



• Top row from left: Stéphane Fortin, Jeanne Crepeau, Carlos Ferrand, André Melançon. Second row from left: Michel Coulomb, Yvon Provost, Michel Paulette, Diane Beaudry, Camille Coudari, Pierre Hébert, Richard Roy, Denys Arcand. Bottom row from left: Martin Barry, Wener Nold, André Gladu, Louise Lamarre, unidentified, Bernard Gosselin

photo: Alain Gauthier

Rendez-vous '86 - A GOOD VINTAGE

by Michel Euvrard

Les *Rendez-vous du cinéma Québécois*, which took place Feb. 10-15, offers a general overview of the year's Quebec films. It's conceived for a limited public – the film community. A café in the lobby of the Cinémathèque Québécoise, where the event took place, encourages encounters and conversation. The atmosphere is relaxed and cordial. Although several awards are handed out, the prevalent spirit is not one of competition. The *Rendez-vous* is not a festival. This is undoubtedly why filmmakers (who generally don't go to movies much) willingly attend.

Nevertheless, as the *Rendez-vous*' foreign guests, who conscientiously saw more or less everything, found out, the event can be trying. Many films are made because they are commissioned, or are the result of an exercise in craft rather than a passion for cinema. As such, they are only marginally pertinent subjects for film criticism. To see one after the other is very wearing. This is not to say that they shouldn't be shown

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– they too are part of our cinema, part of the 'industry'.

THE RETURN OF VOICE-OVER

The National Film Board of Canada was very visible at the *Rendez-vous* with 32 out of the 74 films programmed. Some were animated films, others experimental, but the bulk, 20 of them, were documentaries. In these times of budgetary cutbacks, the NFB falls back on documentary, and documentary filmmakers fall back on the NFB. Many of these films were conceived (as documentaries have been conceived at the NFB since its very beginnings) for community distribution. They are trigger films made to spark discussion and encourage reflection on social problems. Some are commissioned or partly funded by governmental or para-governmental bodies. They testify to the opening-up of Canada to the world (*Retour à Drèsde*), particularly the Third World (*La Casa*), to the French-speaking world (*Nous près, nous loin*), and to its own minorities and their country of origin (*Rends-moi mon pays*).

Other documentaries are made to inform us on, and/or denounce – war (*Retour à Drèsde* and *Paz si, guerra no*), nuclear weapons (*La Bombe en bonus*), the tradition of the dowry in India and the sexual abuses which it en-

genders (*La Fin d'un long secret*), the Chilean dictatorship (*Récits d'une guerre quotidienne*) – or to defend – the Philippino communists (*Philippines, un changement s'impose*). The form, the language of cinema, is obviously not these filmmakers' primary preoccupation. However, they should be concerned with reaching and convincing their audience. It is surprising, after years of *cinéma direct* (and direct sound) to see, or rather hear, the re-appearance of the guiding, authoritative, voice-over commentary telling audiences what they should think of the images they have been shown, as in *Philippines, un changement s'impose*.

In the French version of *Retour à Drèsde* shown at the *Rendez-vous*, a voice-over conceals the English (or is it German?) dialogue between the characters. It is a case of regressing 25 years, of the loss of the authenticity of direct sound. A television system which rejects sub-titling and without whose approval (in the form of a pre-sale) no film is made, is undoubtedly responsible.

Laurette Deschamps' *La Fin d'un long secret* is not without its awkwardness. Instead of having the characters address the camera (i.e., the audience) directly, Deschamps makes them talk among themselves to tell each other...

evidently, things they already know! But the characters, leaders of the women's movements, are warm and passionate. They express a sense of life and humanity, and the film does not separate their militant activities from their personal lives.

Among the eagerly awaited films, Tahnani Rached's *Rends-moi mon pays* and Bernard Gosselin's *L'Anticoste* were disappointing. Rapidly shot on a small budget, with no other preparation than *Haiti-Québec* (her film on Haitian immigrants), *Rends-moi mon pays'* merit and interest lies in its ability to offer an immediate depiction of Haiti's situation so soon after the fall of Jean-Claude Duvalier. Rached and Leduc, the cinematographer, follow a psychiatrist, who'd been living in exile in Montreal, on his first return visit to Haiti in 20 years. They have produced a good document on the country's atmosphere, the fear, the hope, the population's impatience, on its mobilization and the country's failure to give it direction and goals. But the film has come out on the first anniversary of Duvalier's fall. And it doesn't show or say much more than would a good TV news report to compensate for the delay. Happily for the filmmaker – and unfortunately for the people of Haiti – things haven't changed much there so the film hasn't become obsolete.

