

WRITE ME A FILM?

*A Symposium by
Canadian Filmmakers*

INTRODUCTION

Hugo McPherson

WHAT ARE THE CONNECTIONS between writing and cinema in Canada? There is no authoritative answer to this question. Instead, there are almost as many answers as there are film makers and writers. Hence a symposium, the form most closely related to the group effort of making a film. I have not, however, taken a further step towards film: I have not asked each contributor to submit his article to a score of colleagues to have it revised, praised, condemned, cut, expanded, re-titled, or changed to another subject before it reached the page-proof (or test print) stage. That would have been too close to the real process; and of course the budget for a symposium is not a film budget.

What follows reveals the attitudes of four working film makers and writers who occupy important places at the National Film Board. Each has chosen an aspect of the relation between film and writing, and each expresses a personal

vision. So we will regard this as a *quartet*, not in musical terms, where four voices play together, but in film terms, where discordant voices achieve a special harmony or dissonance in a completed work.

In this script, Ian MacNeill, film maker, and former Director of English Programme, relates the costs of filmmaking to the individual effort of the writer. William Weintraub, novelist, script-writer and film-maker, dramatizes the four-way problem of scripted and unscripted films. Guy Glover, producer, and Director of English Programme, emphasizes the inter-disciplinary, *non-literary* nature of the film art. And Jacques Godbout, film maker, novelist, poet, and Directeur de la production française, looks philosophically at fiction and film, and finds that words and visual images—though very different media—have a common bond in *poetry*. Bon appetit! I shall add an Afterword.

UNEASY RIDERS

William Weintraub

The connection between writing and the cinema in Canada? Whither? I got some insight into this matter the other day by eavesdropping on a conversation that took place in the cafeteria of the National Film Board (or any other place where Canadian film makers gather). The conversation was between RALPH OBSOLETE, a 40-year-old film maker, and a 20-year-old colleague of his, PETER WITH-IT.

OBSOLETE: This film you're making, what's it about?

WITH-IT: Alienation. How people can't communicate.

OBSOLETE: Of course. What else is there? Who's writing your script?

WITH-IT: Script? Are you putting me on? Who uses scripts?

OBSOLETE: You're having the actors improvise, is that it? Realism?

WITH-IT: You older cats might have called it realism. We call it honesty.

OBSOLETE: What makes you think that when an actor makes up a line it's more honest than when a writer writes it? Or more perceptive?

WITH-IT: These kids aren't really actors, dad. They're amateurs. More like real people.

OBSOLETE: You mean their jaws will be more slack? While they're grunting around trying to think of what to say next?

WITH-IT: Now don't get uptight, man. I see you're still hung up on that structure thing. Well that's not where it's at. There's nothing that turns the kids

off faster than a well-made play. No, we're just going to roll the camera and let it happen. That's what the kids want.

OBSOLETE: *Easy Rider*, eh?

WITH-IT: *Easy Rider*? Are you putting me on again? The kids are *laughing* at that one. You ought to get out on the college circuit. It's really wild, man.

OBSOLETE: I'd like to read you a quotation, which I just happen to have with me. It goes like this: "The making of a film, to me, is simply the extension of the process of writing. It's the process of rendering the thing you've written. You're still writing when you're directing." It was John Huston who said that.

WITH-IT: Who's he?

OBSOLETE: He made *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Treasure of Sierra Madre* and a few others.

WITH-IT: Oh, John *Huston*. We had him in school. But that's not where it's at, man. That's museum stuff.

OBSOLETE: And Eisenstein and Hitch-

cock and Bergman. They all seem to think that writing the screenplay is important. Maybe the *most* important part of it.

WITH-IT: That's more of the same. Cosy stuff for Film Society liberals. Look, if you want to write, write. If you want to make films, make films. It's two different ball games. What we're trying to do is create a new, non-verbal language. That old words-on-paper bit isn't going anywhere.

OBSOLETE: Let's talk about your last film — *Opus*, I think you called it. If I remember correctly, you spent ten minutes before the screening explaining to us how you were creating a new, non-verbal language. Then we saw the film — six minutes long — and then you spent half an hour explaining the symbolism and other goodies. That was the most *verbal* goddam performance I ever saw. Is that your new, non-verbal language?

WITH-IT: I can't help it if you old folks have to have things translated for you.

OBSOLETE: What you mean is that if I had been high on acid I would have understood what those out-of-focus blurs meant.

WITH-IT: You're getting all uptight again. You would have understood if you *cared*. All you want in films is for the butler to open the door and say, "Anyone for tennis?" Anything to take your mind off what's relevant.

OBSOLETE: (*belligerently*) Unless we involve writers, we'll never have a Canadian feature film industry. God knows, we've made plenty of features, and all of them stink. That's because we've never encouraged writers — brought them along, made them feel part of film making. Instead, we've frightened

them off by creating a whole bloody mystique about film. "It's a director's medium... the director knows best... at best the writer is a necessary evil..." We resent writers and writing because deep down we know that writing is real work and directing is just play.

WITH-IT: You're hung up on that puritan work thing, man. Unless you sweat you won't go to Heaven. Why don't you relax? Roll the camera and let it happen. Let it turn you on. Don't feel so threatened by freedom.

OBSOLETE: We'll never have a feature film industry unless we do something about the writing problem.

WITH-IT: (*triumphantly*) That word "industry" gives you away, doesn't it? The hell with meaningful relevance, you want factories with Hollywood written on the chimneys.

