

Criticism journal challenges norms of mainstream film

By ALEX PATTERSON

Somewhere between the gushings of the publicists' best friend George Anthony and the idiosyncratic intellectualizing of Pauline Kael lies a gap in film criticism. *cineAction!*, new on the York campus, fills that gap, and puts particular emphasis on "Marxism/socialism, feminism and gay liberation."

Subtitled "A magazine of radical film criticism", *cineAction!* comes to us from a collective of York professors, local filmmakers and friends. Two names stand out on the list of editors: Atkinson College's *enfant terrible* Robin Wood, and *Movie* contributor Andrew Britton, whose writing does not appear in this first issue, but who is quoted by two other essayists. All members of the collective, including the ghost of Andrew Britton, are committed to speaking of film within its socioeconomic context; putting the politics back into the discussion. On this, the editors are as one, though their politics may vary somewhat in prime areas of concern, as do their styles of criticism. While occasionally slipping into a reliance upon ill-defined catch-phrases (e.g. patriarchal capitalism, Oedipal trajectory), they generally manage to avoid the more convoluted excesses to which this kind of writing is prey.

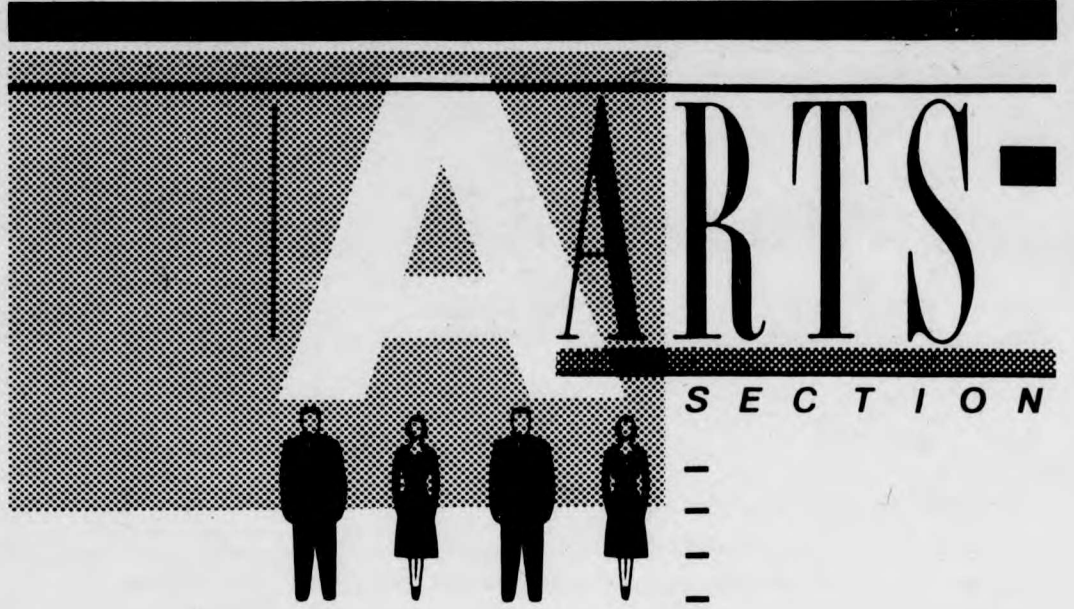
This new kill-them-gooks attitude towards the war is . . . the movie industry's jump on the neo-conservative bandwagon.

As well as steering clear of the worst of semiotic jargon-mongering, *cineAction!* stays out of the potholes of boredom occupied by *Cinema Canada*. Essentially a trade paper for the Hollywood North crowd, *Cinema Canada* is strictly white bread compared to *cineAction!* The new magazine is not afraid to offend, and doesn't mince words when it comes to what it feels is a massive swing to the Right in popular entertainment. Robin Wood's article "80s Hollywood: Dominant Tendencies" (nice pun) acts as a kind of lead-in to the others, which discuss one specific film apiece. Wood's essay is from his forthcoming book *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*, which will be published by Columbia University Press this September. It sets the tone for the rest of the magazine by investigating what value-systems are at work in the most popular films of the last few years, especially those from the Spielberg/

Lucas factory. These movies are examples of what Andrew Britton has called 'Reaganite entertainment.'

(It is ironic that the Gipper, never more than a footnote to movie history as an actor, has become infinitely more influential on Hollywood since he has stopped acting.) Wood is absolutely right when he points out that we have gone from movies that questioned America's involvement in East Asia (*The Deer Hunter*, *Coming Home*) to movies that celebrate it (*Uncommon Valor*, *Missing in Action*, *Rambo: Second Blood*) since the 1980 election of the Republicans. It is also true that the former group are thoughtful examinations and the latter are B-grade action flicks which treat a tragic war as an excuse for bloodbaths in exotic locales. This rewriting of recent American history, this new kill-them-gooks attitude towards the war is, according to the author, the movie industry's jump on the neo-conservative bandwagon.

Other points aren't argued quite so convincingly: there is also a Freudian element at work in Wood's criticism which weakens some otherwise strong cases. Here it is asked to do more than it can cope with, and consequently old Oedipus and company are given quite a workout. Aspects of psychoanalysis are compatible with the feminist concerns of some of the contributors—Freud's notions of the importance of the father can be applied to feminist notions of patriarchy—



but one can only lay so much blame on "the law of the father" before the reader cries "uncle!" Wood also assumes that the 'Force' in the *Star Wars* series and the mysterious powers in *Ghost Busters* are "obvious stand-ins for nuclear energy." They could be standing in for many things, nuclear power among them, but is this really so obvious?

The rest of the issue is devoted to films from the last few years which have been unjustly neglected by the public and sometimes by the critics as well. This is not just the championing of the underdog for which intellectuals are famous; these films were ignored not simply because they weren't promoted adequately, but because of "their problematic nature in relation to . . . current cinema." In

short, *Out of the Blue*, *Tell Me a Riddle* and Bertrand Tavernier's *Death Watch*, (each of which is given intensive scrutiny) didn't conform to the spirit of the age. Florence Jacobowitz and Lori Spring's article on *Tell Me a Riddle*, a forgotten drama with Melvyn Douglas and Lila Kedrova, conveys the authors' passion for the work, and makes the reader want to seek it out and view it. Each article is guaranteed to provoke a reaction, one way or the other. You might be stimulated, you might be irritated, but you will never be bored.

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The authors state in their foreword that their intention is to provide "alternatives to what is generally available." This they have done. *cineAction!* is a lively and welcome addition to the local arts scene, worth looking for and, at \$2.00 for 24 pages with no advertising, worth picking up.

cineACTION!

A MAGAZINE OF RADICAL FILM CRITICISM

\$2.00
Spring '85
No. 1

Neglected films of the '80s



Above, cover of *cineAction!* shows Linda Manz in *Out of the Blue*. Left, Manz and director/actor Dennis Hopper.

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