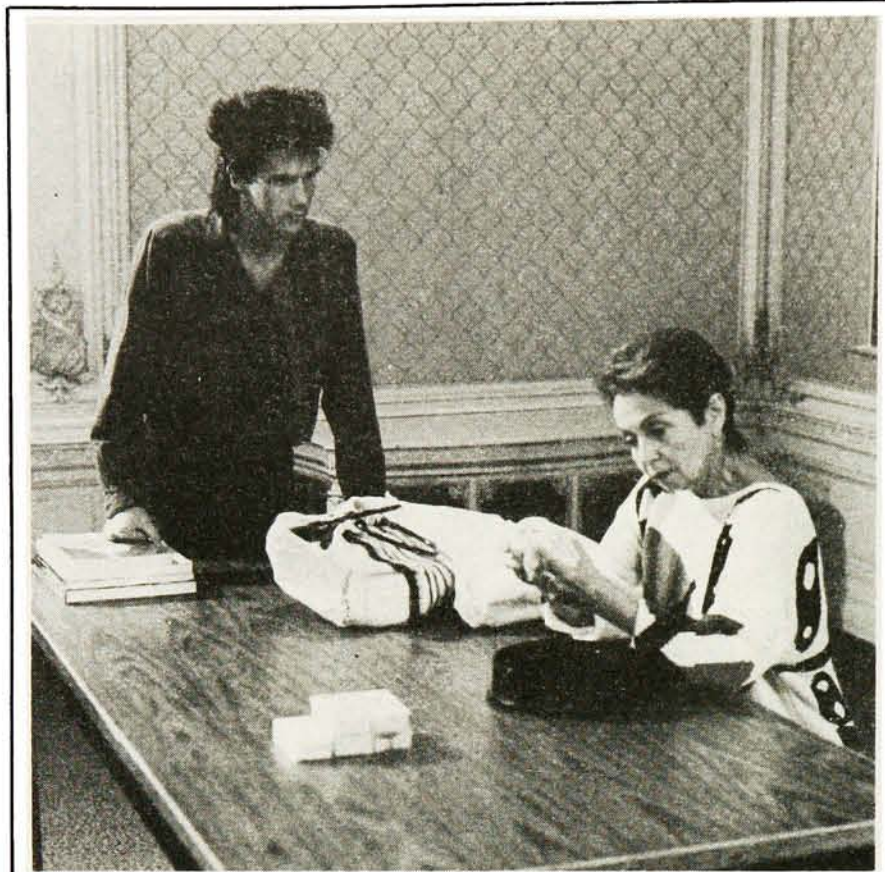
L'Anticoste is a mosaic of all one can find to show and say, if one looks well, on the past and present of Anticostie Island. The film has moments of liveliness and freshness, and astonishing but fragmentary archival footage of the time when the island was owned by a French chocolate manufacturer. However, it also has some lazy and complacent scenes of hunting, fishing and conversation. The dawdling has its charm, but since the film gives the impression that the subject is running away from us and that we are getting nowhere, two hours is long.

FROM DRIFTERS TO

**10 jours...
48 heures**

With the NFB's 50th anniversary fast approaching, Georges Dufaux went to Newfoundland to shoot a documentary on the subject of the first of only two films directed by John Grierson – 1929's **Drifters**, which dealt with deep-sea fishing. From what I can remember, **Drifters** illustrated man's fight against the elements. Grierson ennobled and dramatized the work of the fishermen. It was man and machine, though an almost movingly primitive machine (like the tractors in the Soviet films also of the '20s), against the ocean. In Dufaux' feature-length documentary, **10 jours... 48 heures**, fishing has become industrial work like (almost) any other. A deep-sea trawler in 1986 is no longer a fragile and primitive machine, a nut shell tossed about by the waves. It is now a massive factory sitting on the water. The manoeuvres necessary for its navigation or for fishing no longer require considerable physical exertion or physical skills. What was once a romantic combat has become a routine which is made exceptional only by its schedule – 10 days at sea, 48 hours leave at home.

