

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre

Flowers to Cannes

by Barbara Samuels

Once again, Jean-Pierre Lefebvre will represent Canada at Cannes as his film *Les fleurs sauvages* is screened in the Directors' Fortnight. With 17 features to his credit since 1965, Lefebvre is Quebec's most prolific filmmaker, and one of Canada's most regular ambassadors abroad.

Below are two separate interviews with Lefebvre. In the first, Barbara Samuels speaks to him about his most recent film, and production conditions at present in Quebec. The second is reprinted from the British Film Institute Dossier No. 13, entitled "Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: the Quebec Connection." In it, he addresses himself to the question of national cinema and to the making of his own films.

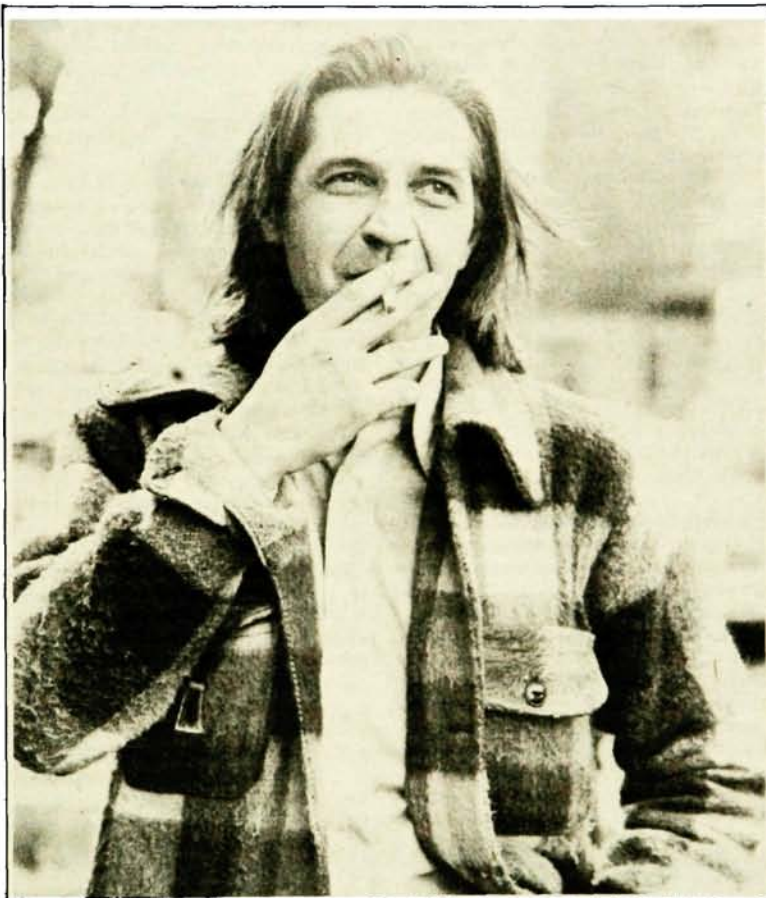
Cinema Canada: The story line of *Les fleurs sauvages* is very classic, very simple: you've dealt with the generation gap between an adult woman and her aging mother. What drew you to the subject matter?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Well, two years ago - summer of 1980, I think - I was very discouraged. The situation was rotten in Quebec, on the economic level, the human level. All those big films had transformed the spirit of the industry. It wasn't what it had been when we were making films 20, or even 10 years ago. So I decided I was going to give up filmmaking. But it's like wine. When you're used to drinking it, and you like it a lot, the taste just lingers somewhere inside you.

For two years, I'd had the chance to see a lot of mothers and daughters - my mother-in-law, the mothers-in-law of some friends. And then there was my own kid, eight-years old at the time, and his circle of friends, and it was a funny concentration in time and space. We had a lot of discussions at home about generation gaps.

I had an idea that I'd like to make a film about it. So I called Marthe Nadeau and asked her if she wanted me to write her a script. And then I did the same thing to Michèle Magny. Of course, the boy in my mind was always Eric Beauséjour, who'd played Paolo in *Avoir seize ans*. It was obvious that I'd ask Guy Dufaux to do the camera, and Josée

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Beaudette to be my assistant. First, I wanted to have a crew of friends, and then I'd draft the script.

Cinema Canada: You're dealing with a tale of non-communication between generations, and yet there are very close ties in the family you portray. Michèle and Pierre seem to be an ideal couple, beautifully balanced. The children give the unit another kind of equilibrium, and there's a different balance between Marthe and her grandchildren. And it's all set against an idyllic landscape, a gorgeous countryside; the whole thing's very pastoral. Is it supposed to be taken on a literal level?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Yes and no. It depends. I don't think there's any equilibrium possible between a man and a woman unless there's an equilibrium between them and the people around them. Pierre says at one point: "C'est la photo qui l'a déniaisée, qui a été son ouverture au monde." So Pierre can have a relationship with Michèle that's an extension of his relationships with other people, and vice versa.

Some people might think there's an autobiographical aspect in there, be-

cause it looks like the relationship Marguerite (Duparc) and I had, and especially because the film was shot in her house. And our relationship was possible because we had relationships with 'le monde ambiant.' I would have found it impossible to live with someone as one entity, feeding my entity. I don't believe in 'le couple ferme' at all; it's just impossible. And to me, those children are real children. They're the opposite of the child in *Les bons débarras*. She was a child coming from film, not life. I'm not judging *Les bons débarras*. I'm just saying I made a different choice. In a way, it's the first highly realistic film I've ever done. In another way, it's not at all realistic.

