

OPINIONS

Perverse Love

by Jane Dick

When a dialogue of a controversial nature fails to produce new themes and continues to breed nothing more novel than variations – clever rewordings of an ongoing argument-counter-argument – it seems to me that the participants in that dialogue are more involved in some perverse love for the intimacies of the familiar than they are in developing that argument towards a resolution. I call this sort of activity incestuous.

In all other aspects of our society incest is frowned on as a no-no. But among our authentic and would-be film critics, it seems to be very much *à la mode*. They are engaged in a dialogue of repetition around the question of what is/should be Canadian in our film industry, and variations thereof.

Fothergill and Hofsess have been the main perpetrators of the dialogue (at least in these hallowed pages) but there are plenty of other critics who foam passionately at the mouth over some misbegotten ideal known as 'Canadianism'. Natalie Edwards equates this elusive term with "the best of our quality of life" (No. 21). This type of attitude may account for at least one of the reasons **Duddy Kravitz**, for example, was criticized – its hero is an out and out rotter, hardly reflective of our best. And Canadian heroes really ought to be kindly characters, after all, like we Canadians are. (Aren't we?) Not only that, but the film was just too polished, too professional; on the superficial level it looked, well, you know – American. Argh! To think that Canada can produce a first-rate film that is a commercial success and find that, oh the shame of it all, it's not as Canadian as it should be. (?!?)

This type of parochial nit-picking is inflicted on countless Canadian films and is a constant source of puzzlement to me. What exactly this 'Canadian' quality/image is or should be is under hot debate. What is Canadian? I suspect that Canadian is simply Canadian, i.e. the product of a Canadian mind and sensibility – involving many things not at all related to Canada – and that the question we should be asking ourselves is, What is *film* and what does it mean to us?

Controversy is inevitable and necessary around a fledgling film industry as is Canada's, especially at a time such as this when we are trying to decolonize ourselves from our southern neighbours. But present critical activity is based more on emotion than intellect, and the result as in other areas is a lot of unwanted children. And, as in other areas, this usually develops into a self-perpetuating syndrome.

Why are so many otherwise intelligent people so very concerned with finding and protecting our identity? As anyone who's made it through adolescence should know, identity is something that is found by the way, while one goes on about the business of growing. Canadian identity is not specifically right here. And it will not be found in dialogue – no matter how many concrete films the dialogue refers to. Identity is out there – in relation to everyone else.

Don't the critics here know what we have here? Canada has recently become self-conscious of itself as a country with a film industry, as a people with (hopefully) valid things to say to ourselves and to the rest of the world. We have here a film industry that is young, and energetic, and possessing sufficient real and promising talent to really get out there and do something with *film*. It is an exciting medium that few have fully explored. *Film*, which still has plenty of room for innovations. Canada has potential for these.

But all I hear from Canadian critics is not explorations of possibilities, but comparisons of our films with the tried and true, and provincial renditions on the theme of 'identity crisis'.

Robert Fothergill (No. 20) went so far as to try to redirect the search for the Great Canadian Film towards what he calls the "Necessary Canadian Film". Sounds like the same thing to me. By constantly being spoken of with a peculiar religious fervour, the word 'Canadian' is now equated with the term 'necessary'.

As I write this I muse that perhaps my accusation of incest is kind. Incest is no doubt more exciting than this infinite plodding around 'Canadianism' and what films should be produced in aid of it, and how. Why the emphasis on product? Why not process?

What is Canadian? Who cares anymore? Is it in fact, a question with an answer?

What is film? Ah, how much more profitable an adventure. Let's find out. □

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