Red River. In the orally narrated version, Groot begins to speak as the first long shots of the wagon train appear; Groot immediately identifies himself as a persona in the diegesis, and his first sentence, "you see, the story of the Red River D started this way," is directed at an auditor who, apparently, has asked Groot to tell the tale. In the written version, the cover is turned, exposing the first page, as if of a diary, written in a careful, obviously modern, script. All references are third-person. Both versions attempt to involve the viewer in the act of discovering the fact of the event: the oral version suggests that we have asked a member of the original party, thus seeking through a social, contractual exchange, the facts of the event. In a sense, we have turned our backs upon the "Annals" and, tape recorder in hand, embarked upon recording oral, folk history. The written version is private — the individual and the book — here, the act of discovering the events, becomes a bit of library research; we are where the Annals are kept.

Not only are we in a library, as opposed to Groot's front porch, but Early Tales of Texas is written in the third person. Hawks could have kept us in touch with the first person narrator; for Groot could have written the diary, as well as given us the oral narration. In fact, such a movement toward personalization of the narrative seems implied by the shift from abstract ideological statement in the metaframe to the literal text: the third step would appear to be (whether written or oral) a first-person account.
David Thompson reflects the same attitude in his essay *Red River*, "All Along the River":

*Red River* is told by Walter Brennan's Groot. In the complete version seen in 1976, the film uses — rather laboriously — pages from a journal he has written. Yet I believe there are versions where Brennan narrates the story — if there are not, there should be.

Here Thompson has wished into existence Groot as author of the diary pages, which are actually not ascribed to anyone: a natural error, since the film seems created for Groot's narration. Thompson further exercises a bit of wish-fulfillment (in this case true) by stating that there should be an orally narrated version. In another observation related to narrative device, Thompson says:

*Red River's* tone is that of a meditative legend, of campfire yarns told by men actually less than easy with horses, guns and cows but yearning for the flourish of expertise and finding it in fiction.

This tone is set by the abstract nature of the diary pages, with their formal language and unascribed author, both distant from the dialogue in the diegesis. Thompson's observations are significant because they reflect a desire for an ascribed narrator.

The first significant difference between Groot's narration and the written version is that of quantity: Groot speaks twenty times, as compared to the twelve diary entries — 40 per cent more narrative framework in the orally narrated version. The effect is one of saturation — of constant commentary on the action. In Groot's narration, even the most obvious events receive a comment, an expansion of the relay function. The effect of much of this is to cause the viewer to do less; for instance, narrative unit five ends with a shot of Groot, in darkness, as he imitates a whippoorwill to draw the last Indian out of hiding. There is a fade, and the sixth narrative unit begins with a shot of buzzards circling. Of this, Groot says:

Next morning, there weren't a sign of an Injun but the buzzards had come 'fore we was ready to start.

There is no such diary entry in the written version. However in both versions, Groot tells Dunson: "Let's go and give them buzzards a chance." The visual reference is obvious to begin with; Groot's diegetic remark makes it painfully so, and his reinforcement of it in his narrated version ensures that any but the most of obtuse viewer will get the point.

The primary distinction between versions, however, is that of the increased relay function of Groot's narration. Groot constantly ameliorates Dunson's actions, causing us to see him as possessing an emotional side (1.a,4,10, in the oral narration in the chart), and causes us to see his actions as results of emotional forces (8.b,11.a). In Hawks' original version, the spectator is given constant assistance in the problem of comprehending Dunson's actions. In the revision, which denies the spectator this relay function, Dunson appears to be motivated by historical destiny; he seems destined to complete actions which will validate results already known to us. Consequently, Dunson is less human here, is more of a pawn of the forces of historical determinism.

It may be that the film's financial failure — its lack of popularity with the public — was the result of the aloof, confusing, and in a sense false mediation of the diary entries. For, as Thompson indicates, the film cries out for personal narration, and the shot structure frequently shows Groot between Dunson and another, or there is a cut to Groot as he witnesses Dunson. There are no similar reaction shots of any other character (with the exception of Matt once or twice). To write Groot out of the position of the narrator, while leaving him inscribed in the shot structure, creates an ambiguity which is not resolved.

Hawks rewrote his own version of history to shift the emphasis from the man to the event, from myth to historical artifact. In a fashion, as I have suggested, the production of *Red
River, Hawks first independent venture, is analogous to the narrative of the film itself. Both Dunson and Hawks sink all their reserves into a venture which, as Melville tells Matt, a man would have to be crazy to start. Dunson's monomania forced him to lose the respect of the men and the herd, with the drive to be completed by another. His fear of losing control causes him to lose control. Likewise, Hawks, in an apparent effort to ensure success of his venture, seems to manifest the same fear — fear of failure. By shifting the narrative techniques Hawks nearly scuttled his project; at the least, he weakened the result.

NOTES

1. "The Rise and Fall of the American West: Borden Chase interviewed by Jim Kitses, Film Comment (Vol. 6, no. 4), pp. 15-16

2. "Red River: Empire to the West," Cinéaste (Vol. 3), p. 15


5. Ibid.


9. Ibid.

INTRODUCTION TO CHART

The following chart compares the early oral narration with the later written narration (Tales of Texas). Both versions were applied to the same photographed sequences. As stated previously, the comparison allows for the examination of Hawk's two visions of narrativity.
1) In the year 1851, Thomas Dunson accompanied by a friend, Nadien Groot, left St. Louis and joined a Wagon Train headed for California. Three weeks on the trail found them near the northern border of Texas. (precedes dissolve in 2)

2) And that was the meeting of a boy with a cow and a man with a bull and the beginning of a great herd. (Next page). In search for land they traveled south through Texas, across arable and promising land but weighed it and found it wanting. So on they went, all through the panhandle, ever southward, seeking the . . . (next page) . . . long enough for sleep . . . Four weeks . . . past the Pecos . . . terrain changed . . . rolling . . . took the piece of flat . . . and their spirits . . . nearing the Rio Grande . . . the country looked good. Here . . .

3) Stopping only long enough for sleep the hills took the place of the desolation and their rose . . . Nearing the Rio Grande, the country looked good. They . . . To Dunson it was just a job, a big job. Ever north they drove. Ten thousand cattle crawling through hot, dry country and by the end of the first two weeks they had covered over one hundred and sixty miles. Every mile takes its toll . . . Quietly (Dissolve into 16).

4) The days became longer, sleep was at a premium, hard work became harder, and Dun-
son became a tyrant. After three weeks they reached San Sava. Here at last was water and a chance to rest tired muscles. (Diary page between 17 and 18, dissolved into 18).

5) Thirty days on the trail and they reached the Brazos. The way now became harder. Hills and rocks impeded their progress. Each weary mile became endless. The men became morose and worried. The cattle restless and jumpy. Each day the job of . . . (precedes 19 dissolves in).

6) But on they went, through more desert country, hot dry and dusty. Forty days and dust turned to rain. Short rations with Dunson driving both cattle and men. There was no turning back now despite the loss of the other grub wagon. Nights . . . (precedes 22, dissolves in).

7) Sixty days, tired cattle and tired men. Trouble was not far off. The men sat in small groups, sullen and morose. The food became worse, and Dunson was constantly on the alert for the first sign of mutiny. He felt as a man alone. (precedes 23, dissolves into it).

8) Secretly the rest of the men hoped Teeler and Laredo and Kelsey would succeed but not Dunson. He ordered the herd to move on and move they did with Dunson driving them at every step. The Red River was not far ahead, and he meant to reach it before nightfall. (bridges 25 and 26)

9) So Matthew Garth had the responsibility of a great herd and onward they went with the spectre of Dunson behind. He had promised revenge and Matt knew nothing in the world the soil; Matt protests that there is no M on the brand; Dunson tells Matt that he must earn that privilege. (b) Dunson and Groot tie up the cow and bull, preparing to brand them. Two Spaniards arrive and inform Dunson that this is Don Diego’s land. Dunson has no intention of leaving, and shoots one of the men. (c) Burial of Spaniard; completion of branding. Dissolves connect the subsegments, and end it.

