

Canadian History and Media

By J.C. Mahé

In July 1982 four agencies collaborated to offer a new course in the Department of Secondary Education at the University of Alberta.

Ed CI 497 **Canadian History and Media** received a very positive reaction from its participants. The purpose of the present article is to suggest possible answers for the course's success. Moreover the article encourages different educational agencies to re-think and re-question the technological orientation attributed to film in education. Film has to be replaced in a theoretical mode beyond the practical and the strategical.

Will education accept the challenge of looking at film in an innovative way?

Judging from the number of new cinemas that recently opened in Edmonton (31 in 1981-82 alone), one must conclude that film increasingly reaches more and more people. This proliferation of delectation in films influences the educational system at some time or other. However, it is noteworthy that film remains, despite its popularity, isolated from curriculum and pedagogical thinking in education. Consequently, it is common to see educational exercises which encompass mini-courses, conferences, workshops and units on film with a strictly technological and strategical orientation. All these efforts seem to happen devoid of integrated and theoretical foundation, of questioning the nature of film as experience and as medium.

In July 1982 twenty secondary teachers participated in a **Canadian History and Media** credit course offered at the University of Alberta.

Ed CI 497 was co-sponsored by agencies such as the National Film Board/L'Office national du film, Access, CBC and the Department of Secondary Education of the University of Alberta.

Classes were offered in an immersion environment which ran from 9:30 to 22:00 every day for a period of two weeks. The syllabus contained among others the following presentations:

- The History of the Documentary
- New Orientations in Curriculum Thought
- Get the Chicken not the Facts: Film in the Classroom
- Research, Development and Production of **The Champions**
- Overview of Traditional Historical Research Techniques

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- The Development of Critical Viewing Skills
- Impact of Media on Political and Economic Issues.

Written course evaluations indicated that Ed CI 497 was a resoundingly successful experience: participants were eager to recommend this innovative course to their colleagues in the teaching profession. Why was such an experience in the trenches of Kiva Room at the University of Alberta evaluated so positively?

The purpose of the present article is to suggest some possible answers. Furthermore, the aim is to uproot greater possibilities for the re-happening of film in education.

Innovation vs Evolution

Institutions in general want to be part of progress, movement towards a higher state, evolution, innovation.

The four agencies that collaborated in offering Ed CI 497 this summer were seeking new ways of reaching 'their people' thereby assuming an innovative role.

To begin with, it is necessary in education to distinguish between two concepts, **innovation and evolution**.

Evolution implies innovation (something new) but is characterized by a slow and continuing process, desirous of change. It is often informal and conscious-less. Innovation on the contrary is conscious, voluntary, thought-full (réfléchi). It is a call for change based on a firm foundation: a revolutionary enterprise.

Innovation by its very nature requires time, thinking, research and a willingness to change something. The above definition also allows us to distinguish between true innovations and those that merely arise from a desire to ameliorate the efficacy of a system or its idealized counterpart of practicality. Evolution therefore has it that education adapts film within this practical and efficacious model.

If educational institutions (universities for example) were to redefine educational objectives relating to the innovative teaching of film, the question would become: Is it possible for a University to realize innovative objectives without changing certain structures of its system?

The above question would lead us to a lengthy discussion on different types of innovations. Suffice it to establish that for innovation to become significant we need to look beyond course content, methods, pedagogical limits or educational environment. We have to redefine all of these, however, and we must also look at a global definition of innovation which implies a commitment to change the system, which in turn embraces new and different ways of thinking and reflecting on film.

Innovation, then primarily implies an integration of thinking between disciplines where art and philosophy bring a fresh orientation beyond the practical and the strategical. The structure must explode and re-formulate pedagogy to the what-ness of film. Ed CI 497 gave us an "avant-goût" of this explosion. As one teacher expressed it recently, "I have a feeling we were served something unusual and extra-ordinary in your course."

Theory vs Practice

In an era of E.T. and PAC-MAN (word directed at a specific ideology), where have all the chess players gone?

The classical dichotomy in education finally becomes: theory versus practice, 'Art' versus 'Education'. Different bodies or departments have different ideas, so different that they can't or won't make the effort to understand the differences each of them possesses.

Education in general has not questioned (remettre en question) the technology of film or media. It has blindly asked for more hardware, rationalizing that the more cassettes, films computers, students and teachers would encounter, the greater the learning that would result.

Universities and audio-visual agencies have followed suit in manufacturing audio-visual specialists and consultants who travel the country delivering the latest Sony machine to assigned teachers. Feeling guilty for not disposing of more than a few minutes to explain the wonders of the new anti-glare screen they then call for workshops. These have to be practical, for teachers shouldn't think, be knowledgeable or resourceful.

Specialists in technology are also masters at handing out statistics, for statistics equals information, information equals knowledge. In some ways technology has become the overpowering ideology. It has virtually stopped all redefining and requestioning of the 'image'.

To counterpoise the above mould of technology which annihilates thinking, reflecting, and creation, we will have to learn to innovate in education. James Macdonald, in his article **How Literal is Curriculum Theory** (1982) views theory and practice in a larger framework. Theory and practice become one. He calls this integration an act of creation. It's then possible to think and talk about 'doing theory' which encompasses our faculties of imagination, intuition, analysis and creation.

The question is now launched, "How can we begin to look at film in an innovative way?"
Vainement ton image arrive à ma rencontre

Et ne m'entre où je suis qui seulement la montre
Toi te tournant vers moi tu ne saurais trouver
Au mur demon regard que ton ombre rêvée

Je suis ce malheureux comparable aux miroirs
Qui peuvent réfléchir mais ne peuvent pas voir
Comme eux mon oeil est vide et comme eux habité
de l'absence de toi qui fait sa cécité
("Contre-chant" du Fou d'Elsa, d'Aragon, cited in Lacan, 1973, 29)

With the present technical orientation inherent to film and media usage we presume in education (like in Aragon's idiot), that teachers and students are only mirrors. We need to avoid the continuous perpetuation of film and media into the 'modulus' of E.T. and PAC-MAN.

Our eyes have to see again.
The experience of Ed CI 497 at the University of Alberta was partly evolution but mostly a step towards innovation. It must continue. . .

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We attended the Western Canada Film Showcase

WUHS

You should too! Banff, Alberta Dec. 4-8

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