



**Independent Filmmaking:  
Projecting a Screen of Particularity  
with Integration**

**VIBEMONOMIC VIEW PRESENTS IN ASSOCIATION WITH  
THE INSTITUTE FOR CHRISTIAN STUDIES TORONTO, CANADA  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS  
A THESIS SUBMITTED BY SCOTT MACKLIN OCTOBER, 1995**

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## Introducing the Screen

*Film is more than the twentieth century art. It's another part of the twentieth century mind. It's the world seen from the inside. We've come to a certain point in the history of film. If a thing can be filmed, film is implied in the thing itself. This is where we are. The twentieth century is on film. It's the filmed century.*

—Don DeLillo  
*The Names*

Cinema provides for our age a screen upon which certain shades of societal interactions are projected. The screen becomes a place where a flicker of light and shadow illuminates the forming and reflecting stories of a particular people in a particular moment of time. The fabric of the screen is woven by a plurality of considerations; where one weave is to entertain, another weave is focused to be either didactic, voyeuristic, empathetic, or visceral, and yet another is stitched toward the telling of a character's story.

Regardless of which weave one makes dominant, the deep-going commitments of filmmaker are imprinted throughout the multi-motivational moments of these weaves. The filmic personality—look, feel, texture, tone, composition, ambiance, rhythm, and motif of a film are composited by the filmmaker's stylistic intimations and projected upon the flickering screen pulling through the focal points of those who are in attendance. These characteristic concerns are the hints by which one is able to distinguish the stilled frames of Bresson from the haunting suspense of Hitchcock or Eisenstein's dialectical montage.

In this, the 100th year since the advent of cinema, there is a variety of means by which a film is produced. Studio funded, state sponsored, and independently produced are the ways I wish to examine. The filtering question of the following pages is, 'what constitutes independent filmmaking?' I will limit the discussion to feature-length celluloid writers. The focus of this work revolves around French filmmakers Robert Bresson and Jean Luc Godard with an eye toward Canadian Patricia Rozema and American Hal Hartley. I wish to discern how certain conditions and environments play into the filmic personality of an independent filmmaker's ability to retain one's particular voice yet not be sidelined by the Hollywood hold on the public imagination. Is it possible as an independent filmmaker to utilize the funding and distribution that Hollywood offers and still retain one's particular vision, or does one have to stay on the margins in order to avoid being placed under lease of the Hollywood tower?

The Hollywood tendency to only do what has been done before is veiled by a mask of innovativeness. The technology advances but the storied aspect stays ensconced in/by tired means. This tendency depicts Hollywood's distrust of the audience to conspire with the filmmaker. Emotions are italicized, and one does not have the chance to read a heartbreak into a pensive glance.

The question under consideration in the first chapter is, 'how do different structures of society, public institutions or private corporations, which purport to develop cultural matters, impress aesthetic considerations upon the production, distribution, and exhibition of cinema?' In chapter 2, the frame of focus will be composed to look at the Canadian system of support, specifically in

Toronto, as a test case countering Hollywood-studio-produced tendencies of film manufacturing. From there, the direction of the discussion will turn to an exposure of the seams that make up the screen of cinematics by engaging the theoretical concerns of André Bazin and Christian Metz with the convictions of the French New Wave bande of critic/filmmakers. Chapter four locates and depicts the austere cinematic offering of lone-figure Robert Bresson. His personal signature is indeed imprinted deeply on each of his films. Did Bresson's iconoclastic style, however, close down a social appeal to his films and thus cast him as an 'unpopular' master filmmaker? In chapter five, I will posit notions of a collaborative grid of cinematics by charting the prints of Bresson through the lemon-drop-dry style of contemporary independent filmmaker Hal Hartley.

After working through the many moments—focus, location, lighting, sound, musical composition, framing, *mise en scène*, genre, casting, and editing—of this grid, I will lean toward a conclusion by putting forth a projection of a nurturing space from which a maker of cinema may integrally work while retaining a particular vision. Through this exercise, I hope to develop this collaborative cinematic grid as a heuristic instrument by which one can gain a keener understanding of the diversity of cinematic aspects, not only in their uniqueness, but also in mutual coherence.



## Supporting the Screen

*"Who the hell wants to hear actors talk?"*

—H.M. Warner

Warner Brothers, 1927

*"Lights, camera, action..."*

These are the ostensible words spoken by a filmmaker to engage the initial filming of a scene. There are, however, significant considerations of support which must be in place before the stage is set, the lights are hit, and the camera rolls. The action of this first chapter is to uncover integral components of various structures supporting the screen in order to assess how particular tendencies show up aesthetically in the comportment of cinema.

My concern is to expose the *échafaudage* of support for the funding, production, distribution, and marketing of feature-length films. Through this exposure, I hope to gain focus on the problematics of film production in North America, particularly for those who play with the screen on the outside of the studio system—the independent filmmaker(s).

Canadian filmmaker Atom Egoyan had this to say when asked about the cultural context from which his films were made, "I think my films are very much made within this culture and are very much a

product of this culture. They are certainly a product of the funding system that we have."<sup>1</sup> U.S. filmmaker Bryan Singer, director of *The Usual Suspects*, says,

Movies are a very interesting art form, because it's not like writing or painting. It's so damn expensive that naturally, by its very nature and its very cost, it is part of either philanthropy, which is rarely the case; endowment, which is moderately the case, though less so in the United States; or industry which is primarily the case. And as an industry, and as a business, a filmmaker has to be sensitive to the needs of the distributor and to the needs of the financier, simultaneously. The cleverness comes in being able to select a genre or present a vision sympathetic to an audience, while at the same time representing the story that you really want to tell. It's a matter of balancing the two.<sup>2</sup>

Although I agree with Singer's view that the filmmaker should be concerned and participate in the economic realities of funding and distributing a film, I would nuance his call for 'cleverness' by pointing to the means by which his second feature *The Usual Suspects* was funded. He received a negative pickup deal from Gramercy. A negative pickup deal takes place when a distributor or a sales agency promises to buy the film once it is made. The filmmaker then takes this promissory note to a bank in order to secure a loan. The catch is that, in order to get the promissory note, the filmmaker has to promise to make the film with certain elements authorized by the

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<sup>1</sup>Lewis, Scott, "Atom Egoyan's Urban Angst," *Reverse Shot* iss. 4, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 23.

<sup>2</sup>Bryan Singer, "The Business of Art," *The Stranger* (August 16, 1995): 11.

studio, such as cast, script, director, running time, and rating. Once these elements are agreed upon, the filmmaker is 'free' to make the film. Even though the studio agrees to take whatever is delivered, there is no guarantee that the film will see the light of distribution.

## **Hollywood Conventions**

Hollywood cinema concentrates almost exclusively on feature-length, big-budget, fictional narratives. The average studio<sup>3</sup> film costs about \$50 million to produce and distribute, as set by the standards of today's marketplace. Because of the enormous amount of money invested in commercially-driven, capital-intensive films, Hollywood looks for certain protection that guarantees recoupment. Behind the industry's insistence on 'proven' formulas of success lie a number of factors.

Robert McKee expounds the formula for the scripting of a blockbuster during his 30-hour weekend Story Structure Seminars. McKee posits a five part structure that a film must adhere to in order to make it big: (1) inciting incident 2) progressive complications 3) crisis 4) climax 5) resolution). The inciting incident becomes the key moment of the story. Such incidents disrupt the protagonists' lives and propel them on a quest towards resolution, which inevitably restores balance to their world. McKee cites *Kramer vs. Kramer* as his textbook example. In this story the wife, Meryl Streep, abandons her husband, Dustin Hoffman, and her son. The inciting incident pitches

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<sup>3</sup>The six major studios include: Universal (owned by MCA/Seagram), Warner Brothers Studio (owned by Time Warner), Paramount Pictures (owned by Viacom), Columbia-TriStar (owned by Sony), Twentieth Century Fox, and Disney.

the father's life out of balance, and the remainder of the movie documents his quest to keep his son and succeed as a single father. This cookie-cutter model for producing box-office-bonanzas is becoming the industry standard. Studio executives and agents use this schema as a template to judge the marketability of a film. During a pitch or meeting, questions like, "how strong is the incident," "what is the crisis like," and "how does it resolve," are often the main questions asked of the story.

| The Times Film Index   |                               |              |                 |              |                        |               |
|--|-------------------------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|------------------------|---------------|
| SUMMER OF 1995'S TOP 20 FILMS  |                               |              |                 |              |                        |               |
| Total grosses of the 'Top 20 box office releases for the period May 26 through Aug. 31, ranked by play period, in millions of dollars. |                               |              |                 |              |                        |               |
| Rank   | Film                          | Distributor  | Wks. in release | Release date | Play period box office | G.O. to date* |
| 1  | Batman Forever                | Warner Bros. | 11              | June 16      | \$180.0                | \$180.0       |
| 2  | Apollo 13                     | Universal    | 9               | June 30      | 159.0                  | 159.0         |
| 3  | Pocahontas                    | Buena Vista  | 11              | June 16      | 135.7                  | 135.7         |
| 4  | Casper                        | Universal    | 14              | May 26       | 97.8                   | 97.8          |
| 5  | Congo                         | Paramount    | 12              | June 9       | 79.6                   | 79.6          |
| 6  | Waterworld                    | Universal    | 5               | July 28      | 77.8                   | 77.8          |
| 7  | The Bridges of Madison County | Warner Bros. | 13              | June 2       | 70.0                   | 70.0          |
| 8  | Die Hard With a Vengeance     | Fox          | 15              | May 19       | 68.9                   | 98.8          |
| 9  | Nine Months                   | Fox          | 7               | July 12      | 63.7                   | 63.7          |
| 10   | Species                       | MGM/UA       | 8               | July 7       | 59.1                   | 59.1          |
| 11   | Braveheart                    | Paramount    | 13              | May 24       | 57.5                   | 60.2          |
| 12   | Clueless                      | Paramount    | 6               | July 19      | 51.9                   | 51.9          |
| 13   | Dangerous Minds               | Buena Vista  | 3               | Aug. 11      | 49.6                   | 49.6          |
| 14   | Crimson Tide                  | Buena Vista  | 16              | May 12       | 48.9                   | 90.1          |
| 15   | Mortal Kombat                 | New Line     | 2               | Aug. 18      | 46.8                   | 46.8          |
| 16   | Under Siege 2: Dark Territory | Warner Bros. | 7               | July 14      | 45.8                   | 45.8          |
| 17   | The Net                       | Columbia     | 5               | July 28      | 43.0                   | 43.0          |
| 18   | Something to Talk About       | Warner Bros. | 4               | Aug. 4       | 41.6                   | 41.6          |
| 19   | Babe                          | Universal    | 4               | Aug. 4       | 38.7                   | 38.7          |
| 20   | Mighty Morphin Power Rangers  | Fox          | 9               | June 30      | 37.6                   | 37.6          |

\* Distributors receive roughly half of box office revenue, on average.  
Source: Top 20 provided by Entertainment Data Inc.

The disposition for protection has inclined the studios to certain tendencies in the making of cinema, creating for the spectator, defined as ticket purchaser, the sense of having the preeminent vantage point—*locus superior*. These tendencies include the foregrounding of the narrative, the use of actors with star caliber, concealing the elements of production, and being resolution friendly.

*Mise en scène* (camera placement and framing), lighting, focus, casting, and editing are all coordinated to give the spectator a make-up of neutrality. Lighting remains unobtrusive, camera angles attending to shot/reverse shot<sup>4</sup> practices are predominantly at eye-level, and framing adheres to the 180 degree rule<sup>5</sup> and centers on the principal business of the scene. Editing creates spatial and temporal continuity, and cuts occur at logical points in the action and dialogue. Bigger and bolder technical achievements are enacted to thrill and stimulate the spectator. And storylines do not venture too far from a particular, familiar genre.

Hollywood big-budget films offer perceptual accessibility by relaxing the spectator to follow a perceived world, which is designed to make sense and be seen and heard without effort. The camera leads the eye through scenes lit so that one will only notice what one is supposed to, and then only when narratively appropriate. The soundtrack gives exactly what is needed to easily grasp the story. Contradictions and ambiguities are evaporated in order to offer acceptable resolutions, which usually come in the guise of a happy ending—a ride into the sunset.

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<sup>4</sup> "The reverse-field figure with matching eyelines...was not merely the last component of the dominant Western editing system; it was, as well, the most crucial. It was this procedure which made it possible to implicate the spectator in the eye contacts of the actor (and ultimately in their 'word contacts'), to include him or her in the mental and physical space of diegesis." Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1979) p. 158.

<sup>5</sup> "In the continuity style the space of a scene is constructed along what is called variously the "axis of action," the "center line," or the "180 degree line." The scene's action—a person walking, two people conversing, a car racing along a road—is assumed to project along a straight line. Consequently, the filmmaker will plan, film, and edit the shots to establish this center line as clearly as possible." David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986) p. 164.

## Manufacturing Excitement

Manufacturing this atmosphere of accessibility contributes to the ballooning effect of Hollywood budgets. A Hollywood crew of 75 can shoot what will be about two minutes of the film's final footage per day.

Hollywood tries to manufacture an aura of excitement and an atmosphere of impulse for an opening of a film. Without a strong opening a film can disappear quickly. "Everybody wants to feel there's some protection," says producer and former Paramount production head Gary Luccesi. "And big stars play an enormous role in that."<sup>6</sup> The use of big stars is thought to be the way to capture potential audience awareness and generate attendance on the so-called crucial opening weekend, where the average Hollywood studio film arrives on 2,000 or more screens nationwide and a blockbuster like *Batman Forever* launches on over 3,000 screens.

The A-list of those who were deemed capable of opening a film at one time was composed of Bogart, Cagney, Hepburn, Brando, Dean, Taylor, Stewart, Davis, and Wayne. This list is now comprised of Connery, Cruise, Moore, Roberts, Douglas, Ford, Goldberg, Hanks, Washington, Costner, Schwarzenegger, Stalone, Stone, and Carrey.<sup>7</sup> It is not enough to carry star status to be included on this list. Actors such as Streep, Nicholson, De Niro, Foster, and Hoffman are

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<sup>6</sup>Who is Box-Office Gold? "Los Angeles Times" F1 Calendar (August 7, 1995).

<sup>7</sup>Pitt and Banderas are quite on their way to making the list. This list is based on box-office data and industry interviews comprised by Richard Natale of the Los Angeles Times. Lee Rich, a Warner Bros. producer and former head of United Artists, had this to add in regard to these actors, "It's not like it was years ago when you knew that if you had Tracy, Hepburn, or Clark Gable, you'd immediately have an audience the first weekend. Audiences today are more sophisticated, so there are fewer guarantees."

considered stars, but are not necessarily deemed capable of 'opening' a film and guarantee long lines and mass box office returns. Those who are deemed capable of 'opening' a film reap a heavy price tag.

Sylvester Stalone just signed a three picture deal with Universal for \$60 million, Columbia/Tristar signed Jim Carrey for a \$20 million picture deal, and Disney just signed Whoopie Goldberg to a two picture deal worth \$20 million.

With the escalation of dollars shelled out to those on the A-list, the studios are setting the standard by which all other salaries in the industry will be gauged. Studios are signing actors to multi-picture deals to assure themselves that they have sole access to those on the A-list. The result is that the studios with the power and capital base to have access to those on the A-list, which is not only comprised of those who play in front of the camera but also includes those behind it, is getting tighter. Former Disney executive Jeffrey Katzenberg has joined up with Steven Speilberg and David Geffen to form DreamWorks SKG. Ron Meyer left his position at Creative Artists Agency<sup>8</sup> to run MCA.

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<sup>8</sup>Creative Artists Agency (CAA) was started in 1975 by five rogue agents who left the William Morris Agency. Michael Ovitz assumed the leadership of this agency which represents over 1,000 clients and most of those who comprise the 'A' list.



The directors of Creative Artists Agency in 1979. Standing from left, Martin Baum, Ron Meyer, Mike Rosenfeld, Steve Roth; seated, Bill Haber, Michael Ovitz, and Rowland Perkins.

Michael Ovitz, described as one of the most powerful players in Hollywood, left CAA to join Michael Eisner at Disney.<sup>9</sup>

### **Grinding through an Economic Lens**

By accepting the A-list as a template of success, two happenings are readily apparent: the re-enactment of contract-player system of the "Hollywood Classic Period"<sup>10</sup> and a consolidation of production and distribution by the conglomerates. The consolidation of resources among these conglomerates is motivated by a restructuring of

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<sup>9</sup>All of these moves have taken place as of 1994. The summer of 1995 also saw Disney acquire Cap Cities/ABC for \$19 billion, while Westinghouse bought CBS for \$5.4 billion and Canadian distiller Seagram bought MCA, owner of Universal Studios, from Japan's Matsushita Electric Corp. It is also rumored that General Electric Company, owner of NBC, will try to buy out Time Warner for an estimated \$30 billion, if Time Warner does not buy out GE first, or Time Warner will buy out Turner Broadcasting. If Time Warner buys out Turner, it would become the largest entertainment conglomerate with \$18.7 billion in revenue and publishing, broadcast, movie studio, music, and other entertainment assets.

<sup>10</sup>Dated from 1930 to 1945, studio controlled cinema took in \$80 million a week in box office, which accounted for 83 cents of every US. dollar spent on entertainment.

regulatory laws by the Federal Trade Commission. For years, federal guidelines ensured that "content was king." Studios, not the networks, would own the shows. Under the Bush administration, new rules allowed for the networks to own their own programs, greatly enhancing the profit base. In this new environment, ownership of "content" has come to be seen as no more or less important than the ownership of the means to distribute it. Studios are now merging with bigger companies in order to buy or start up their own networks. Disney bought Cap Cities/ABC; Twentieth Century Fox started the Fox Network; Paramount, Universal, and Warner Brothers have each followed suit and have constructed networks to exhibit their programs. The culture industry is moving more and more away from a dynamic, entrepreneurial one, that allows for a multiple motivational focus, to one that attracts the deep-pocket conglomerates, who gear motivations to the massing of profit.

