

Bloore calls art rightist, non-radical

By JOHN OUGHTON

Ronald Bloore admitted that he had been upstaged by Tom Wolfe's having appeared for his Fine Arts Series Lecture in a white suit; however, Bloore compensated by wearing a white tie and delivering an interesting, well-illustrated talk on "Radicalism in the Visual Arts". Understandably, Professor Bloore complained of his difficulty in planning a lecture on such a vast topic. His examination of the subject was, considering the time limit of the lecture, remarkably comprehensive.

Bloore restricted his discussion to "modern" art, for which term he gave three senses. Bloore defined as modern: art which he senses to speak to him, from any age; 20th Cent. art forms which have broken with "Renaissance conventions and the illusion of objective knowledge;" or art which shares certain "attitudes towards time and coexistence." There are, he pointed out, many "isms" in modern art. Each ism may pretend to be radical in form, but for Bloore the important question is whether the art has "an internally consistent vision to present."

With this idea that "content if the essence", Bloore came to the conclusion that artists are essentially conservative. "Our radicalism may be in the retention of outmoded art forms", he stated. Bloore discounted the idea that any one style or area (i.e. New York) can be the predominant one for world art. Illusionism in theory has replaced illusionism in form; we must accept a pluralistic con-

ception of World art. According to Bloore, the "reactionary, elitist" institutions which pass for art galleries or museums are among the most enthusiastic supporters of self-inflated producers of "anti-art." Such pseudo-radicalism, to Bloore, is "replaying a historical record, is style as content, the new civilization."

That today's radicalism in art is tomorrow's orthodoxy was emphasized by Bloore. Robert Smithson's large scale work "Spiral Jetty", which tends onto the Great Salt Lake in Utah, may be "the Mount Rushmore of the new age." Bloore also quoted Mao on art and society. Mao (in a 1944 address) stated that "art and politics are not equivalent. . . we deny both an abstract and unchanging political criterion and an abstract and unchanging artistic criterion." He also called for "the unity of form and content. . . of politics and art."

In Bloore's view, art should be part of the world. Although there is some difficulty in "integrating Western art into a global experience", this is the fault of the art and the "western expansionist" cultural tendency which it reflects. The separation between the objects in the Art Gallery of Ontario and those in the Royal Ontario Museum is artificial, to Bloore. Bloore pointed to the architecture at York as an outstanding example of bad planning; the buildings are not integrated with their surroundings, each other, or with what ostensibly happens inside them. York maintains divisions.

Freed Quebec singer at Glendon

By JOHN OUGHTON

Pauline Julien sang to a capacity crowd at Glendon last Friday night in her first tour since her six-day stay in jail courtesy of the War Measures Act. Mme. Julien made few direct references to her imprisonment, other than mentioning that her husband calls her "my little revolutionary." Her songs, however, were radical: she sang of "la chanson folle de la Liberation," of the time when "the masters will be judged on their good con-



sciences. . . the crucified will be judged on their wounds."

Mme. Julien showed a great concern for human freedom in marriage, love, politics and life. "La vie est courte. . . la mort est tres longue." Her strong, slightly husky voice and powerful stage presence provide forceful arguments for the philosophy which her songs express of surpassing artificial limits on each person's pleasure in life.

Despite some early difficulties with the sound equipment, Mme. Julien established a tremendous rapport with her audience and communicated a radicalism that is humanistic and mature. Her songs were a threat to the dull, complacent Canada which sanctioned the passing of the War Measures Act; yet, they also presented her as someone who desires not separation but brotherhood with all humanity.



Lights, Camera, Action!

By DAN MERKUR

It's been a crazy week for westerns. John (Stagecoach, 1939) Ford's Cheyenne Autumn on the tube Saturday night, and I saw Little Big Man at the Uptown, and I've been meaning to catch Soldier Blue which is now at the Danforth. I mention them together (leaving out Rio Lobo, Rio Bravo, Rancho Notorious — all also this week, and good, on the tube and at the theatres) because they all concern various parts of the historical annihilation of the Cheyenne nation.

What follows is trying to get my movie shit and my history shit straightened; obviously, with apologies, failing, and ultimately interweaving the two into the sort of hazy view of history I have. I did do quite a bit of solid research a couple years back; in any event, being unsure of the actual date and the actual sight of a century-old horror doesn't change the reality.

Anyhow: In 1867 General George Armstrong Custer got shipped out west to patrol the lands and keep the peace, after having been busted to colonel and then grudgingly been moved back up to general so long as he got the hell out west and out of the major sphere of political power-playing. Mrs. Custer's uncle and guardian was Phil Sheridan, I believe. Custer, not liking his treatment, took it out on the neighbourhood, I don't know whether directly through ordering, or merely by allowing a certain attitude toward the Indian, who, remember, the US government had already granted government (can you dig that?) lands to live on.

Anyway, some time later, a bunch of his bluecoats massacred several hundred Cheyenne women and children, while their men were away hunting or something, and butchered them all. Not just killed — butchered, raped, cut up, skinned, burned. Just for fun, evidently, because there was no war at the time, the Indians were anyhow bloody well already on the reserve, and it was the middle of winter and too fucking cold to be at war in any event. Whether Custer was present or just allowed the massacre I can't straighten beyond my movie-history/history-history problems.

