

Avant-garde filmmaker Bruce Elder subject of retrospective series and panel discussion at AGO

By STEPHEN MILTON

Have you been feeling just a little bit anxious about your complacent acceptance of the prevailing notions about the space-time continuum and your place in the universe generally? If you have, a discussion last week about the work of Canadian experimental filmmaker Bruce Elder would have provided a potent remedy to your existential blahs.

On Tuesday, October 8, the Art Gallery of Ontario continued its Bruce Elder retrospective with a screening of the 1979 film *The Art of Worldly Wisdom*, with a panel discussion held afterwards. Appearing on the panel were Seth Feldman of York University's Film and Video Department, Queen's University's Lianne McLarty and Bart Testa of the University of Toronto.

The screening of *The Art of Worldly Wisdom* was prefaced by a few comments from the filmmaker himself, and served to introduce many of the themes which would occupy centrestage in the panel discussion which followed. Elder said that although the film is ostensibly an autobiography, it is in fact an investigation into the problem of creating an autobiography on film.

Like much of Elder's previous work the film subverts the conventions of traditional narrative cinema where the soundtrack corresponds to the images on the screen. Thus, when a voice at the beginning of the film announces that "this is a picture of me," no such picture is present. Moreover, although the film nominally resembles an autobiographical narration of Elder's life growing up in Hamilton, and contracting a serious illness, the narrator's voice is frequently drowned out by the sound which accompanies images from his past. In this way the film ceases to be a simple autobiographical narrative, and appears to question the very project which it endeavors to achieve.

The competition between the images of the past and the narrator poses the question of how one is related to the past, and how this affects the filmmaker's ability to present a chronological and coherent account of his life. Elder's film appears to conclude that all

moments in the past are of equal importance to those in the present, for all are equally accessible to the memory. Consequently, images are presented which represent all stages of his life simultaneously, thereby transforming the chronology of time into a spatial representation.

The issues raised by Elder's film were subsequently discussed by the panel of film scholars who spoke following the screening. York University's Seth Feldman initiated the discussion by emphasizing that Elder's films are always political in their intent because they formally challenge the dominant aesthetic of film by subverting the conventions of narrative cinema. Elder's films deliberately deny the logic of identity which dominates Hollywood films, where what is seen appears to be true and self-evident. Feldman argued that Elder consistently asserts that film operates by separating the image from its source, since to have captured something on film means that the event becomes part of the past, even though the image may appear to render it contemporary.

The second panelist, Lianne McLarty, discussed Elder's early experimentation with the material aspects of film, such as montage and lighting, and his romanticism. McLarty argued that Elder's films of the early '70s were concerned with how film actually communicates to the viewer through the manipulation of light and shadow, and the spatial parameters which are enforced by framing the image. Although many Canadian avant-garde filmmakers of the period were experimenting with this sort of filmmaking, McLarty said that Elder's view of the artist as separated from the rest of the world distinguished his work. There is a little effort in his films of this period to put the subject matter in a larger context. This style began to change in *The Art of Worldly Wisdom* where Elder attempted to discover the place of the artist in the world at large.

Elder's concern with history was further examined by the final speaker of the night, Bart Testa. In his presentation "The Horrid Logic of History in Elder's Recent Movies" Testa discussed Elder's later works,

particularly the 1982 film, *Illuminated Texts*. He contended that Elder's work in this period has been characterized by an attempt to realize in film history's role in levelling mankind's spirit.

Although the subject matter of the evening was extremely interesting, unfortunately the dry academic tone

of much of the panel discussion dampened the audience's enthusiasm for Elder's work, and managed to obscure the poetic quality of his films. Nonetheless, the film and its subsequent discussion provided a welcome opportunity to sample an interesting alternative to, and critique of, the mainstream of film.

Ideas illuminated with Northern Lights dance

By NICOLE DESJARDINS

You have to be ambitious to start a dance company these days and Paula Thomson knows what it takes. A faculty member of York's Physical Education department, Thomson is artistic director and choreographer of Northern Lights Dance Theatre, a company dedicated to exploring new works and combining dance with other disciplines in art. The year-old company is opening its season at U of T's Hart House Theatre with a run from October 24 to 26.

Thomson's company includes three York dance students: Beckley Laurin, Dawn Morrison and Rose Williams, as well as four other dancers, all of whom are "sharing common beliefs and the classical form" in their work, which compels them "to make dances," according

to Thomson.

Thomson is aiming towards a "classical, theatrical dance company" with Northern Lights. This is not surprising as Thomson's training includes modern dance at the José Limon School in New York City and the Mary Wigman's Centre of Movement in Toronto, ballet at the Dance Circle of New York City, and mime, voice and acting at the Stratford Shakespearean Festival where she was movement coach and choreographer.

Thomson is strongly influenced by the philosophy of Mary Wigman, one of the forerunners of change in the concept of modern dance. Instead of steps being choreographed prior to the music and theme of the dance, it is "the idea of the dance that tells me what steps to use," said Thomson. Her inspirations for her dances come from quotations from books, stories, and from her past experiences.

One of the four works to be presented next Thursday, "Only the Drowning," emerged from Thomson's experiences as a lifeguard "rescuing people, seeing eyes bulge out, desperate facial expressions, the giving up and the quiet peaceful feeling following death," according to Thomson, all become part of the work. "Only the Drowning" was performed last year when it was commissioned for a York Dance Lab.