This gearing is not necessarily a new phenomenon. Historically Hollywood has thrived on making slick and expensive entertainments. Walter Eaton, a theatre critic, wrote in 1909,

When you reflect that in New York city alone, on a Sunday 500,000 people go to the moving picture shows, a majority of them perhaps children, you cannot dismiss canned drama with a shrug of contempt. Ten million people attended professional baseball games in America in 1908. Four million attend moving picture theatres, it is said, everyday. Here is an industry to be controlled, an influence to be reckoned with.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Walter Preston Eaton, *American Magazine* (September 1909): 498, quoted in Robert E. Davis, *Responses to Innovation: A Study of Popular Argument About New Mass Media* (New York: Arno Press, 1976) p. 15.

By grounding the motive in profit maximization, technical wizardry becomes the kernel of cinematic endeavors. "Fewer and fewer films with complex characters and original storylines are being produced in Hollywood...largely due to the advent of the blockbuster. When a film with a slender, uninteresting screenplay like *Jurassic Park* makes more money than any film in history, who cares if film makes narrative sense?"<sup>12</sup> Only those producers with megamillions or industry connections, who have the ability to hire the new rising bankable star or employ the latest in digital manipulation, are in a position to become industry players, and, thus, they alone establish the definition of the medium itself. Those filmmakers who depart from this Hollywood posited, seemingly intrinsic, essence of cinema run the risk of being regulated to fodder feeding the system or marginalized to appear as mere apparitions.

## **Independent Spacing**

Is there a home for an independent, first-time filmmaker, who has a quirky-feature with a no-name cast and absolutely no connections in the industry? The "independence" is an independence from the Hollywood pre-packaged, agent-driven, market-bonded, studio system. But can one ever be exhaustively independent? The term 'independent filmmaker' is problematic in that the practice of filmmaking is particularly collaborative, drawing upon a plurality of

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<sup>12</sup>Barbara Schoch, "The Write Stuff," *FILMMAKER The Magazine of Independent Film*, vol. 3, no 2 (Winter 1995): 35.

resources and production techniques. Scott Macaulay, editor of *FILMMAKER The Magazine of Independent Film*, had this to say about the state of independent film,

These days, it's more and more important for an independent film to arrive with a clearly defined audience, a marketable identity and unanimously positive critical response. Films that foster heated debate—unless that debate is over sex and violence—are becoming more difficult to release. If an audience for an indie film doesn't perform the way an audience for a hot studio does— i.e., pack the theater in the first weekend — then the film is destined for smaller and smaller ads, poorer bookings, and half-hearted video release somewhere down the line. There hasn't been a success story like *My Dinner With Andre* [Louis Malle]—which opened weakly in New York and then built up its grosses to become a big hit—in some time.<sup>13</sup>

Underlying this statement is the penchant for the independent filmmaker to adopt the considerations which typically define Hollywood studio films. In this way of being, one particular aspect of culture is made to be the driving motive. When this happens co-option works both ways. Independent offerings begin to be defined by Hollywood standards, i.e. box office intake. Hollywood studios, in turn, incorporate the vitality and fresh voice of an independent film. They subsequently devitalize and discard it like a spent ticket, vehicularizing the perception successfully enough so that the viewer can remain comfortably suburbanized.

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<sup>13</sup>Scott Macaulay, *FILMMAKER The Magazine of Independent Film* vol. 3, no.4 (Summer 1995): 6.

Over against the Hollywood studio system, one of the most evident on-goings of vital filmmaking today is a decentralized and regional character. Tried and true independent financing methods, crew deferments, plundered saving accounts, and massive credit card infusions, are much in demand to make creative use of no-budget filmmaking tactics outside of the Hollywood bubble. With the advent of new technologies (faster film stocks requiring less light, smaller cameras, digital sound recording, and digital non-linear editing) the means of making a film are becoming financially more accessible. The bottleneck is, however, distilled in the areas of distribution and exhibition, which remain centralized in studio schematics.

Thus far, I have been pointing toward some tendencies of Hollywood studio-produced films. These tendencies include: positing the spectator in the *locus superior* by adhering to the 180 degree rule and shot reverse shot style of editing, giving the camera a sense of neutrality, casting highly recognizable personalities, and the penchant towards plot resolution within the frame of a specific genre. I am not critiquing these techniques of film production as such. When these techniques are set up and ground through the lens of profit maximization, then they become part of the process of turning cinematic intimations into mere product. Nor am I denigrating Hollywood in order to applaud the independent. For when either Hollywood or independent produced films allow the box office intake to become the criterion by which a film is judged, then aesthetic considerations become subservient to economic considerations. Is it possible to have a system of cinematography that works out of communal consideration, a system which does not posit profit as the

guiding focus, but rather focuses filmic intimations through a collaborative grid? To continue the process of developing such a grid, let us reframe the focus onto the filmscape of Canada.

# 2

## **Screening the Scene of Canadian Film**

*Mermaids did well across the board, wherever it had the opportunity to show. The problem with Mermaids was, it didn't show everywhere.*

—Andre Bennet, distributor

The centralization of Hollywood distribution, the Hollywood umbrella, shapes not only the filmscape of the United States but also has international ramifications. Domination by the major Hollywood studios in Canada is largely due to their domination of the United States market. For practical purposes, Hollywood tends to treat Canada as an extension of the U.S. market. Problems arise when the studios use their access to the U.S. market to obtain the Canadian distribution rights for films created by independent producers. Canadian film production is too small to support a healthy Canadian film distribution industry. Canadian films make up only 4% of screen time in Canada. And, for better or for worse, there has never been a sequel to a film financed and produced in Canada.

### **Facing Corporate Dominance**

The independent filmmaker in the United States and the independent filmmaker in Canada both face the Hollywood corporate

dominance of distribution. The differences, however, are in the area of funding and support for the production of film.

Canadian filmmaker Mina Shum's film *Double Happiness* is an example of the Canadian process of public funding of film. Planning to shoot *Double Happiness* as a low-budget feature, Shum initially received \$58,000 in grant money. Shum then entered her script in the New Views competition, sponsored by the National Film Board and Telefilm Canada. She won the competition, her script being picked over 54 others, and was given \$850,000 to shoot *Double Happiness*. The film was completed in the fall of 1994 and went on to win seven international awards, including a Best Actress Genie award for Sandra Oh, despite the fact that the film did not have a distribution deal at the time. Eventually, the film was picked up by Fine Line, a division of Turner, and received wide release in August of 1995. The story surrounds the life of a 22 year-old Canadian-Chinese woman, Jade Li. Can Jade find a way to remain a dutiful Chinese daughter while following her own passions; can she find that elusive double happiness, pleasing herself while pleasing everybody else. The character of Jade is, in a sense, a *doppelgänger* of filmmaker Shum, who faces a similar question, how does the independent filmmaker locate and retain her particular voice and vision without being subsumed/shelved in the tumultuous vaults of production and distribution?

The visual style and look of the film portrays the play of the double happenings by using two different levels of saturation. The film juxtaposes the use of distinctive shadows with the use of cotton candy colours, contrasting the taboo Western world with her own "traditional" family life. Shum says, "I wanted to be able to squint at

any image in the film and see it as a poster that would connote the subtext of the scene, and show where its power balances lies."<sup>1</sup>

Shum is in the process of securing funding for her next film. She is looking to Hollywood for \$6 to \$9 million, but doesn't want a three picture deal. She has turned down one development deal, "because any way you slice it, playing with these guys means your work becomes product," Shum attests and adds, "I can't be packaged like a can of soup." Hollywood financing could give her the means to be in production by the fall of 1995. Canadian financing would take about 18 months to be processed. Her description of the Canadian funding system is that they are run, "...like a post office. You have to fill out forms, and then fill them out again if anything is left blank. You have to reinvent the wheel every time."

## **State Supported Funding**

The concentration of this chapter will be a study of state supported funding, distribution, and exhibition of independent feature-length films. The two institutions that I will key in on are Telefilm Canada and The Ontario Film and Development Corporation. National cinemas exists in large measure as a result of state subsidies, grants, and loans to underwrite the cost of production. With this in mind, I would like to deal with questions such as: why Canadian films make up only 4% of screen time in Canada, what are the criteria by

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<sup>1</sup>The information on Mina Shum was gathered by Scott Macklin during an interview with the filmmaker at the 1994 Genie awards and from an article by Peter Broderick, "Happy Endings," *FILMMAKER* vol. 3, #4 (Summer 1995): 46.

which a film is deemed worthy of state support, and what happens to a film once it is completed and ready for distribution?

In dealing with this topic, in some sense, I feel akin to Kant when he said, "Everything goes past like a river and the changing taste and the various shapes of men make the whole game uncertain and delusive. Where do I find fixed positions in nature, which can not be moved by man, and where I can indicate the markers by the shore to which he ought to adhere?"<sup>2</sup> There is no fixed formula by which an independent filmmaker can get his/her film produced. Not to be as ambitious as Kant, yet still wanting to trace the murky waters of the making and distributing of film, I will look at some tendencies of the Canadian film industry, first by sketching a historical 'horizon'.

The Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau (CGMPB) became the first state-sponsored film production institution in the world in 1918. The National Film Board (NFB) was its successor, and it has gone on to receive much critical acclaim in the production of documentary, animation, and experimental films. In his book *Canada's Hollywood*, Ted Magder paints the picture that early Canadian film was not interested in film as entertainment. He quotes from the Peter Morris book *Embittered Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema 1895-1936*,

The operation of government film units was paralleled by a sweeping official neglect of private film production. Throughout this period, governments refused to accept the possibility that there might be measures which could protect a

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<sup>2</sup> Immanuel Kant's *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. G. Hartenstein (Leipzig, 1868), VIII, 625; quoted by Paul Author Schilpp, *Kant's Pre-Critical Ethics* (Evanston and Chicago, Northwestern Univ., 1938) p.73 Schilpp's tr.

domestic film industry as there were measures that protected and promoted other industrial and cultural enterprises in the national interest . It is as if there was an unwritten policy which suggested that, apart from the production of films to promote trade and tourism and the occasional provisions of services to foreign producers wishing to film location scenes, it was somehow not proper for Canadians to produce films, and certainly not fiction films.<sup>3</sup>

In 1938, John Grierson founded and became the first director of the NFB. Under his leadership, Canadian produced documentary films took on world class status, but he refrained from producing feature length, fictional films. Grierson viewed the state as the machinery by which the interests of the populace were best secured. Film, for Grierson, was a pulpit, an instrument for the dissemination of cultural values and education. Film was not to be for entertainment, as the Hollywood factory produced. He stated,

When it comes to movies, Canada is a dependency of the United States . We can shout as we like about this new nation we are building: we can be as proud as we please about the Canadian 'thing'; but when it comes to the movies, we have no emotional presentation of our own. It is another nation's effort and pride we see on our screen, not our own. We are on the outside looking in. Here is another problem you can argue amongst yourselves. Is it good or bad that this should be so? Is it necessary for a nation to have its own popular expression of its own loyalties, its own faith, its own pride? As we become more and more an important nation in the world, must we build our own film industry as an expression of our own life and a safeguard of our own national identity? Or is

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<sup>3</sup> Ted Madger, *Canada's Hollywood*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1993) p.4.

this just old-fashioned nationalistic nonsense? Is it not the curse of the nations that every one of them should be so insistent on its own unique and special virtues?<sup>4</sup>

With this preponderance toward the documentary film and the domination of the Canadian theatres by the Hollywood studio system, the condition for the making of independent feature film(s) was indeed bleak. In 1947, then Minister of Trade and Commerce, C.D. Howe looked to be on the edge of opening up this state of affairs. He hoped to engage a quota system whereby Hollywood would kick back a percentage of the box office revenue that flowed out of Canada. But by 1949, Howe acquiesced, under the pressures of the Motion Picture Association of America, and signed the Canadian Co-operation Project. Instead of putting money back into the Canadian system, Hollywood would give free 'publicity' in their films and newsreels in support of Canada. Images of Niagara Falls became the dominant shot to be 'scened' in Hollywood films in regard to this scheme.

The Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences published a scathing indictment on the adverse affects of Hollywood on Canadian culture. This report was published in 1951, and it became known as the Massey Report. The Massey Report still seemed to operate from the neo-classical high culture/low culture distinctions. Grierson set up the NFB to be a select body to educate, discipline (energize), and relax (melt) the sense driven savages and

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<sup>4</sup> John Grierson, "A Film policy for Canada" reprinted in Douglas Fetherling, ed., *Documents in Canadian Film* (1988), 55-56. (first published in *Canadian Affairs* ), no. 11 (June 15 1944).

the reason/moral driven barbarians of society, in order for them to become proper citizens.<sup>5</sup>

Grieson's determined production scheme seemed to be aesthetically impaired/challenged and failed to recognize the nuanced openings that feature-length fictional cinema could offer. He conflated the role of feature film with the out-churnings of Hollywood. Government supported cinema was to be for enlightening, enriching, and uplifting the culture, and the primary vehicle for this operation was the production of documentary films. The production of feature length films was to be left to private enterprise and investment, which could not very well compete with the film industries of Hollywood and Europe. The problem for an independent filmmaker, at this point, was twofold: the monopoly of funding going toward "culture-uplifting" documentary films and the dominance of Hollywood-owned theatres and films.

The Canadian government created the Canadian Film Development Corporation (CFDC) in 1967. Its initial aim was to stimulate the development of Canadian culture industry by establishing a national feature film industry, and it was given a one-time grant of ten million dollars. In 1971, the federal government allocated the CFDC another ten million, and, starting in 1976-77, CFDC began receiving an annual parliamentary appropriation. The CFDC changed its name to Telefilm Canada in 1984 when the corporation created the Canadian Broadcast Program Development Fund. Over the past 25 years, Telefilm Canada has financially supported more than 500 films

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<sup>5</sup> See Friedrich Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967) especially letters 15 and 16.

by over 300 directors. Today, Telefilm funds 25 film productions annually, making it one of the most important financial partners of Canada's private sector producers. It generally establishes contribution according to the project's interest, budget, and the financial participation of other investors.<sup>6</sup>

The road to funding begins with an application. Once submitted, the content of the project is studied by the regional office that received it. Aspects examined include the subject's interest, the planned treatment and technical team, the level of Canadian content, the cultural dimension, and the target audience. If the project passes this stage successfully, it then undergoes an administrative analysis, which focuses on the production framework, budget, and the stability of the financial structure. Then it is time for the distribution and foreign sales framework and the current market potential for this type of production, launching, visibility and profit potential. Lastly, there is the legal evaluation; the contracts between the various parties must meet Telefilm's standards. If the project is given the green light through these stages, it will be presented to the Comparative Committee, which studies all the projects selected and decides which ones will receive financial support from Telefilm Canada.

Typically, Telefilm Canada will fund only professional independent producers. An independent producer is someone who owns a private production company and is not a broadcaster. Occasionally, Telefilm Canada will fund a first time director, but that person must have a proven track record in a related field and have the

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<sup>6</sup> Telefilm Canada, Communications Department of Telefilm Canada Report, 1994.

support of an established production company. Telefilm Canada may fund up to 49% of the total cost of producing a feature-length film, and will not normally invest more than 1.5 million. Priority of funding is given to productions that have the highest level of Canadian creative elements, including stories, themes, creators, actors, and technicians. Eligible productions must have a distribution contract which guarantees the film's theatrical release in Canada within one year of completion.

In 1986, The Ontario Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Recreation established the Ontario Film Development Corporation (OFDC) with a mandate to: "Contribute to the cultural life and economic health of the province."<sup>7</sup> The OFDC funds the development and production of films which it deems as culturally relevant, expressing an original cinematic vision, and demonstrating potential for domestic and international distribution and sales. The OFDC will fund projects that adhere to the stipulation of Canadian content as established by the Canadian Audio Visual Certification Office (CAVCO) and the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). There are three criteria:

- 1) All producers must be Canadian citizens. Copyright must be retained by the producer in order to meet income tax regulations.
- 2) The production must earn a minimum of six points based on the following key creative people qualifying as Canadian:

|              |          |
|--------------|----------|
| Director     | 2 points |
| Screenwriter | 2 points |

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<sup>7</sup> Ontario Film Development Corporation, Published by the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and recreation, 1994 p. 5.

|                           |         |
|---------------------------|---------|
| Highest paid Actor        | 1 point |
| Second highest paid Actor | 1 point |
| Head of Art Dept.         | 1 point |
| Director of Photography   | 1 point |
| Music Composer            | 1 point |
| Picture                   | 1 point |

3) At least 75% of all production costs must be paid to Canadians except: remuneration paid to the producer and key creative personnel listed above; legal, accounting, insurance, and financing costs. Also, at least 75% of post-production costs must be paid for services provided in Canada.<sup>8</sup>

The federal government has established several programs designed specifically to encourage investment in the cultural industries. Administered by the Ontario Film Development Corporation in 1989, the Ontario Film Investment Program (OFIP) gives people who invest in Ontario-based television and film productions rebates ranging from 15 to 25 percent on their investment. The value of this program is that they use various incentives to reduce some of the risk involved in the cultural industries. Over the first three years, OFIP commitments of \$44 million have helped lever investment totaling over \$338 million in over 100 different film and television projects. OFIP works for the government as well as the industry. The minimum requirements for OFIP eligibility are that the project must:

1) spend at least 75% of its budget in Ontario expenditures.

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<sup>8</sup> *The Guide* 1994, published by the Canadian Film and Television Production Association p.30.

2) achieve at least eight out of ten Canadian-content points.

