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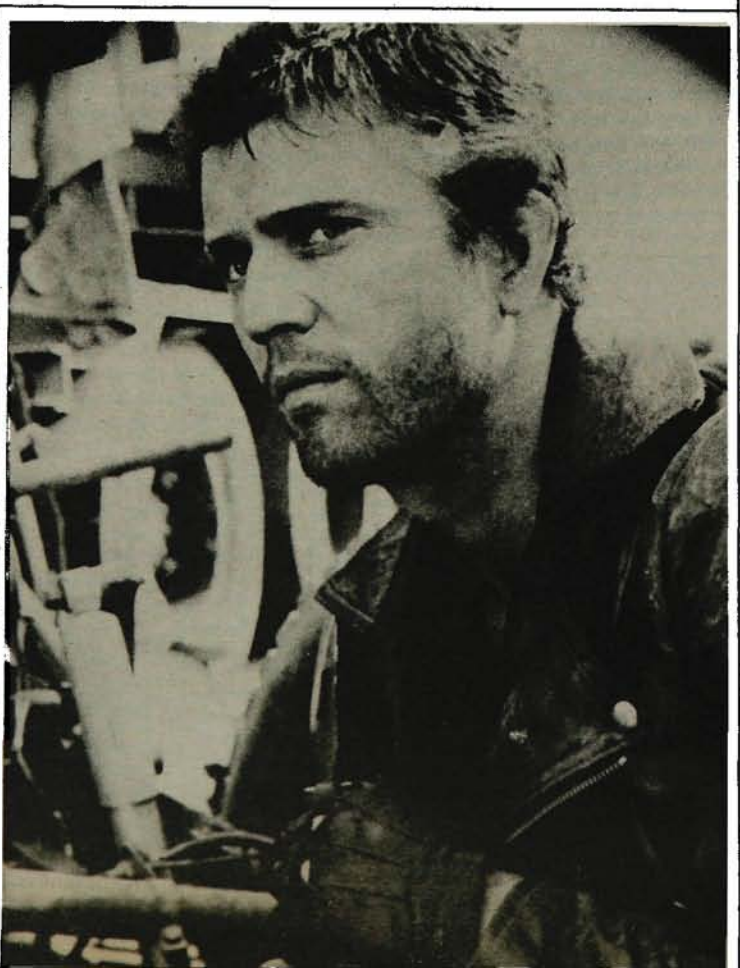
The wizards of Oz

An aesthetico-cultural appreciation

● Judy Davis and Bryan Brown in **Winter of our Dreams**

● Post-industrial machismo: Mel Gibson as the road warrior



by Marc Gervais

It's been more than a year-and-a-half since the Australian feature film industry achieved stardom status. In the fall of 1981 America's powerful popular press (TIME, Newsweek, The New York Times, etc.) decreed officially that Australian film was *in*. Simultaneously at the Sorrento Festival in Italy, the European critical community, and the European media at large, also made the same discovery.

The results have been benign. Western screens have sparkled with a considerable number of fine Australian features, and we are the richer for it. Concomitantly, however, an exaggerated notion has grown about the Australian filmmaking capacity and the utopian film conditions Down Under. And, of course, for Canadians critics that has meant using the kangaroo to thwonk[1] the eager beavers who have made Canadian feature film what it is.

A full understanding of the contemporary Australian feature film scene would necessitate an understanding of its historical context as well. And a rich context it decidedly is, beginning with the infancy of the medium in 1896, through the first fiction feature film ever made *anywhere* (*The Story Of The Kelly Gang*, 1906), followed by the highs and lows of the teens, '20s, '30s, and early '40s, and, finally, the 25-year doldrums prior to the '70s. Such, however, is not the purpose of this article, the major reason being, reasonably enough, that the present writer has seen none of those earlier films.

Instead, the attempt here is at achieving an aesthetico-cultural assessment from a very personal, experience-based point of view; the musings, of an outsider, a Canadian; and as such it may make demands on Australian colleagues in the name of bemused tolerance. Underlying the enterprise is another context, a whole set of personal and broader social points of reference which demand explaining in order to understand the writer's point of view.

Like everyone else's, it is a point of view shaped by the Hollywood cinema. In my case that means mostly the Hollywood '40s, that immense, world-appealing film output whose best work only recently, in the last decades, has begun to be treated with critical respect.

But there was another current shaping my generation's relationship to movies. For many of us, the first serious adult attitudes were formed in that amazingly rich period in the '50s and '60s, when *cinema* began to be *seriously* considered the art form of the twentieth century, a reflector and shaper of contemporary culture. I refer, of course, to our discovery of those successive national cinemas (wave after new wave) that followed upon Italian neo-realism, whether through Fellini, Antonioni, and company in Italy, the British angry young cinema, Ingmar Bergman, the Japanese, Satyajit Ray, the Poles, the Nouvelle Vague in France, the Czechs, and many others. Here were breath-taking works, some of them nothing short of masterpieces, and most of them desperate essays, powerfully reflecting a dying civilization. The Cannes Festival, among others, came to mean a major discovery every year, sometimes a first contact with a hitherto unknown national cinema. Add to that the various intense *political* "new cinemas" (Italy, Brazil, Québec), and the American (and other) Underground movements. The '50s and '60s were indeed a time of unparalled cinematic achievement, and film was practically being re-invented year after year. Film language, aesthetics, politics, life – they were all intermingled, and all up for grabs.