9) Series of nine shots which bridge fourteen years; Dunson’s voice-over is contiguous with the “past.” Dissolve.

10) Matt, Groot, Dunson. Matt is back from Civil War, a gunman. Civil War has impoverished Texas. Dunson has decided to drive his cattle to Missouri. Dissolve,

11) In preparation for the drive, Dunson orders Matt to brand all cattle, even those belonging to neighbouring ranchers. Cherry Valance joins Dunson, and there is an immediate rivalry with Matt. Dissolve.

12) Bunk Kennelly steals sugar; Groot admonishes him. Dissolve.

13) Bunkhouse sequence, in which the men sign up for the drive. Fade.

14) The beginning of the drive. Fade.
would stop him from fulfilling that promise. The time was coming ... (this page precedes 30, dissolves into it).

10) And that night they moved. The river was rising, they must get across while there was still time. In the meantime Dunson had found men and ammunition and had taken up the chase. He was determined to overtake Matt and the herd he felt ... (this page dissolves into 38).

11) That was the question in every man's heart as they drove on. One hundred days and in Matthew Garth's heart a growing fear that there was no railroad. Could they all have been wrong? Was there even a town called Abilene? These and many other...(this page dissolves into 40).

121 And history was written that day in Abilene, August 14, 1865, a day that marked the completion of the first drive on the Chisholm Trail. Excitement and wild hilarity greeted the trail weary men. (preceding page turns to reveal this page, which is superimposed over the first shot 43).

15) That night, at campfire, Cherry tells the others of the railroad having reached Abilene. Dunson refuses to hear of it. Dissolve.

16) One shot of the drive. Dissolve.

17) Day; Dunson tiring out horses; men are beginning to complain. Kenelly steals sugar again; Groot whips him. Dissolve.

18) Day; the men are tired; Dunson refuses to let them rest. Dissolve.

19) A night shot of the drive. Dissolve.

20) (a) Night; cattle restless, Kenelly stealing sugar, drops pans which starts stampede. (b) Stampede sequence; death of Danny. (c) Dunson and others find Danny's body. Fade.

21) The next day, Danny buried. Dunson attempts to whip Kenelly and kill him, but is prevented by Matt. Men are turning on Dunson. Fade.

221 (a) Several shots of cattle in storm. Dissolve. (b) The men quarrel in the rain at night, over the poor food. Fade.

23) A shot of the drive (day). Dissolve.

24) (a) Night; a wounded man arrives. (Dissolve) He tells a tale of Missouri border gangs, and of rumours of the railroad having reached Kansas. Dissolve. (b) Later that night, three of Dunson's men try to kill him, but are killed every step. (at beginning of 26)

8a) The boys hoped Teeler, Laredo and Kel- sey would get away, but didn't give them much chance. Cherry and Grant was too fast with their guns, and so we kept driv- in' until... (at the end of 26)

8b) Next mornin', while I was fixin' Tom's Cherry come back just like I knowed he would. (beginning of 29)

9a) Ten days after we left Tom the herd was drivin' good and the only bad thing, well, Tom was out behind. (at begin- ning of 32)

9b) Three more days passed. Each day we found more Injun signs but not a word from Buster and Cherry. (beginning of 33)

10) In the meantime Tom had found men and ammunition and started after us. I don't exactly blame Tom myself 'cause he'd been fourteen years gettin' somethin,' figured somebody's taken it away from him. Maybe you's a thought the same as him. (38-39)

11) A hundred days and we hadn't seen nothin' human or signs of nothin' for two weeks and everybody was beginnin' to believe there weren't no railroad. (40-41)
by Matt and Dunson. Dissolve.

25) The next day, Cherry is sent to bring back three men who ran off during the night. Dissolve.

26) Day — a short scene in which Dunson orders Matt to go faster. Dissolve.


28) That night, at camp, Dunson drinking, not sleeping, falling apart. Dissolve.

29) (a) Next day, Cherry returns with the escapees. Dunson attempts to have them but Matt and others prevent him and, with the support of the men, assume control of the herd. Dissolve (b) As herd leaves, Dunson vows to kill Matt. Fade.

30) A shot of the drive. Dissolve.

31) Night; Matt and men are in dread of Dunson’s vow. Fade.

32) Next day (?), Matt leading herd. They learn that Indians lie ahead, and they are convinced that Dunson is surely behind. Matt sends Buster and Cherry ahead to scout. Dissolve.

33) That night; Matt is jumpy, discusses men's fears with Groot. Dissolve.

11a) That twelve miles didn't take long. (laughs) Funny how different yuh feel when you know you’re going somewheres. (beginning of 42)

12) That night ended a day when history was written in Abilene. August 14, 1865, was the date. That was the end of the first drive on the Chisolm Trail. It was just the first of thousands of such drives bringing beef to the world. (beginning of 46)
34) The next day, Buster returns from Indian scouting, announces that there is a wagon train of women and gamblers ahead. Matt offers to drive herd in that direction. Dissolve.

35) A shot of the drive (day). Dissolve.

36) (a) Next day (?), Matt and his men hear gunfire; Indians are attacking the wagon train of women and gamblers. Dissolve. (B) Matt and men ride to assist wagon train; meets Tess Millay, who gets an arrow in the shoulder; Matt removes arrow and sucks out "poison." Tess slaps him, faints. Dissolve.

37) (a) That night, she and Cherry talk about Matt. Dissolve. (b) To Matt, on guard, in fog. Dissolve. (c) Back to Tess, who has learned Matt's history from Groot. Dissolve. (d) Back to Matt, whittling in fog, when Tess joins him. Dissolve to — (e) Matt and Tess lying down and talking. Dissolve. (f) To the main camp. It is some time later. Matt, afraid that the rising river will make a morning crossing impossible, decides to leave immediately. He leaves Tess behind. Fade.

38) Shot of Dunson, dissolve, second shot of Dunson. Dissolve.

39) Night. Tess' camp. Dunson arrives; she serves him dinner. He asks her to have his son. She accepts on the condition that Dunson not kill Matt. Dunson now realizes that Tess loves Matt, but refuses to forego his vengeance. He does agree to take her along the following day. Dissolve.

40) Three shots of Matt, men and herd. Dissolve.

41) Herd meets train. Dissolve.


43) A sequence of the arrival of the herd in Abilene. Dissolve.

44) In the office of Mr. Melville, who makes Matt an offer for his cattle, which Matt accepts. Dissolve.

45) Dunson arrives outside Abilene, announces that he and his men will camp and go into Abilene in the morning. Dissolve.

46) Herd completes arrival at night. Dissolve.

47) In Mr. Melville's office; Matt concludes the deal. Dissolve.

48) A bit later, Matt enters his room at the boarding house; Tess is waiting for him, and warns him of Dunson. He embraces her. Dissolve.

49) Next day, Matt waits for Dunson. Dissolve.

50) Dunson strides into town, to Matt, begins shooting near him. As a crowd watches, Dunson punches Matt until Matt begins to retaliate. As the two men are fighting on the ground, Tess shoots near them, thus ending the fight. She scornfully tells them that their brawling is foolish since they obviously love each other. Dunson tells Matt that he had better marry that girl, and, drawing the brand of his ranch in the dust, places Matt's initial into its pattern. Fade.
The Drives and Cultural Production in Red River by Michael Silverman

The attachment of the Freudian concept of “drives” to Red River — of all texts, with its insistence on the movement of cattle to market — suggests a fortuitous and trivial punning. Yet Freud’s defining drives as being indeterminate does not favour such strict and facile correlations, but may help problematize what appears as an all-too schematically explicable film. Freud suggests that the drives be distinguished from need on the one hand, and from desire on the other. Need derives its energy from organic and somatic impulses, while the energy bound up with desire is largely psychical. Not only do the drives mediate between need and desire in ways not entirely clear, but their expression is further complicated in two profound ways. First, the drives are always dualistic: whether one speaks of “ego” and “sex” in reference to earlier Freudian formulations, or to the “life” and “death” of the later writings, a reference to one necessarily brings the other into play. Second, the drives are always mediated: the drive only enters mental life through representation "(Vorstellungs—) Reprasentanz." This “ideational representative” — the inscribed figure of mediation — bears the force of all repression precisely as it feels the necessity of transforming any derivatives of “drive energy” into something acceptable within the domain of representation. Representation is imperative not only in order that repression be sustained, but that mediation in carefully articulated ways be possible between need and desire.

