

Is there a political party in this country that would present these changes as a priority within any election campaign? Would it be elected if it did? I too am angered and sickened by what has happened to our broadcasting system, with what I can hear happening minute by minute to CBC FM. But raving at individuals is not going to change anything. Concerned Canadians will have to work on consciousness-raising sessions for enough of our population to make education and culture a political issue at the national level. Working within education, I am not without hope. But there is still an extraordinary amount of work that needs to be done to overcome the self-ignorance and its attendant complacency that infects the national spirit.

In the struggle that is always before us, Hardin's book will help--through the documentation that it contains and through the record of noble battles fought and lost. So might *Jolts*. A very different work from *Closed Circuits*, *Jolts* actually values the Canadian achievement in television, whatever the problems, compared to the "wasteland" of the United States.

More anecdotal than analytical, Wolfe takes us through a variety of Canadian television programs, largely produced by the CBC, and speculates about the values they contain that he feels are positively Canadian. Citing past work like Margaret Atwood's *Survival*, Herschel Hardin's earlier work, *A Nation Unaware*, Edgar Friedenberg's *Deference to Authority*, and June Callwood's *Portrait of Canada*, Wolfe situates himself within that great tradition of Canadian nationalists who celebrate Canada's cultural achievement and/or lament the character traits that can be found within the traces of our culture which have been made available to us.

Wolfe begins by regretting the impoverished state of television criticism, which I think does an injustice to Michael Arlen in New York and to Joyce Nelson in Toronto -- though it is true that these writers work more on the theoretical level than on the program-by-program descriptive level that Wolfe himself adopts. Wolfe's own theoretical contribution, however, to the discourse about television resides in his having invented the concept of jpm's -- jolts-per-minute.

Throughout his book, Wolfe claims that there are generally more jpm's in American shows than in Canadian ones -- an interesting concept that allows him to relate the pacing of television programs to the energy with which they are tied to their advertising strategies. And if we notice nowadays that films made with the help of the Broadcasting Fund of Telefilm Canada have more jpm's than Canadian films had previously, then we must join in Herschel Hardin's howl against yet another federal institution, Telefilm Canada, that is putting the concept of profits over any concept of culture.

Wolfe, of course, doesn't howl at all. His is a "sensible" book. It is even a light-hearted book. If, finally, we might feel that in its casualness, its informality, it is part of the national complacency, it is also complaisant. It is fun to read as it must have been fun to write -- sitting home a lot and watching television with his children, being pleased with much of what he finds within those programs that he feels are distinctly Canadian.

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### Take Two: A Tribute to Film in Canada

Edited by Seth Feldman  
Toronto, Irwin Publishing, 1984

Every few months a new film book that focuses on a particular national cinema appears in the bookstores. All of these books, whether written by socialists, cultural nationalists, or bureaucrats, aim to define and affirm the uniqueness of a given nation's cinema. They are written to defend against the imperialist flood of US culture that swamps most western and Third World nations. *Take Two* is such a book.

A collection of essays edited by Seth Feldman, *Take Two* provides several good answers to the question of what is an authentic Canadian or Quebec film. Unfortunately, it doesn't dwell much on whether that question is the most useful one to ask. Rather it sets out to prove that good films are made in Canada -- and succeeds. As its subtitle suggests, the book was motivated as much by public relations as by serious scholarship. Published to coincide with Toronto's 1984 Festival of Festivals, the book was designed to complement the international focus of the festival with the best in Canadian and Québec cinema.



The book doesn't shy away from dredging up some of the past fiascos and dark episodes -- the red scares at the NFB, the tax shelter rip-offs, and the god-awful dreck beneath contempt (let alone analysis). But the book is primarily a leap to the defence of Canadian cinema and as such it valorizes the entire output of some filmmakers in the name of Canadian creativity. In the process it settles into the conventions of auteurism and consequently lays the blame for most of the fiascos at the feet of the state -- a state in turns timid, censorious, short-sighted, and miserly. Polarizing the discussion between individual creativity and insensitive institutions in this way tends to close down the distinctions that should be made among films

and filmmakers on one end and among institutions on the other. This polarization also leaves out considerations of genre, working methods, and other mediating factors.

It is too bad that Feldman didn't situate this book within its publishing context. There is no discussion of the role of the film festivals, and the absence of this discussion together with the absence of any assessment of the nature of film criticism, seriously weakens the ability of Canadian cinema to move forward.

Feldman divides *Take Two* into five sections: "The Big Picture", "The English Screen", "Les Québécois", "The National Film Board", and "The Experimental Challenge". As a survey of major films, people, institutions, and movements the book works well and stands as one of the best resources to date on Canadian cinema. With a few exceptions, the quality of the writing and criticism is high. Writers such as Peter Harcourt and Piers Handling have a real love for Canadian cinema and their enthusiasm rubs off. Feldman's introduction to each essay provide excellent summaries of key issues and his insights link the ideas of many of the authors.

*Take Two* includes a number of valiant efforts at defining all of Canadian cinema. In Feldman's key overview, "The Silent Subject in English Canadian Film", he states the historic difficulty "In establishing a truly independent form of self-expression", but goes on to provide a rather startling summary: "the enforced silence of the culture in its most economically vulnerable medium, cinema, has become a tradition that is incorporated into the works themselves."