Then came 1968 – and the death-knell of the '60s, politically and culturally. Even the Cannes Film Festival suffered a spectacular collapse, show-biz style, midway through its two-week run. And

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that surely was a sign of things to come: the Golden Age of International Film Rebirth was at an end. It was not a case of instant, nor even total, death, to be sure. But after '68, the discoveries became few and minor; and even the "old Masters" seemed to lose in vitality, inventiveness, and earnestness. Their works were seen now as repetitive; we had heard it all, seen it all before. Hollywood reasserted its economic control of the film world; and the creative vitality shifted back there as well. To oversimplify: international film, which in its best products had, for a few years, become a director's medium, now reverted to being a producer's medium.

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It is understandable, then, that some of us in regular attendance at Cannes began experiencing a sense of frustration as the '70s progressed. We kept looking and hoping for new developments, yearning for the film climate enjoyed between, say, 1953 and 1968.

For me, the "new discovery" came in Cannes in 1975, when, by chance, I strolled into an Australian film being shown "on the market." Ken Hannam's ***Sunday Too Far Away*** was indeed something different; far removed, on the one hand, from the dying images from the old European masters, and their cynicism and moral exhaustion; but far removed, too, from the American look, the Hollywood recipe, and the whining young male-centred fixations typified by some films starring a Nicholson or a Hoffman. Australian cinema! A new land (for us), new sights and sounds, open spaces, a freshness of rhythm... all of this was conscientiously reported, but only *en passant*, for *Cinema Canada*.

The following year – Cannes '76 – proved that ***Sunday Too Far Away***[2] was no passing fluke. The Aussies came with eight or nine features; and *Cinema Canada* (June/July 1976), in its wisdom, chose to title my report "The Year of the Kangaroo", snippets of which I here reproduce, in an attempt to explain the appeal of Aussie films:

It's not that the Aussies are turning out masterpieces. No. Down Under there are as yet no John Fords or Mizoguchis or Bergmans or even a Francis Ford Coppola. I would go even further. In terms of aesthetic awareness and aesthetic experimentation, the Aussies have not shown the type of concern (or matching achievement) of some aspects of the direct cinema of Allan King a few years ago, or of certain Québécois cinéastes such as Perrault, Lefebvre, Brault...

And yet, Aussie films are having a real impact at both the critical and popular levels. Why?...

Because, mate, the films are ruddy good, that's why. Picnic At Hanging Rock, The Devil's Playground, Mad Dog, The Trespassers, The Fourth Wish, Caddie – *here are fresh, intelligent, often exciting, often lovely films.*

As one analyzes these movies, and studies the Aussie film situation, certain patterns emerge. By and large, the directors and producers and writers are young. Far more important, they tackle subjects they seem genuinely interested in, and they treat them in their own fashion. Unlike most Canadian films, Aussie movies are well-scripted, and they do not look like cheap imitations of American exploitation flicks, weighed down with the same tired language and clichés.

The Australians touch on deeper, wider human experiences. They do not cultivate a kind of mindless nihilism. They do not conform to some dominant recipe. Somehow, out of it all, their films sing a song to people, to life, no matter how tough the context may be.

Totally Australian, totally filled with breath-taking images of their own country, they nevetheless have an enormous appeal for everyone, simply because they are human (however one may define the term), rather than exploitative or hermetically sealed-in. They definitely are not the sort of one-dimensional products of a cynical commercialism that threatens our own scene.

Seven years have slipped by since these words were written. Today I would feel obliged to be more nuanced; some titles would be dropped, others added.[3]

Yet, in substance, I feel they still apply. Beresford, Weir, Hannam, Schepisi, and, later on, Noyce and Armstrong, among others, are film directors who have made the Australian New Wave a splendid, on-going reality.

● Awaiting the court-martial in **Breaker Morant**

● Peter Weir's **Gallipoli** used the Australian coastline to splendid effect

I have by no means seen all of the Australian features made since 1975, and, obviously, none of the most recently completed ones. And yet, of the ones I have seen (mostly in Cannes), about 35 qualify for a personal list of movies I consider of a certain quality. Beresford's *Breaker Morant*, Peter Weir's *Picnic At Hanging Rock*, Phillip Noyce's *Newsfront* and a few others might well be termed "great" films, but many others are almost as good. So much so that one could claim that the typical Australian feature is superior in all-round quality to the typical Hollywood movie – if you except the four or five very best products made in Hollywood each year. Not bad for a country of 14 million people.

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Why is it that Australian films, by and large, are so immensely attractive, both aesthetically and at the level of mass appeal? And yet why don't they quite qualify as "masterpieces"?