Other initiatives set up by the government recognize the problems that small to mid-sized companies face raising capital. They have also developed a range of programs that either offer tax incentives to encourage investment or attempt to reduce the investment risk. Bill 40, the Ontario Community Economic Development Initiative, allows local organizations to form community investment share corporations, which sell preferred shares to local investors and then invest in local businesses. Under the program, the province guarantees to protect the shareholders from losing their initial investment. Bill 150, the Ontario Labor Sponsored Venture Capital Corporations, allows employee organizations or unions to form investment pools. Under this legislation, the Directors' Guild of Canada recently launched a Labor Sponsored Venture Capital Pool to invest in the entertainment industry.

## **Hollywood North**

The OFDC works alongside the Toronto Film Liaison in order to promote on-location shooting in Toronto. Through their efforts Toronto has been tagged as 'Hollywood North', becoming the third largest production location for films in North America, after California and New York. Shooting in Toronto offers a 30% dollar differential for filmmakers from the US due to the current exchange rates. This, along with compliant unions, the multi-cultural character, and the talent pool of actors and technical support, has made Toronto a prime choice for shooting. Also, Toronto, with its variety of architectural

styles: steel and glass skyscrapers, Victorian and Georgian homes, neo-gothic Churches, Beaux-Arts bank buildings, Greek revival post offices, and Italianate warehouses, has become the ideal chameleon city for producers looking for locations to emulate New York, Chicago, Cleveland, Paris, Budapest, London, Beijing, or Detroit. The corner of Landsdown and Dundas, with a few camels, donkeys, and sheep, became an impressionistic Tangiers in David Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch*. The sprawling Kensington Market doubled as Teheran in a potboiler called *Escape from Iran: The Canadian Caper*. One may ask the question, 'when will Toronto be the star of a film?'

The underlying justification of certain government initiatives supporting the culture industry is the economic merit generated. There is a 4:1 multiplier effect for every dollar spent on a production (every dollar spent on a film production, generates four dollars). The Toronto Film Liaison speaks of this effect as labor intensive, creating jobs and income for actors, producers, technicians, office staff, lawyers, accountants, catering personnel, restaurants, bar bills, hotel accommodations and transportation, to name a few of the spin-offs. (See appendix A for production breakdown and money spent). The economic growth potential due to publicly supported arts bodes well for a particular community's economy. When public funding is solely justified based on economic considerations, however, the art offered is reduced and defined as a mere commodity, the result is akin to Hollywoodaic tendencies. The Advisory Committee on a Cultural Industries Sectoral Strategy (ACCISS) has issued a statement whereby artistic intimations are not reduced to product, but the rhetoric of the

statement still smacks of reducing the art object into a function of economy,

The cultural industries strategy is based on the premise that the people and governments of Ontario and Canada must continue to value the arts for their intrinsic worth as well as maintaining support for the not-for-profit sector. This will safeguard Canada's culture and ensure that our artists continue to create art that will enrich our lives. It will also nurture and develop the creativity that will ensure long term viability of Ontario's cultural industries."<sup>9</sup>

Canadian feature films are financed by a combination of pre-sales and investments through industry incentive programs. The budget of a Canadian (Ontario) film typically consists of 49% from Telefilm Canada and 27% from the OFDC. Of the remaining 23%, 10% is financed by deferral fees of creative personnel, with the remaining 13% financed by the distributor in consideration for the acquisition of worldwide distribution rights. The average budget for a Canadian production is around \$2 million, in contrast to \$50 million spent on average for Hollywood funded productions. Hollywood studios will also pump about half of the production budget into distribution, advertising, and marketing. A Canadian feature will be lucky to see \$75,000 devoted to distribution. In his introduction to *Canadian Dreams*, Michael Posner says that, "...marketing and promotion are the Achilles heel of Canadian cinema."<sup>10</sup> To succeed, Canadian distributors

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<sup>9</sup>*Developing a Cultural Industries Strategy, The Business of Culture*. Advisory Committee on a Cultural Industries Sectoral Strategy (ACCISS) 1994 p. 10.

must be able to distribute foreign products in Canada. Foreign-owned distributors—mainly major Hollywood studios— however, continue to control the lion's share of film distribution market in Canada. Because Canadian distributors are unable to acquire consistently the rights to distribute profitable foreign films, they generate fewer resources to reinvest in Canadian productions.

One of the structural problems that independent Canadian filmmakers need to confront is the policy of minimum guarantees. As of July 1993, Telefilm Canada will cover 3/4 of the distribution advances using tax payer's money. The distributor is only at risk for 25%, which is usually recouped through video sales and broadcast license fees. Once the distributor has made back the minimum guarantee, there is little motivation for the distributor to push the film. Distributors are encouraged to buy Canadian films (in order to maintain eligibility for the Fund; the system is based on the quantity of films bought and not on box office results) but are not so highly motivated to market them aggressively. Posner adds, "With no expectation of significant box office returns, distributors have no inclination to spend more than token amounts on marketing."<sup>11</sup> Could a quota system, with integrity, be implemented to increase the amount of screen time allotted to Canadian produced features and/or could Canada repatriate the theatres in order to better support the exhibition of Canadian produced films? Less attention should be paid

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Posner, *Canadian Dreams; The Making and Marketing of Independent Films*, (Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre 1993) p. viii.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. xvi.

to the exclusive festival circuit, and more energy should be spent on the screening of films throughout Canada.

## Toronto New Wave

In 1987, the Canadian government, through Telefilm, implemented a policy to further stimulate the making of feature-length fictional films. Patricia Rozema's off kilter breakthrough, *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing*, was one the first films to benefit from this new policy. *Mermaids* was accepted into the Directors Fortnight at the Cannes Film Festival, that same year, and took the *Prix de la Jeunesse*. The film was sold to 35 countries within four days, and ended up making more then the \$350,000 it had cost.



After winning the Silver Plaque at the Chicago International Film Festival for her short film, *Passion: A Letter*, Rozema applied for and received public supported funding for her first feature *Mermaids*. The budget, for *Mermaids*, totaled at \$362,000; \$163,000 coming from Telefilm, \$100,000 from OFDC, \$79,000 from Art Council grants and \$20,000 in deferrals.<sup>12</sup>

Rozema's lavish, yet delicate, whimsical style depicts characters who play in the abaxial space where desires for privacy encounter needs of social contact. The play of the space is laced with deception and sincerity; isolation and integrity. Polly (Sheila McCarthy), in *Mermaids*, is an aspiring photographer who works as a Girl Friday for a chic art gallery. Rozema describes Polly as *kleine luyden*, "whose inept exterior belies a vast and vivid internal universe."<sup>13</sup> At work, Polly is hard-pressed to type a simple letter, yet in her dreams, she walks on water, scales buildings, and flies.

Rozema's film *White Room* (1990) echoes the explorations of contrasting worlds. The film begins with, "Once upon a time, there was a young man [Norm] who lived a very exciting life—the problem was, it was all in his head." Both Norm (Maurice Godin) and Polly play in the joins of those who watch and those who are watched. Polly does her watching through photographs and a video camera. Polly discovers that the Curator, Gabrielle (Paule Baillargeon), is fronting for the artist Mary Joseph, (Ann-Marie McDonald). Norm gazes into the hidden world of Jane (Kate Nelligan). Jane is the reclusive singer who

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<sup>12</sup>For an in depth description of the making of *Mermaids* see Michael Posner, *Canadian Dreams, The Making and Marketing of Independent Films*, pages 1-22.

<sup>13</sup>The stuff of this section hails from an interview with Patricia Rozema conducted by Scott Macklin, Friday February 3, 1995 at the KOS Cafe, College and Bathurst St, Toronto.

is the voice behind brutally murdered Madeline X (Margot Kidder). Looking not only provides a view, it also plunges one into a de-severed involvement in other people's lives. Polly, through the use of the video recorder creates a flashback, whereby, she directly implicates the audience into the film.

*Mermaids* ends when the bandaged Curator and Mary Joseph enter Polly's apartment. The Curator offers an apology to Polly and Mary Joseph discovers that the photos sent to the gallery are actually taken by Polly. Polly then invites the Curator and Marry Joe into her fantastical world by saying, "Come here, and I'll show you some more," as she enters her transformed darkroom. The double ending of *White Room* is also an invitation into the interior world of fantasy. In these two films, Rozema creates a tension, whereby artist isolation is confronted with media crassness. The tension is dissolved into the interior fantastical haven of Polly's darkroom and Jane's whiteroom.

In her latest film, *When Night is Falling* (1994), Rozema again creates a tension of contrasting worlds. Only instead of juxtaposing an isolated private interior with a crass public world, she sets up a tension between the austere and pristine world of academics with the shamelessly seductive world of a traveling fringe circus. Rozema, however, does not dissolve desire into an interior fantastical room, but rather plays through the tension by depicting both worlds as having carnivalesque characteristics. Erotic intrigue is no longer regulated into a hidden space, but rather surfaces in a lush tableaux. Rozema frames Camille (Pascale Bussières) and Petra (Rachel Crawford) kissing in the foreground as a flight of birds take wing in the background.

Defying gravity is not only depicted in dreams, but now flight takes place on the wings of a glider.

The cinematic contrasting worlds that Rozema creates are analogous to the private and public funding landscape of Canadian film. Although state supported funding has given her an opportunity to make films, she also speaks of how such a system can cause an aura of lethargy. Because of the success that Rozema had with *Mermaids*, she said, "...getting money from the Canadian government for the next one was easy. But somehow it felt like less of an achievement, since I felt that they would have given money for any script that I gave them."

Canadian Genie award-winning filmmaker Atom Egoyan had this to say about the temperament of Canadian film, "The pressure on English-Canadian filmmakers is that everyone is waiting for a hit. We haven't had one since *Mermaids* and the industry really wants something that will prove that it's worth all the money that's being pumped into it."<sup>14</sup> Independent Canadian films have been artistically well received. Egoyan is a three time invitee to Cannes, and in 1994 he won the International Critics Prize for *Exotica* and audiences voted Rozema's *When Night is Falling* as the most popular film at the 1995 Berlin International film festival; however, the agencies want a commercial success. Canadian film critic Geoff Pevere had this to write about the filmscape in Canada,

The extent to which Canada can be said to have a film consciousness, it's a consciousness borne less by tradition than events. We tend to celebrate and

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<sup>14</sup> Denis Seguin, "But will you Still Schmooze me tomorrow?" *Eye Magazin* (Sept. 8, 1994): 35.

promote our films not in terms of where they've come from but by how large a splash they make when they land. With this emphasis on our cinema as a series of discrete happenings—such as the Genie Awards, film festival debuts, or screenings in the south of France—serves as an effective and sadly necessary quick -jolt reminder that yes, Canadians-still-make-movies. Canadian cinema seems to exist in a strange eternal bubble inflated by hype which bursts every time the event is over, leaving only the drips on the ground as proof of its recent existence.<sup>15</sup>

Will recent independent filmmakers, such as Bruce McDonald, Patricia Rozema, Atom Egoyan, Francois Girard, Mina Shum, and Jean-Claude Lauzon, be obscured by this so called 'bubble' as have past independents, Gilles Carle, Paul Almond, Jack Darcus and Don Shebib? This latter assortment of independents seem to have been left on the cutting room floor in an aura of 'where are they now'.

Bruce McDonald (*Road Kill*, *Highway 61*, *Dance Me Outside*) was instrumental in the development of alternative organizations like The Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto (LIFT). LIFT is a non-profit film co-op which supports and encourages independent filmmaking through the exchange of information and access to equipment and facilities. Because LIFT is supported by its members and The Canada Council, The Ontario Arts Council, The National Film Board, the Ontario Government through the Ministry of Culture and Communications, the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, and the Toronto Arts Council, independents have the potential to retain an

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<sup>15</sup>Geoff Pevere, "Alien Nation: Canada '94," *Take One, Film in Canada* no. 7 (Winter 1995): 15-18.

individual voice while still being supported and involved in the community. Through his involvement at LIFT, McDonald worked as an editor on Atom Egoyan's *Family Viewing* and *Speaking Parts*. Collaborating on other filmmaker's work led McDonald to pursue the making of his own films. Considering his days as an editor McDonald says,

...I was given that much welcome [from the directors] in the creative process...that I felt that I was actually writing the screenplay with them...They were great role models for me, people like Ron [Mann] and Atom [Egoyan] and Peter [Mettler]. I thought 'well if they can do it, how hard can it be?' Not to put them down, but, I thought, I know them. They're walking, talking people and they're out there doing it, and so can I." <sup>16</sup>

McDonald then took over and produced an issue for the magazine *Cinema Canada* to foreground an up and coming band of filmmakers working out of Toronto. The issue, entitled "Outlaw Issue," described this band as, "the Toronto New Wave." Taking a cue from the filmmakers of the French New Wave, filmmakers such as McDonald, Egoyan, and Rozema worked from a collaborative moment in order to foster their own intimations of cinema.

If the independent filmmaker, as an artist, could be taken as endemic to society rather than as a rising 'star', the possibility of black hole creation would be far less. By de-emphasizing the need for the next big hit, production budgets would not cause such dizzying effects,

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<sup>16</sup>Marc Glassman, "Rockin' on the Road, The Films of Bruce McDonald," *Take One, Film in Canada* no. 8 (Summer 1995): 17.

due to their astronomical heights, and the independent filmmaker's attention could be modally opened up to transverse the rubric of quality and content of a production in his/her cinematic offering on an enhanced fertile ground.

# 3

## Exposing the Seams of the Screen

*All you need to make a movie is a girl and a gun.*  
—Jean Luc Godard

The first two chapters spent time exposing how certain aesthetic considerations of cinema get processed, based on economic factors of support. Formulaic Hollywood seats the spectator in a position of unintimidated perspective, where a choreography of establishing shot to medium shot to close up demarcates a scene by unity of time and action in which problems are presented and neatly resolved, generally moving to a conclusion of a "happy ending."

Chapter two ended with an initial discussion of the so-called "Toronto New Wave." These filmmakers play on the outside of the dominant Hollywood system. Their films embrace a fresh, vital, and adventurous energy as opposed to processed, formulaic, and safe studio films. I think there might be affinities between these independent makers of film and their namesake French filmmakers of the late 1950's and early 1960's. Whereas the Toronto New Wavers counter the status quo of Hollywood, the *Nouvelle Vague* rejected notions of the "Tradition of Quality," the formulaic process of smoothed out impersonal filmmaking, and embraced a more personal style of filmmaking independent of established industry tendencies.

## **Rising of the Nouvelle Vague**

Indeed there was a lot of hype and the phrase *Nouvelle Vague* became the hip buzzword, depicting an all pervasive movement. But to define the Nouvelle Vague, to itemize and take stock of the tenets and tenants as a 'who's in and out' list, would be to super-impose a coherence on a 'movement' that did not exist apart from a small bande of filmmaker-critics. Beneath the surfacial hype, which led Claude Chabrol to remark, "we were sold like a brand of soap powder," there were multiple dynamic interrelated modes that swelled the wave. Changes in the system of state support for the cinema, the introduction of the Eclair hand-held 16 millimeter camera, development of faster film stocks, and the cross-over of documentary filmmakers allowed for the breakup of studio determined, artificial 'well-made' films about 'well-made' characters. There was also an emergence of a style of on-location direction operating in free association with real-life characters, many of whom seemed to have been met casually on the street. The camera would create its own language, imprinting a sense of immediacy, a thereness. This immediacy gave the sense that the story was not a pre-ordained reflection, but rather a lived-in and even quirky mark, a tendency apertured by independent films.

The movement of the New Wave had its roots in the critical writings of young film enthusiasts, who in the early 1950's served

their theoretical apprenticeship under the guidance of André Bazin by, writing for *Cahiers du Cinema*.

*Cahiers du Cinema* was established in 1950 by André Bazin and Jacques Doniol-Valcroze. *Cahiers* arose from the backdrop of the *Revue du Cinéma* and the Ciné-club *Objectif 49*, which brought together critics, filmmakers, and future filmmakers who discussed notions of a *cinéma d'auteurs*. The auteur theory posits the director as the author of the film. *Cahiers* provided a forum for Truffaut, Godard, Rivette, Chabrol, and Rohmer<sup>1</sup> to voice their criticisms and frame their intimations as critic-filmmakers. These cinéastes immersed themselves in films at the ciné-clubs and subsequent Cinémathèque.

### **Truffaut's 'Tendance'**

François Truffaut's 1954 article, 'Une Certaine Tendance du cinéma français' gives illumination to the mood and filmscape of this time. Truffaut paints the picture of post-occupation French cinema as one being dominated by the tendencies of the adherents of *Film de Qualité*. Former screenwriters-turned-filmmakers Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost reciped the prescription of "psychological realism." Most notably, their scripts for Jean Delannoy's *La Symphonie pastorale* and Claude Autant's *Lara's Le Diable au corps* set the standard which parlayed into the practice of including well-known actresses and

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<sup>1</sup>François Truffaut, *Les Quatre Cents Coups* 1959; Jean-Luc Godard, *A Bout de Souffle* 1959; Charles Charbrol, *Le Cousins* 1959; Eric Rohmer; and Jacques Rivette; *Paris Nous Appartient* 1960. Truffaut won Grand Prize at the Cannes film festival in 1959.

actors (Michèle Morgan and Gérard Phillipe), carefully constructed period atmosphere, and often also the introduction of one or two elements extraneous or marginal to the literary text, as if to append their authorial signature inbetween that of Gide or Radiguet and that of the director.

Truffaut describes the method as one always including the question of a victim, generally a cuckold. "The cuckold would be the only sympathetic character in the film if he weren't always infinitely grotesque. The knavery of his kin and the hatred among the members of his family lead the 'hero' to his doom; the injustice of life, and for local colour, the wickedness of the world."<sup>2</sup> The entire reputation of Bost and Aurenche rests on two points of adaptation: a faithfulness to the spirit of the work they adapt and the talent they used.



far right François Truffaut on set of *Les Deux Anglaises*

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<sup>2</sup>François Truffaut, "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema," *Cahiers du Cinéma in English*. (Jan. 1966): 36 (translated from *Cahiers du Cinéma*. No. 31, Jan. 1954).