At stake here is the shape of a terrain, constantly subject to re-writing and revision, proprietorship constantly being re-assigned. The general movement of the writing, nevertheless, is clear enough: a movement away from the threat of disequilibration emanating from those elements within the energy of the drives tending toward dissolution, a movement toward greater stabilizing control through the containment of oppositional tension. Diagrams of the terrain begin to favour movement across formerly rigid boundaries, the encroachment by one term upon the domain of another for the purpose of modifying antagonisms. The writing of the mental topography undertakes a modification, rather than a complete transformation. In Red River the sign of the landscape is the brand which begins as “D” (“the Red River D”) and becomes modified — as the final sign, point of arrival, in the text — to “D/M.” This grafting not only signifies something earned, the task set by Dunson for Matt at the outset when Matt had protested his exclusion from the sign, but an accommodation made necessary by a re-writing of the original contract of the cattle drive, Missouri giving way to Kansas, Dunson giving way to Matt as leader, but also the intervention of Tess Millay and foreswearing by Dunson of his revenge on Matt. The terrain of the new brand, the “Red River D/M,” now extends from the banks of the Rio Grande to the stockyards of Abilene, following a route — as yet scarcely perceived — set forth by “some guy named Chisholm,” soon to become an artery of production travelled with regularity. The film works towards the consolidation of this western landscape, from a position of uncertainty (“What if there is no railroad in Kansas?”) toward the civilized hospitality of an eager town. But this description is already too schematic: the rhythm of the text is less schematic than this description makes it out to be, it seems rather meandering, punctuated with abrupt pieces of action and new beginnings.
It is necessary to bear in mind, when charting these topographies from within a general Freudian framework, that “it won’t do any longer to reduce this question to a simple matter of morality or of the ideological strategy of dominant powers... The pairs: morality/instinctual, nature/culture, order/disorder, master/slave, authoritarianism/democracy, etc... seem really insufficient to account for an eroticisation of limits...”. The text channels energies of all kinds, broadly speaking erotic, into the coherence of the final sign "D/M." In doing so it finds a way to signify the resolution of tensions generated by the drives, to manifest a plural solution of familial and territorial discord.

The price paid for this resolution is instinctual renunciation, renunciation made strikingly clear in the first instance of Dunson’s emergence in the text, his departure from the wagon train in order to head south with his bull and cow to found an empire on good land which he cannot see but which he is sure will be there. In order to do so he must refuse a woman who is wishing to leave the wagon train with him, appeals frankly to both sentiment and sexuality (“the sun only shines half the day, Tom”); Her demise cuts Dunson off from sexual pleasure, and closes him to everything but the cultural scenario of production. As they say goodbye, Dunson and the woman are shown isolated from the wagons slowly moving westward. This artificial heightening theatricalizes Dunson’s renunciation, making it seem less a matter of cutting away from the mainstream than pushing away a particular loved object. This calls to mind Freud’s paradigm of renunciation, the “fort/da episode” in Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920) introduced subsequent to his raising of the general problem of “unpleasure,” and its partial resolution in the “reality principle” as the great dilemma faced by the organism in its attempts to balance the force of the drives with larger social purposes. This seemingly trivial incident of play, the disappearance and return of a spool accompanied by an exclamation of satisfaction constitutes for Freud the child’s great cultural achievement — the instinctual renunciation (that is, the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction) which he had made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting. He compensated himself for this, as it were, by himself staging the disappearance and return of the objects within his reach. It is of course a matter of indifference from the point of view of judging the effective nature of the game whether the child invented it himself or took it over on some outside suggestion.

Of course we cannot be indifferent to the source of the activity (as opposed to the effective cause) since it must lie within the realm of culture holding out to the child the lure and task of joining its order. But there can be no doubt as to the “effective nature”: it is that of a rehearsal for the inevitable losses (most especially death) which will assail the psychic organism. Only through an experience of loss in such mediating instances as play can the child learn to cope with hardship and to undertake the hazards of life. Unrestrained acquiescence to libidinal energy bound up in the drives would, it is inferred, result in catastrophe whenever “the difficulties of the external world” close off the possibility of satisfaction. The game of the child becomes extended over a period of time and through repetition becomes a principle designated by Freud as “reality.”

This latter principle does not abandon the intention of ultimately obtaining pleasure, but it nevertheless demands and carries into effect the postponement of satisfaction, the abandonment of a number of possibilities of gaining satisfaction and the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure.

This is precisely the substitution made by Dunson, though the substitution cannot be simply maintained, not merely the loss of Fen (the woman) and the gain of a cattle empire. This is Groot’s simple answer when responding testily to Matt’s perception of fear in Dunson just before the drive to Missouri. Of course he’s afraid, Groot suggests,
and think of the price he’s had to pay: “Cost him dear, too. Cost him a woman. The only woman he ever wanted.” But the burdens laid on Dunson by the text are much greater: succession of the cattle empire and its future must be assured (Dunson and Matthew Garth reconciled), a woman must be found to replace the lost Fen, and the land must be opened so that commerce and production can flow untroubled by outlaws and in concert with the expansion of new towns and the extension of the railroad.

The mapping of territory, its designation as “good” land for beef and commerce, is the manifest reason for Dunson’s original departure from the wagon train, and grows in significance throughout the film. At a certain point near the Rio Grande, Dunson alights from his horse and strikes an attitude, proclaiming ownership of the land which stretches away to the horizon. The killing of Don Diego’s gunman which follows figures less as an act of force majeure than as a restitution to social production of land in excess of anyone’s real needs, while of course re-stating a scenario common to dominant cinema that Mexican landholders simply let their vast estates vegetate while Americans put them to work. Though the acquisition of land is naturalized to some extent (the bull and the cow are untied, and Dunson proclaims “wherever they go they’ll be on my land”) the chief premise of the act is to bind Dunson over to a cultural demand which goes beyond the acquisitive impulse of any individual. Dunson asks for “ten years,” and as the text produces a montage of cattle being organized in various productive ways, Dunson’s voice continues, the only moment of the film in which his voice is cut away from the body of the actor John Wayne, elevated now into a hymn for a growing America:

Ten years and I'll have the Red River D on more cows than you’ve ever looked at... I'll have that brand on enough beef to feed a hungry people. Beef to make 'em strong, to make 'em grow.

This speech covers an interval of fourteen years (roughly 1851 to 1865) during which Dunson has partially brought his prophecy to fruition: he has produced the beef but has not delivered them to market. The “temporary toleration of unpleasure” threatens to become permanent, the herd is not worth a plugged nickel, “the very land itself riven with civil war — has become infested with “carpetbaggers” and bandits. Matt’s return from the war, greeted so enthusiastically by the choric Groot, suggests a fresh start, as it had originally when he wandered dazedly into Dunson’s presence leading the cow which would, in replacing Dunson’s (killed like Fen by Indians), start the very enterprise of the herd.

