

BOOKSHELF

Portrait d'un Studio d'Animation

by Jean-Yves Bégin, Louise Carrière, René Rozon and France Tardif; published by the National Film Board, and available from NFB regional offices or the Cinéma-thèque Québécoise, \$5.00, paperback, 96 p., 1983, in French only, ISBN 0-7722-0073-4.

It's about time that the story of the NFB's French Association Studio was put into print. Since its inception 17 years ago, as a separate production unit, the Studio has made an impact on the world of animation that far exceeds its modest material resources. While a more comprehensive and critical account remains to be written, *Portrait d'un Studio d'Animation* is a useful beginning.

Unfortunately, this book was conceived, rather hurriedly one suspects, as an appendage to an exposition of the Studio's work which is being held all summer in the Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris. In addition, it is an in-house publication with commissioned writing, and the text, prepared by four writers, often reads like an annual report.

Portrait opens with a preface by Norman McLaren stressing one approach to animation which he has always highly prized, the responsibility of the individual filmmaker for all aspects of his film, working alone or with other committed colleagues in the manner of the studio artist. There follows a section by Jean-Yves Bégin which traces the history of the Studio and emphasizes its deep roots in this particular McLaren percept. It should be noted that after twenty-five years of world-renowned filmmaking in Montreal, McLaren was at last recognized in his home province as a creative Quebecois, by being awarded the prix Albert-Tessier in 1982.

But Bégin's brief review - a strong chapter in the book both for its factual data and a long overdue tribute to René Jodoin, founder of the Studio - suffers from the incestuous characteristics of both the NFB and the Quebec film world as a whole. The community of Quebec animators is small and insecure, and one must *never* offend anyone else. This attitude leads to numerous "motherhood" statements including a list of the eight successive directors of French Production at the NFB, all of whom go on record as having "supported" the Studio.

A subsequent section of the book, written by Louise Carrière who teaches cinema at the CEGEP du Vieux-Montréal, attempts to fit most of the Studio's 104 productions into six main thematic headings. While such a classification may have some academic use, it is a shaky construct, as Carrière herself acknowledges in noting that "it is impossible to reduce a film to its main theme." When a film does not fit a theme neatly it is either omitted or barely mentioned. *Au bout du fil* (Cat's Cradle), made in 1974 by Paul Driessen and one of the Studio's masterpieces, is one such omission. A film which, both in style and in content, explores the interactions of the "field" or ecological approach to cause/effect relationships, while still maintaining a gossamer narrative thread, it deserves much more attention than such obvious and simplistic films as "E" or *Faim* (Hunger) which attract Carrière's pen.

Despite the book's protestations of allegiance to McLaren's first principles

and the admirable inclusion of musicians as part of the animation imperative, the section devoted to imagery is biased totally to the importance of the static visual, ignoring sound and motion. Written by René Rozon, a well-known editor and critic in the Québec art world, it briefly acknowledges the significance of movement yet goes on to deal with the dynamics of animation only in terms of the classical fine arts. The author trots out a repertoire of comparisons between the Studio's films and the works of Braque, Picasso, Matisse, Derain, Brancusi and even Emile Zola, in a manner which is at best name dropping, at worst pretentious twaddle.

The final 20-odd pages form a concise reference to the films and filmmakers who are NFB French Animation. With the introductory historical chapter, and illustrations spread throughout, it forms the substance of the book. It is weakened however by inconsistency, caused perhaps by the uncertainty of how much territory the Studio should lay claim to and the "family album" characteristics of the publication. Animators are separated into a "nucleus" which seems to be congruent with those who were or are (un)fortunate enough to be on the permanent payroll, including the wonderful Clorinda Warny who died five years ago. Outside this inner circle are the "other filmmakers", dealt with in a cursory manner although their numbers include such notables as André Leduc, Paul Driessen and Normand Roger.

Although the rationale is not stated, the chronological index of productions seems to list comprehensively only the animated works of the core group. For example, films made by Ron Tunis and Laurent Coderre for NFB English Production are excluded, while Pierre Hébert's, René Jodoin's and Co Hoedeman's works are included. A documentary made by Nico Crama for English Production about Hoedeman is inexplicably listed in this chronology; Bernard Longpre's superb *L'Évasion des carrousels* (Carrousel) and the Leducs' majestic *Zea* will be assumed to be frame-by-frame animation if one misses the minuscule parenthetical notes to the contrary in the closing pages. People like Gilles Gascon who co-directed *C'est pas chinois* (A Piece of Cake) are omitted completely.

The cover, by Jacques Drouin, an illustration created on the pincscreen is also the poster motif for the Paris exhibit. It attests boldly to that filmmaker's talent and versatility. The design of the book and the selection of photos is excellent, although one wishes that more illustrations were in colour. A full-page black and white still from Co Hoedeman's *Le trésor des Grotocéans* (The Treasure of the Grotocéans) does injustice to a film of remarkable visual beauty. Lost to all practical purposes because of its placement and the paper stock used is a line drawn flip sequence based on Bernard Longpre's *Tête en fleurs*.