Truffaut goes on to state strongly that, "One sees how competent the promoters of the *Film de Qualité* are in choosing only subjects that favor the misunderstanding on which the whole system rests...under the cover of literature and of course, of quality, they give the public its habitual dose of smut, non-conformity and facile audacity."<sup>3</sup> He follows with,

The school of '*Film de Qualité*,' which aspires to realism, destroys it at the moment of finally grasping it...so careful is the school to lock these beings in a closed world, barricaded by formulas, plays on words, maxims, instead of letting us see them for ourselves, with our own eyes...<sup>4</sup>

Truffaut's rejection of this recipe for 'Quality' led him to denigrate the use of literary dialogue, elaborate studio sets, polished photography, and big named stars. These criticisms echo the criticisms that today's independent filmmakers are making of the Hollywood system. Truffaut wanted to open up the space for directors who dealt with ordinary experience—vulnerable individuals, daily language, and common emotions. Many have considered this article to be the initiating polemic, anticipating the *Nouvelle Vague*, and it indeed stirred the waters. But there were other voices prior to Truffaut's who sensed a new surge in filmmaking.

In 1948, Alexander Astruc coined the term *camera stylo* to describe the expressive function of cinema. The notion of camera as pen not only defined the aesthetic priorities of New Wave cinema in

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 32.

France, but also implied a theoretical stance toward the ontological status and semiotic specificity of cinema with regard to other arts. Alexandre Astruc declared,

The cinema is becoming a means of expression like the other arts before, especially painting and the novel. It is no longer a spectacle, a diversion equivalent to the old boulevard theatre...it is becoming, little by little, a visual language, i.e. a medium in which and by which an artist can express his thoughts, be they abstract or whatever, or in which he can communicate his obsessions as accurately as he can do today in an essay or novel...what interests us in the cinema today is the creation of this language" <sup>5</sup>

The kernel of Astruc's notion was that the filmmaker/author writes with her camera as a writer writes with her pen. Laura Oswald states that this notion of *camera stylo* interacted in tension with André Bazin's notion of *camera obscura*, where the camera was thought of as an instrument for seizing visual reality in the film image.<sup>6</sup> To nuance this tension, however, I would like to rack focus to whom Bazin was facing. Whereas the Soviet theorist and filmmaker Sergi Eisenstein had given cinematic primacy to montage (editing, cutting, or the creation of meaning through the juxtaposition of shots<sup>7</sup>), particularly

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<sup>5</sup> Alexandre Astruc, "La Caméra Stylo," *Ecran Français* no. 144 (30 mars, 1948) reprinted in English in *The New Wave*, ed. Peter Graham. Cinema One Series (New York: Doubleday, 1968).

<sup>6</sup> Laura R. Oswald, "Cinema-graphia: Eisenstein, Derrida, and the sign of Cinema," chapter 14 in *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts. Art, media and architecture*. ed. by Peter Brunnette and David Wills (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). pp. 248-63.

<sup>7</sup> Sergi Eisenstein, *Film Form* (New York: A Harvest Book, 1949). Eisenstein posited, "...montage is an idea that arises from collision of independent shot." p. 49.

insofar as it lends itself to manipulation and didactic intent, Bazin emphasized deep-focus photography, which he said, maintains the integrity of the shot and tends to allow for more ambiguity than montage,

That is why depth of field is not just a stock in trade of the cameraman like the use of a series of filters or of such and such a style of lighting; it is a capital gain in the field of direction—a dialectical step forward in the history of film language. Today we can say at last the director writes in film. The image—its plastic composition and the way it is set in time, because it is founded on a much higher degree of realism— has at its disposal more means of manipulating reality and of modifying it from within.<sup>8</sup>

## **Bazin's Seamless Realism**

Bazin was developing what he called "an aesthetic of reality," an approach that recognizes film's unique capacity to capture and reproduce 'real' experience. Bazin's concern was to isolate 'realism' as the fundamental character of photography and, hence, film. Bazin's notion echoes Siegfried Kracauer who wrote, "The basic properties [of film] are identical with the properties of photography. Film, in other words, is uniquely equipped to record and reveal physical reality and, hence, gravitates toward it."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>André Bazin, *What is Cinema?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967). See vol., 1 chapter three, *The Evolution of the Language of Cinema*, p. 35 & 40.

<sup>9</sup>Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965) p. 28.

Oswald sets Bazin's cinematic notions in binary opposition to Astruc's sense of writing with the camera. But built into Bazin's sense of cinema is an interaction between the realistic reproducing capabilities of the camera and the imagaic manufacturing capabilities. Bazin wrote, "Méliés et son *Voyage dans la lune* n'est pas venu contredire Lumière et son *Entrée du train en gare de la Ciotat*. L'un est inconceivable sans l'autre."<sup>10</sup>

Holding together Bazin's view of cinema was a fidelity to realism which is often a mongrel term that covers whatever is deemed normal and is accepted as reliable and final by a dominant committed vision, be it "picture window representational realism," "1800's realism," "Socialist Realism," or "Psychological Realism." Bazin wears the shroud of the positivist dream of an unmediated window on reality, a perfectly transparent language that would give direct access to objects and ideas. His notion of realism was permeated by a correspondence theory of language where a word is an image of an idea and an idea is a image of a thing.

## Metz's Semiotic Challenge

In the mid-sixties, Christian Metz pursued a rigorous attempt to think through how far cinema could be analysed as itself a language. In

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<sup>10</sup>André Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le Cinéma? I. Ontologies et Language*. Editions du Cerf, Paris. 1958 p. 27. Méliés's film *Voyage dans la lune* does not contradict Lumière's *Entrée du train en gare de la Ciotat*, the one is inconceivable without the other. (translation by S. Macklin) In 1894 Louis Lumière developed the Cinématographe, a combination camera and projector. His film *Entrée du train* consisted of a shot of train roaring toward the audience. The camera was a record of events, reality. George Méliés played with the optical-mechanical characteristic of the camera to invent images.

film, as in language, the relation between the celluloid strip projected onto a screen, and what the projection presents is the relation between signifier and signified. But, unlike language, that relation is iconic and indexical. There is, then, no equivalent in cinema for the arbitrary relation between signifier and signified. Where Bazin's aesthetic placed the primacy of the object over the image, Metz locates primacy in the world of signs. According to Metz, it was Ferdinand De Saussure who laid the foundations for semiotics, "...of which linguistics was to be only one branch, although an especially important one."<sup>11</sup> De Saussure was not the only player on the semiological stage. American thinker C.S. Peirce also provided subtext for the scene.

According to Peirce, semiotics is the 'quasi-necessary' or formal doctrine of signs,

By describing the doctrine as 'quasi-necessary,' or formal, I mean that we observe the characters of such signs as we know, and from such an observation, by a process which I will not object to naming Abstraction, we are led to statements, eminently fallible, and therefore in one sense by no means necessary, as to what *must be* the characters of all signs used by 'scientific' intelligence, that is to say , by an intelligence capable of learning by experience.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Christian Metz, *Film Language; A Semiotics of Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974) p. 60.

<sup>12</sup>C.S. Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce* , ed. by Justus Buchler (New York: Dover Publications, 1955) p.98.

Peirce posits, that a sign or *representamen*, is something which stands for something-referent to somebody-interpretent in some capacity. In this respect, signs are distinguishable by three trichotomies.<sup>13</sup> Film theorists have picked up on the second distinction, namely the sign as having some character in relation to its object or to an interpretent. Peirce terms a sign as either an icon, an index, or a symbol. In an icon relation, the sign configuratively resembles its referent, such as a diagram resembles what it shows. In an index relation, the sign is semantically deepened as a physical, causal effect of the object, such as a light meter registering the amount of illumination on set. In a symbol relation, the sign is habitually related to a referent by convention and would lose its character if there were no interpretent.

Because a photograph resembles its referent and is caused by it (the impact of reflected light ray interacting with the photographic emulsion)<sup>14</sup>, Peirce depicts a photograph as both iconic and indexical. Since, in some sense, cinema is a derivative of photography, at least in origination, it also echoes an iconic and indexical relation to reality. It would seem, then, adopting a Peircian scheme for cinematic studies would not emancipate one from the tangles of representation and realism.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 101 Peirce states that, "Signs are divisible by three trichotomies; first, according as the sign in itself is a mere quality, is an actual extistent; secondly, according as the relation of the sign to its object consist in the sign's having some character in itself, or in its relation to an interpretant; thirdly, according as its interpretant represents it as a sign of possibility or as a sign of fact or a sign of reason.

<sup>14</sup>Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University, 1988) Press p. 36.

Semiotic science, à la Metz, would 'politically' demystify language, denaturalize representation (of reality), and show language as a sign-construction. Ferdinand De Saussure posited that language is a system of signifiers (sounds/script) with (arbitrarily conventionalized) signifieds.

Primary to the thesis of Metz's and Saussurean semiotics is that meaning is produced by a system of differences, along the axis of selection-paradigmatic and the axis of combination-syntagmatic. The relationship of signifier and signified, in Saussure's telling, becomes steadied as signifiers are strung together sequentially along a temporal line. Language has two axes, the syntagmatic or 'horizontal' combinatory flow axis and the paradigmatic or 'vertical' warehouse of potentialities axis. Syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes are mutually dependent; any term in the syntagmatic flow can only be there in place of another from the paradigmatic axis. Different meanings are, however, brought about along the syntagmatic flow.

The question to be asked then, 'is cinema a language?'. The answer hinges on: a) whether cinema directly imitates or is analogous to, or is, in a Bazinian, sense an extension of reality,

The realism of cinema follows directly from its photographic nature. Not only does some marvel or some fantastic thing on the screen not undermine the reality of an image, on the contrary it is its most valid justification. Illusion in the cinema is not based as it is in the theatre on convention tacitly accepted by the general public; rather, contrariwise, it is based on the inalienable realism of that which is shown."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>André Bazin, *What is Cinema?* p.108.

or b) whether it was a form of writing, dependent on an arbitrary and conventional sign system. For Metz then, yes, cinema is a language. But, it is a language without a *langue*, a language system. There is no process of selection from a lexicon of images in cinema, no dictionary, as it were. Metz argues that cinema,

can be considered as a language, to the extent that it orders signifying elements within ordered arrangements different from those of spoken idioms — and to the extent these elements are not traced on the perceptual configurations of reality itself (which does not tell stories). Filmic manipulation transforms what might have been a mere visual transfer of reality into discourse.<sup>16</sup>

Cinematic intimations can act as a model but can never expose lived reality. Film images and sound are no longer to be thought of as fragments of reality; they are signs that have relations only to other signs.

Although Metz's push for a *Grande Syntagmatique*, development of specifically cinematic codes that would form a master grammatical system of cinematographic discourse ultimately faded to black, his notion of cinesemiology has,

enabled us to see the manner in which a representational picture is woven. It has at least enumerated the threads which go into making up the fabric. And this is an essential project, for never again can we accept this picture as the

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<sup>16</sup>Christian Metz, *Film Language* p. 105, cf. also p.116.

"seamless garment of reality" when we have been shown the seams, the threads, sometimes even the weave itself.<sup>17</sup>

According to Metz, the cinema, as a sign system, can model but can never reveal reality. Signs bear relations only to one another rather than relations to actual experience. Not every experience of meaning, however, can be reduced to a microscopic depiction of codes. Cinema can not be reduced to a system of signification, rather it is a place where various codes come together to create meaning. The fruit of the semiotic enterprise has been the exposure of the illusory codes of seamless cinema. Dominant film depicts a meaning that appears to render the real transparently, but actually secretes an ideology.

## **Godard's Exposure**

The critical writings and cinematic offerings of Jean Luc Godard echo Metz's exposure of hermetically sealed off cinema. Godard announces, "Le signe nous oblige a nous figurer un object de sa signification."<sup>18</sup> His intimations do not represent something out there, as in a mirror mode, but rather are loaded to pull their focus through the behaviors and actions of the characters as they slide from street to café through underground passage ways and arcades. Allusive, fragmented, and self-referential, Godard's early films are imbricated to

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<sup>17</sup>Dudley Andrew, *Concepts in Film Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) p. 64. Andrew is picking up the Bazinian phrase which appears in Bazin's *Jean Renoir* (Paris: Editions Champs Libre, 1971), p. 84. The English Simon & Shuster version (1973) translates the phrase "simple cloak of reality." p. 91.

<sup>18</sup>The sign compels us to imagine an object through its signification. (tran. by S. Macklin).

a suggestion of response-ability. Godard intends to "tell the truth 24 frames a second," his starting point, he says, "is documentary to which I try to give the truth of fiction."<sup>19</sup>



Anna Karina and Jean Luc Godard on Set of *Made in the U.S.A.*

Hollywood studio film effaces all traces of its enunciation—the act of speaking or presenting seamless stories told from a so-called non-position. Godard sought to expose this penchant toward neutrality by illuminating the shadows of *énunciation*, the speech act, through the *énoncé*, what is spoken,

I am still as much of a critic as I ever was during the time at *Cahiers du Cinéma*. The only difference is that instead of writing criticism, I now film it.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Godard on Godard, trans. & ed. by Tom Milne (New York: Da Capo Press 1986) p. 181.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 171.

Cinema, for Godard, is not a series of abstractions—camera reproducing reality—but rather is a phrasing of moments. Through his use of jump cuts, improvisation, hand-held camera, and dissolving of seemingly plot structure, Godard not only called into question certain tendencies, he rephrased the film syntax of dominant cinema. In filming the street scenes of *A Bout de Soufflé* (1959), Godard had his cinematographer, Raoul Coutard, operate a hidden-hand-held camera in order to render an impulsive and vibrant view. Story structure is dissolved, in the film *Masculin-Féminin* (1966), into kaleidoscopic comments on advertising, relationships, philosophy, and politics.

By calling into question cinema itself through the very films he makes, Godard plays in the joins between essay and diary, fiction and documentary, and stasis and movement. Godard's play of fiction and documentary is like a Möbius strip, which has at the same time both two sides and one side. In regards to *A Bout de Soufflé*, Godard wrote, "Although I felt ashamed of it at one time, I do like *A Bout de Soufflé* very much, but now I see where it belongs—along with *Alice in Wonderland*. I thought it was *Scarface*."<sup>21</sup>

Godard eschewed the use of star-caliber actors, opting instead to work with non-professional or professional actors who had an acute ability to improvise.

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p.175.

During the filming of *Le Mépris* (1963), Godard said, "The extras did more acting than the star, Brigitte Bardot."



One of the tactics that Godard employs is to place the actor in the part of an interviewer faced by an interviewee. Godard states,

I run behind and ask him something. At the same time, it is I who plan the course. If he gets tired or out of breath, I know he won't say the same as he would in other circumstances. But I have changed him in the way I planned the course...for me, it's the inside seen from the inside. One should be with him, see things from his point of view while the external story unfolds. The film is like a secret diary, a notebook, or monologue of someone trying to justify himself before an almost accusing camera, as one does before a lawyer or a psychiatrist.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p.177 and 179.

Godard takes up Bertolt Brecht's notion of *Verfremdungseffekt*, the estrangement technic, insisting that his audience maintain a consciousness of the vehicle. Brecht said, "The object of this effect is to allow the spectator to criticize constructively from a social point of view."<sup>23</sup> Godard appends himself between his characters and the audience in order to expose the notion of a seamless realism. Consciousness of the vehicle not only allows, but implicates the participation of the viewer in a continuous process of examining images, sounds, and other phenomena. By exposing the seams and breaking up the flow of his films, Godard compels the spectator to question herself about how she looks at film, whether as a passive consumer and judge outside the work who accepts the code chosen by the director, or within the work as a participant in a dialogue.

With the exposure of the "seamless garment of reality," I'll now sharpen the focus by pulling into the work of a filmmaker who occupies a unique place in the arena of independent filmmakers. More of a poetically precise diary writer than a Godardian essayist, his work defies classification with the old guard or the New Wave. He has moved according to his own stylistic convictions, imprinting his own signature. Jean Cocteau has said, "He expresses himself cinematographically as a poet would his pen." Truffaut adds, "His cinema is closer to painting than to photography." He is also described as a Jansenist, exploring philosophy with cinematography.

Where Bazin's notion of cinema is grounded in the photo-chemical representation of reality, Robert Bresson's cinema is

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<sup>23</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. John Willet (New York: Hill and Wang, London: Methuen, 1964) p. 125.

concerned with truth beyond mere reality. Where Metz's semiotics attempted to dissolve cinematic aesthetics into the special province of a general science of signs, Bresson's cinema gives emphasis to the relationship of images in such a way that their juxtaposition transforms them. Bresson's way is not to reduce cinema to an introspective operation of algebra, rather each shot is given its meaning by its context of invitational movement.

# 4

## **Prints of a Cinematographer: Exploring the Screen of Robert Bresson**

*An old silent pond.*

*Into the pond a frog jumps.*

*Splash! Silence Again...*

—Basho

The films of Robert Bresson are an invitation into the deep stillness of intimate disclosure. We, as spectators, are invited to participate emphatically in the exploration of the inward movement of Bresson's cinematic offerings. Bresson is able to put a frame around a moment that invites one to penetrate into and beyond the surface of the screen. The frame allows one not only to engage in something about the moment, but serves as an act of entering into the moment itself, in all of its ineffable ordinariness and particularity. Bresson captures the stillness of a pond that is about to be exploded in a whisper, only to return to the silence. As a participant, the audience member is invited to follow the explosion or to remain in the silence of the surface, only to again await in un/anticipation.

