Part One

The movies, mate

A two-part Cinema Canada special report on the Australian film industry today

by Barbara Samuels

That cuddly koala may be Qantas’ most famous spokesman, but the airline’s corporate logo – a winged kangaroo – is much more to the point. The flight from Los Angeles to Sydney makes a literal quantum leap through time and space: this distance of 14,476 kilometres includes a crossing of the international dateline and a seventeen-hour time difference. You’ve chased the night across the Pacific and lost a day in the process.

But the first sight of Sydney devours the fatigue. The plane glides in over the city and then turns slightly, as though showing off a precious jewel to a very appreciative audience. We are that, certainly: this vision of bays, inlets and that famous Opera House shimmers in the morning sun with an almost unearthly beauty. Its perch on the edge of what seemed to be endless ocean lends a touch of magic to the place. There is life out here after all.

And with a fiercely nationalist streak to it: one soon learns. That stylized, tri-coloured “A” is the first giveaway, because it’s everywhere – on car bumpers, in bathroom windows, on sweatshirts, electrical goods and candy wrappers. It’s the graphic punch for the Advance Australia drive, a campaign launched several years ago that shows no signs of losing momentum. Despite ongoing labour problems, divisive domestic politics and all the other headaches of modern nationhood, the country has embraced this giddy brand of self-promotion with a vengeance. And the timing couldn’t have been better.

It’s a neat “home version” of that ultra-high international profile Australia’s wearing these days. The natives are tickled by their new-found celebrity status abroad, and eager to source back the reasons: the Americas Cup, perhaps? The new music? Aussie comedian Paul Hogan’s wildly successful TV spots.

Cinema Canada contributor Barbara Samuels was invited to Australia by the Australian Film Commission in preparation for Australia’s feature participation at this year’s World Film Festival.

The movies, mate

for tourism now broadcast on the American west coast (“So I’ll put another shrimp on the barbie for ya. mate”), or L’Express magazine’s cover story last March that featured Australia as “le pays de l’année”? Or does it just come down to the need for a brand-new last frontier?

Well, yes to all of that, but the real catalyst behind this upsurge of interest in all things Australian is finally quite simple. The movies. mate. The seemingly sudden film revival of the 1970s that offered the world its first glimpse of a new terrain and a new sensibility. They are part of modern film history now, and so is what happened afterwards: a 15% tax concession introduced in 1980 presented the Australian industry with an occasion to follow its Canadian cousin down the garden path. What happened to us began to happen to them, and four years later – with a scramble on to undo much of the damage wrought by overproduction and a reduction of the incentive to 13.5% – the Australian film community is facing the moment of truth.

Purchases of home VCR units have reached epidemic proportions and shaken up the theatrical market in the process. Miniseries for television have pushed feature films into second place on production rosters, and presales are all but obligatory for producers who need brokers to sell their investment package. Meanwhile, the debate over the nature and extent of government intervention in the industry remains as unresolved as ever. All these factors have combined with the tax concession story to make fodder for the trade papers, and the international press has compiled quite a scrapbook. To this it adds the list of indigenous filmmakers now working abroad and takes a shot at a quick conclusion: Australia has had its moment of filmic glory, and now it can’t hold onto its own.

But headcounts and headlines have traditionally made for lessy source material. The only way to pick up the subtleties is to check out the situation first hand: meet the individuals involved, see the work, try to lock onto the particulars that colour the whole.

And that’s what I came here to do.
Turkiewicz credits Long with "getting the picture up in a particularly difficult period: "We got sandwiched in with the new legislation, ended up raising money in a very bad year. The work that Joan put into that task was extraordinary, and her determination to keep the budget under $2 million was very important. You can still recoup domestically with that, and I was a first-time director, so it was a good decision all round."

The effects of the changing tax laws are something Long has felt personally. "I've made three films so far," she says, "and every one of them has had a different set of ground rules each time I've raised the money. And I'm still not terribly happy with the situation. Now brokers insist on presales up to 30% of the budget; these are not film people, and they don't realize that any presale you make on a film is almost 80% sure to be worse than what you could do when the film is finished. And the kind of films that get presales are generally projects with superficially commercial ingredients. Lots of producers have to fall in line with the brokers, because it's the difference between making the film and not making it." Her objections to the presale bind go further: "It's making the Australian taxpayers subsidize the television stations. The 10BA tax legislation money goes into the making of product, and the television stations get them for a fraction of their value because of the presale. They're essentially getting high-class Australian product dirt cheap.

