

# ‘The Cinema We Need’

## Canadian Film and Cultural Identity

### from the Documentary Tradition to *Auteur* Cinema

**Lecturer:** PD Dr. Stefan L. Brandt

**Room and time:** AR-K 307/1, Tuesdays 16-18

**Course type:** Proseminar

**Modules:** BA LCMS/ LKM: M 2.2 Medienanalyse, Berufskolleg M 1.3: Literatur und Kultur: Orientierung; Text im Kontext, Gymnasium M 2.2: Literatur und Kultur: Vertiefung / Text im Kontext

**First session:** April 13, 2010

**Course description:** The seminar tackles a difficult question: Can we speak of unique Canadian cinema with an identifiable structure and clearcut narrative techniques? Is there indeed, as George Melnyk puts it, “a distinct cinematic identity [in Canada], thematically and aesthetically”? Or can we actually find two Canadian cinemas – an English-Canadian one and a Québécois one which have developed out of different historical, social, and cultural contexts? Bruce Elder’s controversial essay on “The Cinema We Need” (1985) can be seen as a starting point in the debate on Canadian cinematic identity. Rejecting the attempts of independent Canadian filmmakers to establish a new narrative tradition in the national cinema, Elder calls for a revitalization of the documentary roots of Canadian film: “The cinema we need, the cinema that combats technocracy will, therefore, be non-narrative.”

The course wants to trace the ambivalent genealogy of Canadian cinema as a “cinema of otherness” from silent film (Ernest & Nell Shipman, Bruce Bairnsfather) and the first documentaries (John Greyson, Gordon Sparling) to cinéma vérité (Pierre Perrault, Wolf Koenig) and auteur cinema (David Cronenberg, Atom Egoyan, Patricia Rozema, Denys Arcand). Additional sessions will deal with the birth of the National Film Board of Canada (especially Norman McLaren’s experimental works), cinéma Québécoise (Claude Jutra, Michel Brault), indigenous cinema (Zacharias Kunuk), and recent animation movies (Chris Landreth). In how far do these developments represent or negotiate what can be called a ‘Canadian cultural imaginary’? For an introduction to the subject, see Christopher E. Gittings’s study *Canadian National Cinema: Ideology, Difference, and Representation* (2002).

**Grading:** For 5 or 7 CP: regular attendance, participation in discussions, 9 entries in the discussion forum (1/3), oral presentation as part of an expert group (1/3), final paper (4-6/ 10-12 pages) (1/3). For 2 CP: attendance, participation in discussions, 7 entries in the discussion forum (50%), oral presentation as part of an expert group (50%).

**Deadline for Final Papers:** Friday, August 31 (Tuesday), 2010. Note: There is no extension of this deadline. Please throw papers into my box (2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the AR-H building) or send them in postal form. Do not (!) send papers via email.

#### Syllabus:

#### 13 April Introduction: The History of Canadian National Cinema

Basic texts (required):

Christopher E. Gittings, “Introduction” to *Canadian National Cinema* (2002, 1-6).<sup>1</sup>

Scott MacKenzie, “National Identity, Canadian Cinema, and Multiculturalism” (1999)

[http://www.uqtr.quebec.ca/AE/vol\\_4/scott.htm](http://www.uqtr.quebec.ca/AE/vol_4/scott.htm).

#### 20 April The First Steps – Immigration and Empire-Building

Main film (required):

*Back to God’s Country* (dir. David M. Hartford / Ernest & Nell Shipman, 1919).

Additional materials (optional):

*Carry On, Sergeant* (dir. Bruce Bairnsfather, 1928).

#### 27 April Canada ‘American Style’ – Film as a Colonizing Discourse

Main film (required):

*Drylanders* (dir. Don Haldane, 1963).

Additional materials (optional):

*The Viking* (dir. Varick Frissell & George Melford, 1931).

*Has Anybody Here Seen Canada? A History of Canadian Movies* (dir. J. Kramer, 1978).

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<sup>1</sup> All texts for this course are available on the BSCW server. <http://bscw.avmz.uni-siegen.de/>

- 04 May**      **Becoming Independent – Canadian Experimental Films of the 1950s**  
 Main film (required):  
*Neighbours* (dir. Norman McLaren, 1952).  
 Additional material (optional):  
*A Chairy Tale* (dir. Norman McLaren & Claude Jutra, 1956/57).
- 11 May**      **Film screening – The History of Canadian Film**  
*Cinéma vérité – Defining the Moment* (dir. Peter Wintonick, 1999), or  
*Dreamland – A History of Early Canadian Movies* (dir. P. Brittain, 1974).
- 18 May**      **The Documentary Tradition - *Cinéma vérité* and *Cinéma direct***  
 Main film (required):  
*Pour la suite du monde* (dir. Pierre Perrault, 1963).  
 Additional materials (optional):  
*Lonely Boy* (dir. Wolf Koenig & Roman Kroiter, 1962).  
*La règle du jour* (dir. Pierre Perrault, 1967).  
 P. Perrault, “Film and Reality” (short essay from 1967).
- 25 May**      **Pentecost Holiday (Pfingsten)**  
*Relax and enjoy!*
- 01. June**     **The Cinema of Youth – Coming-of-Age Stories and *Cinéma Québécoise***  
 Main film (required):  
*C.R.A.Z.Y.* (dir. Jean-Marc Vallée, 2005).  
 Additional materials (optional):  
*Mon oncle Antoine* (dir. Claude Jutra, 1971).
- 08 June**     **Urban Dreams / Urban Nightmares – The Canadian City and Internal Conflict**  
 Main film (required):  
*Crash* (dir. David Cronenberg, 1996).  
 Additional materials (optional):  
*Rhapsody in Two Languages* (dir. Gordon Sparling, 1934).  
*Jesus of Montreal* (dir. Denys Arcand, 1989).
- 15 June**     **Horror and Fantasy Film – Canadian Identity and ‘Survival’**  
 Main film (required):  
*Cube* (dir. Vincenzo Natali, 1997).  
 Additional materials (optional):  
*eXistenz* (dir. David Cronenberg, 1999).
- 22 June**     **Fictionalizing Crisis – Canada’s Cultural Traumata**  
 Main film (required):  
*The Sweet Hereafter* (dir. Atom Egoyan, 1997).  
 Additional materials (optional):  
*Les ordres* (dir. Michel Brault, 1974).
- 29 June**     **Representing the First Nations – Indigenous Cinema and the Search for Origins**  
 Main film (required):  
*Atanarjuat – Fast Runner* (dir. Zacharias Kunuk, 2001).  
 Additional materials (optional):  
*Clearcut* (dir. Richard Bugajski, 1991).
- 06 July**     **Screening Gender – Counter Culture and Queer Canadian Cinema**  
 Main film (required):  
*Zero Patience* (dir. John Greyson, 1993).  
 Additional materials (optional):  
*When Night Is Falling* (dir. Patrizia Rozema, 1995).
- 13 July**     **Truth and Mythology – Canadian Cinema as a ‘Cinema of Otherness’**  
 Main film (required):  
*My Winnipeg* (dir. Guy Maddin, 2008).  
 Additional materials (optional):  
*Where the Truth Lies* (dir. Atom Egoyan, 2005).
- 20 July**     **Psychorealism – Canadian Animation Movies since 1995**  
 Main film (required):  
*Ryan* (dir. Chris Landreth, 2004).  
 Additional materials (optional):  
*The End* (dir. Chris Landreth, 1995) & *Bingo* (dir. Chris Landreth, 1998).