Dunson’s speech over the montage of the cattle represents as full a subordination of the individual subject to the general good of a culturally imposed scenario as the text offers, until the passionate speech of Teeler which immediately precedes Matt’s taking control of the drive away from Dunson. When we next see Dunson, Matt and Groot are talking over the possibility of a drive to Missouri, the intervening years elided by the text have changed Dunson, brought him to the point where he can begin his slide to demagoguery and despair. All the shadings of sensation and the registration of events which occurred between the time of the herd’s formation and the moment of the decision to make the drive have simply been omitted or excluded from the text. This has two effects: it stresses, first of all, the hardship of the drive itself and the difficult position of the struggling nation, denying any real achievement in the mere assemblage of the herd; secondly, it presents us with the necessity of a return, back across the boundaries of the Red, toward the site of that original unpleasure, Dunson’s separation from Fen. The geography is not exact, but we are headed north, and then, crucially, straight north rather than north-east. Matt’s act of taking control has the effect of moving the herd toward another embattled wagon train, another woman. The film enacts this return without much analysis of personal motive: the operative formations of personal renunciation and cultural gain have been set in place and must be played out.

The drive is begun with the signing of a contract, the binding over of each man to an itinerary set forth by Dunson at the outset. Deviation from this contract is punishable by death at the hands of Dunson; loyalty to the contract will result in payment of $100.
at the end of the drive. Only with the completion of a task fraught with extraordinary hardship will anything resembling personal satisfaction be attained. The most poignant exemplar of this mandate is associated with Dan Latimer. When Dunson announces that those who do not wish to make the trip are understandably excused, one or two mutter vague protestations and leave the room with Dunson's approval. Latimer stands, is excused by Dunson, but instead maintains that he is standing simply to signal his willingness. Of course this marks him textually as the good man given over to involuntary death in the stampede of cattle, a calamity begun through the immaturity of a cowboy who cannot defer gratification of the lowest sort, a rummaging for sugar which results in an endless cascade of pots. Dunson's reaction provides the first moment of separation between his isolated authority and Matt's gentler leadership — after a brief skirmish, the errant cowboy is provided with food and an extra horse, and sent home. Further rebelliousness is subordinated with increasing resentment until three men (including Teeler, one of the first men separated by name from the mass in the text) desert when Dunson shows no sign of deviating from his course toward Missouri even after an expiring survivor of an earlier drive tells them they are nearing a point of no return: "Weshoulda turned north at the Red... Fella named Jeff Chisolm told me he blazed a trail all through the nations." When the deserters are returned, the drive has already crossed the Red, the text's recurrent point of division. While preparing himself to submit to Dunson's justice ("I'm the law") Teeler asks to make a speech. It is, of course, not a plea for life, but a re-introduction of that cultural scenario of which Dunson in his private urgings has lost sight:

There's a good way to Kansas, but you won't take it... This herd don't belong to you — it belongs to every hopin' and prayin' cattleman in the whole state...

When Dunson announces his intention to hang them, the entire group intervenes. An injured Dunson is left behind swearing revenge as the drive moves on to Kansas. The landscape has narrowed, uncertainty awaiting them from in front and behind.

Much has been made by commentators on this film of Matthew Garth as a feminine; he seems rather to be that agency by which the repressed feminine is returned to the text. He is literally present on screen for every mention of women after Dunson's separation from Fen, and Groot's remark on seeing the smoke from the burning wagon train ("Maybe we should've took her, Tom"): Cherry Valance's dull crack about "a good Swiss, watch or a woman from anywhere," Latimer's lost errand to buy his wife a pair of red shoes, Groot's analysis of Dunson's fear as stemming from the lost Fen — Matt listens to them all. Even the possibility of a way to market at Abilene is introduced to Matt by Cherry as news whose proof is blocked by a woman: "I never saw the railroad in Kansas... I met a girl." If Matt's assumption of control signals not only a more humane discipline and a movement toward a more viable social community (Missouri now thoroughly associated with banditry) — it also signals a return of the repressed feminine, that thing repressed never, as Freud reminds us, disappearing from any psychic or textual economy, but finding access in disguised form. Matt's function, must also he to go on ahead, encountering that object before Dunson, blaring a trail to it. Matt will act as a mediating agency between Dunson and his return to the site of original renunciation, and will simultaneously reclaim the woman (she is a gambler and hound for Nevada) and place her within the confines of domesticity and production.

Before examining this process as it works itself out in this text, we might think of a cinematic instance in which a repressed term returns with such force as to produce destructive results. In Bertolucci's The Conformist Marcello Clerici has repressed a homosexual episode from his childhood which resulted, he believes, in the death of the chauffeur Lino Semirama. Lino invites the boy to his room, sits on the bed with a pistol between his legs, and removes his cap. Long hair cascades to his shoulder. "Like a woman!" the boy exclaims. Twenty years later, the head of a woman bends forward submissively to receive Marcello's kiss; an escaping lock of hair brings back the repressed episode in a rush of erotic guilt and homicidal responsibility. These shots are riot contiguously placed within Bertolucci's film, but they are held within a single consciousness which recalls the first event only after the second has occurred. The effect
of this return is shrouded to others — his wife, his associates — and since the force of the repressed incident cannot be taken up and supported within any social field, its only outcome is the death of the loved object, as revenge for triggering, dislodging the repressed material.

The mediation of repressed material in Red River does not occur as a shift within Dunson’s psychic economy, but is worked out in terms of social relations and movement within landscape. The potentially destructive force of the repression is thus softened, and the text prepares us for the social melioration of the ending. The figure of the bracelet takes up in very obvious ways the transit from Fen to Tess, from Dunson originally to Tess finally, and in this last improbable yet certain term of the transmission lies a reconciliation before the actual fact, reconciliation pronounced in Dunson’s not taking the bracelet from Tess and, indeed, in speaking for the first time, albeit guardedly — of the woman he once loved. The bracelet’s movement, (from Dunson to Fen to an Indian, back to Dunson, to Matt and finally to Tess) becomes both a sign of loss and a chance for recovery and re-awakening, not unlike the toy of Freud’s grandson, but here spread throughout a chain of subjects spread over a vast landscape. In fact we do not see Matthew Garth pass the bracelet on to Tess Millay, for as they lie together in the darkness and fog, he passes on to her instead his love for Dunson, capable of articulation only through the presence of the woman as a sanction of love between men:

... So he started this drive ... So he started thinking one way, his way... otherwise, we wouldn’t have got as far as we did. I took his herd away from him.

You love him, don’t you? And he must love you.

Garth prepares Millay for Dunson, binds the three of them together in still undeveloped love. She thinks of killing the older man, then agrees to his offer of bearing him a son if he will call off his revenge. But the end result is her joining him as he tracks down the herd toward Abilene. The town is the final textual destination, the ground on which everything — including the new brand — must be drawn.

If the introduction of Tess Millay marks a textual return, the herd’s arrival at Abilene signifies an entry into an order not previously encountered, a register of stable consumers, ultimate destination of the beef. This does not in fact seem to be a western frontier town, new spur of a railroad: women line the streets in fancy muslin dresses, men wear top hats and stand by carriages rather than buckboards. Hawks’ shrewd casting of Harry Carey, Sr. as Melville the cattle agent confronts the slightly bewildered Matt with a graceful figure familiar as the “civilizing” cowboy of silent westerns and the paternal vice president from Capra’s Mr. Smith goes to Washington, who watched the struggles of another young man with quiet authority. The transaction completed, Melville proposes that the men “Just drive ’em down the streets of the town.” The society must get a glimpse of what it consumes; so the town is given over to cattle swarming from one side of the street to the other, no observing bystanders now, the structure of the town acting as physical and moral containment.