And as an independent producer, Long is feeling the squeeze from the vertically-integrated Australian distributors. "We're subsidizing them as well. They used to invest in films - a $20,000 or $50,000 investment - but now they've set up their own production companies. So not only are they distributors and exhibitors - the big three own most of the major cinema chains - but they're also producers of their own films. Hoyts, Edgley and Roadshow have all set up production concerns. They're dictating which of our films get up on screen, and to a large extent, determining which films even get made. Here we are again under the domination of distributors."

But with Silver City set to open, Long is far from ready to throw in the towel. "Look," she says, "it's always been a ghastly business raising money. In the old days, it used to be worse. So I'm not the eternal pessimist."

At a production facility not far from Long's office, Henry Crawford takes a break from producing a new series called Five Mile Creek and considers the presale situation.

"The only way I could finance the series was to cover it by presales. It's being produced by the Disney Channel, and this way we're making it for half the American cost - about $400,000 an episode. The Australian network has some money in the first series. In the second and third, there'll be no Australian money at all; it's all coming from America. And that's a significant market opening up for us."

Crawford is the man behind A Town Like Alice, and boasts an extensive back¬ground in television production. In his eyes, the facts are quite simple. "The only reason we've managed to survive in Australian television is because Australian programmes are very popular. They've performed well in the ratings. It's obviously very tough to convince a TV network to pay even $100,000 for an hour of Australian drama when they can buy an hour of top-rated American drama for $10,000."

* All figures in Australian dollars.

He views the coproduction route as a viable survival mechanism, relevant to both the Canadian and Australian production scenes. "I would think your economics are similar to ours. We still probably produce a little more cheaply here, but in quality television terms, we can only expect to recoup about 25% of our dough from Australia. Half comes from the U.S. and the remaining quarter from other markets. And I think that if we and you and England are going to survive, we're going to have to pool our resources and take turns doing projects in each other's countries."

As a former AFC commissioner and one of the country's foremost independent producers, Crawford has seen trends in the industry come and go: as the "father" of some of the first major miniseries, he is disturbed by what he perceives as the latest tendency. "Almost all the people who couldn't make a go of it in feature films are now turning to the Magic Miniseries. They figure they're easier than features, when in fact they're harder. You have to hit feature film quality in half the time."

He shrugs, resigned to the idea. "So now we'll have a rash of miniseries. I've always been crazy about bandwagons."

The Sydney Film Festival got underway on June 8, and will run until the 24th. The event celebrates its thirty-first anniversary this year, running - as always - in overlap with the slightly older Melbourne Festival. But the setting alone here is worth the price of admission. The State Theatre in 'The City' is a monumental relic from an era of blissfully mad picture-show palaces, a grand...
scale museum of restored kitsch where rococo maidens smile down at vaguely Roman busts, and where marble staircases and gold-splattered everything are the order of the day. The festivities are presided over by a bizarre relief of St. George and his fire-breathing sidekick, and the movies are only part of the show: patrons are treated to a pre-screening serenade from an organist who specializes in melodies from Camelot. He concludes his nightly performance by disappearing into the stage on what appears to be a hydraulic platform, playing with one hand as he descends, and waving with the other as the crowd cheers him on. If you've braced yourself by sitting down for all this, you're safe enough to really enjoy it.

This year's Festival is a wide-ranging one, and features a particularly delightful selection of animated shorts from Britain's Channel Four. Canada is represented by Jean-Claude Labrecque's Les Annees de Reve, which elicits a mixed response from Festival-goers. Wim Wenders' Paris, Texas is probably the hands-down favourite. The year is also notable as Rod Webb's first in the role of Festival Director. He came to the post in 1972 as head of the first state film body, and the precedent-setting film body, and the precedent-setting body (the antecedent of the AFC) was given terrific freedom by the then head of production Dick Mason to make some marvelous films.