The prints of Robert Bresson, in many ways, escort the incoming steps of the French New Wave. As with any intimations, however, Bresson

was also stepping from a particular cultural dynamic— one that was dominated by the French 'Tradition of Quality' and the films of the Italian Neo-Realists. Like the Neo-Realist, Bresson liked to use non-actors. But where as the Neo-Realists were concerned with preserving a carefully constructed portrayal of everyday reality, Bresson's aim was to penetrate beyond the surface and (en)capture the inner truth of his characters.

In a career which spanned over 50 years, Bresson made only 14 films. This is indicative of the integrity that Bresson has to his way of telling a story, for the way that he tells his stories is, in some respects, the story itself. The kernel of Bresson's intention is a calling for a deep sensual awareness of 'imaginative fellowship' that pervades the mystery of revelation.

Robert Bresson was born on September 25, 1907 at Bromont-Lamothe, Puy-de-Dome, France. At an early age he developed an interest in painting. This early interest would transform into the ocular sensitivity that Bresson would carry throughout his cinematic demeanor. He went on to receive his Bachelor of Arts degree from the Lycée Lakanal a Sceaux, where he studied philosophy. After he completed his education, his attempted career as a painter met with little success. When asked about his painting endeavors Bresson replied,

Cézane went to the edge of what one can do. When I was painting, I used to go, like many other painters, to a movie every night because they 'moved.' The leaves on a tree moved. Film, or rather cinematic apparatus, is the writing of tomorrow, in two links— one for the eye, the other for the ear.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Michel Ciment, "The Poetry of Precision," *America Film* vol. 9 (October 1983): 72.

In 1935 he collaborated on the script of Frédéric Zelnick's *C'était un musicien*. The following year he wrote and directed a short comedy of his own, *Les Affaires Publiques*. Throughout the rest of the 1930's he collaborated on the screenplays of various films, among them Claude Heyman's *Les Jumeaux de Brighton* (1936) and Pierre Billon's *Courier Sud* (1937). In 1939 he was working as an assistant to René Clair on the film *Air pur* when war broke out and production had to be abandoned. Bresson spent a year in a German prisoner-of-war camp in 1940. It was not until several years later that Bresson was able to get his career back on track. On June 23, 1943, *Les Agnes du péché* had its Paris premiere, and the unique cinematic offerings of Robert Bresson were 'officially' unveiled.

The atmosphere of the French movie industry of the 1930's was one which had an emphasis on experimentation, rather than spectacle motivated by mass appeal as found in the out-churnings of Hollywood. It was during this time that Bresson began to develop his particular voice. The prominent French directors of this time were Marcel Carne, René Clair, and Jean Renoir. But soon after the conclusion of World War II, the penchant towards experimentation fell away, and the '*Film de Qualite*' rose to the surface.

Robert Bresson's approach marked a radical break with the '*Film de Qualite*'. It is interesting to note that the first adaptation of *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne* for the screen was by Jean Aurenche, in 1947. The author of the novel, George Bernanos, rejected this offering for reasons summarized by Bresson's bibliographer Michel Estève,

the disappearance of characters essential to transcribing Bernanos's vision of the world (Torcy, Delbende, Oliver), the replacement of inner revolt by spectacular blasphemy (Chantel's spitting out of the host), and of 'everything is grace' by 'everything is death', were betrayals of the spirit of Bernanos's novel.<sup>2</sup>

Aurenche and Bost, under the guise of offering the spirit of the text, served up a pretentious recipe which was often a far distance from the original and marked by anachronistic or superfluous flourishes. Bresson did much to shake the Aurenche-Bost conception of stylistic authenticity by offering to go beyond where the banks of commercialism left off. Bresson's films have the ultimate sense of invitation to break beyond the surface by pruning away all external concessions and putting the human face not under microscopic examinations, but rather the emanation of unfolding relationships.

André Bazin calls Bresson's *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne* a masterpiece due to its power to stir the emotions, rather than the intelligence, at the highest level of sensitivity. Bazin explains,

While the instantaneous success of *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne* is undeniable, the aesthetic principles on which it is based are nevertheless the most paradoxical, maybe even the most complex, ever manifest in a sound film. Hence the refrain of those critics, ill-equipped to understand it; 'paradoxical,' they say, 'incredible' an unprecedented success that never can be repeated. Thus they renounce any attempt at explanation and take refuge in the perfect alibi of a stroke of genius. On the other hand, among those whose aesthetic taste

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<sup>2</sup>Michel Estève, *Robert Bresson—la passion du cinématographe* (Paris: Editions Albatros, 1983), p.26.

preferences are of a kind with Bresson's and whom one would have unhesitatingly thought to be his allies, there is a deep sense of disappointment in proportion as they expected greater acts of daring from him.<sup>3</sup>

## **Invitation to Fellowship Rather than 'Realism'**

These "greater acts" are precisely what Bresson is pruning away. Bazin misses the subtle nuances of Bresson's serene surfaces, unspeakable humiliations, and silent uneasiness, primarily because Bazin seems to embellish a ready-made, locked-down sense of what is real. Bresson's sense of realism is not based on the mechanical process of producing the 'real', but rather in the "...tying of new relationships between persons and things which are, and as they are."<sup>4</sup> Bresson's concern is with relationships, not with representations. Bresson states, "...an image must be transformed by contact with other images as is colour with other colours. A blue is not the same blue beside a green, a yellow, a red. No art without transformation."<sup>5</sup> One of the keys to understanding Bresson's thoughts hangs on his way of filmmaking, which is the process of "...combining images and sound of real things in order to make them effective. What I disapprove of is photographing with that extraordinary instrument—the camera—things that are not real. Sets and actors are not real."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Andre Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. 1*, trans. by Hugh Gray, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967) p.125.

<sup>4</sup>Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer*, (London: Quartet Books 1975) p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.9.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Thomas Samuels, *Encountering Directors* (New York: G.P. Putman's Sons 1972) p.58.

Realism, for Bresson, does not consist of reproducing reality, but rather it is a matter of showing how things really are. Bresson gives only what is needed, stripping away all that is ornamental in order to lay bare what is really there. Bresson walks the tightrope that exists between wanting factual details to be exact, while at the same time attempting to get beyond basic realism. With *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne*, Bresson illustrates that supreme elegance, and slightly decadent refinements are no longer sought after to cover up the simplicity and bareness. Coarse red wine, mud, and vomit are there to remind us that even when people have reached the highest degrees of mysticism or the most subtle forms of art, they are never angels. In *Un Condamné à mort s'est échappé*, the slop pails are emptied to music by Mozart, but this does not make the scene lose any of its 'realism', even if it gains new significance through the music. Charles Thomas Samuels adds, "Bresson's 'realism' is to be understood as a definition of intention, not as a description of style."<sup>7</sup> Bresson chisels his tableaux, to be simple without falling into a theosophical recipe of minimalism.

Bresson's intentions, like his choice of locations and subjects, portray the likeness of interiors and exteriors which are minimally seen, although their presence is known; for Bresson, that is enough. Bresson notes,

I don't choose my subjects; they choose me.  
I place myself on a road,  
I don't seek, I find.  
At the moment of truth, I rejoice.  
I am a fanatic of truth.

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<sup>7</sup>Charles Thomas Samuels, "Bresson's Gentleness," *American Scholar* (Spring 1971): 310.

Bresson's process is a restless pursuit of inner truth. His realism produces a surface only in order to uncover its depths. Samuels likens Bresson's intentions to that of Hamlet's advice to his players: "...in the torment, the tempest, the whirlwind, one must always be moderate and acquire even a certain gentleness."<sup>8</sup> John Updike has indicated that audiences are held by either stories that offer "circumstantial suspense" or by those whose suspense is "gnostic." The former speaks of "knowing the outcome of an unresolved situation," the latter lives "in the expectation that at any moment an illumination will occur."<sup>9</sup> Bresson's course is to cater to the latter, although his emphasis on expectation is considerably downplayed. We are given the ending of the films up front. In *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne*, the heroine says she will be avenged and immediately we know the medium of her vengeance. In *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne*, the face of the priest shows us that he will die soon. The very title of *Un Condamné à mort s'est échappé* tells us that the prisoner will indeed escape. Bresson calls for total concentration of the viewer to strive to move deeper, beyond the surface, to seek the motivations of the actions. By taking this course, Bresson shows little concern for realist cinema. Although his films are often of a specific time, they are strangely timeless.

For Bresson, 'realism' is the springboard for interior action and dramatic tension. The scenes transcend, rather than investigate, the apparent area of concern, for the very area of concern for Bresson is (en)capturing the truth of a particular moment. The crux of his intimation of realism is best recognized by the phrase *le vent souffle où il veut* (the wind bloweth where it listeth), the subtitle Bresson chose for his film *Un*

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 315.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 312 Samuels quotes John Updike.

*Condamné a mort s'est échappé*. In an interview in *Télérama*, Bresson said of this film,

I would like to show this miracle; an invisible hand over the prison, directing what happens and causing such and such a thing to succeed for one and not for the other...The film is a mystery...The spirit breathes where it will.<sup>10</sup>

Bresson's deepest intimation is to invite the spectator to participate in the screen, through which the language of fellowship is possible. Fellowship means an opening of oneself for another, giving another a share in oneself. In this sense, the fellowship of the 'cinematic' to the viewer that Bresson is after is not one of force or possession, as in typical Hollywood renderings, but one of transformation and revelation. Fellowship lives in reciprocal participation and from mutual recognition.

According to Bresson, "Cinematography is a writing with images in movement and with sounds."<sup>11</sup> In the opening shot of *Le journal d'un curé de campagne*, the viewer is invited into the frame by the opening of the priest's diary. The writing and the sound of the priest's voice tie together the imaging and speaking of the words,

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<sup>10</sup> I found this quote from *Télérama* in the file on Robert Bresson at the Cinematheque Ontario Film Library.

<sup>11</sup> *Notes on the Cinematographer* p.5. "Cinematography" for Bresson has the special meaning of creative film making which thoroughly engages the nature of film as such. It should not be confused with the work of a camera person.

I do not think I'll be doing any harm if I write down day by day, quite frankly, the humble and indeed insignificant secrets of a life which in any case contains no mystery.

By avoiding overt discursive dialogue or overbearing visual symbolism, Bresson is cinematically calling spectators, through a metaphoric play of diegetic sound and image, to notice the often invisible yet audible mysteries of life.



Priest of Ambricourt

The invitation is best illustrated in the climax of the film *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne* (appendix B starting with 44). Bresson's process of asceticism and stripping away reaches its zenith at the end, beginning when the priest's voiceover disappears from the final writing sequence. The priest sits alone in a room writing on some paper. The paper and the pencil fall, and he is too weak to pick them up. We can see in his emaciated eyes that he is near death. He gets up and walks to the window to gaze out. There then appears a close-up of a letter written by the

priest's friend to Torcy. This image is replaced by a cross which fills the screen. We then get the opportunity to listen to the words of the letter,

He asked me for absolution. His face was calm, he even smiled. Humanity and friendship forbade me to refuse, but while I performed the duty, I tried to express the scruples that I felt about doing so. His eyes signaled me clearly to put my ear to his mouth. He then pronounced distinctly, with extreme slowness, these words, which I know I am reporting truly. 'Does that matter? All is Grace.' I believe he died almost at once.

The final words "All is Grace" are taken from this letter, written after the priest's death. These words do more than merely exposit the priest's terminal exhaustion, they also focus the spectator's awareness upon the *Shē'arîth*—the remnant of verbal memory. The remnant, as voice, situates the action we see, which not only refers back to God's faithfulness, but also points to the promise of things to come. The disappearance of speech suggests the moment where presence is always/already immersed in absence. This occurs in the filmic text, far more than in the novel, as though Bresson's play on the silence of ellipses and fade-outs reveals as it appears to be concealed. Yet, again, the film ends with, "what does it matter, *tout est grace*." Beneath the inward intimation of Bresson's cinematic style, however, is an existentialist *dynamis*, where the eternal play pierces the ordinary only in rare and unexpected moments.

Bresson's way is to offer an invitation into the language of revelation which is experienced by the characters within his frame. Bresson notes his method invitation is,

Not to shoot a film in order to illustrate a thesis, or to display men and women confined to their external aspect, but to discover the matter they are made of. To attain the 'heart of heart' which does not let itself be caught either by poetry, or by philosophy, or by drama.<sup>12</sup>

## **Pascal's Shadow behind Bresson**

The Jansenist filter through which Bresson illuminated the flickering screen, is present throughout his oeuvre. The Jansenist Doctrine of Grace, that grace is a gratuitous gift of the hidden God who is revealed only to those who seek with all their being, is a theme repeated in varying degrees in the films of Bresson. Jansenists consider grace to be something that can never be earned, and God could never be put under an obligation to offer it. Jansenists have a strong sense of election, and tend to dwell on seeing in worldliness the presumptive evidence of grace withheld. Like Bresson, they were characterized by a certain austerity and puritanism, reacting to prevalent casualness by a rigid attitude to the sacraments and laying much stress on the necessity for constant effort and vigilance lest grace should be forfeited. It is interesting to note that their enemies, namely the Jesuits, accused them of being Calvinists.

I make mention of Bresson's Jansenism in order to draw out the affinities between Bresson and Blaise Pascal. Though not considered a full-fledged member<sup>13</sup> Pascal was indeed close to the plight of the

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<sup>12</sup>Notes on the Cinematographer, p.36-37.

<sup>13</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. by A.J. Krailsheimer, (New York: Penguin Books, 1966) p. 14. In the introduction Krailsheimer emphasizes that Pascal was not one of the 'Messieurs de Port Royal'. "It is true, of course, that his spiritual director, M. Singlin, and his sister, Jacqueline (who entered Port Royal as a nun in 1652), as well as other members of Port Royal, regarded him as an active ally, rather than a mere well-wisher,

Jansenists. In his book, *The Jansenists and the Expulsion of the Jesuits from France 1757-1765*, Dale Van Kley states,

With the papacy, the ministry, the larger part of the episcopacy, and now the Sorbonne against them, and the probability of persecution looming ominously on the horizon, the outlook for the Jansenists were bleak indeed in 1656. It was at this crucial juncture that the Jansenists received unhopd-for succor in the person of Blaise Pascal.<sup>14</sup>

I would now like to focus on the affinities between Pascal and Bresson. Pascal wrote, "The creator of the universe must remain a hidden God for finite creatures, but in God made man the model is plain for all to follow who are not blinded by self-love and self-interest."<sup>15</sup> He went on to say, "Be comforted; it is not from yourself that you must expect it, but on the contrary you must expect it by expecting nothing from yourself."<sup>16</sup>

Pascal systematically eliminates the props with which humanity sustains itself in illusions. He states, "Reason itself can work only from the raw material supplied by instinct or the senses, from which no guarantees exists."<sup>17</sup>

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but on the doctrinal plane Pascal was never wholly at one with his Jansenist friends, who were, indeed, divided amongst themselves. "

<sup>14</sup>Dale Van Kley, *The Jansenists and the Expulsion of the Jesuits from France, 1757-1765* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1975) p.15.

<sup>15</sup>*Pensées*, p. 26.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 95, Bresson notes in *Notes on the Cinematographer*, "Provoke the unexpected. Expect it." p.90.

<sup>17</sup>*Pensées*. p. 23.

Like Bresson, Pascal's manner is deliberately not linear and consists of converging arguments, all directed to the same end but with different starting points. Pascal said, "Jesus Christ is the object of all things, the center which all things tend."<sup>18</sup> And he adds, "To return to the *point de départ*, the wretchedness of man without God is the result of making himself his own center, the happiness of man with God is the result of making Christ his center, of trying to conform his life to that of a perfect man."<sup>19</sup>

In his return to the *point de départ*, Bresson emphasizes the relevance of images only in connection with other images, maintaining that he does not create 'beautiful' images but only 'necessary' ones. Bresson's framing and composition works in an area between senses, emotion, and intellect, creating a singular universe for each individual spectator.

Bresson frames his characters narrowly, he doesn't allow the camera that which we call autonomy. It would be as if you were writing literature in statements. Bresson's camera places itself between the characters, it almost stands on the axis of the action. The axis of action is the name for the conceived line which runs between two characters who relate to one another. It refers to the procession or course of glances, words, gestures. Because Bresson's camera stands nearly on this axis, the characters look a little bit past the camera. This little bit irritates: the camera shoots the character frontally— the character does not return the glance, but dodges the attack. The presense of the camera is clearly apparent and the glance of the character denies it. Now the counter shot comes, the image of the character standing opposite. The camera changes its point of view almost 180

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

degrees and again a character appears whose gaze evades the eye of the camera.

This dodging conflicts with the composed firmness of Bresson's actors.<sup>20</sup>

Bresson's way is elliptic and lacunary, made of fragments, and in its interstices lies poetry. Bresson almost never uses long shots, and he never uses them to give an overview of something before the details have been examined. Before Bresson shows a close-up of a face, he shows the close-up of a hand. Recall the striking image of the hands of the condemned prisoner before he jumps from the car, the hands of the pickpocket before he picks his mark, the hands of the priest as they glide along the page of his diary and the hands of Joan of Arc before she is burned.



Joan of Arc

His cinematography is made up of fragments of reality, which are then assembled in a certain order. Bresson states, "...it is these fragments

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<sup>20</sup> Harun Farokki wrote this of Bresson in the program of *A Retrospective of Harun Farokki* Goethe Institute of the United States, September 1991, NY. New York.

of reality, or rather their relationship and assembly, that are the voicing of expression."<sup>21</sup> Bresson contrives to write his cinematic offerings through the characters as they reveal themselves in diverging encounters.

Everything exists within a stalwart vacuity; what the characters do outside their particular situations is never indicated and what happens to them outside of the frame only emerges elliptically. We never find out what happens to Jost and Fontaine after they escape. We are left questioning whether or not the love between Agnès and Jean will sustain. Although Michel finds redemption, we do not know what happens to him and Jeanne after, or if he is ever to be released from prison. It is up to the imaginative fellowship of the spectator to move beyond conventional tendencies of closure and play in the interstice of transformation.