As I reflect on the 35 features, one fact stands out. Most of the films that appeal to foreign critics and to foreign and (I dare surmise) native Australian audiences are *not* located in contemporary urban settings or do not deal directly with issues stemming from that milieu. There are solid exceptions, to be sure. Beresford's *Don's Party* (1976) and *The Club* (1980), John Duigan's *The Winter Of Our Dreams* (1981), Phil Noyce's *Heatwave* (1981), Don Crombie's *Cathy's Child* (1979), and Esben Storm's *In Search of Anna* (1979) head a pretty impressive list that testifies to the fact that today's city living does find its way onto Australian screens. Indeed, progressively, the old criticism that Aussie films only deal with the past and the great outdoors is becoming irrelevant, as witnessed by the lists of films made especially in the last year or two. Unquestionably, however, the fact remains that the majority of the successes between 1975-1982 have dealt with Australian history and/or the great Australian outdoors – a fact, I feel, that can prove quite illuminating.

Take the case of two of the most popular, though surely not most artistically satisfying, recent films by the Australian film industry's *two* George Millers. Dr. George followed his earlier box office smash, ***Mad Max***, with the even more successful ***Mad Max 2*** (called over here ***The Road Warrior)***; the other George has given Australia its biggest home box-office hit ever, ***The Man From Snowy River***. Quite simply, no two films could appear more different in spirit, in conception, and look. ***The Road Warrior*** is a sort of surrealistic punk odyssey through the holocaust – survival for the chosen few. Violent, frantic, souped-up, it is meant to take place "nowhere", "in the near future", a kind of Rockers' Apocalypse When. Trashy, yes; and yet, brilliantly executed, the work of a born filmmaker trying to clothe the mythic universal unconscious in barbaric contemporary garb.

The Man From Snowy River is diametrically opposed in every way. The clock is turned back over a half-century, and, very definitely, Apollonian serenity replaces Dionysian frenzy. ***Snowy River*** is assuredly somewhat academic in everything from scripting to final execution. And yet, there *is* something there: the viewer (this one, anyway) is enthralled by the sweep of the images of mountain country in a land not normally known for its mountains. Based on a popular poem, ***Snowy River*** becomes overtly a national film ballad about a boy's (ritual) testing on the path to manhood – ***Australian*** manhood. And he measures up the way an Aussie lad should, true to the old traditions and stereotypes. Australians find their national myths, their national ethos reinforced. There is belief here; and foreigners feel it, while sighing for the wide-open spaces, the at-one-ness with "life" out there.

Two opposed film universes, then. And yet the films share certain basic attitudes or options, things we foreigners have come to recognize as uniquely Australian. The best word to convey what I mean is ***size*** – size in the landscapes, the characters, the sentiments, size in the belief in and enthusiasm for what the filmmakers have at hand, the glory of filmmaking. Mad Max Miller may claim his film is not specifically Australian, but where else could the film come from? The surrealistic sweep of the Outback desert, its rough, arid beauty and cruelty, the colour, the organic unity between land, sky, character, and story – difficult things to pin down, perhaps, but so intensely Australian. The proof? Just try to find it in the cinema of any other country.

Snowy River Miller is even more captivated by the Australian outdoors. Take that away and his film loses all credibility, becoming downright embarrassing in its (for us) turn-of-century moralizing. What is it that permits Miller to make his relatively modest Australian Alps range incomparably more imposing than anything ever seen in Canadian films – even our own peerless Rockies, and our frozen winter wastelands? The answer, of

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course, is in spirit, the size of the aspirations, the intuitive rapport with and love for the land, something innately felt – coupled with master craftsmanship.

Both films frame their actors against that land and sky. Thus the actors, too, have size; they are active. Mel Gibson and young Tom Burlinson become almost epic heroes or anti-heroes, each in a radically different manner – and in a manner that no other contemporary cinema can match. Given those scripts, then, and that kind of direction – indeed, given the whole set of operational artistic choices at every step of the filmmaking process – no wonder that Australian actors capture their audiences, stir the imagination, and have been a major factor in establishing the base for a solid commercial film industry. Bryan Brown, Jack Thompson, Mel Gibson, Sam Neil, John Waters, John Hargreaves, Judy Morris, Judy Davis, Elizabeth Alexander, Helen Morse, Angela Punch-McGregor –

● Writer-director John Duigan

I have not even included the more veteran performers of real stature – and many others, are extremely well-served by, and have become exciting show biz assets for a vital national film industry. And, judging from recent reports, starry new faces already make my list outdated.

The positive assets, however, are hardly limited to directors and actors. David Williamson (***Don's Party, The Club, Gallipoli***), already an internationally acclaimed playwright, is only one of a number of Australian film writers who bring quality and know-how to that essential aspect of feature filmmaking, however self-critical the Aussies may be in that regard and however publicly some of them may pine for Hollywood expertise. When it comes to cinematography, even the Aussies express no doubts whatsoever. Don McAlpine (***Breaker Morant*** and most of Beresford's other work, ***My Brilliant Career***) has been wooed internationally for some years now, and he is only the best-known of an outstanding lot who have given Australian films their matchless look.