The festival there eventually dried up, and he was approached by current Australian Film Commission chairman Phillip Adams to start the South Australia Film Corporation. The federal Australian Film Development Corporation (the antecedent of the AFC) was already in place when Brealey accepted the post in 1972 as head of the first state film body, and the precedent-setting aspect of the whole deal was quite obvious. "We knew that if the South Australian Film Corporation was successful, then other state corporations would follow. There was a feeling at the time that South Australia was one too many, whereas I felt the more competition, the better." "Picnic at Hanging Rock," he says, was originally asked to produce it, but he wasn't available. I was able to go into production because of a SAFC grant, and Sunday Too Far Away was the Corporation's first full-funded production. But his work as producer had moved Brealey far away from his original base, and Annie's Coming Out presented a chance to return.

The film details the struggle of a young teacher in an institute for the handicapped to prove that of her charges - an eighteen-year-old named Annie O'Farrell - is of normal intelligence, despite physical disabilities and doctor's diagnoses to the contrary. Based on the true story of Anne MacDonald and Rosemary Crossley, the film now forms part of an effort to close down such institutions, and to re-examine people who were once "written off" as intellectually handicapped.

"It would have been easy to do it as a dramatized documentary," Brealey notes, "but Rosie Crossley and Annie both wanted a feature. They felt they'd had a lot of exposure on television, but it hadn't paid off as yet. Annie wanted all the brouhaha that surrounded a feature. We'd tried television, she told me, 'and the kids still aren't out yet.' Brealey sees the film's application as both particular and wide-ranging at the same time. "It asks whether an individual has the right to a rich full life. It happens to be about a physically disabled kid stuck in a hospital, but it could be about any number of other situations. As a film it's certainly a piece of entertainment, but I think it should be enriched. Hopefully, Annie meets both those criteria."
June 19-20: "Survival's been done. Next please."

David Williamson does a quick addition in his head. "I've done something like twelve screenplays and eleven plays in the last twelve or thirteen years," he calculates. "Until I visited California. I didn't realize that this wasn't considered a normal rate of output. But in Australia - where you have to earn a living from a $5.8 million. The idea's ridiculous."

Williamson is convinced that the only way out of the bind is the obvious: full control.

"You have to direct your own work. It's what a lot of American and Canadian writers are doing, because they're all run into the same frustration." His chosen vehicle? "It's a translation of one of my plays to film, called The Perfectionist. Pat Lovell is producing it, and we're hoping to start later on this year." But he stops to reflect a moment. "You know," he says, "the play has a flawless critical track record, and I'm very happy with the screenplay. But there's chance the film won't happen because it's not a success."

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There's a certain inevitability about government-subsidized film industries: the battle lines are drawn early, and the issues are almost always the same. How much intervention and what kind? The nationalists versus the internationalists, xenophobia versus the sellout artists, cultural integrity versus freedom of expression. The catchphrases are coloured by the positions, and the positions are all hopelessly familiar. What makes the Australian version so intriguing are the subtleties.

Jim and Hall McElroy go back a long way, much of it in tandem with Peter Weir. Together, the brothers produced some of the most inherently Australian pictures of the new wave: The Cars That Ate Paris, Picnic at Hanging Rock (in collaboration with Pat Lovell) and The Last Wave. The poster for their latest Weir vehicle is prominently displayed in their office lobby: that sultry, Gone with the Wind-style graphic for Year of Living Dangerously all but dominates the wall. And this is where the story takes a twist.

"When we sold Dangerously to MGM as a studio picture," Hall McElroy recalls, "it was regarded as a big sellout here. There was a debate as to whether the film was really Australian or not. We paid no attention to that. With the exception of one or two Phillipinos playing Indonesians, and some Americans - including Linda Hunt - everyone else was Australian. But the producers, the star, the whole crew. A lot of the picture was shot here. It's ludicrous to suggest that it isn't Australian, and who gives a damn, anyway? It's just a film made by Australians, and it's either good or bad. Australians are the only ones who ever raised the question, anyway."

He does not apologize for the studio connection, either.

"It was a terrific experience doing a film like this, because whether we like it or not, Hollywood is the centre of the filmmaking world. There are people with tremendous experience, and there were with enormous support while we were making the movie. We learned how to make pictures for a major studio, and I call that learning a lot." McElroy has a great respect for the American majors as corporate rip-off artists: "A lot of people here and abroad have this conspiracy theory in which the Major studios present us as simple filmmakers. Well that's all crap. They don't have time for that. They're just making movies as fast as they can."