Jeanne and Michel

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<sup>21</sup> Michel Ciment. "The Poetry of Precision," *America Film* vol. 9 (October 1983): 72.

Mirella Jona Affron suggests that the transformative play shows up in Bresson's notion of montage,

For Bresson and Pascal, in art and as in nature, it is not so much a question of the matter at hand, *c'est la meme matiere*, but of its editing, *la disposition des matieres est nouvelle*, not so much a question of which words one uses, which ball, which colours, which bones or which shots, or whether they have been used before, but of their placement. In nature, as in art, editing is the vital activity, for in the disposition of necessarily finite material lie the infinite possibilities of invention. In cinema, of course, this activity (to which Bresson refers only rarely by its conventional name—montage) is, as Bresson insists in the variety of his analogies, especially privileged.<sup>22</sup>

Bresson is better thought of as a *metteur en ordre*, rather than a *matteur en scene*. For Bresson, "It's the editing that suddenly creates, when image and sound are put together. Life comes forth. The editing is also the reward for our efforts."<sup>23</sup> If we listen closely, we can hear the distant echoes of Blaise Pascal, "Nature has made all her truths independent of one another. Our art makes one dependent on the other. But this is not natural. Each keeps its own place." This echo becomes voiced by Bresson: "This [fragmentation] is indispensable if one does not want to fall into REPRESENTATION. To see beings and things in their separate parts.

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<sup>22</sup>Mirella Jona Affron, "Bresson and Pascal: Rhetorical Affinities," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* v. 10 (Spring 1985): 129.

<sup>23</sup>*Poetry of Precision*, p. 73.

Render them independent in order to give them new dependence."<sup>24</sup>

The discovery of this new dependence takes place through Bresson's screen,

The cinema is an exploration within. Within the mind, the camera can grasp anything. As far as I can, I am eliminating anything which may distract from the interior drama. The photography is simple; no effects; no sophistication. The natural backgrounds will be very little seen, but their presence will be known, and that is enough.<sup>25</sup>

This exploration of connection is intricately tied to Bresson's intertwining of sound and image.

### **Diegetic Sounds, Images and Models on the Way to Intimacy**

Bresson's austere interior movement is one of precision. This precision of movement is fashioned upon the play of the aural and ocular experience. Bresson said, "When a sound can replace an image, cut the image or neutralize it. The ear goes more toward the within, the eye towards the outer."<sup>26</sup> He continued,

If a sound is the obligatory complement of an image, give preponderance either to the sound, or to the image. If equal, they damage or kill each other, as we say of

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<sup>24</sup> *Notes on the Cinematographer*, p. 84.

<sup>25</sup> Jean Douchet is quoting Bresson in "Bresson on Location," *Séquence* no. 13 (January 1951): 7.

<sup>26</sup> *Notes on the Cinematographer*, p.51.

colours. The eye solicited alone makes the ear impatient, the ear solicited alone makes the eye impatient. *Use these impatiences.* Power of the cinematographer who appeals to the two senses *in a governable way.* Against the tactics of speed, of noise, set tactics of slowness, of silence.<sup>27</sup>

To help amplify how Bresson quietly creates a complex/complete interplay between sound and image, I will now incorporate David Bordwell's and Kristin Thompson's ideas on the function of film sound. Although Bordwell and Thompson utilize Bresson's film *Un Condamné a mort s'est échappé* to describe this interplay, I will also include examples from his other films.

The film *Un Condamné a mort s'est échappé* is based upon André Devigny's description of his incarceration and subsequent escape from a German prisoner-of-war camp. In the film, Fontaine is the Resistance fighter who is arrested and condemned to death. Bordwell and Thompson point to Fontaine's voiceover narration as "...illustrating the category of 'external displaced diegetic' sound, for Fontaine's narration occurs in a time later than that of the images."<sup>28</sup> Fontaine's commentary has polyvalent purposes throughout the film. His voiceover narration serves as exposition to offer facts, "...the pin came from the women's prison." To convey personal feelings after being beaten by the guards, we hear his voice say, "I'd have preferred a quick death." To act as a mode of remembering, he says, "I believed that I gave up and wept...Terry was the exception; he was allowed to see his daughter, I learned that later."

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<sup>27</sup> *Notes on the Cinematographer*, p.52.

<sup>28</sup> David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979) p. 207.

The spectator is also invited into Fontaine's 'internally displaced diegetic' narration. This is eloquently cast in the scene where Fontaine faces the ultimate dilemma of trust. He must decide if he should kill his new cell-mate, Jost, or tell him of his plan to escape and take him along. The viewer not only hears the external narration of what Fontaine is saying to Jost, but also the internal thought-narration of Fontaine. Bordwell and Thompson speak of this interplay between the 'external displaced diegetic' and the 'internal displaced diegetic' voice as allowing the film to present contrasting 'temporal and psychological aspects of the action.' I would agree; however, I would also add that this internal/external interplay is also indicative of the invitation of fellowship that Bresson is offering to the spectator. Once the invitation is accepted, the viewer moves beyond mere spectator status and joins in the relational interactions between Fontaine and the fellow prisoners.

The relationship of the prisoners is disclosed by the interplay of narration and sound effects. Each prisoner is located and limited to their own individual cell. The prisoners can only survive through the mutual trust and help of one another. Fontaine would not have been able to escape if it were not for the warning cough sounds of Blanchet. Communication takes place through tapping on the walls; Fontaine even taps the lyrics of a Resistance song to a fellow condemned prisoner. His quiet neighbor, Blanchet, gives him the blanket that he strips in order to make ropes. Orsini, at the expense of his own life, gives Fontaine valuable information about how to make hooks out of the window bars, to aid in his escape.

The sound effects anticipate and guide our perception by intensifying our attention, and at times, governing what we see. The

precision of the sound creates movement: the sound of the spoon scraping as Fontaine pries apart the wood of his door, the swish of the straw as the shavings of the door are brushed away, the lapping of the water as the prisoners wash. These each give greater countenance to the visual image. In the film *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne*, we hear the sound of the gardener's rake gathering up the leaves as the priest talks with the countess (appendix B 31), the priest's pen as it moves across the page, the bottle of wine as it falls to the ground (appendix B 37). These sounds have an impact as great as that of any visual image.

At other times, sound goes beyond governing the image and replaces it. The sound of gun shots replace the the visual imaging of the execution. We are invited into Fontaine's horror of incarceration by hearing only what he hears—the closing-in sounds of death. Bresson never visually depicts the guards as they make their rounds past Fontaine's cell, but rather he allows for the aural experience to draw the spectator within. We notice that the guard's footsteps take on a heavier tone and cadence than the prisoner's steps. The sounds of the prisoner's steps seem to have a timbre of disarray, a constant shuffling.



Jost and Fontaine

Because the escape sequence is so dimly lit, the only clues that we are given are the aural sounds that are available to Jost and Fontaine. We gauge the process of the escape by the tolling of the church bells that cite the passing hours. We hear the gravel of the roof tops as the prisoners make their way to the wall, yet the sound of the far-off train whistles masks their noise and serves as the call to freedom. Each new sound is nuanced to heighten the unseen caveats to the escape. At one point, Fontaine is forced to kill off a guard. We join in the moment with Fontaine as he listens and counts the steps as the guard draws near. At another moment, Fontaine must clutch his heart in order to cover up the sound of its beating.

In the film *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne*, the sounds of rain drops and the waterfall surround the secret meetings of Agnès and Jean. This may have been to signify that their love, like a waterfall, began with only one drop. In the final scene of the film *Le Procès de Jeanne d'Arc*, the sounds of the crowd dissolves into the singular sound of the fire. Bresson is also able to create scenes that scream through a spectator by

implementing silence. In the film *Pickpocket*, the noise of the crowd at the race track all but disappears as Michel attempts, for the first time, to pick someone's pocket. The still movement produced by the silence invites the spectator to share in the haunted isolation of Michel. Bresson notes,

What is for the eye must not duplicate what is for the ear. A sound must never come to the rescue of an image, nor an image to the rescue of a sound.<sup>29</sup>

Thus far, I have been silhouetting the process of spectator fellowship by illuminating Bresson's interplay of sound and image. I would now like to nuance the relational character of Bresson's films by re-directing the focus to Bresson's notion of actors as models.

Critics, such as Samuels, Lambert, and Ciment, have said that all the characters in Bresson's films speak with a 'Bressonian' voice. Bresson counters by saying,

I think that in other films actors speak as if they were on-stage. As a result, the audience is used to theatrical inflections. That makes my nonactors appear unique, and thus, they seem to be speaking in a single new way. I want the essence of my films to be not the words my people say or even the gestures they perform, but what these words and gestures provoke in them. What I tell them to do or say must bring to light something they had not realized they contained. The camera catches it; neither they or I really know before it happens. The unknown is what I wish to capture.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Notes on the Cinematographer*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>30</sup> *Encountering Directors*, p. 58.

The film *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne* was the last offering of Bresson which included an entire professional cast. After that film, Bresson moved to casting nonactors and referred to them as models. Bresson would often cast a particular person for a part by how the person came across on the telephone. For Bresson, the sound of a person's voice was the barometer by which he gauged their (non)ability to become the other. Bresson states that this (non)ability, "...is not so much a question of doing 'nothing' as some people have said. It is rather a question of performing without being aware of oneself, of not controlling oneself. Experience has proved to me that when I was the most 'automatic' in my work, I was the most moving."<sup>31</sup>

The kernel of Bresson's handling of his models is a correspondence of character. This correspondence is not a matter of catching the model under an arrangement of lights or make-up as actor, but rather catching the actor as a living person. Bresson strives to coax from the model the rarest and most secret thing the model can produce. Bresson notes, "The thing that matters most is not what they show me, but what they hide from me and, above all, what they do not suspect is in them."<sup>32</sup>

This process is one of pilfering the model of any personal initiative, any attempt to create or evaluate character on a cognitive level. The model should not intimate a pre-comprehension of the text. Roland Monad, the pastor in *Un Condamné à mort s'est échappé*, explains Bresson's notion of acting,

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<sup>31</sup>James Blue, *Excerpts from an Interview with Robert Bresson* (Los Angeles: Blue, 1965) p. 2.

<sup>32</sup>*Notes on the Cinematographer*, p. 4.

Forget about the tone and meaning. Don't think about what you are saying; just speak the words automatically. When someone talks, he isn't thinking about the words he uses, or even about what he wants to say. Only concerned with what he is saying, he just lets the words come out, simply and directly. When you are reading, your eye just strings together black words on white paper, set out quite neutrally on the page. It's only after you have read the words that you begin to dress up the simple sense of the phrases with intonation and meaning---that you interpret them. The film actor should content himself with saying his lines. He should not allow himself to show that he already understands them. Play nothing, explain nothing. A text should be spoken as Dinu Lipatti plays Bach. His wonderful technique simply releases the notes; understanding and emotion.<sup>33</sup>

The resulting expressionless voices achieve an understated sincerity of singular endowment. In his films, Bresson creates situations wherein fragments of reality are precisely arranged so that his models can be transformed through juxtaposition. The images must share some unity of tone if the flow and transformation are to be maintained. Bresson asserts that performances of experienced, professional actors destroys the rhythm of a film.

By working with nonactors, Bresson chooses an arduous task in the making of his films. Bresson worked with Claude Laydo, the priest in *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne*, for an entire year before he thought that Laydo was ready. In filming *Un Condamné à mort est échappé*, Bresson had Francois Leterrier, Fontaine, repeat the line "Va ta Coucher" 300 times in order to catch the precise voicing. Although I have a great admiration of

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<sup>33</sup>Roland Monod, "Working with Robert Bresson," *Sight and Sound* no. 1 (Summer 1957): 31.

Bresson's integrity to precision, I can not go along with him fully because I believe trained actors can be as awakened to the openness of mystery as a nonactor. In summation, Bresson's idea of acting is a kind of (non)acting. Bresson creates sculpted moments wherein the model must find without seeking. By implementing this expressionless (non)acting arrangement, Bresson creates a tension with and distance from his audience. It is through this very tension and distancing that the spectator is invited to participate in the process of fellowship and transformation which Bresson imagines within the screen.

Paul Schrader likens Bresson's cinematic intimations to a transcendental style. According to Paul Schrader, the transcendental style,

has been used in diverse cultures to express the Holy...based on the desire to express the Transcendent in art and the nature of the film medium," "...because the transcendental style is fundamentally just that, a style, it can be isolated, analyzed, and defined...although transcendental style strives for the ineffable and invisible, it is neither ineffable nor invisible itself, it uses precise temporal means—camera angle, dialogue, editing — for predetermined transcendental ends.<sup>34</sup>

Schrader posits Bresson's cycle of prison films as the purest example of the transcendental style. Films such as *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne*, *Un Condamné à mort s'est échappé* and *Pickpocket* are concerned with spiritual release. Schrader further builds on the prison metaphor, "In Bresson's films, as in Christian theology, transcendence is

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<sup>34</sup>Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer*, (New York: Da Capo Press 1972) p.4.

an escape from the prison of the body."<sup>35</sup> Schrader's idea of transcendence does not do justice to the revelatory aspect to be found in Bresson's films. To be sure, the prison metaphor can be seen in a body and soul dichotomy, but Bresson is after something more integrative—the wholeness of the body and the soul, where '*tout est grace*.' Bresson notes, "The movements of the soul were born with the same progression as those of the body."<sup>36</sup> Bresson keeps the duality in tension, but does not give over to an inherent dichotomy. Schrader falls short in his analysis of Bresson's transcendental style by leaving it in the theatre of the primitive. Schrader also fails by trying to cast a net on the notion of *le vent souffle ou il veut*. He advocates that the transcendental style is best equipped to deal with films that explicitly imply the Holy Other. It would appear that the transcendental style would have no place in critiquing films which are more attuned to the severe screens of the industrial machine and the ephemeral tinkling of cash boxes. He misses the intrinsic religious nature of all film. Overcasting Schrader's sense of transcendental style is a committed rationalistic approach, which overloads nuance with numinous meaning. The knowledge which allusive acts provide those who have an imaginative sensitivity to receive cinema is not necessarily an intuitive insight of God.

The films of Bresson carry a feeling of an (un)veiled dependence. Bresson's subtle, silent screen offers an empathetic invitation into a frame of imaginative fellowship. Although his films can be seen as intellectual offerings, there is a strong notion of sense impressions. The underlying tone is one of a simple eloquence, of precision where sound and image are

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>36</sup>*Notes on the Cinematographer*, p. 34.

intertwined, just as the intellect and the senses are intertwined to capture the ardent search for the truth of the moment.

In contradistinction to dominant Hollywood studio films, Bresson undermines seamless plot development, avoids dramatic climaxes, and refuses easy explanations of character motivation. Bresson reduces the 'what comes next' expectations of plot by visual action in the dialogue or voiceover narration. Poetically dramatic confrontations and events are recounted as past tense, as when the priest writes them in his diary. The diary becomes analogous to the formation of Bresson's screen as a place of mediation. Bresson's cinematic style overturns received notions of the primacy of image and representation, abandoning the theatrical, public, and architectural ostentation of quality for a still, interior, and ascetic expression. Bresson notes, "Your film's beauty will not be in the images (postcardism) but in the ineffable that they will disengage."<sup>37</sup>

Even though Bresson's integrity—his aesthetic and austere style—may have hindered his films from achieving an appeal to a mass social dynamic, his work has left deep prints upon the cinematic tendencies of particular filmmakers who have followed his play of the screen.

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<sup>37</sup>*Notes on the Cinematographer*, p. 109.

# 5

## Positing a Collaborative Grid

*Cinematographer's film where the images, like words in a dictionary, have no power and value except through their position and relation.*

—Robert Bresson

Robert Bresson noted, "The future of cinematography belongs to a new race of young solitaires who will shoot films by putting their last penny into it and not let themselves be taken in by the material routines of the trade."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the Nouvelle Vague did see the rise of young independent filmmakers, imprinting their mark by challenging the accepted conventions of dominant cinema. But by remaining 'solitary' figures, each member of this bande either went on to work within the established commercial industry or had their films regulated to relative obscurity in the 'art houses' or cinemathèques.

This fifth and concluding chapter will articulate the related moments of a cinematic collaborative grid by pulling the focus through the work of contemporary independent filmmaker Hal Hartley. The grid not only points to certain moments in the production of a film, but also provides a lens by which the spectator can lean into a reception of cinema.

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer*, (London: Quartet Books 1975) p. 111.

## Hartley's Cinematic Horizon

Hal Hartley was born in Lindenhurst, Long Island in 1959, and grew up in with Irish-Catholic roots. After high school and a year of studying art, he transferred to the film school at the State University of New York at Purchase. His fellow students included Michael Spiller, cinematographer, and many of the actors with whom Hartley has worked with in the making of his films. After graduating, he worked as apprentice ironworker on construction sites, and then took a job as a production assistant for a company in Manhattan that made public service announcements—all while writing and directing short films. After getting a loan, ostensibly to buy a computer, Hartley had raised a bit of the money for his first feature film. His employer, Jeremy Brownstein, generously augmented this money with a \$55,000 investment, and he has been Hartley's executive producer ever since. *The Unbelievable Truth*, released in 1989, was made for \$75,000, utilizing homes of friends and employing actors who were also friends.

Ira Deutchman, the president of Fine Line Features (a division of New Line Cinema) who picked up the distribution rights of Hartley's second feature film *Trust*, had this to say,

I call Hartley America's Harold Pinter and, like Pinter, he's an acquired taste.

