

# Landscapes of contemporary censorship in cinema

by Gary Betcherman



National  
Film Board  
of Canada

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## NEWS

Forty-five NFB films will be presented during the course of this year's Festival of Festivals in Toronto, September 6 to 15.

Highlights of the Film Board's participation include a wide selection of NFB productions in the Festival's retrospective programs and the world premieres of two new NFB productions: Gail Singer's *Abortion: Stories from North and South* and Paul Cowan's *Democracy on Trial: The Morgentaler Affair*. Singer's film, produced by the NFB's Studio D, is a cross-cultural survey of the perceptions and practice of abortion. *The Morgentaler Affair* chronicles Dr. Henry Morgentaler's challenge to Canada's abortion laws in the early 1970's. The film recreates his six-year battle in Quebec's courts and provides a profile of an individual who risked everything for a principle he believed in. Programmed together in the "Perspective Canada" series, the films will be screened at 2:00 p.m. Saturday, September 8 and at 11:30 a.m. Monday, September 10 at the Showcase cinema.

### TORONTO PREMIERES

*Mario*, Jean Beaudin's new feature film and Giles Walker's and John N. Smith's *The Masculine Mystique* will open in Toronto at the Festival of Festivals in the "Perspective Canada" series. *Mario*, inspired by Claude Jasmin's book, *La Sablière*, is the touching story of two brothers and their world of imagination. Starring Xavier Norman Petermann in



● Morgentaler discusses a scene with NFB director Paul Cowan for *Democracy on Trial: The Morgentaler Affair*

the title role, and Francis Reddy, Nathalie Chalifour, Jacques Godin and Murielle Dutil, *Mario* will be screened Saturday, September 8 at 9:00 p.m. at the Showcase cinema.

*The Masculine Mystique*, scheduled for Sunday, September 9 at 2:00 p.m. at the Showcase cinema, is the story of four modern men trying to cope with four modern women. The film, combining an unusual blend of fact and fiction, marks the first of a new genre of feature-length alternative dramas from the National Film Board.

*Incident at Restigouche*, an investigation of the 1981 police raids on the Micmac Reservation in Quebec, is programmed in the Festival's "Two Way Streets" series. The film includes newsreel and documentary footage as well as a heated interview between the former Quebec Minister of Fisheries and Abenaki Indian filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin.

### CANADA'S BEST

The National Film Board's *Mon Oncle Antoine*, directed by Claude Jutra, has been named the best Canadian film of all time. Also named among Canada's top ten are NFB films *J.A. Martin Photographie*, directed by Jean Beaudin; *Pour la Suite du monde*, directed by Pierre Perrault, Michel Brault and Marcel Carrière; and Don Owen's *Nobody Waved Goodbye*. The selection was based on a poll of international and Canadian film critics carried out by the Festival of Festivals. Coincidentally both Don Owen and Jean Beaudin have new releases opening at the Festival this year. Owen's *Unfinished Business*, co-produced by the NFB and Zebra Films, is the sequel to *Nobody Waved Goodbye*. It will be screened Friday, September 14 at the Showcase cinema. Beaudin's new feature, *Mario*, will have its Toronto premiere at 9:00 p.m. Saturday, September 8, also at the Showcase.

One of the films shelved in Poland after martial law was imposed in 1981 was *There Was Jazz* by Falk, a director little-known in the West but with a following in his own country. Hardly a political film, it nevertheless deals with a subject that is taboo in most Eastern Bloc countries: jazz. The anarchical philosophy and decadent lifestyle associated with this form of music has for years made jazz, in the minds of officialdom, a kind of foreign virus that threatens to tear apart the fabric of their society. Most Westerners have constructed an image of paranoid authority and bleak repression behind the Iron Curtain, but one forgets that paranoid structures are not restricted to the Soviet Union and that censorship, in one form or another, is practiced almost everywhere in the world. While doing research for a film festival, *FORBIDDEN FILMS: THE FILM-MAKER & HUMAN RIGHTS*, which will be taking place in Toronto Oct. 18-28, I have come to see that censorship is as widespread as film itself and almost as old.