"But the exciting change for MGM - $5.8 million. The idea's ridiculous."

He is far from happy with the current government stand on Australian content and the regulations that accompany them. "One of the disappointing things about this industry at the moment is the fact that it's so fiercely Australian. No one else gets a look in. Jim and I learned basic film education from foreigners working in this country. There was an injection of Americans or Italians every other year, and it didn't really matter if many of the films weren't that good: you learn something even from bad teachers. But at the moment, it's very incestuous. We're all supposedly learning from each other, but I suspect we're also reinforcing prejudices - it's not opening up our minds. With the exception of Herzog's film Where the Green Ants Dream, there hasn't been a foreign picture made here in ten years. And I think that's a pity."

McElroy favours a relaxation of Australian criteria, "believing that the unions and guilds keep a firm enough hand on the entries and exit of foreign talent: 'You do not.' He insists, 'need a government department second-guessing or underlining what the unions are already doing.' And he takes great exception to the idea that co-productions are the scourge of the industry.

"There is a handful of people in this country who know the economic basis of the film industry. It's very easy for someone to say that you've got to produce only for Australia, but the difficulty is that it's difficult - if not downright impossible - for films to break even in this territory. It's always been difficult, but now we've compounded the problem with over-
production and inflation of something like 100%. And this inflation’s been created by Australians, because at the moment, you can finance a film that’s got no relation to the market. That no one wants to see. But you can do it — you can use taxpayers’ money — because you can put out a prospectus. Now what’s the bigger crime? He views co-production as “the price you pay for some rational thought entering the process. We choose to look outside Australia for revenue, for talent, for stories ... for anything. Because we’re part of the world. There used to be a saying in Australia: ‘Export or perish.’ No industry can sustain itself without it. And if you do it without a commitment to some kind of input from another country.”

McElroy’s latest production will also play the Montreal festival. Razorback marks the feature debut of rock clip director Russell Mulcahy, and represents the feature debut of Jason Connery and Diane Cilento. It’s financed in Australia, and we presold distribution of it (as we did with Razorback), the only people who are going to come in and I found it exciting to give Russell his first feature and then just watch him work.

Razorback was a departure for Hal in that his primary focus for the last five years has been television: brother Jim has handled theatrical production. He’s gone back to TV now, and the return has been anything but low-key.

“I’m doing a miniseries just before Christmas that’s gonna cost a million an hour. It’s written by the guy who did Return to Eden (another McElroy miniseries), and I think it’s a wonderful idea that will work internationally. A contemporary western.” He glances up at the Return to Eden poster above his head, and grimaces slightly. “It’s an exciting project, but for four million dollars, it bloody well oughta be.”

The other side of the issue is enounced across town at the offices of Dick Mason and Julia Overton. Astra Film Productions is the company behind the better-known work of director John Duigan (Winter of Our Dreams, Far East) as well as his newest film — One Night Stand — which has also been selected for the Montreal festival.

Astra’s premises are as basic and down to earth as its two producers. At a time of rocketing budgets, One Night Stand’s pittance of a budget still holds firm to the corporate line; both Mason and Overton are committed to the concept of a national cinema, and believe it to be linked to low budgets. In their eyes, the inherent nature of the product will determine its box office potential.

“If you’re creative enough,” Mason insists, “your films will work here and overseas. Winter of Our Dreams was a perfect example of that. It was a film about commitment and human relations, and had the same kind of success elsewhere as it did here. That’s my position.”

“And it’s always been mine,” Overton injects. “I’ve never felt we should do anything else. The most successful films internationally — Chariots of Fire, that sort of thing — have a strong sense of themselves as products, and people are either interested or they’re not. Winter was a story from here, and yet it was totally international at the same time. I think that’s all you can do: it’s not worth compromising or changing the nature of a film to make a bid for the marketplace.

Astra is currently wrapping post-production on a new film by Stephen Wallace. According to Overton, it’s very much in tune with the Astra tradition. “In some ways, I suppose you could say that The Boy Who Had Everything might be considered fairly hard work for the general public. It’s not an action-adventure story. By having our stars — Jason Connery and Diane Cilento — we hope that people who wouldn’t ordinarily go see this kind of film will go. And I think that’s a perfectly valid premise, whether it’s a national or international film. You make the picture the way you believe best, trust your own judgement. When you start producing what you think other people want, you’re lost.”