Georges Dufaux is a calm and discreet filmmaker. He seems suspicious of lyricism and of the temptation to project on his subjects his own ideas and feelings. He too has given serious thought to *cinéma direct*. He does not attempt to hide his presence as filmmaker from the audience. It is clear that there is someone shooting, that the 'characters' are answering questions, that it is the act of filming that brings them to explain how they feel about their work, their lives... However, Dufaux does not want to draw attention to himself. He does not seek to put a recognizable personal imprint on the film. His is the realist vision which demands patience, attention, and modesty from oneself and, with luck, also obtains these qualities from others.



• Lothaire Bluteau, Kim Yaroshevskaya in **Sonia**

Relatively little has been written or said of Dufaux because his films don't lend themselves to controversy, at least within the film community – **Les Enfants des normes** must have made waves among teachers, and **C'est au bout de mon âge** among geriatricians. However, he seems to be at the right place at the right time. **Les Enfants des normes** is *the* audio-visual document on education reform and its aftermath in Quebec, while **C'est au bout de mon âge** examined the increase in average age of the population before the subject became a common topic of enlightened conversation and editorials. Both were directed by Dufaux.

As regards **10 jours... 48 heures**, it is *the* film on the transformation of food production – fishing and agriculture – into an industry, and on the transformation of the peasant into a worker. This becomes evident if **10 jours... 48 heures** is seen, as it must be, in relation to Grierson's **Drifters**. Though filmed 50 years apart, both deal with the same subject, and it is the possibility of comparing them that gives Dufaux' film significance in film history.

The Rendez-vous also permits one to play catch-up. I was able to see three feature films I had missed. Bachar Ch'Bib's **Evixion**, Louise Carré's **Qui à tiré sur nos histoires d'amour** and John N. Smith's **Sitting in Limbo**. The latter, a finalist for the Ouimet Molson Prize for best feature, had a special screening for the members of *L'Association Québécoise de la critique* who hadn't yet seen it. All three were agreeable surprises.

Bachar Ch'bib is mad for cinema. He has the desire to film which, as Belgian critic Philippe Reynaert noted, was absent from many of the films. It is always interesting to see how a filmmaker manages to make a film without money or

means, carried only by a faith shared by a team of cronies in front of, and behind, the camera. Entirely filmed in and around an apartment building in static shots framed by doors or windows, with the scenes set in the halls and stairways shot with a hand-held camera, **Evixion** is not a great film. But it is alert, funny, unexpected and, at the same time, very structured, astonishingly rigorous.

The inhabitants of the building are an incongruous assembly of improbable tenants – a dope pusher married to an ageing homosexual, a working-class couple obsessed with gymnastics, a black mother and her son, who's trying to court a young photographer (the director's alter-ego?), an English woman who one moment lies as if dead at the entrance of the building, at another rants poetry on the stairway, people who enter through windows and leave by doors, who go for walks on the fire escape, circulate incessantly from one apartment to the next. In brief, a small world. An enigmatic but sufficiently agitated life, unexpectedly fertile in surprises and in incongruous events for the spectator to enter into, amused, surprised, and by the end, semi-desolate, semi-indignant that the tenants – whom up to then had succeeded in not having the notice of eviction delivered to them – will be inexorably pushed toward the exit.

Louise Carré's **Qui à tiré sur nos histoires d'amour** has its faults – the most visible being the set for the house in which the heroine lives, and the gowns with which she's rigged out. One of the film styles which Louise Carré utilizes is that of the TV series (*téléroman*), both in conception and in the way certain episodes are filmed (no depth of field, few elements within each frame). But the film mixes styles, and makes a quality of its faults. The combi-

nation of realism, comedy and symbolism, though, at first disturbing, end up working. Together, they paint a portrait of a woman and the people who are, or have been, a part of her life – her daughter, three men (four?), a portrait of a village, its inhabitants, its atmosphere. The film progresses through small scenes in which the tone and style vary – at first meagre and linear, then an accumulation of little inventions, little risks, small ruptures that make for texture and a quite singular personality.

