

BOOK REVIEWS

A Guide to Film and Television Courses in Canada 1978-79/ Un guide des cours de cinéma et de télévision offerts au Canada 1978-79

Edited and compiled by Marie-Claude Hecquet and David McNicoll
Ottawa: The Canadian Film Institute, 1978, 167 pages, \$6.95.

Serving as a reference tool for students, Marie-Claude Hecquet's and David McNicoll's *A Guide to Film and Television Courses in Canada 1978-79/ Un guide des cours de cinéma et de télévision offerts au Canada 1978-79* achieves what it sets out to do by offering, in a direct and accessible manner, information on film and television courses from over seventy universities, colleges and junior colleges.

The *Guide* is reasonably organized with schools arranged alphabetically by province. Such organization allows prospective students to consider the geographic location of schools and their proximity to film and media centres. The format, with the provincial shields used to introduce each geographic section, is crisp and simple.

One of the problems of such a handbook is having to organize information that differs from school to school, as each department has a unique program and set of course offerings. Any means of standardizing this information, then, makes for ease of both communication and comparison, enabling the prospective student to better assess what the different programs have to offer. Hecquet and McNicoll do this by introduc-

ing the majority of schools with a preliminary paragraph or two that describes the particular orientation of their curriculum and also by indicating whether they are degree, diploma or certificate programs. This is followed, in most cases, by a brief description of the courses.

The main weakness of the *Guide* is that it does not take this standardization of information far enough; for example, it does not indicate the number of courses required for a specific degree. Nor does it consistently point out the exact courses of study that students must follow to obtain their chosen degree. There is also a need to better specify which courses are required, which are electives and which are the necessary prerequisites for entering advanced courses. In certain instances, such as with Ryerson Polytechnical Institute, charts are well used as visual aides to indicate the possible avenues of study leading to the different degrees given by the Institute. Statements of the objectives for each year of study, as were given by Algonquin College, are valuable in explaining why students are expected to take what appears to be, an overwhelming number of courses (11) during their first semester.

Although nothing was stated, one assumes that course descriptions written in French imply that French is the only language to be used in these programs and that descriptions written in English mean that English is the only language to be used. What is not taken into consideration is that some schools, such as

McGill University, allow Francophones to write papers and take exams in French. If this is the case with a specific school, then it should be indicated in the *Guide*; it is an important consideration for students planning to take up a course of study that is not offered in their mother tongue.

Finally, the addresses, phone numbers and names of program heads and co-ordinators are readily available at the beginning of each school's description. And it is this directness and accessibility that, in the end, makes the *Guide* a valuable reference tool, enabling the student to assess the orientation and curriculum of each program and to ascertain what degrees are offered. *A Guide to Film and Television Courses in Canada 1978-79* allows the student, from his arm chair, as it were, to weed out unlikely programs and go on to make the next important step: contacting the department of his choice to set up interviews and make arrangements to see these schools for himself.

Charlotte Hussey

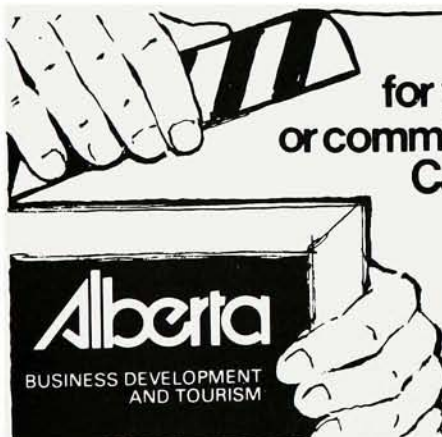
Movies as Social Criticism

by I.C. Jarvie

225 pages, Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1978, \$11.95

In the last ten years, books about film have increased tremendously in volume and popularity, but not necessarily in scholarship. The themes of said tomes vary from biographic popularizations of film stars and filmmakers, to dialectic dissections of films and filmmakers. Where to place Ian Jarvie and his new book, *Movies as Social Criticism*? He's not a film theoretician, a semiologist, a neo-auteurist, nor genre-easte. By profession, Jarvie is Professor of Philosophy at York University; his book suggests he is an informed film enthusiast, an intellectual god-son of Siegfried Kracauer (*From Caligari to Hitler*), a writer whose view of film and the film-going experience is positive, romantic in a 1965 liberal sense, and sociological.

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Jarvie is part of the intellectual pendulum that swings between the study of the content of films and their impact on audiences and the aestheticians who study the art, often independent of content. Jarvie is no Don Quixote; he is part of a larger, ongoing academic examination studying the infrastructure of film, the industry (Balio's *The American Film Industry*), the mass communications implications of the art (Jowett's *Film, the Democratic Art*), and the sociology of popular culture (Gans' *Popular Culture and High Culture*).

