

BOOKSHELF

The Shape Of Rage : The Films of David Cronenberg

ed. by Piers Handling, a publication of the Academy of Canadian Cinema, General Publishing (Toronto) and New York Zoetrope (New York), 217 pp. ISBN 0-7736-1137-1.

Since his first commercial feature, *Shivers*, David Cronenberg has been generally acknowledged as Canada's most disturbing and controversial filmmaker. Since editor Piers Handling and co-publisher The Academy Of Canadian Cinema are both clearly pro-Cronenberg and are using *The Shape Of Rage: The Films Of David Cronenberg* as the lead in a proposed line of books intended to bring Canadian cinema to international attention, it is to their credit that the battle over Cronenberg's worth as a filmmaker has been included in the book.

This is also to their very good fortune. For without the war of words between John Harkness and David Cronenberg, on one side, and Robin Wood, on the other, the book would simply lie there, a collection of seven essays and one interview connected to one another only by their subject matter and to the world at large not at all. But full of the sound and fury of the battle of words, *The Shape Of Rage* becomes a whole much greater than the sum of its parts.

Harkness, in a piece devoted to showing Cronenberg as a science fiction director concerned with "the interface between the human and the inhuman, between biology and the other sciences," begins the fight with an attack on Wood for "the way his quintessentially ideological approach to the contemporary cinema acts as a straitjacket on the films he examines." It is an attack that Cronenberg supports and that both men eagerly expand to a frontal assault on Wood's sexuality, personality, professional abilities and general political stance. This is more than simple academic disagreement: this is a total invalidation of the man and all he stands for.

Then, between the Harkness piece and the Cronenberg interview, Wood strikes back. Before getting around to his ably-supported view of the artist as dull, reactionary, negative and, filled with sexual disgust and a loathing of the current social order matched by a fear that things can only get worse, Wood takes time to point out that Harkness and Cronenberg have demonstrably misquoted him and mistaken his stances, attempting to dismiss him by ridicule (a tactic he says is common with bourgeois patriarchal capitalism) and are, themselves, suffering from "ideological tunnel vision." He also ladles out his fair share of personal insult along with a defence of radical criticism, an elucidation of his personal critical paradigms and a challenge, of sorts. "No one," he says, "has been able to demonstrate that Cronenberg's films do something substantially different from what I said they do."

The effect of this open warfare is to offer the reader strong incentive to change from a passive consumer of explanation to an active interrogator of opinion. Everybody's claims for everybody else can be

checked and, once it becomes apparent that they've all contributed their ration of misquote and distortion, the field is open for the reader to start looking for examples of internal inconsistency and foot-in-mouth disease. They aren't hard to find. Even uncheckable statements, like Cronenberg's "I don't base my life's value and work's value in any ideology," lose their face value in the light of battle. Those inclined to trust the artist as much as the art might see a high mind and a free spirit in Cronenberg's words. Wood sees naïvete. Yet Cronenberg's long and thoughtful interview reveals him as anything but a simple mind. So, where does the truth lie?

The inclination to question, once aroused, spreads easily beyond the confines of the actual debate. William Beard's "The Visceral Mind" is 79 pages of well-written, tightly-reasoned, keenly-observed and cross-referenced analysis of the major features (omitting only *Fast Company*). Its intent - to argue Cronenberg is a horror director concerned with the problems of emotional relationships, sexuality and the balance between repression and release (the latter being the source of Cronenberg's uniqueness in horror) - succeeds so well that it stands as a masterpiece of objective criticism, or more dauntingly, as the last word on the subject. But, with Robin Wood in mind, "objective" can become "ideological" and Harkness' and Beard's views, which seem radically opposed, can appear parallel and complementary.

Where Beard discerns a decreasing importance for humour in the films, Maurice Yacowar's thesis of Cronenberg as a comic philosopher working in classic comic forms seems feeble and ill-supported. Yet it raises questions and offers support to Cronenberg's own casually-expressed view of himself as a "playful" artist. Similarly, questions about the value of Piers Handling's attempt to locate Cronenberg in Canada's cinematic tradition of realism (an attempt that, like Yacowar's, suffers from being too sketchy) find the beginnings of answers, obliquely, in Harkness' comments about the axes of evil - interior/exterior for horror, accidental/intentional for science fiction - and in Geoff Pevere's structuralist view of *Videodrome*.