We'll take it to lots of festivals. When you don't have stars to sell and you don't have sex to sell and you don't have a recognizable genre to sell, all that's left is critical response and audience response.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Ira Deutchman as quoted in an article by Aljean Harmetz of *The New York Times*, filed from the Sundance Film Festival, Park City Utah, Utah, on January 23, 1991.

Hal Hartley's laconic, bizarre, semi-confessional approach is given light in a pared-down universe, where *tableaux vivant* of character and image is austere and elliptical—reminiscent of the work of Robert Bresson. Hartley states,

I am very affected by Bresson and, more and more, I am consciously using that knowledge—whatever that means. Sometimes it's just an emotional clarity that I sense in his films, that I try to bring to mine when I'm writing. When I'm shooting too. Bresson cuts right past everything that's superfluous and isolates an image that says exactly what it means to say."<sup>3</sup>

There is a compositional austerity and elliptical treatment of the human body that echoes the style of Robert Bresson's framing and composition. The protagonist in *Surviving Desire*, Jude (Martin Donovan), a literature professor obsessed with Dostoevsky and a female pupil, Sophie (Mary Ward), reaches out his hand across the table to almost touch her hand before she pulls away. By framing the scene with only the single gesture of hands unmet, Hartley is able to express elliptically the moment of unrequited desire at a more intense level than if he would have composed the scene in typical establishing, medium, and close-up shots. Hartley's use of gesture in this scene opens up the technoformative moment of framing aesthetically. Hartley's use of gesture echoes the thought of Hans Georg Gadamer,

For what the gesture reveals is the being of meaning rather than the knowledge of meaning... . The whole being of gesture lies in what it says. At the same time

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<sup>3</sup>Hal Hartley, *Simple Men and Trust* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992) p.xiii.

every gesture is also opaque in an enigmatic fashion. It is a mystery which holds back as much as it reveals.<sup>4</sup>

Hartley, collaborating with Michael Spiller, exclusively uses a 50 millimeter lens when shooting. This creates a precise and consistent *mise en scène*— depth of field. Hartley says,

...my relationship to a particular lens is really a commitment. The scope of what the fifty-millimeter lens can see in a given situation forces me to wrestle with the physical environment I'm shooting in. If I discover I need to see more of the room, I can solve the problem by either slapping up a wider angle lens or by moving the camera back a few feet. But sometimes there's a wall in the way. So then I have to re-imagine my shot or break down the wall.<sup>5</sup>

All of Hartley's films, except for his latest film *Amateur*, have been shot on location on Long Island. By shooting on location, Hartley creates a sense of 'thereness', of immediacy. The environment in which he shoots becomes a part of the story. In *Simple Men*, a sequence of dialogue is devoted to the actuality that Long Island is a terminal moraine. The look of *Simple Men* is dominated by horizontal lines and earth tone colours, while the look of *Amateur*, shot in the city of Manhattan, is laced with vertical lines and has a drab gray-like look.

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<sup>4</sup>Hans Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p.79.

<sup>5</sup>*Simple Men and Trust*, p. xv.

On location shooting stands in contrast to the Hollywood system of filmmaking, where interior and exterior locations are manufactured in a studio. Entire cities are recreated in the sound stages and back lots of the big studios. There, 'wild' walls silently roll and arise to the director's discretion, and, because the conditions are under such control, there is always an appropriate place to put the lights and light-control devices such as reflectors and scrims, cranes, dollies, and sound recorders.

The music composition of *Amateur* has a choral quality to it. Hartley accentuates cellos to create a bigger sound than in his earlier films. The music does more than merely lead the spectator along emotional hits, but rather the haunting refrains intricately texture the story.

Hartley imaginatively plays with the 180 degree and shot/reverse shot rules. In *Amateur*, Hartley sets up the roadside diner scene by seating amnesiac Thomas (Martin Donovan) behind Sofia (Elina Lowensohn), who knows his true identity. By foregrounding Sofia and not editing the scene according to the standard tactics of shot/reverse shot (establishing two shot cut to two singles-close-ups), Hartley removes the spectator from being in the empathetic eye lines of the two characters. The spectator sees both characters as they converse, while neither character looks the other in the eye. Hartley stretches the scope of the 180 degree rule by giving fore/background status in the placement of the two characters. He does this as opposed to setting up the shot in a horizontal position. The physical spacing of Jude and Sofia points to the emotional distance that exists between them. Hartley states,

I've noticed a lot of times that we don't always look at each other, and sometimes it's much more interesting to detail the way people avoid contact than it is to detail the way people try to gain contact.<sup>6</sup> I'm less interested in manipulating the audience's psychological and emotional connection to the characters than I am in really focusing their attention on the event of becoming interested in these actors playing these roles.<sup>7</sup>

With *Amateur*, Hartley's idiosyncratic perspective pushes the conventional parameters of a specific genre—the romantic thriller. As opposed to his earlier melodramas like *Surviving Desire*, which he says, "...is less a love story than it is a story of love in bad faith,"<sup>8</sup> the surprises in the *Amateur* are meant to hurt rather than be funny. Hartley says,

It's an action movie, but it's a Hal Hartley action movie and that probably means I've got it wrong somehow. I use conventional aspects of the action thriller; people wield guns and stalk one another; they run desperately through lonely ill-lit city streets and make hasty get-aways in late model automobiles. And there are good guys and bad guys, at least superficially.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Hal Hartley, *Amateur* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994) p.xxv.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, xl.

<sup>8</sup>Hal Hartley, *Projections, a Forum for Film Makers*, ed. by John Boorman and Walter Donohue (London: Faber and Faber, 1992) p.223.

<sup>9</sup>Sony Classic Film ,World Wide Web site, *Author's Notes, Amateur*, May 5, 1995.

Hartley's style does not attack typical conventions of Hollywood cinematic structure—suspense, verisimilitude, construction toward climax, and neatly tied up resolutions—so much as he is parodically pushing the borders of these conventions. Hartley does recognize the social dynamic indicated by his filmic intimations. He does not, however, reduce those intimations to notions of processed popularity.

Despite my earliest inclinations, through the evolution of the film [*Amateur*] I felt an increasing need to adhere to narrative conventions. The more I pressed against the envelope of those conventions, the more I feared the film wouldn't appeal to anyone on any level. Nevertheless, right up till the end, there's been this strong urge to say, 'To hell with it. Don't worry about the audience. Don't worry about the people. Your job is to look. Your vocation is to look, not to entertain. Entertaining comes second. You should consider yourself somebody who can be entertaining by virtues of the sincerity and the rigorousness of his ability to look.'<sup>10</sup>

The ambiance which frames Hartley's application of genre is one of ambiguity and laconic poise. The *Amateur* does fit into the parameters of conventional story structure. Typically, in conventional narratives the story is contingent upon an inciting incident, which usually occurs in the first thirty minutes of a film.

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<sup>10</sup>*Amateur*, p. x.



Thomas

In *Amateur*, the opening scene has Thomas' body sprawled out on a cobblestone street. Presumably he is dead, but then his eyes open. He sits up and grabs his rib cage in pain, then looks down the empty street. Off camera we hear the voice of Isabelle (Isabelle Huppert), "...and this man will die...He will, eventually."

The inciting incident is set. We find out that Thomas has amnesia, and the rest of the film is spent on his quest to discover his identity along with Isabelle, an ex-nun who is a nymphomaniac porn-writer although she's still a virgin. By making the quest and the interplay of character the focal point of the story, Hartley resists the tendency of reducing the quest to a component which merely drives the story towards resolution.

Although Hartley's actors carry the same dead-pan, emotionless, almost automatic delivery as Bresson's conception of models, Hartley

works with professional actors more than once; in fact he has a repertory approach<sup>11</sup>.

I like to use specific actors. I know these people, their characters, their bodies, their fears and hopes and I utilize that. It is a collaboration. They bring things to me that they might not even realize. A good actor has the ability to turn abstract ideas into concrete action, but they don't always know what it is they're doing, until they see the end results. I'm interested in what actors don't know, just as in writing I'm interested in what I don't know about characters. I'm less and less interested in explaining and I'm not particularly interested in motivation.<sup>12</sup>

Hartley calls for the actor to suppress every last element of demonstrativeness and pretense in order to isolate and specify the appropriate gestures of expression. He also directs the actor away from cheap sentimentality that tells and expresses everything for the spectator, leaving little room for conjecture. Hartley's engagement of gesture interrupts and alienates the happenings of a scene, replacing the sensational in favor of the discoverable.

Martin Donovan states that Hartley's approach—acting that's subtle to the point of being morose—has been both a strength and liability,

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<sup>11</sup>The on-going list of actors collaborating with Hartley includes Adrienne Shelly (Unbelievable Truth, Trust), Robert Burke (Unbelievable Truth, Simple Men, Flirt), Martin Donovan (Trust, Surviving Desire, Simple Men, Amateur, Flirt), Karen Sillas (The Cartographer's Girlfriend, Trust, Simple Men, Flirt), Bill Sage (Trust, Theory of Achievement, Ambition, Simple Men, Flirt), Elina Lowensohn (Theory of Achievement, Simple Men, Amateur, Flirt), Christopher Cook (Unbelievable Truth, Trust, Simple Men), M. C. Bailey (Unbelievable Truth, Trust, Theory of Achievement, Simple Men), Damien Young (Simple Men, Amateur), and Parker Posey (Amateur, Flirt).

<sup>12</sup>Sony Classic Film, World Wide Web site, *Author's Notes: Amateur*, May 5, 1995.

The way Hal works is to keep his actors from doing all the emoting. This way, audience members feel they are allowed to do little for themselves. The technique always works for me. I always have problems with myself and other actors telling me what they are feeling—and therefore what I should be feeling. When I feel myself falling into that trap I kick myself. And directors who allow their actors to do that—it drives me up a wall. Hal, admittedly, takes it to the other extreme, but there is no one else in America trying to work in that particular formal, non-naturalistic way of his. It is a fairly radical approach, considering most North American movie-goers are used to a) 'naturalism' and b) being told what to feel every step of the way.<sup>13</sup>

The repertory approach of Hartley's independently produced films also extends to those who work behind the camera.<sup>14</sup> His films have been produced through a number of companies independent of Hollywood.<sup>15</sup> In response to being an 'independent' filmmaker, Hartley had this to say,

People have always been making independent films. Distributors are now seeing the potential profit involved and they are picking up the films. It's

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<sup>13</sup>Martin Donovan said this in Toronto during a publicity tour. The quote was taken from *Eye Magazine* (May 11, 1995): 35.

<sup>14</sup>Cinematographer Michael Spiller, executive producer Jeremy Brownstein, producer Ted Hope, editors Nick Gomez, Steve Hamilton, and Hal Hartley, musical score by Jeffrey Taylor and Ned Riffle (Hartley's assumed composing name), and production design by Daniel Oullette and Steven Rosenzweig.

<sup>15</sup>Zenith Productions Ltd., True Fiction Films, American Playhouse Theatre, Twin Cities Public Television, American Playhouse Theatrical Films in association with Fine Line Features, and Film Four International.

business, that's all. There seems to me a cycle in American films history: every seven to ten years the distribution industry recognizes low budget filmmakers doing interesting work. Distributors buy the films and those filmmakers are co-opted into the industry. The last wave were filmmakers like Jim Jarmusch and Spike Lee. Before that it was Scorsese and Coppola and Bob Rafleson. Of course, then it was on a different level but here it is again. Nick Gomez made a film for \$30,000 and people called it a viable commercial product. Five years ago no one would have said that. They certainly would not have said it when I made *The Unbelievable Truth*. I had to lie and tell them that it cost \$200,000 to make. They were shocked. Actually, it cost \$75,000 but I couldn't tell them that because they would never have bought it.<sup>16</sup>

Hartley responds to the question of co-option into the Hollywood system by saying, " I only have one rule, I'll take as much money from anybody who will give it to me as long as there are minimal strings attached. People have already made preliminary offers but they have all been under conditions."<sup>17</sup>

It is, however, through the attachment to "minimal strings" where the guiding concerns of a filmmaker show up. The Canadian system has implemented an arm's length policy akin to a negative pick up deal, as described in chapter one. The strings in this instance would appear to be minimal, but until certain conditions are met, a project will not gain approval for funding. Only after being given the green light, is the filmmaker is left alone—'free' to make the film.

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<sup>16</sup>John Fried , "Rise of an Indie, An Interview with Hal Hartley" *Cineaste* vol. XIX no. 4, May 26, 1993 p. 39.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 40.

Hartley's contention of "minimal strings attached" seems to posit strings as a *lacét*, a noose, whereby Hollywood, by analogy, is the orthodox position—with the authority to declare the heretics. However, instead of examining, excommunicating, and exiling those of heterodox stances, Hollywood offers a limmo ride on the road to co-option.<sup>18</sup>

The kernel condition that a filmmaker gives up when dealing with the Hollywood studio system is the right to the final cut—edit of the film. By taking up the final cut, the ultimate vision of the film is absorbed under the motivation of the studio and not the filmmaker. Russian director Vsevolod Pudovkin stated that editing is, "...the creative force of filmic reality."<sup>19</sup> Along with the choosing, assembling, and ordering of shots, the moment of montage is where pace, rhythm, and the feel of a film is determined. The craft of editing—arranging and juxtaposing of shots—is opened up aesthetically to create meaning, mood, and/or effect. According to Hartley,

In the editing stage, I rediscover total immersion. I was indifferent to continuity. Continuity bugged me. It gets in the way of the image. When it came to editing these images, I was forced to reconsider the necessity of seamlessness and continuity on a moment to moment basis. The way I shot the picture pretty

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<sup>18</sup>R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987) "From the point of view of the faithful, therefore, the heretic is self-defined, and indeed self-proclaimed, as the person who by his own deliberate choice denies the authority of the Church. But by the same token to put it in that way is to be reminded that heresy exists only in so far as authority chooses to declare its existence." p. 68.

<sup>19</sup> Edward Dmytryk, *On Film Editing* (Stoneham MA: Butterworth Publishers, 1984) p. ix.

much determined that I would have to have ellipses, I would have to have jump cuts.<sup>20</sup>

Editing is the place where the non-reducible but interrelated moments of the collaborative grid—focus, location, music composition, framing, *mise en scène*, genre, social appeal, and use of actors—hang together. This grid may not only be viewed as related moments of reception, but as scaffolding upon which the many distinct modes of cinematic operations interrelate and cohere.

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<sup>20</sup>*Amateur*, p. xx.

## Leaning toward a Conclusion: Screens of Particularity with Integration

Henry: *You can't beat up students because they don't like Dostoevsky!*

Jude: *Perhaps.*

—Hal Hartley, *Surviving Desire*

The first and second chapters of this study pointed to how institutional—corporate or public—considerations affect the processes of production, marketing, distribution, and exhibition of cinema. The aesthetics of dominant, economically justified Hollywood cinema is facadical in that commercially driven films attempt to mask the means by which the story achieves its effects. Whether through focus, lighting, sound, musical score, framing, *mise en scène*, camera movement, digitally manipulated images, genre, casting, or editing, the ability to veil the artifice is enacted. Organizations, such as the Creative Artist Agency, package actors, writers, directors, and producers from the template 'A-list.' The template of success is ground through the lens of a commercially marketed mode of being which shows up in an extensive division of labor, standardized production practices, and formulaic storylines. The tower of Hollywood offers seemingly new wine in old skins, where by the stars get caviar and those who work in the trenches are thrown croutons.

The focus of the discussion was then pulled in chapter three to expose the seemingly transparent seams of the screen. Typical Hollywood cinema plays to a sense of psychological realism, engendering a tacit acceptance of conventions and rendering a

crystalline impression of the real. Filmic intimations resist being reduced to photo-chemical matter or restricted to algebraic codification. Hollywood cinema is constituted by an imprint of internal coherence; it moves in a linear fashion of plausality, giving the appearance of spatial and temporal continuity.

Vital independent filmmakers as discussed in chapters four and five, however, proceed analogically, intuitively, carving their own idiosyncratic vision/voice through the imaginative production of the celluloid world. Hollywood filmic form cannot do this because it processes story serially (If this, then this, then this...). Serial processing is, in my view, inadequate to the full range of demands vital film must meet if it is to be an imaginative means of communication, entertainment, and integral intimations.

Can one ever be exhaustively independent? The practice of filmmaking is intricately collaborative, drawing upon a plurality of resources and production techniques. The focus of this study has been the on-going development of a system of cinematography which works out of communal considerations. The primary focus of this system of cinematography forms filmic intimations through a collaborative grid rather than posit profit as the guiding moment.

### **Creating a Nurturing Place**

I would like to project the notion of creating a space to work through—a frame of particularity with integration. A place where a filmmaker is not "taken in by the material routines of the trade," but is made aware that the material routines are not the single defining moment, but rather part of a collaborative grid of cinematics. A place

where a filmmaker is able to retain a particular vision while recognizing aesthetic as well as economic dependencies. A place where the deep-going-hearted-commitments of a filmmaker are the core of directional filmic intimations. By focusing through a collaborative grid, Hartley's "minimal strings" could be viewed as veins which channel life into the possibility of making stewardly vital films, rather than as a noose which chokes films into commodities.

In an effort to make a reforming critique of the economically grounded, monolithically organized Hollywood system of cinema, I suggest that we need to create places that can nurture a filmmaker's particular vision.

Looking to LIFT as a model might prove to be fruitful in the development of establishing vital modes of film production, distribution, and exhibition. If public funding is not readily available, the focus of attention could be paid to the restructuring of tax laws to encourage private investment, as implemented in Toronto. Collectives, like LIFT, could be set up as small business ventures incorporating both private and public financial support which could provide access to equipment and means of production.

Those who work before and those who work behind the camera need to be set up as being in kinship and having a co-responsibility in the production of the film. Each member of a particular mode of the collaborative grid works in concert creating a sense of ownership of the production. Rather than being deemed as mere hired-guns, each member has something at stake and/also benefits from any possible rewards.