This year the company will premiere three new works, two choreographed by Thomson ("Ariadne" and "Melodies"), and "Start," by guest choreographer Jane Kosminsky who was formerly a principal dancer with the Paul Taylor Dance Company.

The leading role of "Ariadne" is danced by Andra Corvino, formerly

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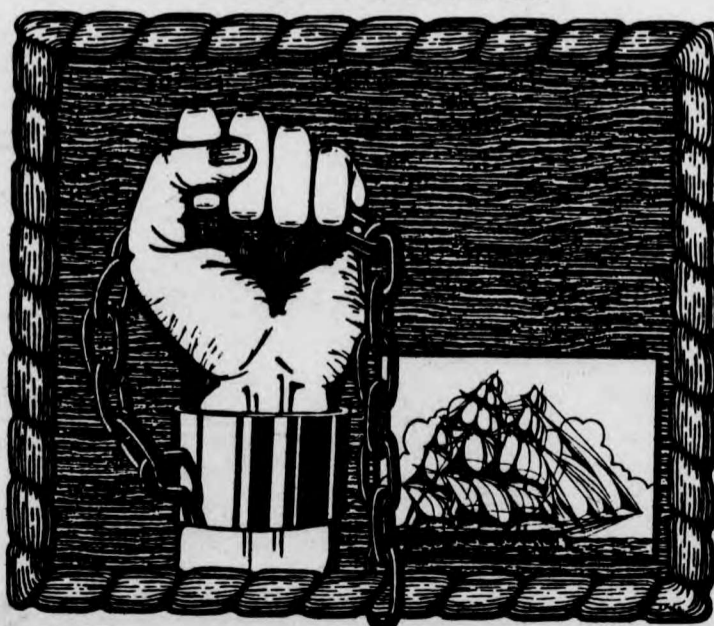


Andra Corvino in "Ariadne"

E.T.P. ECLECTIC THEATRE PRODUCTIONS

FEMALE TRANSPORT

BY STEVE GOOCH



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event, drop by Excilbur
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John Volton, Dean of Arts, Rutgers University
Founders Common Room
Oct. 17, 3 p.m.

Soundstage Readers Series: *The Legend of the
Pied Piper* by Jorki Texidon
Atkinson Studio
Oct. 17, 12:00-1:00

Ignatz Velcro Memorial Wine & Cheese Party
Friends of the late Sr. Velcro are invited to
attend this sombre bash. Please bring electric
toasters in lieu of flowers.

Nat Taylor Cinema, Oct. 23

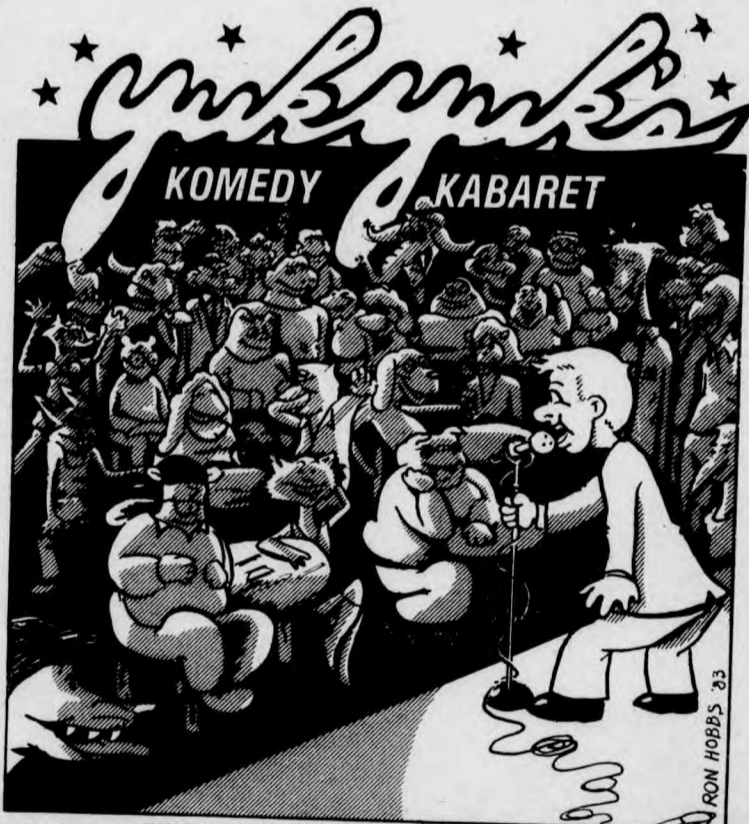
Theatre Theatre Theatre Theatre Theatre
Scenes from Russian Play: from *He Who Gets
Slapped, The Power of Darkness, The Bear, The
Three Sisters*
Burton Auditorium
Oct. 18, 2 p.m.

Lectures Lectures Lectures Lectures
Founders Lecture Series: "The Role of a Liberal
Arts College in a Large University" featuring

"York Swings" by Alex de Cosson, situated in
the field south of Stong college.
Until Nov. 15

Film Film Film Film Film Film Film Film
1960 Watershed Year in International Film Pro-
duction Festival
Oct. 9 films have been rescheduled to Oct. 23
due to strike
1:30 - A Bout De Souffle (Breathless)
4:00 - Exodus

Galleries Galleries Galleries Galleries
Re: Union, a multi-media exhibition of the work
of 39 graduates of York's Master of Fine Arts
program, 1976-1985
Featured at all six York galleries: Art Gallery of
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Gallery, Norman Bethune, I.D.A. Gallery,
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