For all its flaws, *Portrait d'un Studio d'Animation* makes clear that animation as an art form preoccupies the artists in this studio. At a time when the state film agency concentrates its resources increasingly on journalism or *déjà vu* drama to the detriment of developing the film form, it is reassuring to know that a serious commitment exists among a dedicated group of filmmakers to experiment and to explore the medium on its own terms. *Portrait* will raise

interest in viewing these people's work and whet one's appetite for a book not yet written.

Gordon E. Martin ●

The Reference Shelf

Gregory Goodell's *Independent Feature Film Production* is a practical and explicit guide to the making of low-budget movies, privately financed and independently produced. Written by an expert in the field, it covers legal aspects, pre-production, filming proper, completion and distribution/marketing (*St. Martin's \$17.95*).

In *The Filmmaker's Craft: 16mm Cinematography*, Philip R. Courter discusses extensively the skills, tools and techniques of his camera work. Limiting himself to the actual shooting process, Courter reviews in articulate detail cameras, lenses raw stock, lighting and exposure, and touches briefly on production and direction (*Van Nostrand Reinhold \$29.95*).

The newly revised edition of David W. Samuelson's *Motion Picture Camera and Lighting Equipment* carries abundant data on the proper selection of equipment required for production. Detailed descriptions of cameras in current use, their features and accessories are provided, as well as valuable information on types and characteristics of light sources and their components.

Gerald Millerson, in *The Technique of Lighting for Television and Motion Pictures*, considers the cameraman's available choice of illuminating equipment for effective photography. The esthetics and techniques involved are systematically assessed from basic principles to sophisticated effects in this fully revised edition of a standard text (*Focal Press \$39.95/21.95*).

The peculiarities of Canadian film censorship, its arbitrariness, absurdities and irresponsibility, are revealed by Malcolm Dean in *Censored! Only In Canada*. This searing exposé, based on documents from hitherto secret official files, cites chapter and verse the censors' generally mindless, sometimes tragic, and mostly foolish exercises in futility. Political manipulation, religious bigotry, personal sexual hangups and misplaced social concerns are some of the censors' motivations for denying adult viewers the right to decide what they feel mature enough to see (*Phenomena Publ., Toronto \$10*).

In *Banned Films*, Edward de Grazia and Roger K. Newman tell the sad and outrageous story of movie censorship in the USA. In their authoritative and well-documented study, they spell out the appalling details of the often collusive efforts among government, the film industry and various self-appointed groups to suppress, or at least to regulate, the content of motion pictures. Specific legal cases are quoted at length in their relationship to the Constitution's First Amendment guaranteeing freedom of expression (*Bowker \$24.95/14.95*).

Museums' collections of film, tape and other audio-visual records of performing arts are catalogued, along with regular print material, in *World Museum Publications 1982*. Some 30,000 entries appear in this comprehensive index covering the holdings of over 9,500 museums worldwide (*Bowker \$125*).

Theories of Cinema

Just as opinions differ about the entertainment values of any given film, theories of cinema's esthetics, philosophy, morality and sociology abound in their rich variety.

In *Profane Mythology*, Yvette Biro argues that film, as a form of popular expression, not only reflects reality, but forms it in the viewer's mind as well as in the physical world that surrounds him (*Indiana U. Press \$22.50/7.95*).

Cinema as a reflection of a country's national identity is discussed by Keith Reader in *Cultures on Celluloid*. The film industries of Britain, France, Japan and the United States are examined as sources of stereotyped presentations of their average citizen - or are they true images? (*Merrimack/Quartet \$24.95*).

Stimulating essays from *Cinema Journal*, a leading theoretical periodical, are edited by Richard Dyer MacCann and Jack C. Ellis and reprinted in *Cinema Examined*. Ranging from the politics in Visconti's films to Chaplin's view of the world, they provide students of cinema with a number of challenging outlooks over a wide array of perplexing questions (*Dutton \$9.95*).

In *Cinema and Semiotics* (the latter term defines the science or study of signs and sign systems), the application of semiotics to film is vigorously debated regarding its contribution to an understanding of cinema. May not be easy reading, but quite rewarding once you get into it (*NY Zoetrope \$17.95*).

Cinema is viewed in broad social context in *Film/Culture*, a scholarly collection of articles intelligently edited by Sari Thomas. The medium's industrial set-up, the form and content of film, and audience attitudes are explored by specialized educators in well-informed and compelling essays (*Scarecrow \$17.50/8.50*).

Directorial Styles

An informative study by Eugene P. Walz, *François Truffaut*, considers the director's career in a valuable reference guide based on personal interviews and extensive research. The volume includes well-chosen writings by and about Truffaut, bibliographical data, archival documentation and film distribution sources (*G. K. Hall \$35*).

In an ingenious and original study, *American Skeptic: Robert Altman*, Norman Kagan characterizes Altman's direction of *M*A*S*H*, *Brewster McCLOUD* and *Nashville* as personal interpretations of established American genres - war, fantasy, showbiz. Altman's challenging unconventional approach to conventional film themes is a marked innovation in creative filmmaking (*Pierian Press \$17.95*).

In *Eisenstein At Work* by Jay Leyda and Zina Voynow, revealing insights into the great Soviet director's work methods and teaching style are provided in a unique collection of his production sketches and photographs, written instructions to cast and crew, and personal memos. Informed and perceptive comments by the authors bring out the multifaceted talent of an exceptionally gifted artist (*Pantheon \$30/15.95*).

George L. George ●

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