OBSOLETE: (*weakly*) Hitchcock... Bergman... Faulkner wrote for the movies...

(*At this point, SAMUEL SAGE, cup of coffee in hand, enters and sits down at the table. He is Professor of Communications at a well-known Canadian university, and a film sage. He is 50 years old and wears a new beard and a mandala around his neck.*)

SAGE: I liked *Opus*, With-In.

WITH-IT: Thanks.

SAGE: The mosaic thing came off quite well, I thought. And there was a kind of "foreground restlessness," if I may coin a phrase. I was reminded of Oldenburg's use of mass.

OBSOLETE: (*shouting*) What about the *boredom*? What about the goddam savage bone-crushing inhuman *boredom* of these goddam youth films?

(*We notice, for the first time, that while*

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the others have been drinking coffee, OBSOLETE has been nipping at a flask.)

OBSOLETE: (*screaming now*) Incoherence is boring.

WITH-IT: The alcohol makes them uptight. Ugly, isn't it?

SAGE: (*smiling*) You can sometimes pacify them by telling them a nice, old-fashioned linear story.

(*WITH-IT lights up a joint and offers one to SAGE. But SAGE declines, apologetically, and fills his pipe with Edgeworth Tobacco.*)

SAGE: What you don't understand, Obsolete, is that we young people see Film as part of a total Communications Picture. Subject matter is no longer in the ascendancy, no matter what your rear-view mirror tells you. If we have to try to verbalize the New Cinema's qualitative parameters for purposes of identification through *your* generation's syntax, we might call them "honesty," "freedom," "relevance," "spontaneity." But essentially, Post-Syntactic is where it's at. One grooves with the Media Revolution, or one doesn't.

OBSOLETE: Besides an inability to communicate, Sage, what other qualifications does one need to get in on the Communications racket?

SAGE: Don't you ever get tired of the old formulas, Obsolete? Time didn't come to a stop with Clifford Odets, you know.

OBSOLETE: (*drinking openly now*) For chrissakes, Sage, you're *fifty years old!* Why don't you take off that goddam mandala from around your neck and act your age!

WITH-IT: I wish I had my camera. It's happening.

OBSOLETE: (*muttering*) So the Canada

Council sends Old Sage ten thousand to explicate With-It's films. "Come all ye thesis writers..." In the nick of time, too, now that the ole T. S. Eliot lode is drying up.

SAGE: Do you really want to stop all experimentation, Obsolete? Would you have stopped Picasso in his youth? Would you have stopped McLaren?

OBSOLETE: I want to stop being bored by experiments that are unsuccessful. We used to throw those away, but now we screen them for the public. And I want to stop treating every snot-nosed kid who comes along as a genius. Nowadays everybody's a genius until proven otherwise. In my day, it used to be the other way around.

WITH-IT: (*with his generation's Love*) Never mind, Obsolete, you still serve a purpose, I guess.

SAGE: It just so happens that With-It is six years ahead of his time.

OBSOLETE: Then let's put his films away for six years and release them when people have developed the stamina to endure the boredom.

WITH-IT: They all get hung up on value judgements, these booze heads.

OBSOLETE: (*raving now*) It's me against the whole goddam Global Village! I don't *want* to sit chanting around the electronic campfire until my brain is washed away! And then, when we can't think any more — just feel — McLuhan arises, new Pope, pre-Gutenberg, pre-Luther, pre-everything, and delivers us stunned to his Jesuit masters!

WITH-IT: What's *with* him, anyway? All I want to do is make films.

SAGE: (*calmingly*) Don't you realize, Obsolete, that some of the best Canadian films were made without scripts,

without writers? Documentaries, cinema vérité.

OBSOLETE: That was good in its time, but it's old hat now. You see cinéma vérité all over Channel Six. Feature films is where it's at, if I may coin a phrase. People want stories, insight into character, comments on the human condition — not talentless psychedelic blurs. Films for people, not for exegetists.

SAGE: His generation used to hear linear narratives at their mother's knee. They never got over it.

WITH-IT: He's hung up on Doris Day. *(At this point, JACK COMMERCIAL arrives, just in from Hollywood. He is a swarthy man who smokes a big cigar and has diamond rings on his fingers. He sits down, slapping an alligator briefcase on the table.)*

COMMERCIAL: Which one of you is With-It?

WITH-IT: I am.

SAGE: I am.

COMMERCIAL: It's the young fellow I'm interested in. Tell me, With-It, is it true that up here in Canada the kids ride their motorcycles in the snow? That they screw in the snow?

WITH-IT: That's where it's at.

COMMERCIAL: *(opening his briefcase and putting one million dollars on the table)* That's the picture I want. Low budget, hand-held camera, Eastman-colour. We'll call it *Hard Rider*. You interested?

WITH-IT: *(reaching for the money)* You got yourself a film maker.

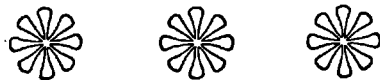
COMMERCIAL: *(withholding the money)* Just a minute. What about a script?

WITH-IT: Uh?

SAGE: *(hastily)* Oh, we'll get you a script, all right, sir.

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COMMERCIAL: (*throwing them \$25,000*) Right. Here's twenty-five for starters. And don't forget to remind your writers that ninety per cent of today's audience is under eleven years old. We're catering to their fantasies of what it'll be like when they grow up to be teen-agers, when they can groove. Right?