Every aspect, in fact, of the endlessly complex phenomenon that constitutes feature filmmaking is of world-class standards. The magnitude of the Aussie achievement can best be understood when one studies in detail and in-depth the situation in other countries, including our own. The key words indeed, are attitude and know-how. But what is especially benign in the Australian situation is that that attitude and know-how – call it living with quality at the creative level – seem to spill over into the productive areas; the national and state film bodies, and the excellent film and TV school are peopled predominantly by folk with a creative film background. All is relative, of course; but when compared with others, the Aussies look good.

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So much for the positive side which accounts for the fine performance of the last seven or eight years. But... and of course there is a "but." It took the Aussie cinema a relatively long time (some five years) to make it big, even among Anglophone critics. Of course, many of them had not even seen an Australian film. But many who had, even now are hesitant, reflecting the more severe ***malaise*** of Parisian critics and others similarly oriented. The present writer waxes enthusiastic (***genuinely*** enthusiastic), but covers himself churlishly with a (perhaps dead-wrong) disclaimer: "no masterpieces, to be sure." Why not?

This brings us back to an aspect of film language very different from that described earlier, and back, too, to the context described at the beginning of this article. The Aussie cinema struck – and reinvigorated – my jaded mid-'70s film consciousness like a breath of clear, fresh air. But from the beginning something was missing... for people of my ilk, at least. It was (to overstate the case) as if the ***film*** '50s and '60s that had formed my understanding of cinema had simply never happened in Australia. Or, worse still, as if the whole '60s cultural upheaval and its ensuing traumas had simply no relevance Down Under. At least not to the extent that they affected the western world.

Godard, Antonioni, and how many others had challenged the very nature of film, of ***all*** communication, as western culture agonized in its own dialectic, as it questioned its traditional values, as it (later) struggled to some sort of reaffirmation, rendered almost impossibly fragile by a terrible self-consciousness or by a despairing, sardonic cynicism. So film – film form, the very relevance of film language – went through the same process. "Good" cinema would henceforth be burdened with that terrible self-doubt, that heavy self-awareness. The hucksters, of course – advertising, exploitative flicks, whole dominant areas of the film industry – would side-step reality and responsibility, and go on using the audio-visual to sell, titillate, or manipulate people. Or, "innocently", unconsciously, some might simply fall back on the old, un-self-critical patterns. But the "good" cinema?

In that kind of critical context one encountered the mid-'70s Aussies. Vitality, newness, freshness – unquestionably! But where was the underlying irony, the shared western neurosis, the doubt? Some of the stories, "surface themes" might be tough, ornery, cynical, but the very texture of the films, their look and feel and rhythm, sang another song – a reassuring one. It was (and continues to be) somehow too straight, so right. Predictable? Or, as Pauline Kael put it, so ***safe*** (not a nice word coming from her.).

In a sense, art is a question of language, its own language. And the death of true art is language that has become banal, unable to challenge. The Australian cinema has not totally avoided the pitfalls; it runs perilously close to middle-of-the-road comfortableness. And yet, how can one use such phrases when referring to films that fairly burst upon the screen with such a spirit of filmic – and life – celebration?

Or whatever. And perhaps, so what? and who cares? But it could be that that is why even a ***Breaker Morant*** may just fall short of truly great art. Has any Australian film director been able to take that final step into a new world, where the language becomes mysteriously his own, where experience becomes transformed through his sensibility, where the codes and patterns he has inherited are subtly undermined in a new communication of spirit, where even superb craftsmanship is transcended?

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Heavy, vague questions, perhaps impossible to resolve. And indeed it has not been the purpose of this article to damn with faint praise. For how can one avoid enthusiasm when assessing the accomplishments of a country that has done what it has done in spite of all the odds, the mad economics that govern our filmmaking way of life?

For the record truly is an impressive one; and Australia has been revealed in its people, its land, its own soul, in works such as Ken Hannam's superb ***Sunday Too Far Away*** (1975) and ***Summerfield*** (1977); Fred Schepisi's sensitive and personal ***The Devil's Playground*** (1976), and his grandiose, ambitious ***The Chant Of Jimmy Blacksmith*** (1978); John Power's delightful story of the early movie days in Australia, ***The Picture Show Man*** (1977); Tom Jeffrey's Australian ***Mash, The Odd Angry Shot*** (1979); Igor Auzen's historical epic on Outback ranching, ***We Of The Never Never*** (1982); ***Mad Max 2*** (1981), which reveals an immensely talented Dr. George Miller who may indeed be inventing his own cinema; and brilliant graduates from the film and TV school with remarkable works such as ***Newsfront*** (1978), by Phil Noyce, and ***My Brilliant Career*** (1979), by Gillian Armstrong.

The list could (and should) be extended. The point, however, has been made sufficiently. A final word is necessary, a special place of honour set aside, so to speak, for the two directors whose accomplishments place them among the best at work in the world today – Bruce Beresford and Peter Weir. Weir, more the ***auteur*** of the two, the poet of sensitive young people bewildered by a mysterious, changing would – and the Australian film director who comes closest to a personal vision, a personal creation – has completed his fifth feature. Among the five, at least ***Picnic At Hanging Rock*** and ***Gallipoli*** rank with the finest films of the last decade, world-wide. Bruce Beresford, the supreme metteur-en-scène who transforms varied sources into many types and genres, the master craftsman, the most political of all self-avowedly non-political filmmakers, is the steady creator of quality, currently finishing his ninth feature. What more need be said about the quintessential Australian film, ***Breaker Morant*** – and, for changes of pace, ***The Getting Of Wisdom*** (adolescent young women at school), ***Don's Party*** (politics), ***The Club*** (sports), and ***The Money Movers*** (thriller)? A few Beresfords might well be enough to keep any quality film industry going.