Cinema Canada: There's a degree of stylization in the film: the black and white sequences you've intercut with all that vivid colour, and then the flower symbolism. You've really "bookended" the film with the image of those wild flowers.

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: It's funny, because I knew I had the script when I figured out that flower sequence in the room. It gave me the ending, which gave

me the basis for the film. When Simone says to Michèle that the reason she made bouquets of wild flowers in the past was because wild flowers were all they could afford, it's really very cruel. There's misery there, and a certain amount of guilt. But the flowers also end it positively, and I'd like the film to provoke some thought between people and their families on that level, to help them work through their relationships.

I want a positive film very badly. I wrote in my script at the beginning that to re-show and restate that there's a generation gap would only make the problem worse, and the margin I gave myself to explore the real feeling was the black and white sequences. But I wanted the positive aspect to come across strongest.

Cinema Canada: In terms of the format, you've given the story a very special treatment.

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Yes, I almost wanted to use a dramatic line close to a soap opera, but I chose to stop that line every time there was a danger of really falling into soap opera. One of the ways I did that was to treat the film as a chronical. So all the situations had to be very clear. I wouldn't say 'intense', nothing's really intense in the film. It's very impressionistic, very 'en touche'. And by using that chronical form, I gave each day a different mood, a different style. One day even looks like a documentary, that party scene at the *Beaudrys*. So you had none of the usual conclusions you get in that kind of story. I didn't want to treat the subject on a 'psychological' basis. I didn't want to be very clear about the reasons for that gap, or the possibilities of bridging it. So I chose a form that was totally open, just showing pieces of life.

I'm very concerned with the problems of forms as related to subject, and the subject giving us that form. I wrote at the beginning of my script "un film pour que les générations qui ne se parlent ni ne s'écoutent puissent quand même entendre et voir ce qui pourrait se dire." Meaning that for people who don't speak to each other, the film is just a key, an unlocking of a door to possible communication between them. That's always been an obsession for me, that possible relationship between an audience and the screen. Leaving some space for reflection, not spelling everything out.

Cinema Canada: Has that audience remained primarily a Quebec one for you?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Yes, I want to share the experience of the film with the public here in Quebec. I'm trying to make a film that Québécois would like.

First and above all other audiences.

It's normal that Québécois were having some problems - and still are having them - with some of the films we're making here, because we're so brainwashed by format. I always think of the time my mother was terribly ill, back in 1960, and she asked me to take her to *South Pacific* for the third time. I wanted to say to her: "I won't take you to that shit; that's precisely the kind of filmmaking I'm against," but of course I simply took her to the film. I thought: what kind of answer could I give my mother? My answer has been my films.

Les fleurs sauvages is a way to make films here. At \$340,000, it's a direct response to people who are interested in making films about themselves, in talking about Quebec, and doing it our way. It's like cooking. You don't need a thousand bucks to make a good meal. I think our recent history proves that the more money you have, the less imagination you seem to put in.

Cinema Canada: *But if your public has been trained to accept the South Pacific format, how do you sell them Les fleurs sauvages? It's a very leisurely-paced picture, no cross-cutting at all, a lot of tableau scenes and slow pans. Isn't there a certain limitation on the kind of audience you can reach with that form?*

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: I don't think so. *Les fleurs sauvages* has an easier form than *Les dernières fiançailles*. That film initially had problems getting started - especially here - but two years later, it was sold around the world. I don't think you make something accessible just by using one film language.

Les fleurs sauvages isn't as slow as *Les dernières fiançailles*, and there's a very practical reason for that. When I first approached Marthe Nadeau to play the mother - she'd acted in *Les dernières fiançailles* - she said: "*Les dernières fiançailles* was made nine years ago. I'm nine years older now. I can't do those long takes. I tire too easily, and my memory's not very good." So that gave me a key to the format.

The film's built like a mosaic. That's how I wanted to make it accessible - on every dramatic level. That's part of what

we lost here in Quebec over the last ten years. I had to relearn more direct, simple forms. The kind of structure I'd used in '73 on *On n'engraisse pas les cochons à l'eau claire* and *Les dernières fiançailles*.

I think the business mentality changed the form of Quebec cinema. If you look at most of the films shot in the last five years, they all have that tendency to be 'straight' pictures. *L'affaire Coffin*, *Les beaux souvenirs*, *Cordélia*; they all tended to look like "films." I think filmmakers now have a very limited idea about dramatic film, and I shared this problem. So I set out to make a very positive film, a reaction against the desperation of the current situation. We all tried to make something of beauty and simplicity.

Cinema Canada: *You had an amazingly short shooting schedule - 15 days - and you worked in 16mm, and yet the film isn't restricted by either of these factors.*

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: It's a small film, and at the same time, it's a big film. The subject was so simple, so non-dramatic, in a way, that I wanted to give the picture a very special dimension. I think of film as music, really, as a movement in time and space that starts and ends. A very sensuous flow. So I asked Guy not to do photography, but painting. He made some tests, and finally chose to filter everything with an 81A brown filter that brings up skin tones, all the browns and reds. It also kills the green. Because the most difficult thing to shoot in 16mm is landscape in July. It's so thick and green.

Cinema Canada: *When Eric is walking through the forest at one point, there's direct sunlight on the grass, and the trees, and yet the green doesn't bleed all over the place. It's so controlled.*

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Well, that's Guy's genius. We also shot with super high-speed Zeiss lenses, and almost all the film was shot at 1.5, which is totally non-Hollywood. The lighting was incredibly important. Not one scene is directly lit. It's all *clair-obscur*, all indirect. The interiors were lit from outside, with HMIs. Perfect daylight. Guy

exercised total control over the negative.

