

# Film without a title rejected by censor

BY ADELE FREEDMAN

The Ontario Board of Censors has refused permission to show a 20-second art film at The Funnel, a screening house for experimental movies in Toronto, because it doesn't have a title.

"It's impossible to put a title on it," says Toronto artist-filmmaker Bruce Elder, who teaches film and art criticism at Ryerson College. "It's only a few seconds long. It's the negative of a thought that passes through the mind, an after-image or subliminal thought. To set it up with a title would be completely inappropriate." As a result of the censor board ruling, Elder's after-image can't be shown anywhere in Ontario.

Films by artists fall under the jurisdiction of the censor board if admission is charged for screenings, which is the case at The Funnel. "The regulation is administered in a slapdash, haphazard way," insists Elder, citing the example of Joyce Wieland's film on Pierre Vallieres, which he says has no head credit. When The Funnel first submitted it to the Censor Board, it too was turned down. But it was submitted a second time — and approved — because the words "Pierre Vallieres" do appear on the screen during the course of the film.

The day before submitting his 20-second film to the board, Elder says he took some footage from an untitled work in process to the board — and it was approved. Furthermore, he argues, "when Apocalypse Now was first shown it didn't have titles either."

"The Funnel insists we don't stamp their films," says Mary Brown, chairman of the censor board, referring to the fact that film artists, like painters, don't want their artwork stamped with the censor board seal of approval. "The Funnel wants a written

permit rather than a stamp. If we could use the stamp, this problem wouldn't arise. Elder's film came in — it had no beginning or end. All it was, was a lot of flashing symbols on the screen. How can we write a permit for this? How can we identify it on the print?"

Couldn't they identify it by the name of the filmmaker? "I suppose so — except this gives the filmmaker a blank permit to make any film he wants. We just can't issue a blank permit. I believe we have issued permits before for films without titles, but there's something on the film that did relate to what the title would be on the permit."

Mrs. Brown claims she'd be a lot happier if The Funnel would become a private film club, in which case it wouldn't have to submit films for censorship.

Elder points out that even after a film has been approved by the censor board (at the expense of The Funnel), there's nothing to prevent a filmmaker from excising some parts of it or adding others.

Another way to circumvent the censor board is simply not show a film — a form of negative censorship. This is Elder's attitude to another of his films, The Art of Worldly Wisdom, which he's recently shown at the Museum of Modern Art. "It's a diary film," he says, "and I won't show it here because I bet the censor board won't permit it. Taking on the board is troubling for two reasons. The first is the legal costs. And the second is that it gives the work a kind of notoriety you don't want."

Despite these reservations, Elder is planning either to resubmit his 20-second after-image to the censor board in the hope it will change its mind or challenge the ruling by appealing to a magistrate to overrule the board's decision.