SAGE: Right.

WITH-IT: Right.

COMMERCIAL: (*exiting*) It's been a real pleasure working with you, gentlemen. Let's have lunch sometime.

OBSOLETE: (*reaching for the money*) Would you like me to have a crack at that script?

SAGE: (*rapping him on the knuckles*) No, I think we'll get Mack the Hack down from Toronto to work on it.

WITH-IT: (*worried, for the first time*) But Sage, what's this with *scripts*?

SAGE: (*sagely*) Now don't get uptight, With-It. Mr. Commercial needs something on paper to show the bankers, so they'll put up the money. Then you can throw away the script and just shoot.

WITH-IT: (*nodding*) Spontaneity . . .

SAGE: Relevance.

OBSOLETE: (*cradling his hung-over head*) Honesty.

CURTAIN

THE FABLED MOVIE CONTRACT

Ian MacNeill

GOD KNOWS I hesitate to sully the pages of *Canadian Literature* with talk of money, but the most important thing for a writer to know about films is that they are expensive. This applies whether the film is a Communications Arts student's maiden project or a \$20 million programmed disaster like "Paint Your Wagon", for budgets are relative to the financial resources of the producers or backers. At little more cost than sweat and carbon paper you can write your imperishable novel. It may, of course, never get published, but there it is. It exists. If no one else, your friends can read it. Before a feature film — the movie equivalent of a novel — can exist, money must be found for a great many costly ingredients: film stock (about \$36

for a minute's worth of 35mm colour stock, developed and printed, but not counting materials for release printing); cameras (\$325 a day for a blimped 35mm Arriflex with standard lenses and accessories); actors (\$200 a day ACTRA minimum, including television buy-out rights in perpetuity, for a principal performer in Canada, to \$1 million plus percentage for an international star); lights (\$36 a day for a ten kilowatt lamp, of which you may need five or ten, as well as many other lamps); and other such items, including the writer's fee.

The high cost of films strongly influences the writer's rôle in feature film making. A novel may be written for love, a feature film almost always is written as an ingredient in a complex commercial

venture. Even the makers of low-budget independent films, no matter how fervently they may talk of the art of the cinema, are entirely aware of the profits that *may* be made in films. The current Golden Calf is "Easy Rider," reported to have cost \$360,000 to make, and according to *Variety*, predicted to have final gross earnings of \$60 million. You will see — or, better perhaps, not see — many imitations of "Easy Rider."

These high costs and high potential profits affect film writing in several ways:

1. Unlike novels, plays, poetry, and other forms of writing, film scripts are seldom written on speculation. They are almost always commissioned by a producer to a writer, and usually based on what is known in the industry as a "property" — a novel, short story or play, that may or may not be the writer's own. There are two encouraging signs in the Canadian feature scene. Producers are more frequently asking writers to develop their own "properties" into scripts, even though the writers may have had no previous script-writing experience. And producers are more frequently commissioning scripts from original, unpublished stories. But producers, a generally unadventurous lot, still prefer published properties, and the best way to break into film writing in Canada is to write a successful novel. If it gets film bids, sign with a producer who will let you write the script. And work through a good agent.

2. Relatively few feature films are made as compared, say, with novels published. So, the opportunities for script writers are relatively few. I know of no Canadian who makes a living from writing only feature films. But, again, there

are encouraging signs. The National Film Board, in recent years, has commissioned about a dozen feature-length scripts in English, but the Board's output of features is likely to remain fairly small. The Canadian Film Development Corporation, since it began operations in mid-1968, has helped to finance directly or indirectly the development of about 35 scripts, almost all of them by Canadian writers.

3. To complete a script to the satisfaction of a producer does not ensure that the writer's name will appear, third from the end of the list of credits (the usual place for the script-writer) on the silver screen at the Capitol Theatre. Hundreds of entirely competent, even brilliant scripts languish in producers' files and fester in their writers' minds: the right star was not available; financing could not be arranged; the distribution deal fell through; the subject is no longer fashionable. These, and many other interdependent factors, determine the "package", and production of a film depends on a suitable package being assembled. The Film Development Corporation, for example, will not put money into a Canadian producer's film unless there is also a substantial financial involvement by a film distributor. In this the CFDC follows industry practice: no distribution guarantee, no production money. In fact, the bankers to the film industry may require approval of the stars, the director and, of course, the "property."

4. The *Dictionary of Occupation Titles* (U.S. Department of Labour) defines a Scenario Writer, in part, as follows:

Writes stories, screen adaptations or scenarios for motion pictures, receiving assignments and recommendations for story treatment or theme development from Scenario Editor or Producer.

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That is not quite accurate. The writer for film may also receive recommendations, suggestions ("you can ignore this, if you want, it's just a suggestion"), direct orders, or howls of injured ego from the backers, the actors, the director, the set designer, the director of photography and the script girl. Film writing is not a lonely occupation. But it has rewards which have attracted writers like Brian Moore, Mordecai Richler, Faulkner, Wallace Stegner and many other novelists. The rewards are not only financial, although film is traditionally the most lucrative market for writers.

5. How lucrative? Here are some examples:

A Canadian writer recently received \$15,000 from a Canadian producer for the screen rights to a first novel. The writer, without previous film writing experience, also contracted to do the screenplay, for \$6,000 — \$3,000 for a first draft and, if it proved acceptable, \$3,000 for a final script, plus a small percentage of the net earnings of the film. (Writers often find that net earnings are highly elusive. A writer in high demand gets a percentage of the *gross* earnings.)