I think I've given up 35mm, first because it's too expensive, and second, because I think the most likely market worldwide is TV. So I prefer to have a good 16mm print and then make a blowup. The 35mm blowup is beautiful; I can't believe my eyes. And besides, 35mm is wonderful, but can you name three good theatres in Montreal where you can see a decent projection? On top of that, most of the copies in theatres are made from internegatives, which are usually not as nice as blowups from 16mm. And then they sell 16mm reduction prints to TV, and you're watching the film at home, and suddenly your image goes green. And I've had bad experiences making slash reduction prints from 35mm subtitled copies to reach the English market. I mean, the copy of *Rimbaud est mort* is just horrible, so green. It's not what the film could have been in 16mm. So I've covered that problem now by budgeting for a 16mm English subtitled print of *Les fleurs sauvages*. I intend to do that all the time.

Cinema Canada: *It must be a little ironic to you that the only Canadian feature going to Cannes this year had an entire budget that would probably just cover coffee money on one of the big features.*

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Well, it's been like that since we started. It's all those little, so-called 'cultural' films made in Quebec that kept the Canadian Film Development Corp. alive, and made all those big productions possible. And when the big ones came in, the little ones were pushed aside. It's ironic to see the way things are swinging back to the way they were.

Cinema Canada: *L'Institut québécois du cinéma reacted to the changed situation through Le Plan quinquennal. How do you think the new financing scheme will affect you?*

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: I think Le Plan is a kind of punishment. As though parents have allowed their kids total run of the house, and they suddenly find the kids are too undisciplined. So they say: "O.K. From now on, you'll obey us. Shoes off before entering the house,

beds made every morning..." whatever. I think it's very dangerous. I think a major problem here - both in Quebec and in Canada - is that we haven't any measures to make producers, young or old, really take risks. For example, "la prime à la qualité" [a prize based on merit] would be a very important measure here, the way it's been in Sweden... Now we simply have two monuments, the CFDC and L'Institut, who control everything. And I really look at it as a kind of punishment. And we're always yelling at L'Institut and forgetting the CFDC, which has a much more 'occult' way of doing things. At least there's a possibility with L'Institut of fighting back through the Board of Directors.

I think another thing that's caused a lot of problems is the overabundance of indirect financing. At one time, people were running between "l'aide à l'artisanat" at the National Film Board, L'Institut, The Canada Council and even private companies, and films ended up costing more and more money. And no one was responsible for the whole budget. There was something immoral about spending all that money without any kind of return.

Cinema Canada: *And Les fleurs sauvages is a response to all that?*

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Yes. A film for friends by friends. A very simple experience, the way we live a lot of experiences. That's my intention. It's not for me to say whether or not we succeeded. ●

LES FLEURS SAUVAGES d. Jean-Pierre Lefebvre p. Marguerite Duparc ec. dial. J.P. Lefebvre p. man. M. Duparc asst. p. man. Yves Rivard, Edouard Faribault p. sec. Claudine Fauque a.d., cont. Josée Beaudet d.o.p. Guy Dufaux asst. cam. Philippe Martel, Serge Gregoire ad. Claude Havanavicius boom Denis Dupont head elect. Jacques Paquet asst. elect. Daniel Chrétien key grip Marc De Ernsted stills Gilles Corbeil ed. M. Duparc mixer Michel Charron music Raoul Duguay, Jean Corriveau from a melody by Claude Fonfrede titles/opticals Yves Rivard lab. Bellevue Pathé Ltee blow up from 16 to 35mm by Film Optical (Quebec) Ltd. Lp. Marthe Nadeau, Michèle Magny, Pierre Curzi, Eric Beauséjour, Claudia Aubin p.c. Cinak Ltée (1981), with the participation of IQC, CFDC, Radio-Québec and Geoffron et Leclerc Inc. running time 152 min.

● Lefebvre and crew (below)



Of national cinema

by Susan Barrowclough

Susan Barrowclough: Why do you think a national cinema began to flourish in Quebec in the 1960s?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: It is very difficult to explain. The Quiet Revolution has become such an idealised thing. People here in Quebec do not know what really happened to them then. At that time Quebec didn't exist in the minds of people here or elsewhere. It was the realisation that other countries had the same colonial relationship with places like France, Britain and the United States that made us feel that we were not alone and that our situation was very similar to other peoples. For example, when I was living in Paris in 1962-3 the French were very hostile to the Québécois; we spoke differently, etc. and we were often mistaken for Algerians. That was the year in which Algeria gained its independence. In trying to understand what it was like to be French Algerian or Arab Algerian in relationship to France, I began to understand what it was to be Québécois. In school we had only been taught French literature, French philosophy, French values. We were not taught anything about Québécois culture. The Algerian War of Independence suddenly changed our apprehension of France and our relationship to it. In the same way we were gradually demystifying our relationship to the church and to the priest. The Roman Catholic Index had banned the books of Zola, Sartre, etc. and yet my generation had read a tremendous amount. At fifteen I had read Zola, at sixteen Sartre - it was the pleasure of the sin. You have to understand that in the 1960s we were making up for lost time. You couldn't, for example, have a civil marriage in Quebec until 1974 - imagine that! Until the change of the censorship laws in 1968 you couldn't go to the cinema until you were sixteen. There was only one certificate; every film had to be for everybody. At the beginning, in the late 1950s and 1960s, cinema was terribly important for naming our society, for making it exist in people's minds. It was almost like falling in love with your country and with the cinema at the same time - it was one and the same thing. Those first documentary films taught me where I was living and with whom I was living; they were a revelation. You suddenly felt you belonged to something. I wanted to make films, to go on enlarging that family portrait, to share it and to show people that there were extraordinary things going on here. The cinema became so important because we had never seen ourselves, we were hidden to ourselves. We had an inferiority complex towards our big cousins in the United States and our small cousins in France. But, above all, it was our language which was hidden, almost forbidden. You cannot imagine the joy I