Seen optimistically, censorship is a strategy to foster a just and cohesive society; approached from the opposite end, it is an attempt on the part of a power base to maintain control over the masses. In application they amount to the same thing, and it is only the methods and targets that change from country to country. Thus, in Brazil, the state-run Embrafilme pumps out soft-core porn for the urban masses (unthinkable in Canada), while at the same time it imposed a ten-year interdiction on a film that dared suggest women were equally capable of having the sorts of extra-marital affairs that men enjoy. The authorities were willing to release the film if the scenes showing that the woman was married were purged, and if the title was changed. The title, taken from street slang, has been translated into English as *The Men I Loved*, but a truer rendering would be *The Men I Had*. It is an idiom in the Portuguese language of Brazil used by men to describe trophies of sex, and the substitution of 'men' for 'women' in the term was suddenly very shocking. This film would have encountered no difficulties in Europe or North America, but in a country where a man can

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be acquitted of the murder of his wife because she had been having an affair, it is not so surprising that the film could not be seen for a decade.

Teresa Trautman was 21 years old when she made *The Men I Loved* in 1972. She was the first woman director of modern cinema in Brazil and has continued to be a strong and rather witty feminist voice despite anonymous threats and the sort of neglect on the part of the industry that comes of having made a banned film. She will be in Toronto for the festival of forbidden films and will talk about her experiences at the hands of the censors and some of the projects she has been involved in over the past ten years.

Brazil has a long history of repression, and not all of it is concerned with social roles and gender identity. The Cinema Novo derived much of its style in the middle and later period from the development of a coded language that would pass the scrutiny of the censors. By 1972 most of the Novo directors had left the repressive regime of Brazil, and when they returned years later they found that a new generation of filmmakers had taken over the reins of cinema. The Novo movement, aside from giving us classics of the cinema, provided the model for the autonomous and socially conscious film movement throughout South America, which in turn injected new ideas and offered alternate strategies for world cinema. From the point of view of censorship, however, South American cinema is little more than a catalogue of horrors. The story of censorship in this area is intimately tied up with foreign economic domination and unstable local governments.

*Hour Of The Furnaces*, by Argentinian directors Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, was both made and shown in almost total clandestine conditions. Completed in 1968, it called for a popular Peronist revolt against the military regime of Onganía. A year after the Peronists resumed power in 1973, the film was banned! It seems that Peron, once back in power, did not want to stir up revolutionary fervour over social injustices. The year 1974 marked the turning of the Peronist government towards the political right, and other bannings include Raymondo Gleyzer's *The Traitors*, which attacked corruption in the trade unions, and Hector Olivera's *Revolt In Patagonia*, an historical reconstruction of the brutal army suppression of the 1921 peasant revolt. In 1976, under General Videla, the military once again regained power, and Raymondo Gleyzer "disappeared", never to be heard from again. The other directors took this as a warning and all but one fled Argentina. Getino went to Peru, while So-

lanas and Jorge Cedron, director of the expose of secret executions conducted by the army in the '50s and called *Operation Massacre*, left for Paris. Hounded by foreign agents there, Cedron finally took his life in 1980 - the last of all the principal participants of *Massacre* to die a victim of repression. Olivera meanwhile stayed in Argentina and continued to work, claiming, of course, that there was no such film as *Revolt In Patagonia*.

The situation in Chile and

Bolivia, though not quite as extreme, was cast in the same mould. The coup in Chile in 1973 forced more than 35 directors into exile. Some, like Miguel Littin and Patricio Guzman, remained in Latin America and continued to make films relevant to the social and political life in that area. Others, like Raoul Ruiz, went to Europe to make films less restricted in subject matter and more concerned with the art of film. At least three Chilean filmmakers - Marilú Mallet, Jorge Fajardo,

and Leuten Rojas - are living and working in Canada.

