

CTV Documart, June, 2007, Introductory Speech
Tom Perlmutter

Thank you, Bob. I have two reasons to be grateful to CTV. My second or third time at Banff I came as a CTV Fellow and the experience proved greatly valuable. I kept coming back and when CTV launched the Documart competition I was there as one of the seven finalists pitching. And one of the winners. Thank you, Bob, for that very handsome cheque. But for all us private sector documentary producers and creators we always had a guiding beacon: John Grierson and the NFB. Grierson remained both inspiration and a kind of Jiminy Cricket, Pinocchio's too insistent internal conscience. He was always over our shoulders, whispering into our ears: "remember why you are doing this...tell a story, yes...but be by guided by social relevance, authenticity, truth. Art is a hammer."

Three days ago, I took over John Grierson's chair as government film commissioner. I am fully cognizant that what he did was build something not for a time but for the ages and that my responsibility is to the essence of that Griersonian vision. I came to the NFB five years ago as head of English Production. Before I gave up the private sector I spent a lot of time thinking about what the NFB was, is and could be. I formulated a position paper for myself...I wrote out a lengthy strategic/philosophic analysis. I won't go into all the details but what I came to was that the NFB at its best was the cultural conscience of this country. I joined the NFB because I believed in its unique mission. Five years on I am more passionate and engaged than ever.

Sometimes, I think I must be utterly naïve to believe that culture has importance, that creation is central to our lives, that art is transformative and that all this can be embodied in an organization. Our industry can breed a special species of cynicism and disdain...I don't buy into that cynicism...I remain convinced that what we do as an industry means something and within that there is a fundamental, distinctive role for the public sector. For example, in revitalizing "Challenge For Change" for the digital era we have pushed the boundaries of documentary form while giving creative voice to those who even in this age of anytime, anywhere media remain excluded. The result has been projects like *Filmmaker in Residence*, where a filmmaker joins the front line medical team of an inner city hospital; *Wapikoni Mobile*, a mobile film studio traveling to remote aboriginal reserves in Quebec discovering that talent and creative expression is not limited to mainstream urban society; or *Who We Are*, an online interactive, constantly evolving experience of diversity in Canada.

Five years on I believe that the NFB is more than the cultural conscience of this country; I believe it is the crucible for cinematic/media creation---not that it is the be all and end all of media making but that it is one of those fundamental formative places that creates possibility, that allows for what has not been conceived or perceived and enlarges the scope of what we can do as creators, as an industry, as a people.

This year alone—and we're only half way through the year--the NFB has brought home an Oscar, two awards--Canada's only awards--at the Cannes Film Festival, the GSM award, the "Oscar" of the mobile world, for original mobile content, the first ever Rocky for original mobile content, the Canada New Media Award, the top two awards for feature docs at Hot Docs, a nomination in the second annual international interactive Emmy awards and that is only a partial list. This is by anyone's reckoning a phenomenal achievement. A record that we all can take pride in; because if it takes a village to nurture a child; it takes a whole country to nurture its cultural institutions.

John Grierson was the father of docs; he set his stamp on the form for ever; but he did not cast it in stone. The world of docs is undergoing significant change, questioning, enrichment in the digital future. But what docs do, what we all do as doc makers has and retains a particular importance no matter what the form or platform. I think of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* where Wily Loman's wife cries out: "attention, attention must be finally paid." *What docs do is pay attention.*