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In conclusion, then. This article has resolutely avoided doing the Canadian Thing, that is, using the Australian experience at least implicitly to criticize the Canadian situation. If I may digress monumentally, it is high time that Canadians take a much more ***objective*** look at what has happened in Canada, cinematically speaking, over the last few decades; to examine our own '60s and '70s film history from a positive, constructive point of view.

The focus has been on Australia, on what has been achieved there, and how that achievement measures up, critically speaking, against the rest of the world's film output. Realistically, and over-all, the Aussie story is a wonderfully positive one. And inevitably, from many different perspectives, the Australian film industry has a lot to give us, not least of which are continued moments of film enjoyment. Best of all, given that Aussie film spirit that has produced so much quality in the last seven years, one has good reason to expect that such moments will be afforded us anew for years to come. ●

● A trio of talent: Russell Boyd A.S.C., writer David Williamson and director Peter Weir

1. Thwonk is an aboriginal word meaning to bash or to clobber. North-American equivalents include to boink or to gong.

2. A film which, by the way, this writer would rank among the three or four best films ever made in Australia – and which, to my knowledge, has scarcely received a showing over here.

3. The comments on film language at the end of this article will seem to contradict the above quotation. That is because the terms of reference are different, the early article addressing itself to our own Hollywood North efforts, whereas the present terms of reference, as shall be seen, are those of contemporary sensibility and the self-conscious art cinema

THE SENSE AND NONSENSE OF APPLEBERT & FOURNIER

Part II : Distribution The push for Canadian content

by John Roston

Author's note: *The first part of this article, published in the last issue of Cinema Canada, examined the logic behind government aid to production as recommended by the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee (Applebert) and Quebec's Commission d'étude sur le cinéma et l'audiovisuel (Fournier). Shortly after Cinema Canada went to press, Quebec's Minister of Cultural Affairs tabled Bill 109, the proposed cinema and video law. The bill is based on the Fournier report, but with several major changes.*

Part I of this article took Fournier to task for "recommending such extensive and complex government intervention in the film industry that it creates as many problems as it solves." Bill 109 performs radical surgery on Fournier's recommendations. Fournier's complicated maze of new governmental film organizations has been reduced to one new agency and modifications to existing agencies.

The new Société générale du cinéma et de la vidéo is a Quebec version of the Canadian Film Development Corp., with a similar mandate to promote films and provide financial assistance to the film industry. Although far more efficient than the system recommended by Fournier, the new agency still suffers from some of the ills of committee decision-making described in Part I of this article. (Fournier's statutory system of "automatic" aid to producers, directors, screenwriters and others, also criticized in Part I, has been dropped.)

The existing Bureau de surveillance du cinéma is transformed into La Régie du cinéma et de la vidéo. In addition to classifying films for exhibition, it administers the new system of permits in a manner very close to that recommended by Fournier. Producers working "on a professional basis" in Quebec will be required to obtain a special permit, as will non-Canadian professionals wishing to shoot material in Quebec. These unwarranted intrusions by the state on individual rights and freedoms, as stated in Part I, "are well-intentioned, but they create a bureaucratic nightmare, a sort of film police."

Although Bill 109 is a major improvement on the Fournier proposals, it fails to set up a system which will maximize the production of creative and innovative films.

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Applebert and Fournier are most convincing when they suggest that the primary objective of government intervention should be the production of creative and innovative films and television programs. They are less convincing when they suggest that this objective can best be achieved by the private sector. Whether high-quality films are produced by the public sector or the private sector, they must be given the widest possible audience. Reaching that audience is the task of the distribution process. This part of the article will examine the logic behind the distribution mechanisms recommended by Applebert and Fournier, modified in the latter case by the manner in which its recommendations are implemented by Bill 109.

Continuity of product

Applebert states that, "one of the chief goals of cultural policy must be to establish strong and stable lines of communication between artists of all kinds and those who will see, read or hear their messages." If strength and stability of communication between artist and audience are to be our chief goals then there must be predictability in the method of distribution so that consumers can easily find the high-quality productions and enjoy them. (In the past our high-quality films have been distributed on an erratic basis. They may appear first in major theatres, small local theatres, on the CBC, private networks or educational television. Word about them tends to spread slowly. Consumers who have been disappointed by the poor quality of previous Canadian productions react skeptically at first. By the time they decide to have a look at a film, it has moved on, to pop up at random somewhere else months later.)

The Hollywood Majors promote a film on the basis of key ingredients – the stars. The stars have already been heavily promoted over a long period of time and that gives the films in which they appear a head start. Applebert comments that they "economize on information by a reliance on 'stars'." In the absence of anything else to go by, they are willing to believe that the star is the key ingredient which guarantees the quality of the product.