Qui a tiré tells us how a fortyish woman, divorced, whose daughter is in her 20's, who's searching to be free, or at least free to choose her bonds, who lives in the small town where she was born, where she was married, where the husband (whom she left because she wanted to live in Montreal), also resides, where she returned to host a phone-in radio talk-show at the local private station, manages her life. **Qui à tiré** tells us this story with humour, with emotion, making us feel the unused power, the anger, the dreams of this woman, her regrets, her awkward good will, her good heart too, the men who desire or love her.

Sitting in Limbo is a feature-length fiction film, with a strong documentary component, on the youth of Montreal's West-Indian black community. It tells the simple story of two high-school students, a boy and a girl, who drop out when the girl becomes pregnant. He finds work. She leaves the apartment she shares with two unmarried mothers to move in with him. He quickly loses his job and can no longer afford to pay the bills. After her confinement, she returns to her friends, herself an unmarried mother.

With a reggae sound-track as a backdrop, John N. Smith paints a lively portrait of an underprivileged but unified and vital subculture with detached complicity. The young actors, though undoubtedly amateur, are playing more or less themselves and they are well-directed. They provide a know-how and authority which contribute to the film's fluidity and authenticity.

NEW TENDENCIES OR ONLY FADS

Le retour à moi (the 'me' generation), the importance accorded to personal fulfillment, the dimming of the great collective projects, the depolitization seemingly characteristic of the '80s, have an influence on the kind of films being made in Quebec. Films on social issues, collective or political, are set, with rare exceptions elsewhere (**La Casa**, **Rends-moi mon pays**, **Retour à Drèse**, **Nous près, nous loins**, **Phillippines, un changement s'impose**, **Le gens du fleuve**, **La Fin d'un long secret...**) In those that are set in Quebec, the individual comes first, an individual who, apparently, has no problems with money, work, or lodging, but only with himself and those close to him in the context of the nuclear family: relations between parents and children,

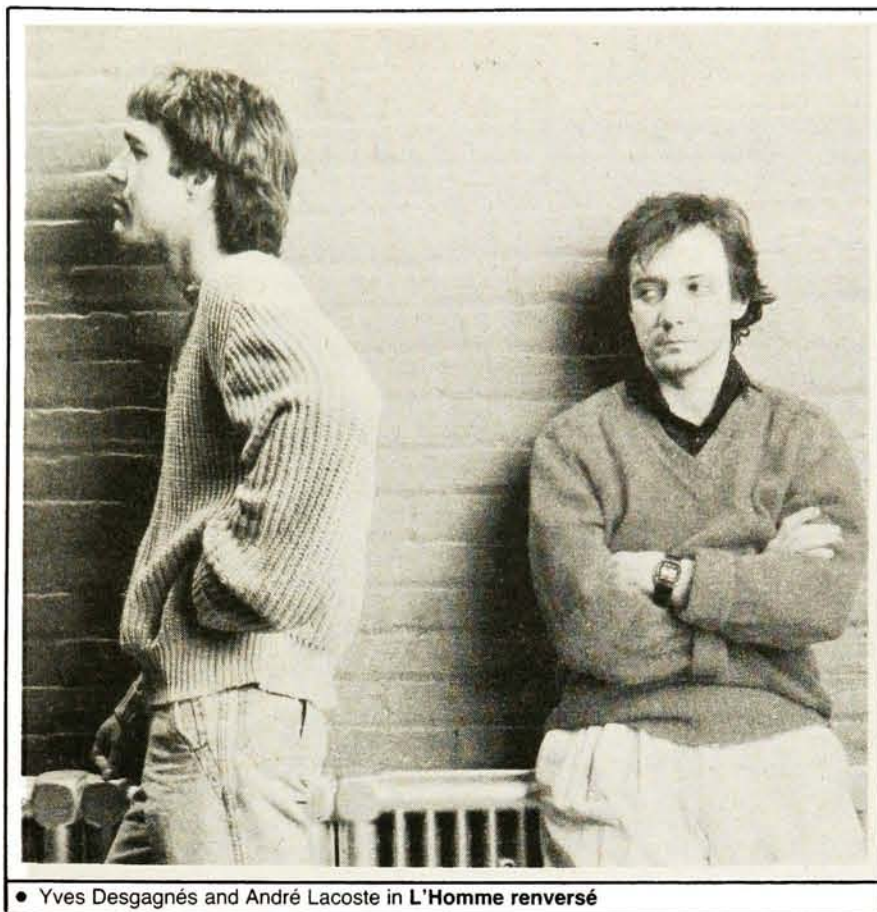
separated parents, sexuality, incest, illness. An unconsciously isolated, helpless individual, concerned above all with his physical and mental well-being, with feeling good with his body and his psyche.