Susan Barrowclough, past programmer at the Pacific Cinematheque, is currently adviser at the British Film Institute and has just written the British Film Institute Dossier No. 13 entitled "Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: the Quebec Connection."



felt when I saw Gilles Groulx's *Golden Gloves* - made in the part of Montreal where I had been brought up as a child. I saw my own streets, but most of all I heard people speak Québécois in a film for the first time. In the early 1960s we were just a small group of people in love with the cinema. For instance, *Objectif*, the film magazine that we published with our own money between 1960 and 1967, was very important in developing our thoughts on a possible cinema here. Interestingly, over half of the *Objectif* writers went on to become very active in the cinema in much the same way as the *Cahiers du cinéma* critics. At that time there were almost no good films shown in Quebec and so we had to go to New York about once a month to see films and then I went to Paris for a year just to see the movies. It was a wild dream then to actually have a Cinematheque here. Gradually we began to think of making films ourselves, to make something happen here. There was nothing here but the National Film Board. Maybe the circumstances were right, we were in a period of great changes without really knowing it at the time. We wanted to do something. When I began to make films I wanted to speak about passivity and the historical status quo. Over twenty years I have made a lot of films to fight against that historical passivity of our society, but also to show that passivity to people. I have always wanted to show people what, in a way, they do not want to know.

Susan Barrowclough: The documentary movement was very important to you and to Quebec's emergent cinema - why did you choose fiction?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: I think that Gilles Groulx is the father of Quebec cinema. *Le chat dans le sac* was the beginning of a real Québécois cinema. But Pierre Perrault's *Pour la suite du monde* was just as important. Together they are the two sides of our society, our culture. Without their tradition of Direct Cinema I wouldn't have made fiction

films. It taught me so much, but I wanted to go on and experiment. My own formation, my education, my feeling for something beyond the image, naturally led me to fiction. I was closer to theatre, to philosophy, history. In fiction you can re-invent situations, you can travel in time and play with the past, the present and the future. I always knew I would consciously follow the line, that there would be a continuity between the work of those filmmakers in Quebec who had been making Direct Cinema, *cinéma vérité* and my films. But I wanted to get away from the trap of realism. There is so much more to say than the little that can be shown on the screen. I do not believe in the false objectivity of documentary reportage as it is now used. Our experience of life and therefore of making a film is subjective: I can only talk about what I know. I think that people, wherever they live, have a lot in common, so that if I can speak with a certain sincerity of my experience of life in my society, I will at the same time be able to speak to other people in the world. Ironically, even though my films are very personal, very close to my experience of Quebec society, they are also very successful in Europe. *Les Dernières fiançailles* did well in Quebec (it played for eight weeks in Montreal) but it also did very well throughout France, and *Mon amie Pierrette* did very well in Portugal for example. People there recognised themselves in our situation.

Susan Barrowclough: When you began making films did you think of a project of work which would try to define and name your society?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Yes, that was an absolutely conscious choice right from the beginning with *Le révolutionnaire*. Québécois culture was always an outcast culture. We are much more American than we are French - but we are neither. We are perhaps much more like the Indian in North America. No

English Canadian film has ever spoken of the differences between Canadians and Americans, but many Québécois films are concerned with defining those differences. The naming process and the identification process is very important to me. *La chambre blanche* is my most obvious naming film. Like all my films, I am trying to say 'je me nomme Québécois, je vous nomme Québécois'. In saying that, I recognise that every individual is an individual, but is also a part of a collectivity. In a way I've always made home movies. If I need to speak of what is happening around me, it is simply because Quebec and the Québécois have been forced into silence for so many centuries. Yet, with my first films, people here said they were 'too Québécois, too specific' and that they would never cross the borders - but funnily enough they were the first Québécois fiction films to be recognised abroad. *Il ne faut pas mourir pour ça*, for instance, was our first fiction film to be commercially released in France and the critics there liked it because it was about a different society, in a different language.

Susan Barrowclough: The past is a recurring preoccupation in your films, but an ambivalent one. *L'Homomane* in your first film says, 'I have had enough of the past,' the woman in *Mon Oeil* says, 'what use is the past to me?', and *Abel's journey* in Rimbaud is almost like an exorcism of the past. But, in *Les maudits sauvages*, you seem to be suggesting that an understanding of the past is crucial. How do you explain this ambivalence?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Well, even *Les maudits sauvages* is about the ambivalence of the past because we don't exactly know what our past was. Right into the 1950s our history was taught here in terms of mythological figures; that's why I refer to so many myths like *Tékacouita* in this film. We have to relate to the past to be able to go to a certain kind of future. My earlier films, while dealing with the present, look at the way my generation in Quebec was historically formed, the conception we had of our own history - a very mythical and religious conception. But recently in films like *L'Amour blessé* and *Avoir seize ans* I have been much more concerned with the difficult present. The film I am making now, *Les fleurs sauvages*, is about three generations of people, so while it is about the present, again it is playing with the concept of time and with different perceptions of the present and the past.