Tess’s reconciliation with Matt, their waiting for Dunson’s arrival next morning. The ending of the film can no more be criticized than that of other classical texts, indeed, it manages to maintain a balance — Dunson’s inexorable march through standing cattle and nearly invisible dispatching of Cherry, Matt’s immobility — between elements so fully written by the film up to this point that we cannot seriously entertain fatality as an outcome. What remains to be done is the fulfillment of a figure, traced now in the sand after the fight and Tess’s explosion; we may now see that the figure was incomplete all along, the wavy river-line of the brand needing its complementary “M” to balance and to ensure that the “other side” of the river, across from the “D,” not remain blank. The journey completed, the full figure traced: how Matt has “earned” the brand cannot be located in a single act (the fight, the overturning of Dunson’s mad authority) but in the totality of a restitution of all the textual elements (Fen and the “empire” in particular) which had either been repressed or given over to the death drive, now restored metaphorically to the text, indeed in the figure of the brand a new text authorized more solid than any previous one, bound securely now within a scenario of cultural productivity and sexual stability.
With Norman McLaren as its world-renowned central figure, the Animation Section at the National Film Board of Canada has been recognized as an exception to the general decline in animated filmmaking since the golden age of animation in the 1930's. The NFB has recently enhanced its reputation by the addition of several younger animators, none of them more successful than Co Hoedeman, a transplanted Dutchman who joined the NFB in 1965. Hoedeman has concentrated on making animated films for children, and, in an industry dominated by the shoddy cartoons made for Saturday-morning television (at their best merely “radio with still pictures”), it is rare to find films like his, films with imagination, intelligence, warmth and style.

Like Gulliver's Travels, Alice in Wonderland and other children's classics, Hoedeman's short puppet films (none is longer than fourteen minutes) work on several levels, embraceable by all age groups. Most of his films are clear and colourful enough for a child to comprehend and enjoy, yet so original and so resonant as to satisfy an adult's tastes. They are children’s fables, but they are well-crafted and full of careful detail-work. They do not, therefore, insult a person’s perceptual intelligence the way current cartoons do. Nor are they heavy-handedly didactic or sentimentalized. They present simple half-forgotten truths in a manner that is engaging for children and adults. Hoedeman has produced a body of work that is refreshingly unique because of the magical fantasy worlds that are created, his films' technical proficiency, and their combination of familiar parable and intellectual depth.

The most striking initial feature of Hoedeman's films and one of the keys to his fantasy worlds is the lively attractiveness of his creatures. They are familiar to anyone who can recall his or her childhood: a bent-wire man, block children, seal-fur owls, and gumby dolls. In other words, they are recognizable without being banal. Although Hoedeman has conscientiously set out to provide each of them with distinguishing traits, his creatures cannot really be called “characters.” What is engaging about them is not their “personalities” but the kinds of creatures they are, the credibility of their movements and behaviour, and the mere fact that they are animated. They are creatures from a child’s world which generally come to life only in the imagination. And they are made out of basic materials that would seem to be incapable of actual movement: wood and sand, for instance. But they are alive, active, and expressive (though through bodily rather than facial movements).
These creatures and the themes of Hoedeman's films are intimately related. For his approach to storytelling is holistic. In describing the processes involved in creating his films, Hoedeman reveals the wholeness of his approach, the interpenetration of the characters, their worlds, their actions, and the themes generated.

In Tchou-Tchou I built a story and a whole fantasy world with blocks. In The Sand Castle I wanted to create a different world again, one with sand. You have to ask yourself what the sand is all about; in Tchou-Tchou, what wood and blocks are all about. With the sand it came down to smooth forms, no sharp edges. The characters had to be created to fit the landscape... It would be nice to make a film about rope or about metal.

Similarly, an earlier film, Matrioska, is about the seven Russian nesting dolls who dance in it. Out of the possibilities inherent in the dolls spring the characterization and the story and consequently the themes of the film.

But these films are about more than just wood or sand or nesting dolls. They are also about creativity and, more specifically, about animation. This meta-cinematic dimension is what gives Hoedeman's works a maturity and modernism beyond most animated films.

An animator more than any other kind of filmmaker does not rely on the camera to record a continuous objective movement. He himself must create movement through the camera, by filming up to twenty-four slightly modified still pictures for each second of film. And he cannot merely produce actions from naturalistic models. (An old adage in animation says: Better a live actor than a puppet emulating one.) To animate is to give life and soul to a design not through the copying of reality but through its transformation. This is not only what Co Hoedeman does, it is what his films are about. His two major films, The Sand Castle and Tchou-Tchou, as well as most of his earlier works, are celebrations of inspired action, joyful movement, and creative transformation: matters central to the animator's art.

Clearly, Hoedeman's approach to animation is similar to a sculptor's approach to his art. A sculptor works in space; an animator works in both space and time. As a sculptor in carving a chunk of wood or chiselling a piece of marble is often said to be freeing the spirit imprisoned in the material, so does Hoedeman the animator loose the spirit dormant in his static creatures. In the process, his films become paeans to the freedom of the creative spirit and the transforming power of the animator's art.

The Early Films

Oddball (Maboule in French), a clever and charming but youthful film made in 1969, established many of the patterns and characteristics that Hoedeman has followed throughout his career. Like all of his films, Oddball is an ingenuous moral fable with an uncomplicated story line. A small white ball makes its entrance onto an empty black background. It is soon joined by a little silver figure (looking like an un-fuzzy pipe-cleaner-man) and a bunch of marbles. The wire figure ignores the white ball to play with increasingly larger and more colourful varieties. When an enormous beachball overwhelms the wire man, the oddball returns and shows him the magic it possesses within itself by reproducing itself into large numbers of lively, primary coloured balls. At first glance, this is a fairly familiar cautionary tale about the dangers of excess and prejudice and the value of knowing one's own capabilities and recognizing the hidden talents of others.

But there is more to it than this. The film builds to a climax which involves
a choreographed dance of colours. The white ball bursts out of its shell of whiteness and fills the screen with glorious, swirling, multi-coloured circles. This is the central movement in all Hoedeman films — the point at which a small unprepossessing creature demonstrates its creativity by transforming itself and/or its environment in a captivating display of its hidden powers. As in the other films this display is presented in the face of seemingly overwhelming forces. In Oddball these forces are not only the uncontrollable beachball and the large numbers of competing agates; they include the ignorance of the wire man and, more importantly, the ominous presence of the void. The film begins and ends in darkness and emptiness (as do most of Hoedeman’s films), and the story is staged against a black, featureless background, thus emphasizing the fragility of the creatures and their activities. In the context of the still and inert-looking cosmos (which is a black, felt-presence before, after and behind the action of the film), the creative transformation is not only dazzling but poignant. The spirit is freed but is a circumscribed, fleeting gesture.

Matrioska, although it is a quantum leap beyond Oddball because it exploits its resources so fully and naturally and is so skillful in its animation techniques, has many things in common with Oddball. It is another deceptively simple film with a minimal set and story line and a limited “cast.” An empty tabletop with a smooth flat backdrop serves as the setting; it is like a stage without an audience set down in the middle of nowhere. There is only one “character” in the film: The Matrioska of the title — the wooden Russian folk doll that is really seven dolls stacked one inside the other. And the basic premise of the film is simply to combine these bulky and solemn-faced but gaily-painted female figures with Russian folk-dance music. What results bears a faint resemblance to the familiar fairy tale about Christmas toys coming to life under the tree while the household is asleep. But the virtuosity of the animation and the implications of the tension between the dancer and the dance make it a much wittier and richer film.

Like Oddball, Matrioska is a film about creative energy and hidden resources. In the former film, the ball looks white; “underneath” or “inside” it are many balls of many colours. In the latter, the large doll opens up and inside are six smaller dolls. And beneath their stern countenances and unpromising bulk is a vital terpsichorean spirit or elan vital waiting to break out. When the music begins, the dolls line up and then spin and hop and play “snap-the-whip.” As the dancing builds, the figures seem more and more like little Buster Keatons. Despite their exuberance, their faces maintain their expressionless reserve as if they are battling to hold their emotions in check. Perhaps because of this fierce concentration, the six larger dolls grow less and less aware of the smallest one’s presence, to the point that they restack themselves and forget their core member. In the end, they must re-open themselves and let it hop in before they can resume their initial repose.