The first full-length feature made in Bolivia, the 1925 *Prophecy From The Lake*, was banned because the story involved an official's wife falling in love with an Indian servant. Censorship in that country hasn't let up since. The leading filmmaker, Jorge Sanjines, had to flee the military coup of Colonel Banzer in 1971. Antonio Eguino, the cameraman on Sanjines' *Courage Of The People*, was imprisoned in 1975 for

his part in the production. Sanjines returned after the fall of Banzer in 1979, but had to flee again in 1980 with the military take-over by General Meza. Alfonso Gummucio Dagrón, another filmmaker who narrowly escaped with his life in that coup, has since explained the growing popularity of Super-8 filmmaking in Latin America: when the soldiers come at you with guns, you can still run with a Super-8 camera, but 16mm only slows you down.

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# montréal

If Latin America is a dangerous place to make films, at least films do get made. In many countries of the world, scripts have to be approved before permission to produce the film is granted. In Pakistan for instance, one cannot buy film stock without a license, and one cannot get a license without script approval. Jamil Dehlavi, who had the good fortune to be well-connected, managed by a series of happy coincidences to by-pass this

stage; his film, *The Blood Of Hussain*, could not have been made otherwise. The film shows Islam as a revolutionary force, but is critical of the military. A month after shooting was completed, General Zhia, in a coup strangely reminiscent of the opening scenes of the film, took control of the country. Dehlavi secretly had the footage sent to England, but word soon got out about the existence of his film and his passport was impounded. He

managed to escape to England two years later on a forged passport. Dehlavi will be coming to Toronto to participate in the festival.

Another film on Islam, this one critical, also went unseen in its own country. Ousmane Sembene, Africa's first black director and Senegal's most renowned novelist, has repeatedly found himself in trouble because of his outspoken criticism of social injustices. Newly liberated African countries are

still quite tender and seem unable to weather any criticism that implies that they, rather than the old colonial governments, might be responsible for any existing social ills. *Ramparts Of Clay* by Bertucelli is one example of this, although Sembene's *Ceddo* goes much further in its indictments of regressive "new" regimes. His film was banned ostensibly due to the spelling of the title: *Ceddo* with one 'd' is how the old French regime spelled the

word for "outsider", while the native Wolof spelling has two 'd's. This is certainly a red herring, for the "outsiders" of the story are precisely those Africans marginalized by the conquering Islamic faith. In his call for Africans to reclaim their own culture, Sembene embarrassed a government that is both Islamic and the natural heir to the colonial regime.

Nationalist sentiments are naturally frowned upon in a country under foreign domination. The great Armenian director, Sergei Paradjanov, has suffered unspeakable crimes at the hands of the Russians. His *Shadows Of Forgotten Ancestors* was banned at home while winning 16 awards for the Soviet Union at film festivals around the world. *Colour Of Pomegranates*, described as "more a vision than a movie," is about an 18th-century Armenian. Banned in the USSR since 1969, it has been available outside the Soviet Union only in a bootleg print until the authorities finally released a copy this year. In a closed trial in 1974, Paradjanov was convicted of either homosexual related crimes or dealing in art objects, and upon his release from prison four years later he was not allowed to work in film. He is reportedly back in prison now; though on what charges nobody seems to know.

The extent of Soviet influence and the crude manner of its application is really quite frightening. The military crackdown on Ducek's Prague Spring in 1968 not only curtailed the rights and freedoms of the Czechoslovakian populace, it brought to an end one of the most exciting periods in the history of the cinema: the Czech New Wave. Many of the leading directors, such as Milos Forman and Ivan Passer, left to work abroad, while those who stayed behind - voluntarily or otherwise - had to modify their attitudes or else not work at all. Jiri Menzel, director of the Academy Award-winning *Closely Watched Trains*, denounced his earlier films and has been allowed to work. Vera Chytilova did not denounce her earlier films and was not able to work again until 1976; even now she is not permitted to leave Czechoslovakia to attend festivals where her work is being exhibited. Jan Nemecek, the enfant terrible of the Czech New Wave, was not allowed to work after the Russian invasion either, but in 1975 managed to get an exit visa to West Germany. He is presently residing in the States, where he is in pre-production of a film for Amnesty International on torture victims. Nemecek too will be coming to Toronto for the festival, bringing with him two of his films that are no longer in distribution and a third film, *Czech Connection*, which has never been shown here.

If one comes to expect, grudgingly, Russian interference in



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Over the last year, the Canadian Film Institute has received many inquiries about its current activities and its plans for the future. We have decided that the most efficient and economical method of responding to this interest is to publish a series of Communiqués in *Cinema Canada*.