The challenge for the distribution process is to minimize risk by creating convenient places where the consumer will have the best chance to see quality films and television programs on a regular basis. If the product itself is hard to identify, at least the consumer will know the best places to look for it. To maintain consumer confidence in such places, every effort must be made to keep inferior products out of them. Applebert sums up the principle neatly: "Promotion implies selection." Unfortunately, Applebert and Fournier tend to confuse high-quality programming with Canadian content.

Taxation and the distribution system

If the consumer is given a quality product, she or he should expect to pay for it. Both Applebert and Fournier seek the ideal means to channel funds collected in the distribution process back into production. Fournier is very specific, calling for a production fund, or "fonds de soutien du cinéma," which in addition to a statutory allocation, receives income from several taxation measures:

- a 10% tax on cinema admissions;
- a 50% increase in the sales tax on television commercials;
- a 10% increase in the sales tax on basic cable services;
- a $2 increase in the sales tax on each blank small format videocassette.

As Bill 109 is not taxation legislation, none of the above provisions have been implemented and are still under study.

Applebert rejects the idea that cultural needs should be financed by the yield from special taxes. "Initially there may be a correlation between the need and the yield, but with the passage of time that correlation may diminish rapidly." It therefore recommends that, "Public funds for the support of cultural activity should as a general rule be financed from general revenues," a point of view that makes sense over the long term, though it avoids the problem that production funding must be increased dramatically in the short term.

U.S. domination of the theatrical market

Fournier condemns the existing theatrical distribution system in which several major Hollywood studios dominate the world market. They are, "so powerful that almost no Occidental country succeeds in escaping from their hegemony." Applebert explains how the system works: "The theatrical market is highly integrated with the United States market; both Canadian and U.S. theatres are supplied chiefly by distribution companies which are integrated with the major Hollywood studios... These studios have the greatest control over what theatres exhibit because they control the 'blockbuster' Hollywood releases, which are what the theatres want." In other words, Canadian theatres must exhibit their quota of mediocre Hollywood product if they want to be given the heavily promoted expensive productions which rake in most of the profits.

The two major Canadian theatre chains, Famous Players and Odeon, have done little to improve the situation. Famous Players is owned by Gulf & Western, the same U.S. conglomerate which owns one of the major Hollywood studios. Yet Applebert is more irritated by Odeon which stopped exhibiting a voluntary quota of Canadian films shortly before it was acquired by Canadian interests: "The problem we are describing cannot be resolved by a policy requiring Canadian ownership of theatres." As Fournier puts it, "Everyone knows that the large Canadian theatre chains benefit from privileged agreements with the Majors which make their productions available to them on a priority basis." To Fournier, "Reappropriating control of the national marketplace constitutes, therefore, in the eyes of the Commission, one of the prime objectives on which the State must concentrate when intervening in film distribution and exhibition."

Unfortunately, beyond such generalities, Applebert and Fournier are not of much concrete help.

Increasing Canadian content

When it comes to solving the problems they have articulated so clearly, both Applebert and Fournier miss the target by a wide margin. Applebert is vague. "The federal government should provide the Canadian-controlled film distribution industry with the economic strength to market Canadian films successfully to Canadian and foreign audiences through all channels of exhibition and sales." It suggests that subsidies and loans could be made to Canadian-owned film distributors for distributing Canadian films – throw money at the problem and maybe it will go away.

Fournier's recommendations have been simplified by Bill 109 which provides that:

- all film distributors doing business in Quebec must be 80% Canadian-owned and obtain a permit from the Regie du cinema et de la vidéo;
- the Regie du cinema et de la vidéo sets the minimum percentage of box office gross receipts which must be received by each party as part of the agreement between film distributor and film exhibitor.

Unfortunately, transferring power away from the Majors to Canadian distributors is not that easy. Fournier recognizes that the Majors may simply make a sweetheart deal with a Canadian-owned distributor willing to do what it is told in return for cash. The permit system is apparently to be used to prevent such a deal. Bill 109's new Regie du cinema et de la vidéo can set regulations for the procedure to be followed in the issuance of permits, but the bill does not clarify exactly how far the Regie may go. Fournier intends it to go far indeed: the Regie should "ensure that the grants of distribution rights to Canadian enterprises are genuine. In particular, it will be able to require that the distribution rights for a film are granted for a period of at least two years. It will also be able to require that the distributor's commission, established by contract, be not less than 20% of distribution revenues. The issuance of permits can be based on all other conditions, established by regulation, which the Régie judges necessary to attain the objectives which govern the recommendation." In other words, the Régie can bend the regulations to ensure that the Canadians receiving distribution permits haven't sold out to the Majors.

There is no way of knowing all the criteria on the basis of which the Regie will issue permits. If the regulations are straightforward, they will not prove to be much of an obstacle for the Majors who can make their contracts of convenience with little to fear. They will see the system as complex nonsense that benefits some private sector opportunists. On the other hand, if the Régie adheres to the policy suggested by Fournier, it risks becoming a force with frightening powers.