Matrioska has taken the climatic dance sequence from Oddball and expanded it into the subject of the entire film, In essence what has been eliminated is the effect of the dance. The little white odd-ball must demonstrate its creativity and energy, must transform itself, in order to be accepted by the wire man. In Matrioska there is no audience to impress; there are only the performers, the stage and the void. Because they break out into dance in the vacuum of space, whether it be in rehearsal, or in secret, or even perhaps in spite of themselves, the irrepresibility of the creative forces unleashed in the dolls is enhanced. They stand as (seemingly unwitting or reluctant) testimony to the fact that vitality cannot be squelched. Creativity is irrepressible.

The spirit that is loosed in the dolls is not a wildly disruptive one; it is not chaos. For the dance is fairly orderly, as if it is familiar to the dolls (The largest doll seems to be in charge, and the smallest and its nearby siblings are not well-trained enough to participate smoothly). And in the end the dolls return to their designated places inside the “mother” doll and resume their rigid and
mute pose. This family of performers, temporarily released to engage in a kind of invigorating yet purposeful activity, not only harks back to Oddball, it also anticipates one of Hoedeman’s major films, The Sand Castle. In all three cases the infectious activity is only temporary (if repeatable) relief from the dominant condition of stasis and quiet. Transformation, the freedom of the spirit, is not permanent.

After Matrioska Hoedeman began a series of films to illustrate Eskimo legends. The Owl and the Lemming (1971) and The Owl and the Raven (1973) — hereafter abbreviated as O/L and O/R respectively — allowed Hoedeman the opportunity to develop his skills as an animator and storyteller while using material that was essentially someone else’s.

They are children’s nature fables featuring creatures especially familiar to the Inuit but with stories and morals as universal as Aesop’s. They are not, however, devoid of the filmmaker’s special concerns. Both emphasize release through joyful movement (in each case, again, it is dancing) and creativity (though perhaps more in a negative sense than in the other films). Clearly Hoedeman found something in the legends that struck a sympathetic chord.

O/L is ostensible about flattery; the moral of the fable cautions against it. A hungry owl who stalks and captures a lemming is flattered into singing and dancing. While he is doing so, the lemming escapes, and the owl is left to cope with the grumbling admonitions of his mate. But O/L is also indirectly about the advantages of responding creatively to each situation. In contrast to the foolish owl, the clever lemming first feigns death to keep from being killed and then cunningly distracts the owl to make its escape. As in the earlier Oddball and in Tchou-Tchou the creature that is continuously aware of the potential of the surrounding world and can adjust to deal with matters is the one that triumphs, however temporarily.

At the start of O/R the two title creatures decide to decorate each other with black paint to relieve their boredom. The owl is more than happy with his paint job and he rewards the raven with a pair of boots. The raven is so proud of the boots that it dances happily, making the owl’s reciprocal painting task impossible. Frustrated, the owl hurls the paint can at its friend. And that, says the narrator, is how the raven came to be black. It is pride that defeats the raven and provides the primary or overt moral of the story. Linked to this, however, and in a more subtle way than in O/L is a sub-theme dealing with the imagination. At the beginning of the film both creatures are playing a game in which seal-bones are maneuvered (through imagination by the creatures, through animation by Hoedeman) to become an igloo, a sled, and a dog-team. The raven is the first one to tire of this, the implication being that it is the less imaginative. Later, although it paints the owl artfully, the raven again loses interest in the project. It, if you will, denies or frustrates the full creative impulse.

What the raven does when it is happy is the same thing that the owl does and what the lemming gets the owl to do in the earlier film: dance. Throughout Hoedeman’s career, joyful physical movement, dancing, is, as has been indicated, a constant touchstone. It is the subject of an entire film, Matrioska, and is a central incident in most of the others. Primarily, it is a way of expressing happiness, a way of celebrating, a release of pent-up vitality, energy or the creative spirit. But it must not go too far. It is a release, but it must not be total abandonment. The owl in O/L dances itself into a swoon and suffers; the raven in O/R gets carried away in its dancing and also pays a price. But the owl’s response in the latter film is not as reckless. It does a spontaneous cartwheel and a single merry spin. And then it goes about its business. In the magical but precarious worlds that Hoedeman has created, it is best to balance release with restraint. Since animation demands such patience and rigour as well as a playful imagination, it is understandable that Hoedeman’s world view would involve this kind of balance.

The Major Films

At the core of all of Hoedeman’s films is a cluster of ideas and experiences that are for this animator both personally and cinematically expressive. His career is a sort of cum-
ulative elaboration on this cluster. Each film is more ambitious in terms of the creatures, the stories, and especially the techniques than its predecessors, and builds from them. This combination of variety, evolution and consistency is best illustrated by comparing The Sand Castle and Tchou-Tchou. For, although they are separated by five years and three films, in many ways they can be seen as companion pieces.

They are both set in familiar childhood environments. And both feature a wide range of playful activity, culminating in a creative response to a transformation of their environments. But one is full of vibrant colours while the other is subdued, almost colourless. More significantly, though both films describe a circle in their narratives, i.e., both return essentially to the point from which they began, one ends more ambiguously than the other. Tchou-Tchou concludes with a positive sense of release; The Sand Castle with a sense of closure (though there is a definite possibility of repetition).

Tchou-Tchou opens with an empty azure-blue screen. Quickly three planes of building-block structures impose themselves, one by one, back to front, on the camera which is at a low angle shooting up through the buildings at what becomes a blue sky. The shot indicates that the world is magical but rather intimidating; this is reinforced by three metallic, ringing thuds on the soundtrack. They seem to be resounding emptily in an endless vacuum. Despite the obvious correspondences to the Biblical creation story (an innocent couple amid friendly fauna threatened by a serpent-like monster), the scene is not idyllic, not Edenic. It is a child’s building-block world, and it is presented in such a way as to include the audience in that world, from the point of view of one of its small citizens.

The block-children are noticeably at ease in their environment when they first appear, perhaps because they are in a way products of their environment, at one with it. They play ball and then hopscotch, having merely to wish, it seems, for markers and gameboard to make them appear. When the boy does a happy flip, the dragon appears like a grouchy neighbour or a sour-tempered bully. Its appearance thus seems to be in response to the exuberance of the children. That it materializes expressly to stop them and is therefore not just biblically diabolical but the symbolic antithesis of creative energy and playful enthusiasm is reinforced by the dragon’s initial actions. Intimidated by the noise, the boy and girl hide themselves. The dragon does not seek them out; it destroys their gameboard. The same thing happens the second time the dragon appears. The children are playing ball and rocking on a see-saw. When the boy’s spirits cause him to do another flip, the dragon reappears. Again the children go into hiding, this time behind a fortress wall they build, and the dragon wreaks havoc on the playingfield.

The children’s response to the dragon develops the playful creativity versus brutish destruction antithesis more systematically. At first the children simply hide behind a convenient cylinder. Then they build and hide in the fortress. Then they bomb the dragon with blocks. Then they direct it away from their territory with a series of hastily-designed road signs. But these strategies for coping are not enough. Although they have developed an increasingly aware and active response to the threat, from willed ignorance to recognition and clever manipulation, they also realize that these are only temporary helps. The progress of the narrative implies that they must be more creative.

Their final response is a result of their ability to see the dragon as something else. It is more than just a visual similarity; it is conceptual. The children make the metaphorical connection between the dragon as something strange and menacing and the dragon as something familiar and useful. They see the dragon as a train, just as Hoedeman is able to see the nesting dolls in Matrioska as dancers, the odd white ball in Oddball as a combination of colours. And not only do they see; they also act on their vision. They transform the threat into a toy, the danger into a game. They too are animators, if you will. In the end they guide the train through their city, moving it past their reconstructed playgrounds and buildings as if reclaiming them and reasserting the values they stand for in the presence of the former threat to those values.
Tchou-Tchou is therefore more than a simple Genesis story. Hoedeman is not content to duplicate the Old Testament world. He creates a magical new world and invites us as audience not merely to inspect it from afar but to participate in it. Thus the opening point of view shot. And thus the dark secretiveness of the actual transformation of the dragon. While the boy and girl scurry in and out of focus behind strategic obstacles and under the cover of darkness, we the audience are encouraged to figure things out. Once the dragon appears at dawn as the train, we are drawn in even more — to the children and their imaginative leap and to the appropriateness of the film’s title. We participate in their triumph and their celebration. The camera tracks along with the dragon-train as it moves through the entire city-scape, up and down ramps, past the playground, the fortress and other buildings as it picks up the boy and girl and later even the bird, the ladybug and the inchworm. It is a remarkably complicated and daring animation-manoeuver, but not an ostentatious one, stunning in both conception and execution. Thus both the narrative and the technical aspects of the film peak at the same time. And we are encouraged to retain this sense of victory, at least imaginatively, when the camera tilts up into the airy blueness of the sky to end the film.