Filmmakers, viewers, and critics would need to work together in order to change the structures that make up the cinematic horizon. In order for those films that do not cater to dominant tendencies not to be typecast as stylistically iconoclastic and unapproachable, we also need filmmakers who actually talk to and with critics, rather than take defensive or market-driven action. We need critics who can imagine and are alert to different entry points of a film into the social and historical imaginary—the realm where images, sounds, and memory are collected, who make full use of the verbal audiovisual technology to contextualize and cross-relate films with each other and with other cultural endeavors.

To do this we need thrift grounded, yet festively guided exhibitors, such as cultural institutions, art galleries, public libraries, schools, colleges, or churches and ad-hoc promoters, such as local radio stations, public access cable television, state operated television stations, newspapers, or internet access, that can create an audience discussion around a film in order to target and invigorate different markets.

What needs to be enhanced is for the filmmaker to view him/herself as part of a community—a regional repertory— adopting the embrace of a neighborhood rather than an absorption and co-option into the Hollywood townhouse. The community must then foster an integrating spirit along with the particularity of the filmmaker—integration with particularity in order to stay contemporary.

Whether through filmscape planning or getting involved with innovative means of distribution and exhibition, there is a place for a

more playful horizon of cinematics. If filmmakers, critics, and viewers, can create a place of opportunity, perhaps an independent voice can remain 'other' and yet exist in the mainstream.

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# Appendix A

## Scene Segment of LE JOURNAL D'UN CURE' DE CAMPANGNE (DIARY OF A COUNTRY PRIEST)

Origin: France  
Released: 1951  
Released in U.S.: 1954  
Production: Leon Carre for Union Générale Cinématographique  
Producer: Pierre Gérin  
Direction: Robert Bresson  
Assistant director: Guy Lefran  
Screenplay: Robert Bresson; based on the novel by George Bernanos  
Photography: Leone Henry Burel  
Montage: Paulette Robert  
Decour: Pierre Charbonnier  
Music: Jean-Jacques Grünenwald  
Costumes: Elise Servet  
Sound: Jean Rieul  
Catholic advisor: M. l'Abbé Rioussé  
Shooting dates: 6 March-19 June 1950  
Filmed: Exteriors at a rented chateau, vicarage and church in Pas-de-Calais region, in and around Equilles; interiors at the Hesdin, in the same area.

### Cast

|                       |                      |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Priest of Ambricourt: | Claude Laydu         |
| Count:                | Jean Riveyre         |
| Countess:             | Marie-Monique Arkell |
| Louise:               | Nicole Maurey        |
| Chantal:              | Nicole Ladmiral      |
| Priest of Torcy:      | André Guibert        |
| Olivier:              | Jean Danet           |
| Dr. Delbende:         | Antoine Balpetré     |
| Séraphita:            | Martine Lemaire      |
| Louis Dufréty:        | Bernard Hubrenne     |
| Dufréty's mistress:   | Yvette Etiévant      |

### **Scene Segmentation of the Film:**

- 1) Credits super imposed over a diary
- 2) Opening shot a hand moving across the screen close up to diary:  
Voice Over begins: "I do not think I will be doing any harm if I note down day by day, quite frankly, the humble, indeed insignificant, secrets of a life which in any case contains no mystery."
- 3) Dissolve to c.u. of Ambricourt sign, cut to priest wiping his face, cut to Count and his mistress (Louise) embracing behind the grille, cut to priest walking bike off, cut to lovers walking away.
- 4) off camera whistle, v.o. "My parish, my first parish." m.c.u. of priest at the door.
- 5) Dissolve to the diary as we hear priest's v.o. priest talks of his stomach illness and diet. Cut to wheeling of barrel-wine cut to filling of wine bottle,
- 6) Shot of priest soaking bread in wine, sitting and eating—fade to black
- 7) c.u. of diary, v.o. fade to black
- 8) shot of first conversation with parishioner, Fabrigars, who visits to complain about funeral prices. Seeming to be apologetic the priest is shaken by the exchange.
- 9) Dissolve to priest visiting the Vicar of Torcy—series of shot-reverse-shot, camera moves over the shoulder from priest to Torcy as Torcy talks about the weakness of the young priest, "...a true priest is never loved." —fade to black
- 10) m.c.u. of priest peeling potatoes, his back is turned as the mayor's clerk enters to tell the priest the council has consented to install a light. The priest 'tunes out' v.o. the priest is unable to confront the clerk about the corrupting Saturday night dances, "The simple tasks are not the easiest." Shot of priest—fade to black
- 11) Shot through the window as the priest is unable to sleep due to sounds of the dance. morning-off camera sound of a cock's crow.—fade to black

12) c.u of diary, v.o. of hopes for his catechism class; shot of students unable to answer question of what is communion. Séraphita gives an eloquent answer, but responds to the priest that it is only because of his fine eyes, her friends giggle off camera as she runs away. Shot of diary v.o. "...they are all against me."—fade to black

13) priest is giving Mass, notes that if it were not for Louise, the church would be empty, shot of Louise crying in hands, conversation about Chantal, her charge; the priest says he will visit her at the manor of the count.

14) Shot of priest walking out of gate toward the manor, shot moves away from the camera. Chantal sees the priest approaching, cut to priest leaving the manor.

16) diary v.o. the priest thinks of the count as a friend, the count enters bring the priest some rabbits, which the priest is unable to stomach. The priest thinks of the count as a friend, he wants the count to help fund a club house for the youth. The count warns the priest to not be in such a hurry to show his hand. The priest speaks of his concern for the count's daughter Chantal who seems to too sad for her age. The count tells the priest that he is crazy. Shot of reverse over the shoulder of count, c.u. of priest's head turning from left to right as the count exists.

17) shot of diary v.o. why question—fade to black

18) repeated shot of priest walking out of the gate toward the manor. They see the priest approach and leave him waiting.

19) Conversation with the countess about her dead child. Priest 'tunes out' becomes sick in the pit of his stomach and almost passes out and leaves.—fade to black

20) diary v.o. I am seriously ill...it has been six months since I fist felt the pain, goes to see Dr. Delbende whose motto is, "Face it." The doctor informs the priest that it is too late, "what has been drunk for you long before you came into this world."—fade to black

21) diary v.o. Séraphita's cleverness is tormenting him, shot of priest on the road as Séraphita throws her book bag and runs away; later as the priest returns the bag he receives a poor welcome from Séraphita's mother.—fade to black

22) diary v.o. priest reproaches himself for insufficient prayer life. He is visited by Torcy who tells him that he is too fussy.—fade to black

23) fade up on priest as he awakens in pain and walks to church to pray. v.o. "...it is a desperate effort."

24) priest receives unsigned letter that tells him to get out; cut to mass, he picks up Louise's missal and discovers that the handwriting is the same as in the threatening letter.—fade to black

25) priest v.o. another frightful night, he can't sleep or pray, dissolve to diary, elliptical action of priest laying himself out, shot of priest getting up; dissolve to priest climbing down stairs—blows out a candle; v.o. "God has gone out of me."—fade to black

26) diary v.o. "I am not letting myself out of my duties." shot of priest on bike stops and hears off frame gun shot. In church he finds out that Dr. Delbende has been killed by his own gun.

27) funeral scene: the priest is with Torcy, sound of off frame bells. Conversation ensues with Torcy, who tells the priest that Delbende has lost his faith, priest 'tunes out' v.o. about suffering, could not get over not believing, "we are at war after all"—Torcy drives away, shot lingers as camera dollies in to the priest on his bike—fade to black

28) shot of priest on edge of his bed v.o. "My faith remains. I feel it." He rises with the certainty that somebody is calling him, goes to the window to find no one.—fade to black

29) Chantal comes to visit the priest in the sacristy. She asks a favor of him and he promises, cut to priest going to see Torcy for advise, finds that Torcy is away and that he must face it alone. Chantal meets the priest back in the church demanding what "he promised must be done today." The priest directs her to the confessional 'tunes out', guesses and asks for the letter in Chantal's pocket. Shot is c.u. of her face, all else is dark—she steps out of the confessional and asks "are you the devil."

30) dissolve to priest burning the letter without reading it, goes to the window.—fade to black

31) repeated shot of priest going out the gate toward the manor. Talks to the countess of his fear for Chantal, 'kingdom of God confrontation' ensues, countess says, "...nothing in my past calls for a blush." Shot of Chantal outside the window; off frame sounds of yard

work, leaves being raked. The priest says that her hard heart might separate her from her dead son forever. Priest 'tunes out' v.o. "Our hidden faults poison the air others breathe," the countess throws locket of her son into the fire, the priest retrieves it from the flames saying that God wishes that we be merciful to ourselves.—fade to black

32) shot of priest walking his bike through the gate, he receives a package containing a letter and the locket from the countess, the letter expresses gratitude for the "peace I have received from you." Dissolve to shot of clock, it is 6:33 in the morning, diary v.o. the countess has died during the night, cut to priest running out of the gate toward the manor, this time the framing of his action is toward the camera, cut to arriving at the manor, priest goes up the stairs passes the count on the stairway v.o. the count pretends not to notice me, blesses the countess, v.o. "I do so wish, I don't know what." dissolve to diary, cut to priest returning to the countess's room which is full of mourners. Kneels at her bedside, v.o. "How wonderful that we give others that peace which we ourselves do not possess. O miracle of our empty hands." cut to priest descending the stairs, v.o. they are talking about me.—fade to black

33) the count's uncle, another priest, pays a visit to check up on Chantal's story of the overheard conversation of the priest and the countess. The other priest wants a full account of what occurred, the priest of Ambricourt refuses. The other priest tells him, "The illusion of health is not health." The priest of Ambricourt feels that everyone is against him, the other priest responds, "That you are what you are...People don't hate simplicity; they defend themselves against it. It burns them."

34) The priest returns to the manor, Chantal opens the door, She informs him that Louise is leaving, the count arrives he lets the priest know that he does not approve of his habits and he is forbidden to see Chantal anymore.

35) shot of priest beating rugs, dissolve to shot of snowflakes falling outside the window, diary v.o. "Her long trial was accomplished, mine is just beginning...perhaps I should destroy these pages; shot of diary pages being ripped out.—fade to black

36) shot of the priest and Torcy walking through the countryside, find a seat in a barn? they talk at first without looking at each other; Torcy is talking to him of his health and absurd diet, and accuses him of blackmailing the countess's soul, the priest 'tunes out' unaware that he is crying, he is a "prisoner of the holy agony." The priest doesn't reveal the secret of the countess's letter, he assures Torcy that the countess died in peace.

37) the priest walks away from Torcy, cut to shot of bread and wine, v.o. of suffering, door opens, Torcy enters, cut to wine bottle falling sound of breaking and spilling. The priest 'tunes out' v.o. "The strange peace I have just experienced is just a prelude to new misfortune." The priest asks for a blessing but it is Torcy who insists that the priest bless him.—fade to black

38) cut to priest making the rounds and attending to his parish, during one of visits he is about to pass out and is given something to drink, he leaves shot of him checking his list, cut to long shot of priest walking through the night woods, he falls—hears child's voice, eyes close.—fade to black

39) the priest opens his eyes, Séraphita wipes his face, takes his hand, tells him of the trick of putting powdered in his drink, she walks he to the end of the road.—fade to black

40) shot of priest washing his clothes v.o. he has lost a great deal of blood,  
diary v.o. fear of death...dawn's delivery.

41) Chantal visits the priest, he going away to Lisle to see a doctor—off frame sound of motorcycle, the priest challenges Chantal, "answer you soul to soul."—fade to black

42) shot of priest walking out of the gate toward the camera, cut to on the road walking, up comes Olivier on his motorcycle offers the priest a ride, v.o. "...the miracle of feeling young" the priest gets a taste of joy, cut to conversation with Olivier about the legion and death, off camera sounds of bells and train whistles.

43) shot of priest is leaving the doctors, dejected, finds out he has cancer of the stomach, cut to priest entering an old church—he could not pray, cut to him in cafe; all three diary forms are present simultaneously: shot of the priest writing, v.o. "I must have dozed off

for a while," shot of doze through a slight reframing after a dissolve. The very episode that is being written down is the one that is being depicted.

44) The priest visits a friend from the seminary, Dufréty, who has given up his vows and has left the church in search of his 'intellectual life,' is living with a women who will not marry him so that he may still re-enter the priest hood. The priest faints, exclaims, "I do not want to die here."

45) shot of priest laying on the bed has a conversation with the women.

46) shot of priest sitting wrapped in a blanket, writing, there is no v.o. he drops the pencil and paper and is unable to pick them up. He walks to the window, sits camera move to a c.u. of his face.—fade to black

47) Shot of letter written to Torcy by Dufréty, v.o. of Torcy describing the priest's death.

48) Dissolve to cross (shadow of cross or plain black cross?) filling the screen. v.o. of Torcy reading the letter, " He asked me for absolution. His face was calm, he even smiled. Humanity and friendship forbade me to refuse, but while performed the duty, I tried to express the scruples that I felt about doing so...His eyes signaled to me clearly to put my ear close to his mouth. He then pronounced distinctly, with extreme slowness, these words, which I know I am reporting truly, 'Does that matter? All is grace.' I believe he died almost at once."—fade to black

# Appendix B

## CITY OF TORONTO PRODUCTION—January 1 to October 21, 1994

**TOTAL  
PRODUCTIONS=104**

|                               | <b>CANADIAN</b> | <b>U.S.</b> | <b>CO-VENTURE</b> | <b>CO-PROD</b> | <b>OTHER</b> |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------------|----------------|--------------|
| <b>FEATURES</b>               | 19              | 9           | 1                 | 1              | 1            |
| <b>MOVIES OF<br/>THE WEEK</b> | 10              | 12          | 3                 | 0              | 0            |
| <b>MINI-<br/>SERIES</b>       | 0               | 1           | 0                 | 1              | 0            |
| <b>TV<br/>SPECIALS</b>        | 15              | 2           | 1                 | 2              | 1            |
| <b>TV SERIES</b>              | 16              | 2           | 4                 | 3              | 0            |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                  | 60              | 26          | 9                 | 7              | 2            |

|                              |                   |
|------------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>CANADIAN</b>              | \$ 160.677        |
| <b>U.S.</b>                  | 117.777           |
| <b>CO-VENTURE</b>            | 53.846            |
| <b>CO-PROD</b>               | 20.595            |
| <b>OTHER</b>                 | 3.030             |
| <b>TOTAL SPENT<br/>HERE:</b> | <b>\$ 355.925</b> |

(in millions)

# Appendix B

## CITY OF TORONTO PRODUCTION—1993

**TOTAL  
PRODUCTIONS=113**

|                               | <b>CANADIAN</b> | <b>U.S.</b> | <b>CO-VENTURE</b> | <b>OTHER</b> |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------------|--------------|
| <b>FEATURES</b>               | 19              | 8           | 2                 | 0            |
| <b>MOVIES OF<br/>THE WEEK</b> | 10              | 12          | 3                 | 0            |
| <b>MINI-<br/>SERIES</b>       | 2               | 1           | 0                 | 0            |
| <b>TV<br/>SPECIALS</b>        | 22              | 1           | 1                 | 1            |
| <b>TV SERIES</b>              | 14              | 2           | 10                | 0            |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                  | 67              | 22          | 23                | 1            |

|                              |                  |
|------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>CANADIAN</b>              | \$119.518        |
| <b>U.S.</b>                  | 84.685           |
| <b>CO-VENTURE</b>            | 112.100          |
| <b>OTHER</b>                 | .040             |
| <b>TOTAL SPENT<br/>HERE:</b> | <b>\$316.343</b> |

(in millions)

# Appendix B

## CITY OF TORONTO PRODUCTION—1992

**TOTAL  
PRODUCTIONS=88**

|                               | <b>CANADIAN</b> | <b>U.S.</b> | <b>CO-VENTURE</b> | <b>OTHER</b> |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------------|--------------|
| <b>FEATURES</b>               | 14              | 6           | 0                 | 1            |
| <b>MOVIES OF<br/>THE WEEK</b> | 8               | 5           | 6                 | 0            |
| <b>MINI-<br/>SERIES</b>       | 0               | 1           | 3                 | 0            |
| <b>TV<br/>SPECIALS</b>        | 16              | 2           | 1                 | 1            |
| <b>TV SERIES</b>              | 12              | 2           | 10                | 0            |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                  | 50              | 16          | 20                | 2            |

|                              |                  |
|------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>CANADIAN</b>              | \$116.339        |
| <b>U.S.</b>                  | 85.866           |
| <b>CO-VENTURE</b>            | 101.972          |
| <b>OTHER</b>                 | .800             |
| <b>TOTAL SPENT<br/>HERE:</b> | <b>\$304.977</b> |

(in millions)

# Appendix B

## CITY OF TORONTO PRODUCTION—1991

**TOTAL  
PRODUCTIONS=79**

|                               | <b>CANADIAN</b> | <b>U.S.</b> | <b>CO-VENTURE</b> | <b>OTHER</b> |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------------|--------------|
| <b>FEATURES</b>               | 14              | 6           | 1                 | 1            |
| <b>MOVIES OF<br/>THE WEEK</b> | 6               | 6           | 1                 | 1            |
| <b>MINI-<br/>SERIES</b>       | 1               | 0           | 0                 | 0            |
| <b>TV<br/>SPECIALS</b>        | 21              | 0           | 4                 | 0            |
| <b>TV SERIES</b>              | 9               | 0           | 8                 | 0            |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                  | 51              | 12          | 14                | 2            |

|                              |                  |
|------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>CANADIAN</b>              | \$94.452         |
| <b>U.S.</b>                  | 53.460           |
| <b>CO-VENTURE</b>            | 80.008           |
| <b>OTHER</b>                 | .502             |
| <b>TOTAL SPENT<br/>HERE:</b> | <b>\$228.422</b> |

(in millions)