Solving the theatrical puzzle

The objectives which Applebert and Fournier fail to achieve in the theatrical market can be summarized briefly:

- a method of distribution which provides a continuous flow of high-quality product and thereby gains consumer confidence and loyalty;
- a priority in this distribution method for Canadian productions whenever these are available;
- a meshing of this system with the distribution of expensive and heavily promoted Hollywood productions which provide a solid financial base for film exhibition.

The solution to this puzzle may require the active involvement of the public sector, but both Applebert and Fournier reject this option, the former because "governments and government agencies are not the best promoters," and the

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latter on the basis that governments should "foster the development of independent and responsible Quebec enterprises." However neither report proposes a mechanism whereby the private sector can do the job required.

Language

The Majors have usually been slow to introduce French versions of their big hits in the Quebec market. Bill 109 requires the Régie du cinéma et de la vidéo to limit distribution of films for which there is neither a French version nor a contract to make such a version. The restrictions only take effect 60 days after the first public showing of the film in Quebec. After that the film may not be shown publicly for a period of 180 days. Following this blackout period, only one copy of the film in each format can be distributed for public exhibition. These provisions are reasonable. In fact, it is difficult to believe that the federal government has done all that it could to see that high-quality Canadian films and television programs are made available in both languages as quickly as possible. Applebert comments that, "federal cultural policy should be shaped by the fact that we have two official languages, but it should not partition Canadians into two linguistic compartments."

U.S. domination of the television market

Both Applebert and Fournier are very concerned about U.S. domination of Canadian television. According to Fournier, "Almost a million Quebec homes now subscribe to cable and thus receive an abundance of programs, mostly American." Not only do the majority of Canadian homes receive American stations, but Canadian stations purchase as much U.S. programming as they can. Applebert explains that, "the problem of Canadian content stems from two facts : first, it is much cheaper to acquire a foreign program than to produce a domestic one of equivalent quality ; and second, foreign, especially U.S., comedy and drama tend to attract larger audiences than Canadian equivalents because they can be more heavily promoted and because the larger market to which they are sold makes it possible to invest larger sums in their production, thus often enhancing their appeal." What irritates Applebert even more is that the Canadian networks bid against each other for U.S. programs : "Competition between the CBC, CTV and Global networks and some independent broadcasters for American programs means that Canada pays considerably more for those American shows than does the United Kingdom, for example, with a market nearly three times the size of Canada's." Although Canadian-produced light comedy and drama suffer from this U.S. competition, there are profitable television markets for Canadian-produced sports and variety programs. Applebert is disturbed by CBC purchases of U.S. programs and finds the root of this evil to be the acceptance of advertising by the CBC. "The need for advertising revenue exerts a profound pressure on CBC programming to fill prime time with U.S. programs." To solve the problem of U.S. domination, Applebert recommends that, "CBC television should discontinue selling air time for commercial advertising." Since CBC affiliates also want U.S. programs, "CBC television should discontinue its affiliation agreements with private television stations."

Applebert confuses the problems of Canadian content with those of revenue-producing potential. In the early part of its report, Applebert makes a "functional analysis" of cultural activities in general. "There is clearly a very large sector of activity of which the primary function is to satisfy varying demands for entertainment and recreation, transmitting little from the past, leaving little residue in the form of future heritage and showing little conscious concern with the interpretation of society of itself... From goverment it demands courses of action that involve at least as much industrial (or, more broadly, economic) policy as cultural policy..." Although this may suggest some disdain on Applebert's part for activities which consist mainly of simple entertainment, Applebert later asserts that "the programming policies of the CBC must encompass not only the arts and specialized programs but also popular and mass entertainment." To accept that assertion at face value, one would have to conclude that the CBC should run sports and variety programs. Perhaps the objective should be to reduce purchases of U.S. programs without adversely affecting the revenue generated by Canadian mass-appeal programs.

Specialized programming

Applebert attaches considerable importance to the rapidly expanding number of available channels and programs : "To an extent, the control over programming is passing from the hands of broadcasters to viewers and listeners." This transfer of control becomes more pronounced with pay-television. The viewer purchases what he or she wishes to see : "Television broadcasters will probably become more specialized in the production of programs, provided they have a market large enough to yield a profit." That profitability proviso is crucial : it may be technically simple to pump one hundred television channels into homes, but who on earth is going to pay for the programming which runs on them ?

Applebert is correct in recognizing that conditions will favour specialization. If a viewer is in the mood for sports, drama, variety, public affairs or soft-core pornography, she or he is likely to turn first to a channel which either specializes in that type of programming or runs it frequently at that time of day. Those who run such programming on an erratic basis, no matter how high the quality, may keep missing their audience. In trying to be all things to all people, the CBC will find itself at a serious disavantage.

Public-sector distribution objectives

A natural question arises as to just what the difference is between the production objectives of the CBC and those of the NFB. In recent years, there have been quite a number of CBC-NFB co-productions which in itself indicates that there is quite an overlap of the two agencies. Applebert goes so far as to make the extraordinary statement that, "the NFB's mandate 'to interpret Canada to Canadians and to other nations' has been increasingly assumed by the CBC's news and public affairs programming." The marvellous thing about "interpreting Canada to Canadians" is that no one knows what it means exactly, but everyone wants to do it.