The focal point of these studies has, in the past decade, been television, but thanks to the work of Jarvie and his spiritual colleagues, questions are again being asked about the social-psychological implications of film.

Jarvie focuses his attention on the Hollywood film. He provides us with a historical perspective to the socio-psychological approach to film.

Are films good or evil? Are they propaganda? What are their effect on children? His chapter "The Social Psychology of Movies" provides an intelligent and intelligible analysis of the literature of the last fifty years. Jarvie is particularly valuable in his separation of the pro-censorship group of social psychologists from the pro-media people ("the catharsis school"), and, in turn, from the blend of the two, i.e. Paul Lazarfield and Elihu Katz, who, in their book, *Personal Influence*, feel that it is the opinion leaders within peer groups, or society, that are influential, rather than the media.

As to Jarvie's position, he seems to lean toward the view that film is an important reflection of the society's psyche at any particular time. "For the moment, then, America's movies are critically self-aware. It is an uncomfortable state, but one never ceases to be surprised by America's capacity to experiment." American film, according to Jarvie, is an ongoing self-exploration and an integral part of the society's maturing process.

Jarvie is an admirer of American film, and the book itself speaks to American films and the society. But his insights go beyond the forty-ninth parallel. When he comments on the courage of the Hollywood film industry, he is speaking of its diverse subject matter, ranging from *Our Daily Bread* to *The Manchurian Candidate*. The question arises, what issues do we in Canada deal

with in our films? Are we leaders or followers in the cultural articulation of society's goals and fears?

Jarvie's book has shortcomings, but before I deal with them, I should like to mention two other insights. Neither are startling, but they do add to a current understanding of the nature of the film medium.

Firstly, Jarvie is one of the few writers on mass media who acknowledges that the film industry has broken down and evolved away from the studio system and its product. The industry now services, not one large mass, but numerous and varied sub-cultures. And films are made in 1979 to cater to a sub-culture. Does film remain a mass medium? Or is it going the way of magazines, where there are one to two mass circulation titles, but the majority moves toward more and more specialization?

Secondly, Jarvie differentiates film from television by highlighting the group experience in the film theatre, i.e. the excitement of a shared experience, as opposed to the fragmented and usually more isolated television experience. Other writers have suggested film-viewing is different (Hugo Mauerhofer and Siegfried Kracauer), but their emphasis has been more psychological. They have dwelt on the escapist possibilities of film, the dream-like quality, the illusion of reality. Jarvie tries to explain or justify escapism as a positive experience:

Might it not be that there is a human need to fantasize in the same way that there is a need to sleep, or a need to dream; that coping with reality can only go on if occasionally there is a respite from it, a respite where we imagine a world with other problems, or no problems, and where the childish fantasy or omnipotence can prevail? What we do is then to act out the problems of real life in an unreal way. That they work out at all may release tension, as dreams are thought to do. More importantly, the world of movies, unlike dreams, is one where resolution comes no matter what we do. Thus we are able to rehearse emotional and intellectual reactions to something that happens beyond our control. What happens in movies has, however, a shape and perhaps a meaning.

The book is not without its weaknesses. Jarvie spends a great deal of time

justifying his approach and the seriousness and importance of his examination of film. He doesn't have to. Although the thrust of film study has been toward a more subtle film aesthetic, no one in this era would seriously question looking at film from any perspective. Ian Jarvie and Christian Metz can co-exist.

Jarvie is drawn to re-examine the liberal themes of post-world War II film — racism, marital breakdown, anti-authoritarianism. All these themes have rational roots in the society, but they have been dealt with fully by black writers, or feminist writers, with a perspective that is less voyeuristic and more interior. Consequently Jarvie's insights on these themes are distant and less revealing.

Jarvie also mistakes commercial decisions for content decisions in the production of many American films. Otto Preminger did not make *Such Good Friends* or *Anatomy of a Murder*, for that matter, for any other reason than their commercial potential. Jarvie also gives weight to commercial and artistic failures, *Marriage of a Young Stockbroker*, for example, a film that hardly would have been seen by a fraction of the people who saw *Bob and Carol, Ted and Alice*.

Finally Jarvie seems to rely on the "Middle-brow" film as his yardstick. Frequently these films are revealing of on-going social themes and concerns, but more often it is the "art film," even within the Hollywood system, that makes the myths concrete, reiterates society's archetypes and has a powerful impact on the public imagination. These artistic advances are not the same and some recognition must be given those films.

I understand that "art" and "elitism" have become equally unpalatable terms for the student of popular culture, but surely without the artistic advances film would be nothing more than television on a larger screen.

Kenneth Dancyger

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