A good American novelist, whose books sell well, was commissioned by a Canadian producer to adapt for the screen one of his short stories that had a Canadian background. He had no screen writing experience. Film rights to the story, \$6,000. Script, \$9,000, without a producer's option to cancel at any stage, plus a bonus of 25 per cent of the original total fee if the film were distributed in the U.S.A.

A Canadian producer recently commissioned an American novelist (four novels which earned critical praise but

little money), who had done no film writing, to write a screen adaptation of a European novel. Fee: \$6,000 plus a small percentage of the net earnings of the film.

These screen writers' fees are low, in my opinion, but it depends on how eager the writers were to get screen writing experience and credits; what other film offers the first two novelists had received for their stories; and on recognition that the Canadian feature industry is very young. Credits are the trade goods of the film writer, the subject of interminable contract clauses, frequent litigation and lasting bitterness.

More like the fabled movie contract is one for a recent medium-budget Hollywood film, commissioning an experienced screen writer to do a treatment and screenplay based on a property already owned by the producer. Fee: \$150,000, paid in stages and without a producer's option to cancel. Delivery requirements: eight weeks for the treatment; ten weeks for the first draft script; ten weeks "on call" for revisions. Many of the 32 single-spaced pages of the contract are devoted to making clear that the writer retains absolutely no rights in his work even, as the contract puts it, "any so-called 'moral rights' of authors." The producers have the right, also, to "use, adapt, change, revise, delete from, add to and/or rearrange" the material in any way they wish. There even is a morals clause: "You will conduct yourself with due regard to public conventions and morals and not do anything . . . that will tend to shock, insult or offend the community or public morals or decency, or prejudice us or the motion picture industry in general."

Before you elevate your life style to

meet these standards, you should consider the more run-of-the-mill rewards for screen writers. The current ACTRA (Association of Canadian Television and Radio Artists) agreement with the AMPPLC (Association of Motion Picture Producers and Laboratories of Canada) calls for a minimum writers' fee of \$1,500 for a 90-minute film for unlimited theatrical use and one Canadian television network release. (For unlimited world television rights an additional 150 per cent would be paid.) No writer can afford to do good work for fees like that.

Compare it with the actors' minimum of \$100 a day; it represents 15 days—to write a 90-minute script. Or compare it with that \$325 a day camera; it is the equivalent of a week's rental. Producers who are quite willing to pay fairly high fees to performers or for equipment, still economize on writing. But of course it is a false economy, as many Canadian films prove. On the other hand, I have yet to see a morals clause in a Canadian film writing contract. We may be poor, but we can remain lasciviously free.

THE NON-LITERARY FILM

Guy Glover

THOSE WHO ARE CONTENT to view the fiction film as a variety of theatre are quite at ease with the notion that there is a fundamental relationship between film and literature and between the film-maker and the writer. A sophisticated variation of the "theatre" view is that the fiction film is perhaps better thought of as "operatic," with the script as a kind of libretto.

Since film deals with the moving image and is a temporal art, however, it is linked with music and dance as much as with drama, and such a link need not be merely postulated as a theory but can be observed in practice.

As various potentials for film in non-narrative and non-figurative forms are explored (documentary, *cinéma vérité*, animation—both figurative and non-figurative, etc.) it is becoming evident that, if in some types of film a relation-

ship to literature has existed, in much that already has been created, literary forms, literary elements and literary inspiration have been either absent or extremely reduced, and these non-literary tendencies appear to be on the increase.

This, of course, raises interesting and perhaps troubling questions of aesthetics, but the questions are no more troubling (or need not be) than those which have been faced by the practitioners of other media in which it is quite natural *not* to expect relationships with literature. In this connection, Fontenelle asked the classic question when confronted with a piece of programme-less music: "Sonata, what do you wish of me?"

Pre-stressed concrete can be used to build replicas of the Parthenon or Chartres Cathedral but current architectural theory and practice have found other forms for that medium. Film, too, can

be used to reproduce plays, novels or other forms of literary derivation, but it can also be used for its own properties, in forms integral to it. It is a fairly obvious fact that the film industry does not use film in this way and that the commercial film is still parasitic on the theatre, the novel and even on journalism.

Can a writer play a role in the creation of the "essential" film?

Many directors themselves note down reminders in writing which they use during filming. These notes bear no resemblance to literature and would often be scarcely intelligible to anyone but the individual who wrote them. Nor, except in dialogue elements — if these have indeed been written out as part of the film-maker's notes (Godard, for instance, does not write out his dialogue) — does any writing as such appear in the finished product.

Some writers are able to work with film directors as researchers and ideamen, helping to invent or expand characters and action (or plot). Their material is then taken over by the film-maker and turned to his ends and to the ways of his imagination. Some such role must have been played by Arthur C. Clarke who, using a short story he had written some years ago, provided the armature upon which Stanley Kubrick elaborated the visual poetry of "2001". There are whole sequences in "2001" however which came out of Kubrick's imagination and clearly do not depend upon anything that Clarke would have been able to write down on paper.