Susan Barrowclough: When you made *Ultimatum* that too was about the difficult present, of autumn 1970 in Quebec. How would you describe your personal approach in this film to the political events it speaks of tangentially?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: *Ultimatum* is a series of impressions. It is the story of a man and a woman who live through the October Crisis. On one level it is just about two people during the summer. It is about the sun, growth, eroticism, yet it also poses the question of autumn. But, on another level, there is the spectre of October - while they love each other and enjoy the summer there is a forbidding atmosphere, a weight of violence around them. It is a film which tries to personalise a political experience, to interiorise a vision of an event which was completely new for Quebec, a country which had never known an army of occupation, etc. For me the only way to politicise people is to personalise political issues.

Susan Barrowclough: Was *Ultimatum* shown in Quebec and did people see it as a political film?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: No, it was hardly shown at all. It has had two screenings in Quebec: one at the Cinéma québécois when I had a retrospective there in 1973, and another at the University of Laval. It is not generally considered a political film and nobody has ever written about it. The first person to write about it was Peter Harcourt (P. Harcourt, *Jean Pierre Lefebvre*, Ottawa, CFI, 1981). For most intellectuals here, as elsewhere, if you do not spell out the politics with a big P, a film is not a political film if you do not obviously discuss politics in it. My political philosophy in a way is expressed at the end of *Ultimatum*: 'I'm not against my society, I'm not for my society, I am with my society.' Actually I borrowed that from a story Marcel Sabourin told me (Sabourin is the actor in many of Lefebvre's films). He was in Paris in 1968 and gave a lift in his car to an old woman who was carrying a big basket of food, on her way to the barricades. Marcel asked her, 'Are you for the students?' and she replied, 'Monsieur, I am not for the students, I am not against the students, I am with them.' When you criticise your society, you are criticising yourself. When I criticise myself in my films, I am criticising my society. It is difficult to be with your society; it is much easier to separate yourself off from it and criticise it from outside.

Susan Barrowclough: Your use of narrative, editing and photography changes from film to film. A film like *Jusqu'au coeur*, which is about television, advertising and the violence and irrationality of war, is edited as frenetically as a TV advert. A film like *Les dernières fiançailles*, on the other hand, concerned with the slow, traditional rural life of an old couple, is filmed in long takes, has minimal editing and unobtrusive camera work. Do you consciously try to find a form that is analogous to the content of your films?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: My deepest rule is that every subject has to have its own form. Language is never separate from the form, or the form from the subject. That is why I never talk of technique or art and why I dislike directors who always use the same form. If you want to say something different, something new, you have to use a different language. The old form carries with it the old ideas... I am very interested in the use of time and the use of real time as in *L'amour blessé*. That is probably my most theoretical film, my most rigorous film. I used real time to avoid dramatising the subject as it would be dramatised in a Hollywood-type movie. In *L'amour blessé* I wanted to mix the past and the present, but I hate flashbacks. So all the flashbacks are in the sound. The girl who is talking on the radio hotline is telling Louise's story of her past, and what is taking place with the couple behind the wall - which we can hear - is also Louise's past. A direct flashback is taking place in direct time, but behind the wall. I could have taken the camera and shown the couple making love behind the wall, I could have cut to the girl talking on the radio. But I think sound is much more effective. It is much closer to our consciousness and affects us much more deeply than visual images for many reasons. I am much more preoccupied by what is off the screen than by what is on it. What we can show on the screen is only a part of the whole. The screen is like a door being opened;

I am only trying to open that door for people watching the film. They must then go in and look for themselves and make their own conclusions. I think that is why so many people are unhappy with the endings of my films - I don't say what is going to happen or whether it is good or bad. That is very intentional. That is why the use of sound is so important to me. The sound in *L'amour blessé* is extremely realistic. But this realism is used to open the door to another level. In fact a commercial distributor in Montreal, who usually deals with pornographic films, saw the film when they were thinking about distributing it. But they found it too 'vulgar'. There was actually no sex in the film. It was all on the soundtrack. The viewer has to imagine and has to complete the meaning of the film by listening, so they have to be much more active than they would be in relation to a real pornographic film. The sound in the film is trying to sell you what the visual is not giving you.

Susan Barrowclough: Do you spend as long editing the sound as you do editing the image?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Oh yes, and sound men like working with me be-

Marguerite Duparc

For twenty years, Marguerite Duparc and Jean-Pierre Lefebvre worked together. Editor, producer and companion, Duparc shared the responsibilities of their production company Cinak, inspiring many young filmmakers to get on with the business of using film for personal expression. Her death in March was sorely felt. Carole Langlois, responsible for French production at the Canadian Film Development Corp., remembers.

In February 1981, Marguerite and I met to discuss Cinak's film projects. As usual, she was handling the difficult financing aspects of Cinak's activities. But this time, she had something new and exciting to talk about. After a film production silence of about two years, Cinak had two projects scheduled for production in the coming summer. *Les fleurs sauvages*, a film by Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, and Marguerite's first feature film as a director, entitled *Histoires pour Blaise*.

I was curious about her own film project and, in her modest way, she explained it all to me. Her son, Blaise Lefebvre, would play the lead. The story would be told in live action and animation and would focus on Blaise's own experience growing up. Money being scarce, I pointed out to her that Cinak would have to establish its priorities since the CFDC would probably find it difficult to get financially involved in two projects handled by the same production company. Half a second later, Marguerite replied, "Of course, you must give priority to *Les fleurs sauvages*. I'll manage." All her friends, and there are many, will recognize her here. Thanks to her dedication, *Les fleurs sauvages* was financed, produced, completed and is now on its way to Cannes. Her own film, *Histoires pour Blaise*, was only partially shot when she died.

