

DESIRE IN RUINS

AL  
RAZUTIS:

This text is yet another response to "The Cinema We Need" as well as to "The Photographic Image in Canadian Experimental Film." It is part of a commentary on Canadian experimental film that was published in INDEPENDENT EYE, Summer 1989. I have excerpted sections from the first two pages that deal with my writing and my views on experimental film.

The comment about my lack of concern with technology is rich, since the writings that raised the author's ire (and especially "The Cinema We Need") address questions about technology, as does my piece in the Anthology. Film Archives catalogue from which the author cites just before making this remarkable comment.

UNDER THE SIGN OF THE

BEAST

## D E S I R E I N R U I N S



**WHAT FOLLOWS IS AN INTERVIEW COLLAGE. ALL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS IN STANDARD TYPE ARE FROM A 1984 INTERVIEW WITH DAVID BRYANT. ALL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS IN *ITALICS* ARE FROM A 1989 INTERVIEW WITH MIKE HOOLBOOM AND INCLUDES FURTHER REFLECTIONS ON THE 1984 MATERIAL. IN ADDITION THERE IS A SMALL SECTION IN **BOLD** FROM A 1985 LETTER TO THE EDITORS OF CINEMA CANADA.**

**Q:** How have you managed to make your films and how do you intend to continue in the future? Has all your work been produced in Canada? How has this affected your output?

**AR:** My earliest films were produced in California (1966-68) and afterwards I moved to Vancouver (and all of the subsequent work has been produced there). Living in Canada, first as an American expatriate, divorced from the 'American film scene' and not accepted by the 'Canadian film scene' presented a lot of problems initially. (I compounded these problems by withdrawing my films from US film co-ops in the 70's after I was disgusted by what happened in Chicago at the Democratic Convention). The Canadian arts scene in the early 70's was dominated by anti-American chauvinism (doubling as a kind of 'nationalism' and promoted by artists themselves who were trying to advance their own position in the arts) and this has continued in experimental film even into the 80's.

*In 1982, after 14 years of making films, teaching and participating in the creation of a number of Vancouver film organizations, I found myself "excommunicated" from the Canadian avant-garde by a person I had (foolishly) considered to be an ally: R. Bruce Elder. This arose on the occasion of his published essay (Parachute #27, Summer 1982), "Redefining Experimental Film: Postmodernist Practice in Canada", an essay which sought to create a theoretical paradigm (as invention) for Canadian avant-garde*

*cinema. In this essay, Bruce maintained that "Canadian avant-garde cinema is postmodernist cinema precisely because of its commitment to analyzing the nature of the photograph". Well, I thought, he (as anyone) is entitled to theorize and valorize...but it was only in the concluding paragraphs that I realized why my work had been excluded by Elder for so many years in national and international exhibitions. Elder offered: "The contrast between Rimmer's manner of reworking historical footage and that of Al Razutis is a measure of the distance separating Canadian avant-garde filmmaking from its American counterpart". His observations were that I was "American-born" (which is false) and share "with American Pop artists an interest in visual forms which lie outside the acknowledged Fine Art tradition" (Since when is "Pop Art" outside of Fine Art?) In sum, Elder sought to rationalize why my work should be excluded from "Canadian" context (to quote him earlier: "Many of our key experimental filmmakers - filmmakers belonging to our central tradition of filmmaking - have explored issues associated with photographic representation".) The films comprising Visual Essays, short films such as Portrait, and much of Amerika dealt precisely with photographic representation, media and interpretation (as history, as myth, as meaning and construction). Yet, here, and his views were, I believe, pivotal in my exclusion from future Canadian retrospectives, I was declared "un-Canadian" (once again)...*

*As for Bruce, his impact on creating a false view of the diversity of experimental work, work which included feminist,*

*political, media-oriented films has been considerable. I think, more than any other individual, he has strangled experimental film in Canada to the point that many filmmakers now will only imitate his call for 'landscape and alienation' films as true Canadian works. Byron Black, Peter Lipskis, and a number of other filmmakers have been 'sacrificed' (ignored) in favor of consolidating the 'official' Canadian version of history and film.*

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(from a letter to the editors of Cinema Canada 1985):

**Elder's cinematic pronouncements concerning the 'true Canadian cinema' are based on an ontological idealism rather than a practice as it exists in fact. He contends that 'the history of the avant-garde cinema reflects changes in the conception of the nature of self' as superceding other concerns (ie. the political, social, cultural contexts of the time) and by definition applies this to his**