Astra was caught in a nasty case of bad timing with the release of One Night Stand in Australia when the film was buried by the press stampede surrounding The Day After. To their surprise, the producers found little remaining interest in their picture’s nuclear theme after the American media blitz had passed.

“It all evolved from a desire to make a film on the nuclear issue,” Mason explains, “and we didn’t know about The Day After. Poor old Testament and One Night Stand suffered similar fates. The general consensus is that The Day After is the least effective of the three films, but it was released first — on TV in America, and as a feature in Australia. It’ll also have a television run here.”

“That sort of thing makes you cynical,” Overton remarks. “Here you are making a film about the most important issue — survival — and the distributors and exhibitors say, ‘Oh, survival’s been done. Next, please.’ That’s when you wonder if you’re really in the right business.”

In the face of all these things, Astra holds to its philosophy: keep the budgets down and produce what you believe in. “People often ask us how we make low-budget films,” says Mason. “I tell them that you travel in a bus. There’s no other way, because one of the keys to the whole thing is the producer’s approach. So that means an ostentatious lifestyle is out of the question. We share whatever profits we make with the leading creative people; all department heads have a percentage.”

Overton gestures towards an adjoining room and flashes a naughty grin. “Our share of the profits bought us the orange juice maker in there. So does this mean we’ve hit the big time?"

June 21-24: “We might as well be making shoes.”

It’s back to the Sebel some days later for the official announcement of the Documentary Fellowship Awards. A special advisory panel headed by filmmaker Tom Haydon has reviewed fifty-four applications for the $75,000 grant, awarded to finance both living and production expenses on the winners’ next projects. The first set of fellowships was expanded from two grants to three, and AFC Chairman Phillip Adams begins the presentation by explaining the added award as a “recognition of the backlog of excellent candidates whose body of work deserved immediate recognition.”

In announcing the winners — Sydney’s Gary Kildea and Tom Zubrycki and Melbourne’s Brian McKenzie — Haydon stops to pay tribute to (National Film Board of Canada documentarian) Mike Rubbo. “His name came back here at a significant moment in time to open our eyes to the kind of documentary work being done internationally. We owe him a great debt of gratitude.”

Rubbo’s trip home to give documentary courses at the Film and Television School have become a tradition of late, and there are many here who hope his next Montreal-Sydney flight will be made on a one-way ticket.

“If we get really lucky,” someone tells me. “Mike soon won’t go back to Canada at all.”

We’re going to begrudge them that.
One weekday afternoon in late June, the Valhalla Cinema in Paddington opens its doors to an exclusive audience of men. The group sits in concentrated silence as a film called Strikebound unspools before them, and the picture has probably never played to such a critical crowd. But these men are neither reviewers nor producers – they are miners, for whom this remarkable movie has a very special significance.

Strikebound is based on events that took place in 1936 on the Cippenland coalfields in the state of Victoria, when a small group of miners and their wives organized Australia's first successful strike. The event is a landmark in the history of the Australian labour movement, and the picture is rapidly winning its own place of honour both here and abroad. Sparkling, sardonic, and brilliantly dramatic, it marks the feature debut of writer-director Richard Lowenstein, exciting theatre companies in the country. Sydney's Nimrod Theatre has become legendary as a launching pad for some of Australia's hottest talent. He also made a heavy impact in domestic television, specializing in "nasties."

"I got roles in cop shows playing baddies, rapists and robbers. Died about twenty times the first year. But the typecasting didn't bother me: the important thing was that a lot of people were not. He is blithely pragmatic about his screen image as it has evolved. Apart from some notable exceptions (Strikebound, Phil Noyce's Newsfront and David Steven's The Clinic among them), he has generally specialized in the brutal and psychotic. Razorback features star turns by Haywood and Argue as a pair of degenerate brothers, and in Paul Cox's sensitive, quirky Man Of Flowers (a possibility for Montreal as we went to press), he plays a violent, minimally-talented painter who beats up on his girlfriend. But the weirdo tag doesn't worry him.