In some kinds of film, then, it appears that some elements of what a writer must deploy in writing a literary work can be used. The elements are clearly

short of full literary composition. The verbal element (chiefly dialogue) is usually of considerably less importance than in a theatrical text but, whether it bulks large or small, it is of a different texture from that found in a stage work and is such that its rhythms are achieved as much through cutting as through the speech-delivery of the actors or speakers. This suggests that writing for the film requires, first, specialized study and, finally, a working knowledge of the processes of film-making; and it must be assumed that, in many typical instances, this writing will be as "invisible" as the notations of a choreographer. In many others, equally typical instances, the collaboration of the writer will not be required at all.

The idea that a "good script" goes a long way toward guaranteeing the good film (and a bad script, a bad film) is still current in much of the commercial film industry; and thus, at a time that the "good script" has come to mean much the same as what "the well-made play" meant at the end of the 19th century, films are still produced of which their "good script" is their most fatal liability. It is significant that in the case of "big-budget" films, the script is considered a basic requirement in the search for financing and it is no less significant that "big-budget" films with their built-in notion of the script "property" as the guarantee of a sound investment, have recently been reported to be on their way out.

How do we judge good film writing? I have suggested a kind of collaboration in which the writer might work to bring a film into existence. The only way I know to judge the success of a writer's contribution to that collaboration is to

inquire if he has been invited to collaborate again.

Having written the foregoing I thought it would be instructive to look at the point of view presented in a book bearing the suggestive title *Great Film Plays* (Crown Publishers, New York, 1959). Sure enough, in one of two prefaces John Gassner writes: "We assume that there is a new literature of the screen — the screenplay. If this fact has not been widely recognized it is only because screenplays have not been properly accorded the dignity of print . . . Naturally not everything that is set down on paper is worth publishing, but it will be found on very little investigation that film writing already has substantial claims to literary recognition." In a second preface, "The Writer and the Film," Dudley Nichols, himself a distinguished and experienced screenplay writer, is persuasive in his moderation and good sense; but even he, in his final paragraph, writes "In conclusion I hope that in sketching the successive steps of making a film I have not underrated the importance of the screenplay. It is, in my opinion, pre-eminent in the field of film-making. It is the writer who is the dreamer, the imaginer, the shaper."

Many film-makers of the 60's would question Mr. Nichols' last sentence, simply because their experience does not bear it out.

Finally, if literature has an influence on film and vice versa, we should be clear in what sense that may be true. One might say, for instance, that in *Under the Volcano*, among other well-absorbed influences, Hitchcock is as powerful as Joyce or that *Gone with the Wind* is a not-unusual case of a novel anticipating a film of the same name



Goethe's Faust

TRANSLATED BY
BARKER FAIRLEY

No work of literature makes a stronger appeal to our common humanity than Goethe's *Faust*. This epic-drama, completed less than a century and a half ago and ranking as the great German achievement in poetry, addresses itself equally to young and old, whether highbrow or lowbrow, sophisticated or unsophisticated, because it turns on the basic problem of every man — that of good and evil and the search for the mastery and management of life. This version omits nothing of the original text and remains scrupulously true to every shade of meaning from first to last. At the same time it brings the poem so close to contemporary English that it reads like an English work.

Leonard W. Forster, Schröder Professor of German, University of Cambridge, has called this version 'the most humane and approachable translation of Faust in existence.'

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made some years later. Conversely, one might say that Bresson's *Un condamné à mort s'est échappé* is "Dostoyevskian" and that in *La dolce vita* Fellini demonstrates spiritual kinship with Marie Correlli. On this general level the two media might be said to interact, though obviously at a safe distance and well down in the subconscious. Sometimes however it is not in the subconscious at all: Antonioni has admitted to conscious attempts to "Proustify" his material in *L'avventura* and he is obviously not alone in this type of situation. It should be remarked that prose narrative is usually the influence in question and not

poetic works in verse — not so unthinkable a notion as the almost total absence of poetic works adapted for cinema would seem to indicate.

It is doubtful that my remarks would be read sympathetically (or at all) by the young, but it is they, in fact, who have taken up the non-literary film and have begun to use it with a freedom and purity little known in the past. Specific questions of competence and taste aside, I am content with their intuitive grasp of the "essential film" and it is with them, fortunately, that the future of the medium rests.

LE TEMPS: *La Poésie du Cinéma*

Jacques Godbout

PEUT-ETRE bien qu'avant de mourir, le cinéaste en moi étranglera l'écrivain. Ou vice versa. A moins que cette schizophrénie ne soit mon lot. Tout ce que je puis affirmer aujourd'hui c'est que le cinéaste fait vivre l'écrivain; aussi bien au plan financier qu'à celui des contacts avec la réalité.

Je n'aurais jamais écrit le roman *Salut Galarneau!* si je n'avais participé au film *A Saint-Henri le cinq septembre* qui m'amena à réaliser *8 témoins*, et à me lier d'amitié avec Maurice Nadeau. Ce qui revient à dire que le contrat social du cinéma documentaire m'a permis de signer, au niveau de l'imaginaire, un contrat de transposition littéraire. En

somme c'est à l'occasion de rencontres provoquées par la caméra que j'ai écrit, non, que j'ai nourri plutôt certains livres, certains personnages . . . Grotowski dit que l'art est d'abord une rencontre. La rencontre d'un metteur en scène avec des comédiens, avec un texte, la rencontre entre un écrivain et un langage. Certaines rencontres ne sont que des rendez-vous manqués, d'autres laissent des traces.

La profession d'écrivain n'est pas une réalité sociale: ou alors on est écrivain, scripteur, bonne à tout faire portant un tablier des dictionnaires. Le métier de cinéaste, lui, existe.