Feldman argues that, unlike the films of Québec, English Canadian cinema has neither developed the forms nor captured the language appropriate to its society. They are either dominated by the imperial voice of God or peopled with characters "battered into silence" by circumstances beyond their comprehension.

Other overviews by Jay Scott, James Leach, and Bruce Elder also attempt to define what distinguishes Canadian and Québec cinema — one enormous joke (Scott); that the characters overwhelmingly display frustration and emptiness (Leach); that concern with photographic reality determines form (Elder).

Apart from these attempts at very general criteria, most of the writers in *Take Two* have retreated (or rather advanced) to look more closely at specific forms, institutions, and movements. These specific kinds of analysis aren't more appropriate simply because they're more modest. It's that the nature of the 'objects' under study — the NFB, broadcasting, Québec's big-budget features, the Anglo avant-garde, and so forth — share so little terrain that generalizations prove weak indeed.

The section on the NFB contains two historical essays that cover the immediate post-war years — a period poorly known in film studies. Both articles document the close but always strained relations between the Board and other institutions of the State, including Cabinet.

For all the influence that NFB films have had on Canadians, perfectly illustrated in recent years by the controversial *Not A Love Story, If You Love This Planet, Speaking Our Peace, and Home Feelings*, few people have a way of understanding the context of these films or a knowledge of their historical antecedents. The two essays on the 50s, together with Handling's essay on Michael Rubbo, open up that area.

The essays on Québec are quite strong, especially when read in sequence. In particular, the analysis of Pierre Perrault by Harcourt and Clandfield achieves the kind of depth that allows us to understand the specifics of the films and at the same time to consider the larger questions of Québec documentary. The two articles on Perrault work well as an illustration of one of Feldman's main themes — the importance of language and of finding a national voice in cinema. Harcourt describes Perrault's work as "un cinema vécu" — "Language has dominated his every activity. Authentic speech has been the goal of all his quests."

This search for authentic Québec speech introduces us to the may fascinating people in Perrault's films, but it also suggests some the fundamental problems of cinema direct and other forms of observational cinema. Perrault remains a controversial figure in Québec because his portraits seem to some critics to be an appropriation of his subjects because the search for authentic speech can look reactionary.

Unfortunately these criticisms enter the book second-hand via the English Canadian writers. Inclusion of at least one of the key critical texts from a Québécois writer would surely have deepened our understanding of Perrault's importance.

Brenda Longfellow provides a valuable discussion of Québec feminist fiction. Her argument about the reasons why women directors in Québec have chosen fictional forms highlights the different social and political contexts surrounding Québec cinema. Although women directors in many countries fight similar battles within the mainstream and on the margins, Québec women have achieved distinctive solutions and have created an impressive body of work.

A key article for linking the concerns about Canadian media with the experiences of other countries is Sandra Gathercole's "The Best Film Policy This Country Never Had". Gathercole, who for several years chaired the Council of Canadian Filmmakers, recalls Canadian state attempts to foster a cinema policy. She suggests that while good ideas have been put forward, none have been adopted. Unlike many other countries, Canada has only threatened to use quotas, taxes and the like and has opted instead for voluntary agreements or half-baked tax incentives. Gathercole argues that only a comprehensive economic and cultural policy has any chance of fostering an indigenous cinema.

The political orientation of *Take Two* is nationalist and auteurist. Question of feminism and socialism are made to fit within national and aesthetic categories, like pesky younger siblings — something that has to be put up with. A few writers question the ideological work of Canadian cinema (Kneelman, Morris, Handling) but, overall, questions of aesthetic quality prevail. For most writers here, the worst example of Canadian cinema are those that pretend to take place elsewhere. This nationalist approach makes it possible for deeply misogynist and reactionary class portraits such as *The Parasite Murders* and *Wedding In White* to be treated unproblematically.

To be fair, very few of the 'good' national products discussed (*Goin' Down The Road, Paperback Hero, The Grey Fox*) are utterly reprehensible in their depictions of women and working class

characters. Yet Canadian criticism will remain inadequate if writers continue to shy away from examining home-grown state and ruling-class ideologies. This orientation serves the public relations function of the book, but not the overall health of film criticism.

In my view there are serious flaws in the selection of articles. Though Feldman states in his introduction that good writing about Canadian film is easier to find than in 1977 (as it is), his reliance on some writers for two and three articles belies his interest in the real range of current. Why, for example, does he include two pieces by Toronto academic David Clandfield in the section on Québec? And four pieces by and about Bruce Elder on experimental film betrays a clubbiness that seriously mars Feldman's survey — and tries my patience. 40 of 52 pages in this section are by or about Elder!

But the most serious flaw by far is the absence of Québécois criticism. To state that Québec cinema differs profoundly from Canadian is to state the obvious; to argue that "the thoughts of our colleagues" lie "outside the parameters of this book" reveals a political failure on the part of the editor.

The main debates about the kind of Canadian cinema desirable in *Take Two* relate primarily to the degree of truth about Canada contained in a cinematic self-portrait. The underlying question is whether the film is really Canadian or merely ersatz Hollywood. Such attempts to generalize filmic qualities play a useful critical role, but we also need to ask whose interests are served by defining a cinema merely as Canadian. We need cinema that is progressive culturally and politically as well as viable industrially.

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