Carole Langlois ●

cause I make it very clear before shooting a film that we will do a scene as many times as necessary for the sound, as much as for the camera. Before I write the script, I always write what I call the 'grammar' of the film - why we are doing it that way, why we are using direct sound or opposing sound. For example in *Rimbaud* the documentary aspect of the film is all in the soundtrack. Sound is much more abstract than the visual image; it has to be read on many levels by the audience - the listeners. In the Middle Ages people lived in a totally symbolic world. But, since the invention of photography, our society has believed almost scientifically in realism in the mistaken belief that we can reproduce mirror images. The greatest mistake of our Cartesian civilisation is that something exists only if it can be shown. If it cannot be shown it doesn't exist. I am much more interested in what cannot be shown, in what is off the screen and in what the viewer has to find for him/herself.

Susan Barrowclough: Is it because you are aware of the limitations of the visual image that you use both your images and your characters as signs which the viewer can interpret in a number of ways?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: I don't believe in the psychological representation of characters. For me an individual in my films is never just an individual, but a sign, a symbol, an image, an allegory of many people - our society exists through its signs and its images of itself. Abel, in *Il ne faut pas mourir pour ça*, and in *Rimbaud*, is a sign of the Québécois, but a sign which can be interpreted in many ways. If a film like *Mon amie Pierrette* had been made like a soap opera, the characters would only have represented themselves. But when you break the traditional structure they come to be more than they are in themselves. *Mon amie Pierrette* is not about the psychology of adolescence, but a dictionary of attitudes, of mores, of taboos in our society. I didn't want to make a journalistic film about an historical period and say, 'look, we are like this, a product of Catholicism, etc.', I merely wanted to retransmit the gestures, the everyday moments of life. It does not paint a period of history, but a period of life, a portrait of a generation between 1955 and 1967. The father is an image of the Québécois father, the mother is an image of the Québécois mother. So that more people can identify with them and find themselves in these images of their society - even if they don't like them. In *Patricia et Jean-Baptiste*, I take the part of Jean-Baptiste, but while I identified very closely with that character, it is not just me. It is a type of person out of a particular society. I was not showing my psychological problems, I was offering instead, this image of a Québécois to others to see themselves, to understand themselves. In a way to show a familiar thing in an unfamiliar way. Yet, I do not think you have to be Québécois to interpret the Québécois sign. I am a great admirer of Mizoguchi. You don't have to be Japanese to interpret his characters. What is important is the rhythm, the notion of time - it is always very slow.

Susan Barrowclough: Could we talk about the crisis which Quebec cinema now seems to be in. Why do you think that now there is both federal and provincial financial help, the future of Quebec's cinema is so much more threatened than it was in the 1960s when there was no help at all?

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Unfortunately there has been a great change in the attitude of people making films here now. Fifteen years ago there was nothing here: there were no funding institutions, no provincial cinema organisations. But we wanted to make films and somehow together, with a lot of enthusiasm, we managed to make them. Now, filmmaking has become big business in the hands of the producers, with bigger and bigger budgets and crews and the close working relationship with people has disappeared. It is also perhaps a question of people getting older and being concerned with their own careers. At Cinak we are still resisting and trying to go on making films in a personal and controllable way. One of the problems for both English and French Canadian filmmaking is that people do not want to make a different cinema. They want to compete in the international market above all so they make films that are not different, but the same as American commercial film. But the problem today is also an economic one. In 1970 the average cost in Quebec of a 35mm colour feature film was \$150,000. In 1975 it was around \$340,000. Today, budgets are in millions of dollars. These sort of budgets are completely out of proportion with the economy of a small country like Quebec and with its box-office potential. It is impossible to make a profit on such large budgets or even to earn back the investment capital. That is why people have to make international co-productions, to get the production capital and to be assured of at least a second market. These budgets are totally unrealistic and bear no relation to the economic realities of Quebec.

Susan Barrowclough: However, there was an overwhelming feeling at *La Semaine du Cinéma Québécois* in October 1980 (the eighth annual conference to be held in Montreal on independent Québécois film and the first to invite filmmakers from other countries to discuss mutual problems of production, exhibition, distribution) that Quebec's cinema was going in two directions. On the one hand, young filmmakers had merely adopted and reproduced a certain type of Québécois cinema 'to show Quebec to the Québécois' that had fulfilled a function in a particular period; on the other, there was a tendency to multi-dollar productions aimed at an international market.

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Yes, we have been discussing this problem a lot recently. You could say it is rather similar to the way in which Italian Neo-Realism died. At a particular time in Italy filmmakers felt a need to say essential things, to make emotional and political statements in an immediate way in relation to what their society was experiencing at that time and had just experienced. People like Rossellini and De Sica were very important to me and to many filmmakers here in the 1950s and 1960s - the connection between Neo-Realism and Québécois cinema is very close. The filmmaking of Michel Brault and Pierre Perrault, for instance, was very close to that of De Sica. But, there again, De Sica's films of the 1940s and 1950s are very different to his films of the 1960s. *Bicycle Thieves* came out of a precise moment. The present crisis in our cinema is perhaps not just due to a change in political climate, but in people; the mentality of those working in film has changed also. It is very sad for instance that after *Objectif* stopped publishing there has been no regrouping of people working in film. There is very