The Sand Castle does not have as positive or as permanent a conclusion. Instead of tilting up to the blue sky, the camera tilts down to the sand. This is not as grim as the conclusion Hoedeman had originally intended. In the finished film, the little troop of castle-builders completes its work and gets a chance to celebrate its accomplishment at some length before the wind rises, chases the creatures into their castle, erodes it and returns everything to the primordial desert. In the script version, the creatures retreat into the castle because of the rising wind. Their festive dance begins after they are inside. The celebration is therefore counterpointed and undercut by the storm. The dance becomes an act of defiance, more poignant and almost frivolous than jubilant. It is quickly terminated by the incoming tide which obliterates everything. These waves are much more destructive than the wind and give the incident a finality that is missing from the actual film. Here the concluding images of the blowing sand return to the opening. Thus the conclusion becomes part of an eternally recurring cycle. Although there is a residue of melancholy here, of existential futility (dust to dust), there is also hope. Creation, it is implied, cannot stay the elemental forces of nature, but it will happen again. This ending is not as upbeat as Tchou-Tchou’s, but it is tempered by its temporariness.

This conclusion which is not a conclusion may have been a second thought by Hoedeman, but it is entirely in keeping with the rest of the film. In a world of shifting sands, there can be no permanence, no dramatic endpoint.

Tchou-Tchou is like a staircase. The geometry of its world is sharp-edged, all straight lines and right angles. The plot is similarly clear-cut — a steady step-by-step build-up that culminates in a distinct and irreversible conclusion. The only way the camera could move at the end of Tchou-Tchou is up. It is propelled there by the logic of the rest of the film.

The Sand Castle, on the other hand, is more like a balloon that can expand and contract. The geometry of its world is smooth and sinuous: circles and mounds and flowing contours inhabited by seemingly half-formed creatures both flexible and highly mobile. The action throughout is continuous and overlapping. The sandman is constantly adding to his troop of workers, and the camera never stays for long on any one of them. The creatures dance when they are created and they dance when they create. Even the dances they perform are circular.

Again comparison between script and film is instructive. The incidents in the script are all separate. First the sandman appears. Then he creates the entire menagerie. Then they are animated by the wind. Then they unite to make the castle. And finally it is destroyed. A key to the concerting choppiness of the script’s story is the fact that the creatures are created en masse and are initially immobile. The sandman forms them and lines them up, and while his back
is turned the winds animate them. In the film the sandman continues to make creatures throughout, often offscreen. And the creatures move immediately, sometimes even before they are fully formed. Oddly enough, the desert or beach world of The Sand Castle is more magical and fecund than Tchou-Tchou's world. There are more creatures and the creativity is more continuous.

The creativity is not limited to the one main creature either, as it is Tchou-Tchou. There the boy figures things out, and the girl helps him a bit. Although the sandman is the prime mover, he is not the only creative force. The “gardener” is another artist or creator. He is the creature that draws strange pre-Columbian designs in the sand courtyard by blowing through its trunk. If the sandman is Hoedeman’s obvious surrogate in The Sand Castle, helping the filmmaker to create and animate the other creatures, then the gardener represents perhaps a not-so-obvious or secondary surrogate. The gardener draws what Hoedeman draws, a fact that is implied by the opening titles which are traced in the sand, he takes his cue from the playful antics of the creatures and the independent shapes that they have made. Some of the creatures have even assisted in their own creation.

What is presented, therefore, is not another simple creation fable patterned on the genesis. Again as in Tchou-Tchou, it is close enough to be familiar and evocative. The sandman is a kind of god-figure for he un-buries (ressurects?) himself at the beginning and remains in charge right to the end when he is the first one to sense the oncoming sandstorm, ushers everyone else inside the castle, and is the last to succumb to the sand. But the story is richer than this. The Sand Castle is initially about undeniable creative energy and movement. More centrally it is about cooperation and community. The two “villains” of the film are snakes. But they are not satanic temptors. Their “sin” is that they antagonize some of the others and disrupt the work by chasing the pig and by sleeping, and by messing up the gardener’s frescoes. Even the lens that Hoedeman uses to film this story communicates the idea of togetherness. Whereas he used a long lens in Tchou-Tchou, one that separates planes of action which can only be bridged by changing focus, in The Sand Castle he employs a wider lens. The activities of foreground and background in a particular shot are united on the screen. And Hoedeman sets up shots and arranges activity to include two kinds of action in most shots. Creatures are often busy in both the foreground and the background. And the camera follows one creature until it’s path crosses another’s, and then the camera will follow the second.

The longest and most dramatic shot in the film also emphasizes community. The finished castle is presented by slowly zooming back from a close-up of the three-legged “tamper” spinning merrily on the top of the central turret to an extreme longshot of the entire finished castle, with all of the creatures dancing spiritedly and in harmony. The shot is a movement from an individual to a community celebration. The shot in a way is a microcosm of the entire film. Just as the film expands from the sandman to his entire crew, so the frame enlarges bit by bit to take in more and more group activity. At the outward limits of the range of the lens, the group is united in its dance, the creative accomplishment and the celebration having dissolved whatever tensions may have existed. The force of the shot, the gradual zoom back from the tamper, is an attempt to draw the audience into the movie. It is another disclosure device similar to the shot at dawn in Tchou-Tchou. Here Hoedman pulls us away from the individual and tries to elicit an appreciation of the exhilaration of communal activity, and the joyful transformation of a barren environment, however temporary.

The slow outward zoom is a contextual shot; it shows a part in relation to the whole. Generally the implications of this kind of shot are such that the individual is made to seem less significant. Extended to extremes, i.e., to the edge of the cosmos, the zoom lens shows that the world, to revise William Blake, is seen as (not in) a grain of sand. Given this, and the overlapping, circular quality of the story, it is only logical that The Sand Castle return via a series of dissolves to a close-up of the sand. In terms of the film’s narrative and the ominous presence of the void in many of Hoedman’s films, it is the only suitable ending.
The Adventitious Detail

While the raven is painting the owl in *The Owl and the Raven*, it carelessly spills a bit of black paint on the floor of the igloo. At the time that it happens, neither the story nor the camera emphasizes this detail. As the raven gets more involved in its work, however, Hoedeman cuts to a close-up of the raven’s feet stepping in the splotch of paint and tracking it around the igloo floor. This adventitious detail is not at all necessary to the story. It merely provides a brief moment of levity and perhaps helps to characterize the raven and set up its later foolishness. What it demonstrates is Hoedeman’s continued development as a storyteller. In his recent films he moves beyond the lean and functional exposition of *Oddball* and *Matrioska* to include bits of business that do not serve to propel the plot.

Obviously Hoedeman has grown more confident in his abilities as an animator and therefore more expansive as a storyteller. This assurance can be seen by comparing the scripts for *The Sand Castle* and especially *Tchou-Tchou* with the completed films. What becomes evident is just how much the filmmaker is willing to alter and/or expand upon his original ideas in the actual filmmaking process. Hoedeman had worked out a complete storyboard for *Matrioska* and had faithfully adhered to the pre-production plan. In the course of transferring *Tchou-Tchou* and *The Sand Castle* from script to celluloid, however, he seems to have advanced enough beyond his earlier work to be less rigid and more creative while animating.