"To me, acting is a job. I look at myself as a service company: acting's my main form of cash flow. Now I get offered roles in cop shows playing baddies, rapists and robbers. Died about twenty times the first year. But the typecasting didn't bother me: the important thing was that a lot of people were not."

One of the hottest wrinkles in the community over the last two years has gathered around the producers' association and Actors' Equity. The most controversial on the importation of foreign talent has been firm and - in the eyes of many producers - unrelenting. Haywood does not apologize for it.

"As far as our Defense of Employment Policy goes, I feel that if the industry supported Australian actors more, and better utilized us as marketing tools, we'd become valuable commodities. The use of foreign talent is a difficult
physical layout and overall ambiance, it’s as far from the cluttered chaos of the L.A. enclave as you can imagine.

Australians may bitch about the coldness of a 17°C winter day, but the "surfies" aren’t having any of it. Out beyond the beach, they ride the waves in shiny wetsuits that catch the sunlight and flash the rays back to shore. From his home well above the water, David Effick stands on his new patio and gazes down at the tiny figures on surfboards.

"Best place to be," he remarks suddenly. "And if the weather doesn’t turn up soon, it’s exactly where I will be."

He’s in the middle of additions to his beachfront house in the picturesque, dance hall that now fronts new living quarters on the hill behind it. He is also—though not at this precise moment—in the midst of directing Undercover. Effick is one of the first wave’s premier producers; he oversaw Phil Noyce’s first major feature (Heartbeat), Gillian Armstrong’s second (Starstruck), and David Stevens’ recent (Undercover). The new project is entitled Emoh Rau—mirror writing for “Our Home” and associated tension is working on his nerves.

“One dunno,” he says, sweeping wood chips off the patio. “I sometimes think I’d like to rid myself of Sydney. Move out here full time. If I’d be so easy to forget the bloody film industry…mean, who actually needs the aggravation?” He leans on the broom for a moment, gazes out at the ocean. “A life of full-time surfing,” he muses. “Now that’s something we could discuss."

But the painter finally turns up, and they never get round to it.

Melbourne—June 25:
“Co-productions are free ways into our tax schemes.”

This is a colder, greyer day. The winter rains here are frequent and chilly, and Sydney’s glittering connection with the ocean finds no echo in the narrow, brownish Yarra River that winds its way through the Victorian capital. The antipathy between the two cities is legendary, and glumly familiar to anyone acquainted with the Montreal-Toronto tradition of mutual loathing. But there are people who swear by this place, who regard its northern sister as a kind of urban paeon to the superficial: “Beaches are more important than books in Sydney,” they’ll tell you. “Who needs it?”

Phillip Adams certainly doesn’t. It’s rumoured that day trips to Sydney are generally all he can tolerate, no doubt making for a scheduling nightmare of sizeable proportions since his appointment last year as AFC chairman. Adams does not run on normal schedules. It’s also rumoured that he doesn’t take time off to sleep, and a glance at his weighty resume would seem to back that premise up. Besides his pivotal involvement in the country’s largest domestically-owned advertising agency, he is also Australia’s most widely-published “journo”; having written extensively for a variety of national and international newspapers and magazines, he currently pens regular columns for the influential Australian newspapers and magazines. Add to this his title as chairman of the Victorian Arts Council, his AFC posting and his impressive credentials as a film producer (The Adventures of Barry McKenzie, Don’s Party, The Getting of Wisdom, Grendel, Grendel, Grendel, We of the Never Never, Lonely Hearts, Kitty and the (Bagnold) Fights on), and the picture is perfectly scary.

So less surprise is in order when people trace much of the film industry’s business back to Adams, name directors as a little overblown. "Our Home“—young, the term payments... all the things people who live in a caravan park turn up soon, and to our astonishment, it turns out to be a nightmare."

"It basically goes back to 1969, when Barry Jones—who’s now the minister of Science and Technology—and I grabbed the independent producers; he oversaw the politicians and pursued him that we should have a film industry. We got him very excited, and the two of us charged all around the world on a study trip. I came back and wrote a one-page report to the Prime Minister, suggesting we start an industry here. We worked out a new project is entitled ‘Our Home’—mirror writing for ‘Our Home’ and the structure that involved an experimental film fund which gave away money... $500 to $1000—to almost anyone with something to say, a national film school and the AFDC, which metamorphosed into the AFC. We set the whole thing up, and to our astonishment, it worked."