The return to the individual, to private life (and consequently, to the good old psychology, slightly changed to be palatable to present tastes) was evidenced at the '87 *Rendez-vous* by two types of films – confessional films like Francine Prévost's *L'Amour en famille* and Yvon Dubuc's *Les Limites du ciel*, and docudramas like the NFB bio-ethic series (made up of Diane Létourneau's *À Force de mourir*, Gilles Blais' *La Vieille dame*, Robert Favreau's *La Ligne brisée*), André Melançon's *Le Lys cassé* and Paule Baillargeon's *Sonia*.

L'Amour en famille is one of those psychodramas which are normally played once – in front of a therapist but without spectators. Here it has been organized, partly rehearsed, obviously edited, and also partly staged. It is one of those family settling-of-accounts where all blows are permitted and nothing is solved; each will continue to mull over, alone or with others, his explanations, griefs, grundges... Fascinated and embarrassed at the same time, I had the disagreeable feeling of being a participant in, if not an unpleasant act, at least a dubious enterprise: it seemed that the filmmakers' narcissism and personal power plays were trying to be appeased while the audience and cinema were held hostage.

As the starting point for the above-mentioned docudramas, there is a problem, a question of ethics – What to think of euthenasia in *À Force de mourir*; should we abandon the elderly in hospitals: in *La Vieille dame*; incest may have profound and permanent psychological consequences on its victims and more so if one doesn't talk about it, in *Le Lys cassé*. The directors have approached these questions through fiction, utilizing actors, maybe because a film shot with a real victim of cancer on his deathbed, or a film in which an old lady's children really 'place' her in a hospital, would be too painful (though Michel Dion, whom we will return to, has done it). But certainly, the subjects offer situations which affect people and the undertakings do not seem *apriori* desperate. However, it must be said that neither *À Force de mourir* nor *La Vieille dame* are very convincing as *fiction*. Specially in the former, actors, make-up, and sets are seen as such. They are signs too easily read, too univocal, without depth. You know what you're supposed to feel but you don't feel it. Are they too short – 17'30 and 15' respectively – to come to life?

Le Lys cassé which is 48 minutes long is a little different. One gets the impression that André Melançon is less interested in the theme of incest than in the reconstruction of an era. The story about a French Canadian family is set, if we are to believe the present age of the



• Yves Desgagnés and André Lacoste in *L'Homme renversé*

young heroine, in the '60s, but evokes more the '50s. In the black and white sequences set in the past, he has effectively found the texture and grain of old photographs, clothes and, even better, the look and conceptualization of characters as depicted in the naive melodramas of the film and radio shows of the era... This quality is maintained when the film moves to the present, especially in the scene where the young girl whips the grave of her father with the bouquet of flowers she was going to leave for him.

These three films remain exercises dominated by their initial objectives – to make people reflect on an ethical problem. They do not succeed on their own as fiction.

L'HOMME RENVERSÉ

If anything can justify the confessional films and the docudrama, it is Yves Dion's *L'Homme Renversé* which inverts both genres. Here a filmmaker hires two professional actors to act out the 'masculine condition', that is, to invent situations which would permit them to express, would oblige them to express, those aspects of that condition which they regard as most significant and problematic today. This becomes a fascinating document on both acting, the relation between the actor's art and his own self, and the relation between illusion and reality.

HOORAY FOR ACTORS!

Of the films on illness and the moral dilemmas they gives rise to in these "CLSC

(community center) films", as Marcel Jean called them at the *Le Crû 86* (The '86 Vintage) panel, which closed the *Rendez-vous* – only one went beyond the limits of the genre and truly ascended to the heights found in fiction: Paule Baillargeon's *Sonia*.