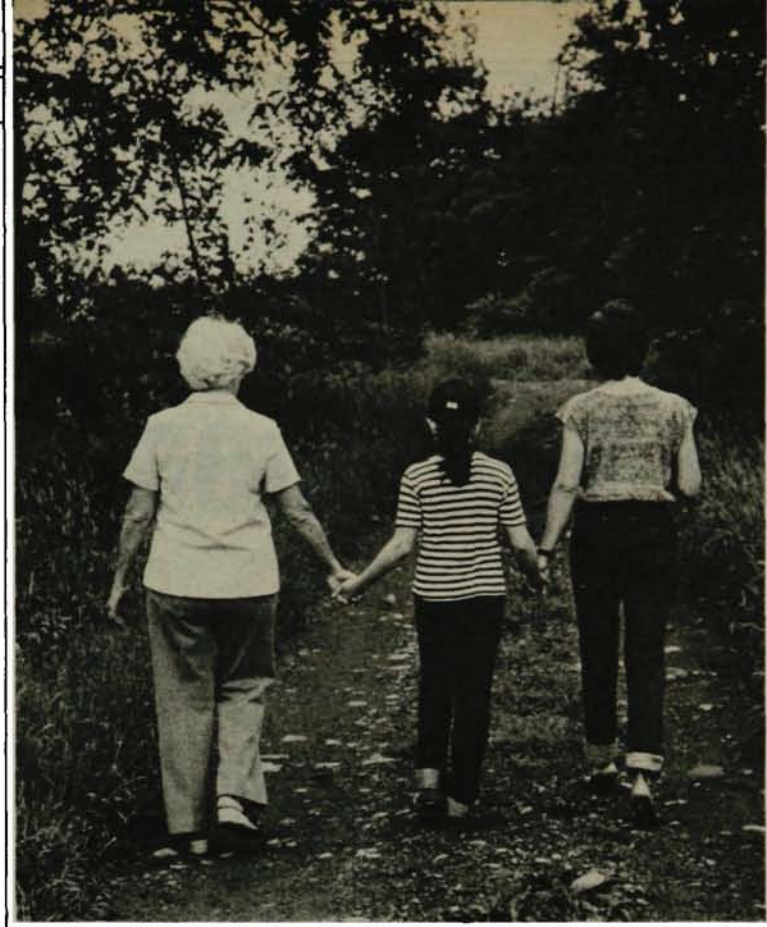
little analysis of what our cinema was trying to do in the 1960s and how it should or should not differ now. There is very little reflection on the practices and the effects of the policies of the CFDC (Canadian Film Development Corporation) and the Quebec Film Institute, or even on the eternal life of the NFB. Unfortunately today the public and even film students do not know the films of Jutra, Groulx, Carle, Perrault, but of course they know all the American and French directors. I have no desire to be nostalgic about the past, but we have to be conscious of the history of our cinema, to have a clear idea of what its future could be.

Susan Barrowclough: *How have the federal funding policies of the CFDC and tax-shelter investment affected the type of film now being made in Quebec?*

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: We are now in a situation in which tax-shelter investment has taken all the power out of the hands of the filmmakers and put it into the hands of the producers. The investors don't care what sort of films are made; they have made a profit even if the production deal is never made into a film. However, you have to remember that far fewer films are made with tax-shelter money in Quebec than in English Canada, as Québécois culture is considered marginal and has much smaller potential markets than so-called Canadian films in English which are very often just bad copies of American movies. At the same time tax-shelter films are made in Quebec - in English and usually with Montreal as a stand-in for, say, Paris or Atlantic City. Denis Héroux, Quebec's biggest commercial producer who does arrange tax-shelter productions, makes films that have very little to do with Quebec and are on the whole aimed at the French market. The cultural references of the CFDC bureaucrats and of tax-shelter producers are those of Hollywood and Los Angeles.

Susan Barrowclough: *Given the sort of international packaged films that the CFDC has helped produce in recent years, how did you manage to get financial assistance from them for five films?*

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: When the CFDC started in 1968, we had already made five features and had a certain kind of credibility. In their first year the CFDC made a cultural gesture by awarding 'Primes à la qualité', prizes or bonuses amounting to \$100,000 for what they called 'quality films,' rather like the system in Sweden (without which, by the way, Bergman would never have been able to go on making films). We received \$14,000 for *Il ne faut pas mourir pour ça* and \$13,000 for *Patricia et Jean-Baptiste* - that put us into business. That money enabled us to pay the crews' salaries and then left us some capital with which we could go and ask CFDC for additional financing for our next film, *La chambre blanche*, which we received. That was the first film of ours they invested in. This sort of direct incentive was terribly important, but the CFDC only did it for one year. In 1975 we didn't even bother to show the script of *L'amour blessé* to the CFDC as we were sure they would turn it down: there is very little action and at script stage it just looked like a dialogue list. So we took the risk of shooting it and then showed it to them and received some money for post-production. I co-wrote the script of *Rimbaud* with Mireille Amiel, a friend from France, and when we showed it to the CFDC they agreed to put up some money if we could find a



co-producer in France. We found L'Institut national de l'audiovisuel.

Susan Barrowclough: *You have received financing from the Quebec Film Institute, haven't you?*

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Yes, I got money for *Avoir seize ans* and I have just received confirmation that they will fund my new film, *Les fleurs sauvages*. We are shooting it on a total budget of \$303,000 (the Institute gives a maximum of 60%). It is a film about three generations - the mother, the daughter and the young children. It is a film about communication or non-communication between generations - it is about tolerance. It will be made on 16mm, which means a budget that we can afford and so that it can be shown in many different sorts of places.

