

WAYS OF SEEING

Over the past year, the editors of the *Journal* assisted in the development of an international conference, titled and this mindful of John Berger's thought, of "Ways of Seeing". The conference was sponsored by *The Association for Canadian Studies* and involved representatives from fourteen countries, ranging from Japan and the United States to Italy and Ireland. Held in conjunction with the annual meetings of the Learned Societies at Dalhousie University, the various sessions focussed on a critical examination of the cultural and historical imaginations. Reflecting, in good part, the importance that we attach to the recovery of a critical perspective in and on North American thought, the conference engendered a series of statements on the crisis of civilization. It was as if from the traditional solitudes of poetry, political theory, historical research and the visual arts, there emerged over two days a free commonwealth of ideas, indeed the beginnings of the renewal and regeneration of creative discourse. While it is impossible to reproduce here the intellectual vitality and generosity of debate which typified the conference, we are bringing to our readers two papers which, among others, represented significant reinterpretations of North American inquiry.

In his essay, "Lament and Utopia", Michael Weinstein compares George Grant's reflections upon the will to power in technological society and Leopoldo Zea's critique of the dialectics of imperialism. The traditions of Canadian and Mexican thought are thus linked as polarities of a common discourse. While Canada is envisaged as a society as a society given over to the historical remembrance of things past and Mexico viewed as a nation of utopian imagery, both intellectual traditions are presented as unifying around the critique of American empire. The essay sketches out the possibility of the existence in the New World of a silent, but profound, union of minds among the most anguished of thinkers. The discourse of North America may, in the end, involve an original and terrifying vision of the rebirth of Babylon.

Eli Mandel, one of Canada's most distinguished literary critics, examines anew the tension between Northrop Frye's estimation of the discursive basis of criticism and oppositional viewpoints which seek to break forever with the "cultural freudianism" at work in Frye's thought. In his paper, "Strange Loops", Mandel reflects upon the relation between the artistic and literary imagination and the sense of place, of region, which informs the most critical of perspectives. Mandel argues that in the writings of Robert Kroetsch, Michael Ondaatje and others there is a voice expressed, a language of discourse found, which is simultaneously particular and universal, local and cosmopolitan. In direct terms, Mandel opens up a violent meeting of two cosmologies of criticism, two contending epistemes on the meaning of the language of discourse. In the end is the language of discourse — the language of the poet who mediates reason and unreason — to be the visual language of Escher or Blake? Escher is the master of the paradox of strange loops, but Blake is the witness of the fall into modern consciousness.