From what I gather, Soldier Blue centralizes on the massacre and makes a big, gaudy show out of the gore and

butchery. I haven't seen it, don't want to build it up, don't want to out-of-hand condemn it.

Sometime after this, around 1870-72 by my figures (umpteenth Custer movies, some legitimate histories, and far too many popular magazine pseudo-historical account ever to properly understand) Custer returned to Washington, discovered he was regarded as a "hero" whose "exploits" in the west were such that he might yet be recalled to favour. In fact he quickly realized that he could name his own terms. Which meant the White House, certainly, if that drunken ass Grant (who was one of the ones, along with Sheridan, who cut him to colonel) could make it there. So Custer went back west, nursing his grudge against the army echelon, against the Washington political world, and against his wife by the way, who he saw for the first time since she had left him, with their child, a son, when he got sent west in 1867.

So Custer evidently created a war climate in the west — in Wyoming, Arizona, Montana (?), New Mexico — and virtually created the Indian wars of the 1870s and 80s, which are the ones all the movies are about.

As everybody know, and as Frederick Remington has eternally, ignorantly, pastelled as glorious, George got his'n at the battle of the Little Big Horn, one fine 25th day of June, 1876.

To be fair to Custer, I only phrase everything this way because it seems that that is how it is best to be understood. I rather imagine if it hadn't been him, it would have been some other equally luckless bastard shipped out west who would have caused the wars now a hundred years past, and certainly past my recrimination's helping.

Custer went down in 1876, but the wars he evidently incited continued for quite a while, Geronimo causing the last noise over a decade later.

To continue with the next main step in the story of the Cheyenne, who were slowly being starved and weather beaten into annihilation on some New Mexico or Arizona reservation, the second one, mind you, that the US government had granted them for all eternity. Well, some several thousand men, women, children, the old, the infirm, infants, the totality of that entire people, were force marched

from that second reservation, I think it was in Yellowstone, twenty, twenty-five miles a day (soldiers can do 30 in top condition over good country, and live, not well, and still fight wars, that's where you get these statistics) everyday, months it was, for 1800 miles, almost no food, in the autumn through the dead of winter north to Oklahoma, high up in the Rockies. They were marched to another plot of ground — all rock and stone, this time, with no game, no possibility of agriculture, nothing to live upon, and so of no possible use to the government.

Some 600 survived the trip to find the place, and 286 turned around and fled home. To my knowledge there is only an account of them to that point, which was made by a shrivelled spinster schoolmarm who marched with them (out of what possible motives?), whom John Ford turned into Carroll Baker in Cheyenne Autumn. The spinster could not take it at that point, and quit.

Meanwhile a couple hundred young Cheyenne and their women, under a restless warchief who had refused the decision to allow to be marched, and who had turned renegade (sic) had broken off the main part of the nation shortly after the march began, and staged a succession of self-destructive battles in general defiance of the end of their world. Geronimo, you know, survived that era and made a fortune for somebody, I don't know if he ever got it, with his autobiography (1906).

For those who would like to know, the philosophies of the Cheyenne as expressed by Chief Dan George in Little Big Man are essentially historically true: their use of "human being", a humane, human, real, honourable being to mean only the Cheyenne, and their understanding that homo sapiens and human being are not interchangeable terms; the acceptance of homophiles in a necessarily hetero-sexually-oriented society; and even the awareness that magic only works sometimes, that if you could count on it, it would no longer be magical. Yes, all that existed in those men a century ago.

John Ford, a great Republican and a brilliant filmmaker, whose political thinking never progressed beyond the 1880s, said that he felt he had to make Cheyenne Autumn (1964) because "I've killed more Indians than Custer, Beecher

and Chivington put together, and people in Europe always want to know about the Indians." Ford's propulation of the Old West as Glory myth (including his Custer's Last Stand in his own Fort Apache, 1948, the first of his "Cavalry trilogy" as the films are known to buffs, if you can dig it) did more serious damage, biased more minds, than the mere historical fact of Custer. The glory singers, the flag raisers have so clouded our minds that all that is left is shame, and the daily effort to redeem our predecessors' failings. And so Arthur Penn came to make his Little Big Man, a younger artist, Penn, aware of what Ford is too old to realize, although he tried in his way with Cheyenne Autumn, that when you make a movie that a lot of people see, you create a new bias, a new history, and that it takes new eyes (and new kinds of critics, I am well aware) to see it right. Because, baby, you weren't there and neither was I, and all we have is the lousy movies.

What we have, for real, for true, today, in 1971, is 75 years of white men killing Indians on movie screens, and the white men being made out as heroes. The reality is not Custer and Beecher and Chivington, but the power of the damn movies, and the misuse of that power (through whatever motives) which has become a part of what keeps our society fucking itself.

So now we've got a few movies trying to undo some of the harm. A few men, the filmmakers, trying to undo the damage their filmmaking predecessors have caused, knowing how little they can truly undo, doing what they feel they must in spite of that knowledge. Of course, they're making a fabulous living at it, but that doesn't invalidate this line of thought either. A man does what he can. You don't have to be poor to be sincere. It's just easier that way.

I don't mean for you to go see Little Big Man because it is part of that effort, part of the effort, the only effort, because that'd only be making a bullshit hype out of this review. I saw the film and was prepared to be profoundly moved by it, and so I was.

This review is only to say, that if you can walk away and say, "Well, after all, it's only a movie" then perhaps you'd better know, that in those terms, your terms, it is all only a movie.