Je sais de nombreux écrivains qui rê-

vent de faire du cinéma, ou qui "pensent" cinéma. Peu de cinéastes rêvent d'écriture littéraire. Le cinéma documentaire est à l'écrivain ce que peut être le journalisme. Est-ce Moravia qui cessa il y a quelques années d'écrire pour prendre, dans le journalisme, un bain de quotidien?

Le cinéma documentaire excelle à décrire l'aliénation, et c'est souvent cette aliénation qui est à la source des grandes oeuvres littéraires. Mais il y a aussi le cinéma de fiction. Dans ce domaine, au Canada comme ailleurs, le cinéma a puisé dans des oeuvres romanesques. Mais c'est là un phénomène de rencontre qui dépasse, et l'écrivain, et le cinéaste. C'est par accident qu'un roman donne naissance à un film libre. Le plus souvent la littérature est une frontière, que peu de metteurs en scène osent traverser. Car il s'agit de faire un cinéma libre, qui renvoie au cinéma.

De même que les livres (la bibliothèque) donnent naissance aux livres, de même le cinéma est à la source du cinéma. Ce n'est pas un coucher de soleil qui engendre une peinture, mais d'autres tableaux.

L'écriture littéraire est une exploration du langage, comme on dit que les cosmonautes explorent l'espace. Il y a un espace dans les mots, entre les mots, que l'écrivain fouille (comme les lunaires qui grattent le sol pour en ramener des pierres). Et ce voyage dans les mots, dans la magie du mot, n'est pas sans danger.

Le ridicule qui s'est emparé des analyses comparées du cinéma et de la littérature tient au fait qu'il y a eu (il y a encore) confusion de vocabulaire: on s'est mis à parler du langage cinématographique, de la grammaire du cinéma

...c'était par analogie, mais l'analogie s'est pétrifiée. Or il n'y a pas de langage ni de grammaire cinématographiques, car le langage exige des monèmes, des phonèmes, des structures, un code. Le cinéma n'est pas un langage, chaque image est unique, et si certains clichés ont fait leur apparition, ils n'en forment pas pour autant un "vocabulaire".

L'écriture veut faire dégorger les mots. Le cinéma veut faire dégorger le temps. La problématique du langage, sondée par le style d'un écrivain, donne l'oeuvre littéraire. La problématique du temps, sondée par le cinéaste, donne l'oeuvre cinématographique.

L'homme cherche, par le cinéma, à explorer le temps, avant même les 3 dimensions. De là la fascination qu'exerce le suspense (le temps suspendu). En littérature, il en est ainsi de l'espace des mots: quel est celui, par exemple, du mot: seigle? Ma première association en est une de tache jaune, puis de vent dans les damiers des champs de tabac, puis le son me suggère aigle, et je m'envole.

C'est à ce point précis que l'écriture littéraire et le cinéma se peuvent rejoindre: dans la poésie.

Le pouvoir de suggestion de la poésie peut donner naissance au pouvoir d'exploration du temps qui appartient au cinéma. Les vrais écrivains sont des poètes. Les grands cinéastes aussi. Les uns dans l'espace du mot, les autres dans le temps que fixe l'image. Pierre Perrault et Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, au Québec, sont à la fois des poètes (en écriture et au cinéma) mais il y a aussi les poètes qui oeuvrent exclusivement avec les mots ou d'autres avec le temps.

Pourquoi le cinéma est-il si souvent cité comme "l'art du XXe siècle?" Parce qu'il est né avec celui-ci? Non. Parce

qu'il est un art du temps et que la société industrielle d'abord et avant tout a fragmenté le temps. Le cinéma est une reprise en main du temps. Le cinéma n'est pas un art de l'image, ni du son, mais du mouvement en ce qu'il est un temps. Si tous les arts cherchent à échapper au temps, le cinéma lui veut et peut le dominer. Et la télévision n'est pas un art puisqu'elle n'a de sens qu'en rapport avec le temps réel (l'assassinat d'un président, un voyage sur la lune).

Et le génie de Godard aura été d'explorer le temps cinématographique en y superposant l'espace des mots, le jeu du théâtre, la lumière de la peinture: ce qui fait dire à plusieurs que Godard, c'est du mauvais cinéma.

Or, le seul mauvais cinéma est celui qui ignore que la première grande invention de l'homme, et la seule au fond puisque toutes les autres en découlent, c'est le temps. La journée divisée en parties, puis en heures. Puis les jours additionnés. Le calendrier: voilà la base de nos civilisations. Car qui divisait le jour et dépeçait l'éternité avait inventé les mathématiques, les objectifs, l'argent. La prise de conscience d'une existence autonome, l'hypothèque, la famille, la propriété, l'espace sont autant de fruits du temps. Et les arts ne sont, comme les religions, que des tentatives désespérées de contrôler le temps. En ce sens l'expression ultime de la civilisation américaine: "time is money" est la formule descriptive la plus lucide et la plus désagréable de la société post-industrielle. Mais aussi cette expression relie la civilisation d'aujourd'hui à celle qui naquit d'un baton enfoncé dans le sable, d'une ombre portée, mesurée.

Le cadran solaire ne pouvait être utile que sous un ciel bleu. Dans les pays nor-

diques l'homme inventa des systèmes de mesure mécaniques qui se pouvaient utiliser malgré les jours gris. Aujourd'hui ce qui sépare l'occidental de l'africain, par exemple, c'est encore la notion de temps. L'homme blanc est à l'heure. Et ses heures sont comptées. Le noir et le jaune comptent en mois ou en années, ils ne parlent pas le même langage car ils ne parlent pas du même temps.