Pevere is the writer who most synthesizes all the views found in *The Shape Of Rage* and who, in his consideration of *Videodrome* as an ideological artifact, manages to suggest an answer to Wood's challenge. But for the reader committed to questioning, Pevere provides no final answers and that is as it should be. The unanswered questions, and there are many more than I have indicated here, drive the reader to engage Cronenberg's works more deeply, to synthesize independent views and, ultimately, to locate the films and the criticism in the context of real life. Not bad for a book that's also highly readable, entertaining and packed with terrific pictures.

Andrew Dowler ●

Variety Film Reviews: 1907-1980

16 vols., index, (set) U.S. \$2000, (vol.) U.S. \$135. Garland Publishing, New York & London, available from the Hollywood Film Archive, 8344 Melrose Ave., Hollywood CA 90069.

There are hundreds of books about the cinema published and reviewed each year, among them a large number containing nothing other than facts, figures and reviews, and classified as works of reference. Many of these, however, are never reviewed because there is so little to say about them other than the familiar remark about such volumes being "invaluable for any library" or, "deserves a place on any library shelf."

But the latest among this kind of publication is indeed invaluable: a sixteen-volume set of all the reviews ever published in *Variety* from 1907 up to 1980. *Variety* is, of course, the great trade paper which continues, unchanging in its make-up and appearance, to inform us about what's going on in the international world of art and entertainment.

Published by the Hollywood Film Archive, Volumes 5 - 6 - 8 - 9 are now available. The entire set, with index, is priced at \$2,000 U.S. or \$135.00 U.S. for any individual volume.

Unlike the *New York Times* film reviews (which is all we have had up until now in the publication of reviews since the very early days) which review only those films that opened in New York City, *Variety* covers the world, and includes thousands of films made and shown in other countries.

Reading through them is both sad and exhilarating: sad because so many films and admired actors will never be seen again, pleasing because so many are still with us; and sad again at the numbers of cinemas in which the films were reviewed that are now only a memory. The early films represent periods in society and in the development of the movies which were once a part of our own early years of growing up - times of simplicity and charm.

And how the methods of reviewing have changed! From some once-terse story outlines, the writing has moved into a deeper awareness of what motion pictures represent. Bearing in mind the fact that *Variety* is a trade-paper supported largely by advertising and subscriptions paid for by the business of film production, it would seem to follow that, not wanting to bite the hands which feed it, the paper would look at films only from the point of view of their likely commercial returns.

While this is true of many trade-papers, which express no personal views about films under review, but treat everything as being worthwhile, *Variety* has always maintained a breezy, balanced air of concerned independence - a concern for and understanding of motion pictures, but never a blind subservience to the powers of the trade.

Variety has always recognised the commercial prospects of films while deploring perhaps, form, content or technique. Conversely, it has recognised the brilliance of many films as works of art, but pointed out their probable lack of popular appeal.

Because, in recent years, *Variety* has

come to be admired and widely read it circles outside the business of entertainment, such as libraries, universities, cinemathèques, and by the public a large interested in movies, its reviews in recent years have reached a high level of sophistication, out-spokenness, insight and observation. It has frequently given scathing reviews to expensive film popular at the box-office - without fear of retaliation by the studios.

The effectiveness of its reviews, however, frequently depends on the abilities of the writers, or stringers as they are known, whose names have always been abbreviated to the first four (usually letters of the reviewers' last names. As *Variety* has never been generous in its payments, the writers swing wildly between the very ordinary (making full use of *Varietyese*, a shortened style of writing which no reviewer was compelled to use), and the very exceptional. Few however, in this remarkable compilation, which testifies to the long-life of *Variety* (what other trade-paper has lasted as long in the same style under the same name?), are without value and the credits of course are essential-right down to the running times.