## NATIONAL FILM THEATRE OF CANADA TOURS "CANADA'S TEN BEST"

The National Film Theatre of Canada has reached an agreement with Toronto's Festival of Festivals and the Labatt Brewing Company Limited to co-ordinate the national tour of *Canada's Ten Best* - ten films selected by over 150 critics and filmmakers from a national poll conducted by Festival of Festivals. This programme will premiere at the Festival of Festivals in September before touring to ten Canadian cities, from Victoria to Halifax, in October and November.

## CFI PERSONNEL TO ATTEND FESTIVAL OF FESTIVALS

CFI Executive Director Frank Taylor will attend the Toronto Festival of Festivals and Trade Forum. Also attending will be National Film Theatre Director Harry Sutherland and Manager Rob Unsworth. They can be contacted through the Festival Information office.

## UPCOMING PROGRAMMES AT THE NATIONAL FILM THEATRE OF CANADA

The NFT's Summer Programme will conclude in August with the highly popular Disney series *Persistence of Mickey*, curated by Richard Gotlib of Toronto, and sponsored by Metropolitan Insurance Companies.

Highlighting the NFT's September and October programme is a week of films from the European Community, including Bertrand Tavernier's *A Sunday in the Country*, winner of Best Director's Award at Cannes '84.

As part of the NFT's programme "New Asian Cinema," Filipino director Lino Broca will be in Ottawa to premiere his latest film *Bayan-Ko*.

The Fall Programme will conclude with a 20-film salute to Canadian cinema, sponsored by the National Film, Television and Sound Archives as part of "Archives Month" in Ottawa. Several filmmakers will be invited to Ottawa to participate.

## NEW SPONSORS OF CANADIAN FILM INSTITUTE PROGRAMMES

The Canadian Film Institute is currently developing a wide variety of new projects which will contribute to our long-term stability and benefit the Canadian film and television community. Recently confirmed sponsors for the Institute's activities include: Telefilm Canada, the Department of the Secretary of State, the CBC, the National Film, Television and Sound Archives, The Canada Council, the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture, The Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Family Foundation, Northern Telecom Limited, Labatt Brewing Company Limited, and Metropolitan Insurance Companies.

## NEW PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE FROM THE CANADIAN FILM INSTITUTE

The Publications Division of the Canadian Film Institute is pleased to announce that the *British Film Institute Guide to International Film Festivals - 1984* (\$10.00), is now available from our Ottawa offices. This publication contains detailed information on all film festivals around the world, and is a valuable resource for Canadian producers and distributors seeking to promote their films abroad.

The CFI is now also distributing its new *Guide to the Collection*, a comprehensive listing of over 6000 film and video titles available from our Film Library, based in Mississauga, Ontario. The Film Library serves educational film users across Canada, and provides a special focus on the sciences, cinema studies and the visual and performing arts. The *Guide* can be purchased for \$15.00, prepaid, plus \$3.00 for shipping and handling. Please allow 4 weeks for delivery. To obtain your copy, please contact the CFI Film Library at our address in Mississauga, given below.

## COMMUNIQUÉ



Jacques Gagnon (Benoit) and Jean Duceppe (l'oncle Antoine) in *Mon Oncle Antoine*, selected as Canada's best film and part of the touring programme *Canada's Ten Best*.

## MAJOR PUBLICATION FOR CANADIAN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY NEARS COMPLETION

Research for the final 3 sections of *Perspectives on Development* will be completed in the early fall of 1984. Produced by the Information and Research Division of the CFI with the assistance of the Canadian International Development Agency, this 7-section publication provides detailed evaluations, in both official languages, of over 150 documentaries dealing with a wide range of international development issues. These films, evaluated by such organizations as the Institute of Asian Research (Vancouver) and the North/South Institute (Ottawa), have been chosen for their extremely high standards of production and content. Copies of this publication can be obtained, without charge, from our Ottawa offices.