Que font les touristes occidentaux? (Y en a-t-il d'autres?) Ils échangent leur temps de vacance, leur temps de vacuité, le vide soudain dans leur temps normal contre le plaisir d'un temps exotique. Le Canadien qui va en Europe recule sa montre de vingt années s'il visite les capitales et de mille ans s'il fait les châteaux. Le Français qui va en Grèce recule dans le temps: deux cent, trois cents ans?

Les bergers que nous photographions en Espagne vivent en l'an 1440, nous sommes un instant portés vers jadis, avec un serrement au ventre et une nostalgie du temps perdu. L'industrie du tourisme est une industrie du temps marchandé: en déplaçant des hordes dans l'espace l'American Express tire son profit de la même denrée dont IBM fait des cotes. Car que sont les ordinateurs sinon les premières machines à comprimer le temps?

C'est sur la notion de temps que s'appuie l'économie du crédit, la structure des assurances, les négociations collectives de travail.

Le temps, c'est l'espace humain. L'éternité, c'est l'utopie ultime. L'amour, c'est la valorisation du temps. Le bédouin qui entassait des pierres pour se retrouver dans ses jours et ceux qui tentent de congeler les incurables jouent dans la même dimension. D'ailleurs l'ultime ven-

geance consiste à tuer, c'est-à-dire à priver brusquement du temps, ou à emprisonner, c'est-à-dire à trancher dans un temps de vie donnée.

C'est ainsi que toute l'entreprise semi-consciente des sociétés industrielles consiste à utiliser au maximum le temps de chacun. En ce sens l'invention de la lumière électrique est beaucoup plus importante que celle des armes atomiques. L'effort entier de l'économie tend vers un contrôle de plus en plus précis du temps de chaque homme. L'espace humain est ainsi érodé. Les classes moyennes qui forment la majorité démocratique des sociétés occidentales sont prisonnières d'un quotidien qui leur est débité de façon si parcimonieuse qu'elles n'ont même plus mémoire de ce qu'était le grain de folie qui peut différencier la joie de l'atonal.

La réforme agraire, dans les pays sous-développés, consiste en la répartition des terres aujourd'hui entre les mains d'une minorité de possédants. La réforme urbaine, dans les pays industrialisés, consisterait en une meilleure répartition du temps, aujourd'hui propriété d'une minorité de familles.

Les classes moyennes n'ont pas encore pris conscience qu'on leur avait volé leur temps (en échange duquel, bien sûr, elles ont obtenu des objets, comme les indigènes obtenaient des miroirs des grands navigateurs) et le sous-prolétariat est condamné au coma. Le sous-prolétariat, quand il réussit à manger, se vêtir, se loger, n'aspire qu'aux valeurs de la classe moyenne; pourtant, parce qu'il n'a pas encore réalisé le troc temps-objet à consommer, ce sous-prolétariat possède une valeur (l'espace humain) que les classes moyennes se doivent de reconnaître, avant qu'il ne soit trop tard.

Vivre, c'est consommer. Pourquoi donc

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des descriptions de "l'homme aliéné" dans la "société de consommation"? Ce que l'on perçoit confusément c'est que si vivre c'est consommer, cela ne doit pas se passer *ainsi*. La consommation aujourd'hui, dans nos sociétés du désir, est une consommation dirigée dont le principe est le suivant: occuper l'individu dans toutes ses minutes, lui échanger son temps contre un objet à consommer. Le veau tête, il est heureux, il ne voit plus le temps passer.

Les dépressions nerveuses autres que pathologiques, nombreuses dans les classes moyennes, semblent toutes trouver leur origine dans l'interprétation du temps: la femme au foyer qui croit qu'elle y *perd* son temps, l'homme surmené parce qu'il *n'a plus* de temps. L'adolescent qui refuse de se plier au temps adulte.

Car l'adolescent des sociétés primitives ne changeait pas de temps après son initiation. Et c'est pour éviter des heurts trop grands que le commerce a commencé de solliciter des enfants depuis l'âge de huit ans désormais. Ainsi c'est au sortir de l'enfance, peu à peu, que l'homme apprend à céder son espace humain.

Les premiers ministres, et leurs collègues, sont de parfaits exemples d'une aliénation de classe. Elus le plus souvent par les classes moyennes, libéraux en temps de prospérité, conservateurs en temps d'inquiétude, les hommes politiques qui devraient administrer une civilisation et ses cultures n'en ont strictement pas le temps. Car ils partagent leurs jours entre des relations électorales, il passent leur temps dans les parlements, les comités, les meetings, les diners, les enterrements, les inaugurations, les parades, les bals, et consomment ainsi de la "politique" en capsules, aussi pris et en tous points

semblables à ceux qui les ont élus. Le gouvernement de sociétés aussi complexes que la nôtre exigerait que nous éliions des hommes et des femmes à qui nous *donnerions le temps de réfléchir*. La notion du politicien-homme d'action a son origine dans les temps anciens où le chef était à la tête de la bande armée. Le vrai chef devrait être un contemplatif.