The NFB distributes both general interest material (produced by itself and by the CBC) and special interest material (produced by itself and by the private sector for individual government departments). These materials are made available on a free-loan basis. The private sector distributes its own general interest and special interest material (produced in the hope that it can be sold and rented profitably) as well as productions from other countries. With so many overlapping paths, it's not surprising that the NFB and the private sector keep treading on each other's toes. According to Fournier, the NFB's free-loan service "creates consumer habits which are injurious to those who rely on a market which is already restricted and difficult." Why should consumers rent films from a private sector distributor when the NFB loans them out for free ?

On the other hand, Applebert suggests that the CBC should take over responsibility for all NFB distribution. "We would like to see our hundreds of public and school libraries become more effective distributors of audio and video productions than the 27 NFB offices have been in recent times." In fact, public and school libraries do help to distribute NFB productions, but when budgets are under pressure, audiovisual activities are often the first to be restricted. Applebert observes that the free loan of NFB productions should eventually by restricted to non-professional videocassettes.

The international market

Bill 109 specifically provides that one function of the new Société générale du cinéma et de la vidéo is to provide financial and other assistance for Quebec films "in festivals and other cinematographic exhibitions." Applebert proposes a new "Film Canada" agency to be supervised by the CFDC. "The new organization would assume most, if not all, of the functions now performed by the NFB, the Department of External Affairs, the Department of Communications and the CFDC itself for promotion, sales assistance and exhibition of Canadian films outside Canada." While such an enterprise remains a future possibility, the extant Film Canada has been shelved due to private-public sector friction.

The new technologies

Fournier believes that the effects of the electronic revolution will be profound : "The coming technological upheavals are undoubtedly going to involve changes in the economics of the audiovisual field and encourage the emergence of new styles, new formats and a new aesthetic." Applebert agrees : "As always, such changes bring with them opportunities and dangers." Applebert and Fournier discuss how three of the new technologies affect the distribution process :

- videocassettes ;
- pay-television ;
- direct broadcast satellites .

Videocassettes

The problem with videocassettes is that they remove the economic base for non-theatrical distribution. Some of the Hollywood Majors are battling Sony in the U.S. Supreme Court in an attempt to obtain compensation for the erosion of this market. One might as easily try to restrict the use of Xerox machines.

Fournier is particularly concerned about the video pirates who sell illegal copies of movies to retail stores. Bill 109 requires all commercial distributors of videocassettes to register each title with the Regie du cinéma et de la vidéo. As part of the registration procedure, a copy of the distributor's agreement with the rights holder must be deposited. The Régie issues a registration certificate for each title, a copy of which must be given to the retail store.

Both Fournier and Applebert mention the idea of a special tax on non-professional format videocassettes. Fournier recommends the $2 tax per videocassette which was mentioned earlier as part of its proposal for taxation measures to support production. Applebert's suggestion is more interesting : "The federal government should empower a non-government, Canadian cultural products marketing organization to administer a discount voucher scheme, based on a levy on sales of blank audiotapes and videocassettes, to stimulate the sale and production of Canadian sound recordings and film and video productions." The buyer would pay a fixed levy on the blank videocassette. "In return, the buyer would receive a voucher, redeemable at the value of the levy (or a multiple thereof) towards the purchase price of a 'Canadian recording,' with that category of products being fully defined and identified."

Pay-television

Another overrated bonanza is the large portion of pay-television fees which the CRTC believes will be allocated for Canadian program production. Applebert and Fournier have no argument with this view.

Direct broadcast satellites

Direct broadcast satellites will have signals of sufficient strength for consumers to capture them with a device the size of an umbrella. This will give consumers the opportunity to receive U.S. and Canadian networks cheaply without cable. Applebert comments that, "it is sobering to contemplate what the impact will be when a host of U.S. services can be received via satellite anywhere in Canada." This cannot be prevented, but Applebert realizes that there is also a positive side to the coin. "This new technology provides unprecedented opportunities for us to increase the distribution of new Canadian programs and services, not only domestically but internationally."

It is not a time for timidity. As our direct broadcast satellites expand their coverage into our north, their 'footprints' extend south into the U.S. If Applebert and Fournier are correct in stating that a large Canadian audience is watching U.S. border stations, what better place to promote Canadian programming ?

Conclusion

Applebert and Fournier have taken an honest look at film and broadcasting in Canada. They recognize clearly the mistakes of the past and make a sincere effort to formulate policies which will improve the situation. In general these policies look to the private sector for solutions to the existing problems. Bribes and threats are frequently used to convince the private sector that it should pursue culture instead of profit. Applebert and Fournier keep trying to pound square sticks into round holes. Neither public nor private sector can do everything well. Government policy must find and support the strength of each sector and set clear goals which can be evaluated afterwards. This has not been done. The challenge now is to build on Applebert and Fournier to arrive at a film and broadcasting policy which unlocks creative potential and establishes meaningful communication between artists and audience.