With an eye to its 50th-Anniversary in 1985, the Canadian Film Institute will continue the work it is mandated to do: encourage and promote the production, diffusion, study, appreciation and use of moving images for educational and cultural purposes in Canada and elsewhere. It will continue to serve its constituents from coast to coast. And it will continue to plan its growth with the next fifty years in mind.

We invite your comments and suggestions on our services and programmes. Please write to us at our Ottawa offices.

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# CENSORSHIP

the affairs of Soviet Satellites, its influence in places like Turkey still seems surprising. In 1978 Kilic made a film, based on an historical incident about Russian subjects who had escaped to Turkey and were eventually sent back. *When Will The Sun Rise*, a fast-paced espionage tale, is less an attack on a specific country than a call to Turks to throw off the cultural domination of both East and West and to search its own past for solutions to its present problems. The film was originally passed by the censors, but certain unnamed diplomats from the North lobbied against it. When this didn't work, prints were stolen and theatres bombed. Finally the government banned what is probably the most famous film inside Turkey.

The Americans have not allowed cultural imperialism to remain a function of the Russians alone. Governments dominated by the U.S., notably in South America, have levied cruel taxes on filmmakers interested in social and cultural change. Beyond this they have exported their world vision through the great Hollywood Dream Machine. At home, American methods of cultural repression are different but no less effective than those of the Russians. People still think of Joseph Losey as a British director rather than an American victim of the McCarthy witch-hunts. Jules Dassin, director of *Naked City* and *Never On Sunday*, was not, despite his name, French, but rather was born in Middleton and was also driven out by the House of Representatives' Un-American Activities Committee. This method of blacklisting, which in Russia has just forced Andrei Tarkovsky into exile, in America destroyed the careers and in many cases the lives of hundreds of people. And the fate of Hollywood Ten director Herbert Biberman's film *Salt Of The Earth* provides an insight not only into the world of cinema but into that of labour as well. A movie sympathetic to striking miners in New Mexico, this independently made film survived both legal and economic attempts to destroy it. Even vigilante groups set up outside the theatres were unsuccessful in preventing audiences from seeing it. Finally, the AFL-CIO persuaded the projectionists' union to refuse to screen it, setting a pattern for labour solidarity for years to come while consigning the film to the limited circuit of universities and non-union theatres.

Marginality is an effective method of censorship. In Britain, where a classification system is set up, a film given an X rating, such as *Peeping Tom*, will end up playing small houses on the outskirts of town. Leaving aside the emotional disappointment of a director whose film will be little-seen

and less reviewed, this practice ensures that the film will lose money and the director will henceforth be a liability in an industry already hopelessly enslaved to the banks.

One is not surprised to hear that censorship is in effect in most Arab countries, where strict codes governing most aspects of life already exist. Even less of a surprise is to find censorship heavily applied in South Africa. But who would have thought that France has one of the strictest and structurally most arbitrary codes of

censorship available? Some of the most famous victims of censorship in that country have been Jean Renoir, Luis Bunuel, André Malraux, Alain Resnais, Chris Marker, Jacques Rivette, and Jean-Luc Godard. Any mention of the Algerian situation in the '50s and '60s was bound to get a film banned. The Resnais/Marker film on the subject, *Les Statues meurent aussi*, was not released for fifteen years, and even then it was cut to half its original length. Godard's *Le Petit soldat* was banned for three years, and

when it was released certain references had been deleted – holes in the sound-track still exist in the prints we see today. Rivette's film *The Nun*, based on a story by Diderot, was banned because the story itself, rather than any particular scenes, was deemed immoral. It is about a woman who must choose between a convent and a brothel, and somewhere along the line confuses the two. A similar banning happened in Ontario, when Harel's film, *Vie d'ange*, about a man and a woman who become stuck

while making love and are unable to disengage, was banned because of the theme rather than anything in the picture.

Two famous cases of censorship are Nagisa Oshima's *In The Realm Of The Senses* and Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò*. Both of these films raised the hackles of even the most liberal supporters of anti-censorship laws. Oshima and Pasolini are clearly artists of the first rank, and yet – or perhaps because of this – their films are clearly transgressions of the accepted limits

(cont. on p. 51)

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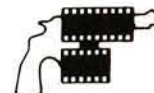
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