The most significant changes between script and film have to do with the creatures. While he was making *Tchou-Tchou*, he added the three secondary creatures: the bird, the ladybug and the inchworm. They contribute greatly to the light-heartedness of the film because of their actions and mere presence, and they fill out dimensions. Often they anticipate and enhance the emotional response of the little boy and girl, especially by scurrying out of the way of the marauding dragon. So, while they are additions, adventitious details, they are an integral part of the fabric of the film.

They also provide a key to Hoedeman’s effectiveness as an animator. There is a vast difference between animation as a scientific, objective process (a step-by-step system that can be executed by an engineer) and animation as a magical and mysterious experience which seduces the audience into believing in something in spite of themselves. The worlds and the creatures that Hoedeman presents to us are obviously unreal. But it is his belief in them, illustrated by his skillful presentation of the adventitious, life-engendering details, that makes them so convincing. The objects begin to breathe and become vital presences. So it is not just the idea of transformation that is important in his films, it is the fact of transformation. It is a transformation of static creatures and a transformation of a skeptical audience. Hoedeman manages to free the spirit of his audiences, both adults and children, and allows them to play in the fantasy worlds of his films. That is the ultimate mark of his artistry.
Book Review by Ron Burnett

The Dream that Kicks: The Prehistory and Early Years of Cinema in Britain by Michael Chanan
Routledge, Kegan, Paul Ltd.

The History of the British Film 1929-1939: Documentary and Educational Film of the 1930s
Films of Comment and Persuasion of the 1930s Two Volumes.
by Rachel Low
George Allen and Unwin,
London, 1979. 244 pages each volume.

Cinema and History: British Newsreels and the Spanish Civil War.
by Anthony Aldgate

Of the books listed above the most exciting and certainly the most innovative is The Dream That Kicks. Not only is the book itself a careful study of early British cinema but it is equally an important exploration of what it means to write film history. Chanan constantly reveals his own assumptions, raising questions about the historiography that he is practising and trying to avoid an approach that would end up as inventory — as mere classification.

In spite of the extensive documentation which exists concerning the early days of film there is a sense in which the origins of film are obscure. Film has taught us to see the world anew, but it seems that the one thing it could not properly picture was its own birth. What we see in the earliest films is the beginning of a new way of seeing. What we don’t see is how that way of seeing was first seen.

One of the most impressive parts of the book is the section where Chanan raises questions concerning the invention of cinema. He tries to interrelate popular entertainment during the nineteenth century with the attitudes held by audiences towards film. Furthermore he avoids the almost ‘mystical’ treatment that is given the invention of a technology like film and tries to ‘locate’ it within a context that is both social and economic. How were the institutions of cinema constituted?

How is it, I want to know, that cinema became a system in which moving images (and then later recorded sounds) are combined in various ways, according to various conventions, so that on the surface, as it were, the screen appears to be a kind of ‘window’ onto reality — whereas what is really screened is a world apart, which produces its own meanings, the genres, etc., which form our modern myths, legends, fantasies?
To realize this disjunction, the disjunction between process and appearance, leads to a conception of cinema as a form that is deeply involved in producing ideology.
What is the relationship between that constitution and ideology?

In a chapter entitled "Theories of Perception" Chanan tries to counter the superficial explanations that are given for how the cinema is 'viewed.' Early theories of perception concentrated on comparing the eye to the camera, the brain to a photographic plate. Persistence of vision was the way through which movement was supposedly created though most film historians had no scientific basis for asserting that and merely 'borrowed' the notion from the inventor Plateau who in turn had based his work upon ideas drawn from mid-eighteenth century research. Chanan explains that this immaturity in the analysis of perception is evidence of a methodology that has not quite understood its own assumptions.

As Kuhn has explained, this is inevitable in the early stages of discovery within a scientific field. "In the absence of a paradigm or some candidate for a paradigm, all of the facts that could possibly pertain to the development of a given science are likely to seem equally relevant. As a result early fact-gathering is a far more nearly random activity than the one that subsequent scientific development makes familiar."

Another crucial contribution of this book is found in Chanan's chapter on Celluloid. After asking why discussions of celluloid are always absent from film histories Chanan goes on to describe how it was first created. He then links its development to that of the chemical industry in general and more importantly the relationship of that industry to colonialism. One of the raw materials for celluloid came from Chile and Britain owned most of the Sodium Nitrate mines there. Chanan tries to analyse what all these links mean particularly for the kind of corporate empire that was being created by Eastman.

For Chanan the folklore of film history has become film history and the kind of critical work that is necessary to distinguish between that folklore and the way that the industry has developed requires an examination of the way that film historians see themselves, which in its earliest phase was dominated by oral history.

The real problem, therefore, in writing film history — as evidently all kinds of history — is the question of the criteria which are used to discover coherence and give the individual elements of the history their 'solidity.'

In his final chapter Chanan tries to explain the notion of film as dream and the implications of that for film as a commodity. His examination of film and dreams is too short and therefore is quite weak but it is written to counteract the 'accepted' notions of film historians that the medium they are dealing with simply reproduces the world and does not recreate it anew.

This short review cannot do justice to the wealth of ideas and information in this extraordinary book suffice to say that the review is meant to signal the book's existence because it is unlikely to get a very wide distribution.

As far as the other three books are concerned Rachel Low's work though traditional, is very rigorous and her book on The Documentary and Educational Films of the 1930s is a valuable contribution to the field. In particular I want to signal a chapter entitled "Reality and the Documentary Film" wherein Low begins to deal with the relations between narrative, realism and the documentary. She points out all of the pitfalls of an approach that does not recognize its own artifice and is particularly critical of John Grierson for avoiding the debates around this question.
Finally, Anthony Aldgate’s book Cinema and History can best be summarized by his own introduction. This author recommends it highly.

The purpose of (this study) is three-fold. First of all it seeks to fill in the background to the debate, current among film historians in Britain, about the usefulness of film as a primary source for historical study and to assess the value of archive film as a historical source. Secondly, it attempts to investigate the emergence of the British newsreel during the 1930s as a medium for mass communication and as a means for the dissemination of news. Both these tasks serve as a necessary prelude to the major purpose: a detailed examination of the film coverage of one particular event, the Spanish Civil War, by the British newsreel companies operating during the years 1936-9.
THE IMAGINARY CANADIAN

An Examination for Discovery

TONY WILDEN

PULP PRESS

$6.95
The Song of the Shirt grew out of a video project on women and the Welfare State. We wanted to examine why the status of working women had deteriorated from the time of the Industrial Revolution, and how it was that women living and working outside the family came to be seen as a challenge to the social order.

The film looks at the origins of philanthropy — and resistances to it — by examining as a group women working in the ‘sweated’ clothes trade in London in the 1840s — a new trade, overflowing with poor often unmarried women from the country, for whom employment was seasonal and prostitution often the only alternative. The film refuses to credit any historical source as the ‘truth’ about these women, but turns the tables and looks at the motives behind what was written, from Mayhew’s sensational accounts of their domestic lives, to hysterical comparisons in Parliament with the ‘festeri and mouldering discontent’ of the 1848 Paris Revolution, and the absurdly impractical schemes to get those ‘500,000 surplus women’ to emigrate. These conventional sources are repeatedly played off against arguments and criticisms from the radical publications of the Chartist and Cooperative movements.

The film is episodic, using short sequences of still photographs, graphics and acted reconstructions. Central to this structure is a popular sentimental novel, first serialised in a Chartist newspaper, which is repeated in different forms throughout the film — first, read by a young Victorian debutante, then presented in still photographs with ironically romantic music, and later read and satirised by a group of women in the lowest ranks of the trade.

The music, researched and composed by Lindsay Cooper, is wittily reworked from original lyrics and melodies. It is used in the film not just to comment on the images and narratives, but significantly to transform them, bringing together themes and ideas by a layering of sounds, instrumentation, and musical references.