So as book reviewers like to say: "No library (or film enthusiast) should be without it."

Gerald Pratley ●

Errata

Last month CTV vice-president of network relations Marge Anthony was erroneously identified on the content's page by the wrong network. Our apologies both to Ms. Anthony and to CTV.

In Gail Henley's story "Women decision-makers in Canadian television", Jackie Pilote's title should have read: business manager, CTV news, features and information programming.

Pictures from Toronto's Festival of Festivals should have been credited to photographer Gail Harvey.

And, finally, Francis F. Coppola's middle name is Ford and not Fox as was mistakenly printed.

**Newsmakers,
please note**

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

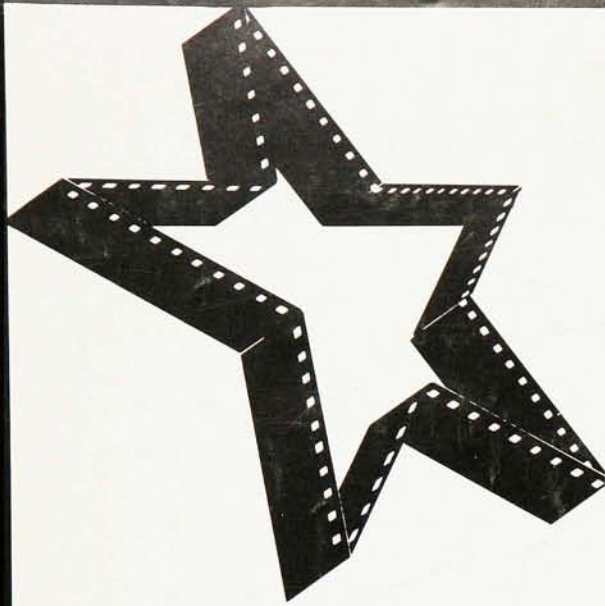
VINCENT TANGREDI



Carmen Lamanna Gallery
Toronto, Ontario
November 26 - December 15, 1983

49th Parallel
Centre for Contemporary
Canadian Art
New York, N.Y.
February 4 - March 3, 1984

P.S. 1 (Project Studios One)
The Institute for Art
& Urban Studies, Inc.
Long Island City, N.Y.
April 8 - June 3, 1984



Atlantic Film and Video Festival '83 Awards



Best Overall Entry (Atlantic Television System Award)

Massabielle Office National du Film
Centre Acadien de la Production Française
Terminal Plaza Building 1222, rue Main, Moncton, N.B.
E1C 1H6

Best Performance (Thespis Award, Actra)

Robbie O'Neill (Tighten the Traces, Haul in the Reins)
Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, P.O. Box 3000,
Halifax, Nova Scotia B3J 3E9

Film Awards

Best film **The Hooded Seal**

Office of Education Practice
University of Guelph
Guelph, Ontario N1G 2W1

Best Drama **Massabielle**

Best Documentary **The Hooded Seal**

Best Animation **Campfire Moose**

Doomsday Studios Ltd.
1672 Barrington St.
Halifax, N.S. B3J 2A2

Best Industrial/Sponsored **A Time for a Change**

Carota films LTD.
368 Beausejour
Dieppe, N.B. E1A 1Y6

Video/Television Awards

Best Video/Television Awards **Les Gages de la Survie**

Les Productions Prisma Inc.
1100, rue Bluery
Montreal, Quebec H4Z 1N4

Best Documentary **Les Gages de la Survie**

Best Experimental **The Apartment Conflict**

Yves-Daniel Thibodeau
P.O. Box 6000
Fredericton, N.B. E3B 5H1

Best News/Current Affairs Inquiry Series:

Bethel, N.B.
CBC, Halifax

Best Variety **Maternity Nurses — The Wonderful Grand Band**

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
P.O. Box 12010, Station "A"
St. John's, Nfld. A1B 3T8

The Critics Choice **The Winter There Was Very Little Snow**

Walter Ungerer
Dark Horse Films
P.O. Box 982
Montpellier, Vermont 05602 (U.S.A.)