La qualité de la vie d'un peuple ne dépend plus aujourd'hui que du choix qu'il fait dans son emploi du temps.¹ De même pour les groupes: les contestataires, qu'ils soient maoïstes ou John Birchistes, affrontent la police comme jadis s'affrontaient les armées des nations. Mais il ne s'agit même pas de guerre civile: il s'agit d'exercices où la violence est une réponse au viol du temps.

Qu'ont choisi les hippies? Quand cinq d'entre eux habitent une maison et partagent quelques bouteilles, du saucisson et de la marijuana, assis tout le jour à regarder passer ceux qui ont des rendez-vous pressés, voilà cinq hommes qui désespérément cherchent à protéger leur espace humain. Ils vivent l'utopie du temps pleinement possédé, et mieux même: les hallucinogènes étirent le temps dans une dimension inespérée, *contraire* à celle qu'on tentait de leur imposer.

Qui collectionne des peintures collectionne le temps. Et les appareils photos arrêtent le temps. Et les cosmétiques maquillent le temps. La valeur-jeunesse, cliché de la publicité, à première vue semble vendre la force, la joie, la beauté; il n'en est rien: la valeur-jeunesse veut faire croire au client qu'il a le temps de

¹ La valeur de l'Exposition universelle 1967: la notion de temps était abolie. Nous avons redécouvert le temps de vivre.

consommer autre chose encore, comme la jeunesse a "tout son temps pour elle". Si l'homme est un singe nu, il porte au poignet une Timex pour, dirait Pascal, lire l'heure sans gêner ses invités, mais surtout pour se rappeler ce qui le distingue du singe: il a le temps de penser. C'est d'ailleurs en pensant qu'il inventa le temps.

Je suis loin des rapports entre le cinéma et la littérature? Peut-être me suis-je laissé emporter par les mots, c'est un défaut d'écrivain. Mais c'est parce

que je suis fasciné par le pouvoir du cinéma d'enregistrer le temps et d'en jouer à volonté, ce qui est un défaut de cinéaste.

De toute façon, ici comme ailleurs, littérature et cinéma ne vaudront que si les créateurs tentent de fouiller les problématiques propres à chacun de ces arts: et l'espace du mot n'a pas à se conjuguer avec le temps du cinéma, sauf en cas de génie, ce qui sera toujours un accident, surtout au Canada.

AFTERWORD

Hugo McPherson

THIS SYMPOSIUM — containing four statements, but lacking points of view from either established commercial film makers or youth — is only a beginning on the question posed. I would add a few comments to suggest the broader spectrum. Jacques Godbout argues that the nature of film is essentially poetic — a release from the temporal clock-watching mode that regiments contemporary life. Guy Glover's definition of the intuitive "essential film" is close to Godbout, though the emphasis is different. William Weintraub ironically reveals the gulf between the youthful roll-the-camera enthusiast and the film writer who believes in scripts; and these two characters have their individual evil geniuses — the academic swinger who is devoted to facile "communications" theory, and the commercial square who wants a script, a "property."

A significant general point is that no one today will talk about a narrowly-

confined Canadianism in film. The art is international and multi-national. Films are *documents* which people, particularly the young, "read" avidly. A Canadian film is simply a film produced by a person or group whose centre of consciousness is Canadian, though its visual idiom may reflect many influences.

But what about the *author* in relation to film? We know that Chaucer rifled Boccaccio in producing *The Canterbury Tales*, and that Shakespeare regarded any literary source as fair game for the live art of theatre. Why, then, be suspicious of film adaptations of literary works? The full spectrum is bounded by two attitudes. First, film desecrates great works of literature. Second, film must reject literature altogether; some younger film makers even argue that a university education castrates a film maker; the academic process deforms his imagination in advance.

The central fact in this conflict is that

one art cannot *record* another. The arts develop their own means and styles. Thus, for example, *The Maltese Falcon* may be a better film than Dashiell Hammet's novel; or *Wuthering Heights* (with Laurence Olivier and Merle Oberon) may be inferior to Emily Brönte's romance. But somewhere between a literary work and a film is a script or scenario. John Grierson, first Commissioner of the N.F.B., has remarked that behind every great film lies a great script. Margaret Laurence, whose novel *A Jest of God* became the popular film *Rachel, Rachel*, says that she does not care about screen adaptations. On publication day her work as an author is over. When her novel becomes a film it is a new work — the collaboration of people working in another art form.

Obviously, works of the past may undergo extreme sea-changes in their adaptation to the new audio-visual modes. But the new versions can no longer be thought of as mere frivolities. Very often a powerful artistic light burns behind the images which we see on the screen.

And that brings us finally to the idea of *auteur* films which is so strongly supported by many young film makers, and

such journals as *Cahiers du cinéma*. If the author-director-producer is to become the presiding figure in tomorrow's cinema, then the writer has indeed lost his place in the art of film. We have seen this *auteur* phenomenon frequently in the last decade; we must recognize that it implies a particular and rare kind of genius — a domination of all the elements which make a film. My own view is that such talents are rare exceptions in film making. We welcome them when they appear, but we know that the writer and the script-writer remain fundamental to the art of film.

Today, original scenarios — whether a relatively brief set of directions and bits of dialogue, or carefully finished works (as with Hitchcock and Bergman) form the most significant bridge between traditional fiction and film. The scenario writer must see and hear and taste and touch as he writes. In this sense, Ian MacNeill is close to Godbout and Glover: he has suggested to me in another context that poets have more feeling for screen writing than conventional novelists. This may be one of the reasons that more Canadian fiction has not found its way to the screen.

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