We went on to found the ‘AFC’ on the establishment of the South Australian Film Corporation, thus initiating the trend toward state film bodies. Adams maintains the move was something of a mixed blessing. “We went from being the toughest country in which to make films to a place where it was too easy. I sometimes regret that we were quite so successful in creating a plethora of bureaucracies. If a filmmaker couldn’t get his project through the AFDC or the AMC, he’d take it round to the states and someone would eventually make it. A lot of the pictures were pretty pathetic. I think filmmaking ought to be tough, and it’s getting that way again.”

He also admits to mixed feelings on the issue of tax concessions, but very basic ones as regards the role of the AFC in the whole debate. “The Commission’s prime job is to serve the nationalist stream of filmmakers more than the international one. In my view, the internationals can be funded by the internationals. We’re the fifth market on earth for America, and by our own legislation, they’ll be repatriating one billion dollars from Australia in the next decade. I’m talking to the American majors now and suggesting that they may have to have a more nationalist ethos. It’s much easier for a film to get up if the Commission invests in it, particularly since the investment often falls in the non-deductible areas. But we’re unashamed xenophobes— in the way we allocate that money.”

Interestingly enough, the aspect of the AFC so admired by the Canadian community—the involvement of leading industry figures in the Commission itself—is something Adams now views as undesirable. “The industry has been controlled by the filmmakers up till now. We all fought at the barricades together, and the government gave us money which we divided among ourselves and went off to make our movies. We didn’t have an infrastructure; there was no management class. In this light, the appointment of Kim Williams as Chief Executive is an intriguing one. He doesn’t come from the film world, although his father happened to be the chief executive of Greater Union. But Kim can be a chamber music organization called Musica Viva. He was hired because I thought he was far away and the most exciting applicant we interviewed. I liked him for two reasons: he’s an exceptionally skillful manager, and he doesn’t owe anybody anything. He hasn’t come into the job too close to the industry. We have to grow out of that, because there’s been too many conflicts of interest; every second AFC meeting sees one or more of the members leaving the room every agenda item. I hope the new class of people coming through will be able to contribute without being hampered by these conflicts.”

The subject of co-production treaties has hung heavy in the air for some time now; this includes the issue of a Canada-Australia accord. Adams’ response is short and simple.

“We’re loathe to sign any agreements now because we don’t want to open up a fragile industry to American intervention. We view the agreements as free ways into our tax incentive schemes. On a project-to-project basis, though, we’ll deal..."

He is concerned about the major problems facing the theatrical market—"We’re looking at some kind of legisla..."

The month has been tough, with one of our stories, since we’ve got the highest percentage of video penetration in the world: 50% by the end of next year. It’s having an impact on the way we view the industry..."

On September 1984—Cinema Canada/25
frustration to work off, an explosion of activity, just as there was in China after the Cultural Revolution. And obviously you're bound to run out of your first puff! So a lot of our filmmakers are working in the States. But I think these departures free the system up for the kind of people - they're an exciting bunch. You couldn't ask for more than that.

Talk about rapid transit: I haven’t gone near an airport, and suddenly I'm home again. The Melbourne offices of Cinema Papers bear more than a passing resemblance to this publication's Montreal headquarters, and the magazine itself - in format, at least - has got to be Cinema Canada's kissing cousin. Not surprisingly, Cinema Papers fulfills a similar function on the Australian film scene, but has only resumed doing so since April of this year; an AFC decision last year to withdraw its annual subsidy to the journal effectively shut down operations midway through 1983.

Now that a new funding arrangement between the Commission and Film Victoria has put the magazine back into gear, Goin' Down the Road recently reported: Giannane named a role for a forum for the intellectuals vs. internationalists debate. "Giannane for the AFC."

When the reduction happened last year, they claimed the cutback would kill the magazine's function. "I don't think any government body should be in this business," says Murray. "They should determine if a product should or should not be produced with taxpayers' money. The AFC refused to invest in Mad Mac I, and later congratulated themselves for the decision. Well, they can't sense what the public wants. George Miller can; let people like him determine what gets made.