Lucien Brouillard

Bruno Carriere
I A C P A V
1210 rue St-Hubert
Montreal, Quebec H2L 3T7

The Peoples Choice Stations

William D. MacGillivray
Picture Plant Productions
P.O. Box 2465, Station 'M'
Halifax, Nova Scotia B3J 3E8

The Pioneer Award **Dr. Bramwell Chandler**

(Sponsored by CBC)
Prince Edward Island

The Star Channel Script Development Award

(\$1,000 cash prize) **Tom Cahil**
CBC
St. John's, Nfld.

Craft Awards

Film

Best Direction **Jacques Savoie (Massabielle)**

Best Editing **Werner Nold (Massabielle)**

Best Sound Editing **Norman Lightfoot (The Hooded Seal)**

Best Cinematography **A. Thomas Vamos (Massabielle)**

Video

Best Direction **Jack Kellum (Maternity Nurses — Wonderful Grand Band)**

Best Editing **Josée Beaudet, Louise Michaud (Les Gages de la Survie)**

Best Sound Editing **Wayne Tomes, Gordon Warren (Iceberg Alley)**

Special Award **Kent Stetson**

Best adaptation of a stage production for Television —
Tighten the Traces, Haul in the Reins

Awards of Merit

Film Animation **Squeeze Play**

Mac Holyoke/N.B. Film CO-OP
297 Queens Avenue, Apt. 204
Oakville, Ontario L6H 2G4

Donald Snowden, Paul MacLeod, Eyes See, Ears Hear

Media Unit Extension Services
Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John's, Nfld. A1B 3X5

Humour **Carota Films LTD.**

Commercial: Ronnie (2) — Crap Out 8000

Use of Video in Education

Kaminuriak Herd Project series

Donald Snowden Productions
54 Circular Road
St. John's, Nfld. A1C 2Z1

Best Commercial

1st Place Campfire Moose
Doomsday Studios Ltd.

2nd Place War AMPS/Atlantic PSA

The War Amputations of Canada
207-2277 Riverside Drive
Ottawa, Ontario K1H 7X6

3rd Place Spaceman

Doomsday Studios Ltd.

Incentives for Students and Independents

Video

\$300 (NTV, St. John's, Nfld.)
TIGHTEN THE TRACES, HAUL IN THE REINS
Divided between Producer/Director Kent Stetson and
Writer/Actor Robbie O'Neill

\$300 (Avalon Cablevision, St. John's, Nfld.)
Most Promising Video — **THE APARTMENT CONFLICT**

Videotapes from Sony, Backman Vidcom and Instructor
Aids to directors of **AQUARELLE/CITY OF NIGHTS/ LADIES MAN**

Film

\$300 (PFA Labs, Toronto)
Divided between Newfoundland Independent Filmmakers
Co-op/New Brunswick Filmmakers Co-op/Island Media
Arts Co-op (P.E.I.)

\$250 (Carota Films, Dieppe, N.B.)
Most Promising Film (first-time filmmaker): Marusia
Bociurkiw (75 **TERRIFIC LOOKS**)

\$100 (Anigraph Productions, St. John's, Nfld.)
Drama by a Newfoundland group: Newfoundland
Independent Filmmakers Co-op
"In recognition of the witty Pontifical opening of
EXTRAORDINARY VISITOR"

\$500 laboratory services (Film House, Toronto)
Lulu Keating (**CITY SURVIVAL**)

\$300 sound mixing services (ABS Productions, Dartmouth,
N.S.)
Neil Livingston (**A PORTRAIT OF SMALL HYDRO**)

\$200 laboratory services (Bellevue-Pathé, Montreal)
Mac Holyoke (**SQUEEZE PLAY**)

\$100 laboratory services (Eastern Film Labs, Halifax, N.S.)
Atlantic Filmmakers Co-op

Atlantic Festival Association

1572 Barrington Street
Halifax, Nova Scotia B3J 1Z6
(902) 426-6011