Susan Barrowclough: *In what sorts of cinemas have your films been shown?*

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: A lot of them have opened in small cinemas in Montreal (*salles parallèles*), but they have also been shown in schools, universities and in small, communal places in the country. I have spent a lot of time travelling with my films and discussing them with people - that is what I like doing most. For instance with my last film, *Avoir seize ans*, we couldn't find anyone here to release it commercially, so we hired a cinema in Montreal and it played for sixteen nights and it did very well. Each screening was accompanied by an *animateur* and there were wonderful discussions afterwards between parents and children. Since then we have had a lot of bookings on the film, mostly in venues that involve discussion. There was a time when many Québécois films were shown in cinemas and on television and a good audience was growing, slowly but wonderfully. Many people used to tell me that Brault's *Les ordres* and our *Les dernières fiançailles* were very important in re-building the audience here for Québécois films after they had deserted them in the early 1970s when there was such a flood of sex films. *Mon amie Pierrette* was shown quite often on Radio Canada and *Maudits sauvages* was shown twice. When *Les dernières fiançailles* was first shown - I think it was in 1975 or 76

- it had very high audience ratings. One and a half million, out of a population of six million - that's pretty good. But now it has changed. There hasn't been a film of Pierre Perrault's on for eight years, even though he has four new films sitting at the Film Board and his films used to be shown at prime time on Saturday or Sunday night. They did show *Rimbaud* on Radio Quebec twice in 1979 - they paid \$25,000 for it. They offered us \$12,000 for *Avoir seize ans*, including the actors' rights. After paying \$7,000 to the actors, we would have got \$5,000 for a two-hour colour film - ridiculous, isn't it? What we need here is for television to get into production or co-production with the private industry instead of the routine of just buying Film Board films.

Susan Barrowclough: *It is somewhat surprising that the provincial film organizations that do exist - the Institute, the Cinéma-thèque - were actually founded by the provincial Liberal Party and that since the Parti Québécois has been in power they have done so little to improve the situation in the arts in Quebec. They have not increased the Institute's meagre budget, or made any gesture towards legislation on quotas, amusement tax, etc. Is there a feeling of disappointment with the Parti Québécois among those working in the arts?*

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: Filmography

- Le révolutionnaire* - 1965
- Patricia et Jean-Baptiste* - 1966
- Mon oeil* - 1966
- Il ne faut pas mourir pour ça* - 1967
- Mon amie Pierrette* - 1967
- Jusqu'au coeur* - 1968
- La chambre blanche* - 1969
- Q-Bec My Love* - 1970
- Les maudits sauvages* - 1971
- L'ultimatum* - 1971
- On n'engraisse pas les cochons à l'eau claire* - 1973
- Les dernières fiançailles* - 1973
- Le gars des vues* - 1975
- L'amour blessé* - 1975
- Le vieux pays ou Rimbaud est mort* - 1977
- Avoir 16 ans* - 1978
- Les fleurs sauvages* - 1981

cois among those working in the arts? **Jean-Pierre Lefebvre:** Totally; they have proved a great disappointment to most people in the artistic community. They did start with a very developed position on cultural policy, but have not fulfilled either their practical or their ideological promises. Like the federal government, the provincial government does not understand what is at stake ideologically in allowing our cinemas and our television channels to be flooded with American films and programs. They do not seem to understand the ideology of cultural production. I am transmitting of a way of life, a way of thinking. They also do not understand the economic side of it. People in Canada now say that there is a film industry here but that is just not true. An industry can be said to exist when all the sectors are integrated - production, exhibition, distribution - but nothing has been done to protect our market; there is no quota, there is no law about reinvestment of profits made, for example, by Famous Players cinema circuit in Canada. Of course, Famous Players has been investing in production on a modest scale since the beginning of the CFDC in 1968, but that is a sort of gentlemen's agreement to pre-empt legislation on box-office profits. I have often said that I think the cinema in Quebec is the perfect analogue of Quebec itself and of its future; to have a healthy national cinema here we need to work on both the cultural and the economic level. To do that, what is needed is the political decisions and direct political measures and legislation.

Susan Barrowclough: *Finally, how do you manage to continue to produce and make your films? When I talk to other filmmakers in Quebec they tell me that it is absolutely impossible to make films on budgets as small as yours.*

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre: We have gone on making films in the same way as everybody was making them here ten years ago. In 1964 there was no sort of institution which could give us money, so we took our pocket money and began to produce our own films and also some friends' films. We have always had production ceilings at Cinak because we knew we didn't want to become big. I certainly don't want to go back to the past, to no money at all, and I don't think the key to the future of Quebec's cinema is to be found in either large or small budgets. But I do think it's essential to recover a way of thinking about film, of working together and of controlling our films which we had at the beginning of our cinema - a guerilla-type filmmaking. Ten years ago people were making films here that were financially and culturally relevant to Quebec itself. We, Marguerite and I, simply try to go on producing films with reasonable budgets. One of the secrets, of course, is to shoot fast. To shoot fast, you have to be very organised and carefully pre-plan a film, but the producer has to be part of the crew, not an enemy. I like working very closely with a small group of people who I know very well and who contribute to the film. Now, of course, everybody gets paid. On our new film that we are just going to start shooting, *Les fleurs sauvages*, Marguerite and I are taking the risk of investing our salaries of director, script-writer, producer and editor. But that's normal: we've always taken those risks and that is how we have been able to go on making and producing films for twenty years. ●