Mary and now also a role as a forum for viewing point, and trade news updates. And the April issue - the tenth anniversary edition, in fact - contains a strangely relevant face-off between AFC chairman Phillip Adams and independent producer Antony Giannane on the "nationalists vs. internationalists" debate. Giannane has chosen to make his case for the internationalists by submitting the CDPF's 'McCabe eras' as a role model for the AFC. "An enormous amount of ill-informed comment has appeared in the Australian media as to the success or failure of the years 1975 to 1983 in Canada," he writes. "The facts are that during this period, a number of Canadian films became huge, worldwide box office successes... most of them were criticized by purists for being set in Midville, U.S.A. rather than Midville, Canada. But they provided a real industry in Toronto with worldwide recognition for producers, technicians and facilities."

In fact, a number of Cana­adian films have been very successful, such as "Next Wave," "The Colour of Money" and "Long Time Coming." The Australian film industry has been criticized by purists for being too small and too close to home. "The facts are that during this period, a number of Canadian films became huge, worldwide box office successes... most of them were criticized by purists for being set in Midville, U.S.A. rather than Midville, Canada. But they provided a real industry in Toronto with worldwide recognition for producers, technicians and facilities."

Giannane's piece - actually the transcript of a speech delivered at a university seminar in 1983 - is the subject of some concern among the internationalists, and this is very much in keeping with the kind of provocative publication that editor Scott Murray believes Cinema Papers should be. "I don't feel the magazine's function includes the taking of editorial positions," he says. "It really is a forum for debate and discussion, not a podium for putting my points across."

One of the most interesting things about Tony Giannane is the fact that he was always regarded as a money-oriented internationalist who never paid much attention to anything connected with the domestic industry. When Cinema Papers folded, he was one of the strongest voices out there battling to bring us back. So things are never black and white.

Murray has been with the magazine since its beginnings, and this has provided him with plenty of time to formulate some strong opinions about the state of the industry. "The producers' response to the tax concession cutback was rather ridiculous. Two years ago, they were predicting the death of the industry when the 150% incentive came in. When the reduction happened last year, they claimed the cutback would kill them. Making movies is a hard-edged, entrepreneurial business that demands terrific determination. It should not be an easy task.

Neither does he hold great faith in the concept of government intervention. "I don't think any government body should be in this business," says Murray. "They should determine if a product should or should not be produced with taxpayers' money. The AFC refused to invest in Mad Mac I, and later congratulated themselves for the decision. Well, they can't sense what the public wants. George Miller can; let people like him determine what gets made.

Murray also views the exodus of superstar directors as less of a problem than the accompanying working in the States. But I think these intentions are quite sensible. They have been tempting for producers find that difficult. They have offices in London and L.A. and a marketing department in Sydney, and that's how they've been strong. In fact, they should be 'facilitators,' not 'deciders.'"

Labour relations in the recent past have also been a source of unhappiness for the Association, and North is working to change that; the traditionally bitter confrontations with actors' Equity have been tempered for a while with an interim accord. "We'll be negotiating a new feature film award collective agreement with them in the next few weeks," he says. "We've been negotiating for an agreement for no industrial action for twelve months, which I'm very happy about. And when there are disputes, whether with the actors or the technicians, we take them straight to the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission." She's convinced this route is the more productive. "There's no better way to go. We're all learning to talk it out, rather than just shout at each other. We're moving toward the kind of cooperative relationship this industry is supposed to be all about.

If so, no better place to start looking than across town at the Swinburne Institute of Technology in Melbourne, where the new film school is already something of a cause celebre for many members of the student body. "We have a very strong feeling that the College's Film and Television Department is a real hotbed of creativity," says Rock. "We're working on the basis that the school's lack of physical resources is more than compensated for by a wealth of energy and a strong sense of creative environment. We're turning out top-grade people every year,"

"That's very important to me. We've got People have asked how such a serious subject could be treated so lightly, and I think this was about it. The film's serious intentions are not just to entertain, but also to provoke. This situation is very important to me. We've got to work toward raising the temperature of the whole issue debate.

When I'm ready to leave Melbourne, I'll make a point of dropping in on Auckland's most interesting things about Tony Giannane is the fact that he was always regarded as a money-oriented internationalist who never paid much attention to anything connected with the domestic industry. When Cinema Papers folded, he was one of the strongest voices out there battling to bring us back. So things are never black and white.

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