Sonia, a charming, lively 50-year-old, of Russian origin, is a painter who teaches history of art and is very much appreciated by her students. She lives alone. Suddenly there are absences, inexplicable gaps in her memory. She disappears. Her daughter calls the police but finally finds *Sonia* three days later, sitting on the steps of her house, and takes her to a doctor. The lapses, the loss of memory, the components of this fugue are the first symptoms of Alzheimer's disease.

The illness is not essential in *Sonia*. Emotion does not come out of a description of symptoms or the character-as-victim of the disease. It simply comes from the character herself. The illness is but the starting point for this film conceived by an actress, who is also a filmmaker (she plays the part of the daughter), Paule Baillargeon, for an actress whom she loves and admires, Kim Yarochevskaya, and to whom she wants to give a good part. It is a film based on an idea and the cinematographic expression of that idea. *Sonia* goes to her death backwards. She regresses to her adolescence – a pretty scene where *Sonia* puts her head on the young student who's come to visit her after she has left teaching), then to her childhood, regressing to the point where she seems to become her daughter's child.

Sonia won the André-Leroux prize for best medium-length film.

The Normand Juneau prize for best short went to Richard Roy's *Transit*. (Both *Association Québécoise de la*

Critique prizes went to actors' films.) Upon leaving prison, Michel Côté goes directly to the sister of his cellmate (who is more than just his cellmate), Marie Laberge, a pharmacist in Quebec. He installs himself at her place and they begin an affair, made difficult by the ex-prisoner's repeated fiascos.

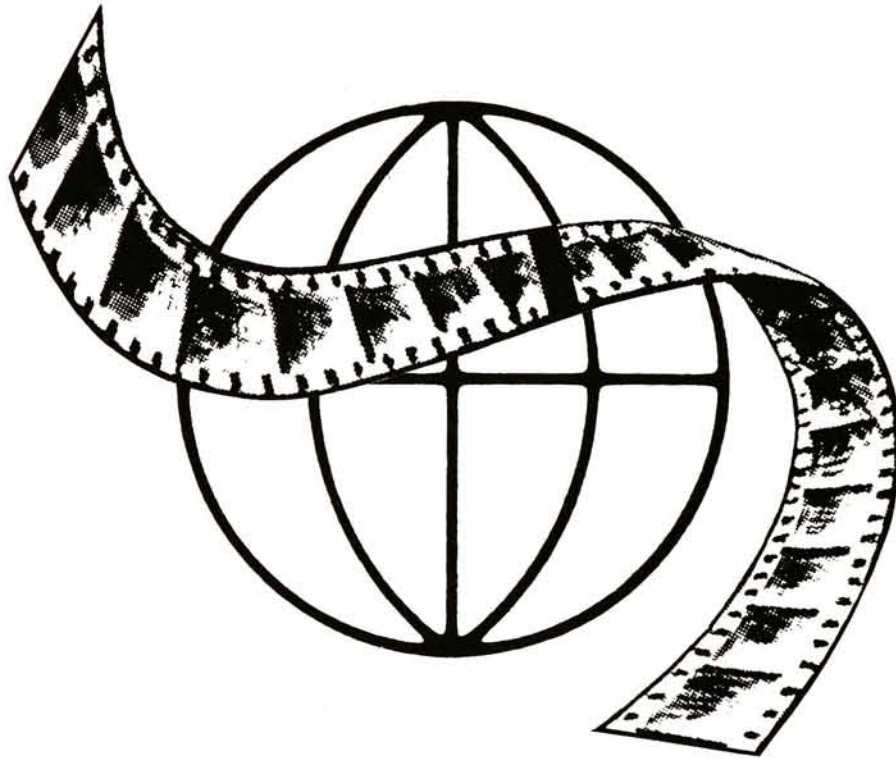
Richard Roy practices an American-style cinema which seeks economy. This drives him to saturate his images with varied signs that are sometimes too obvious and too numerous but which are much better than the sparseness characteristic of TV shows. All is intelligently done to showcase the two actors, Michel Côté and a dazzling Martie Laberge, and their encounter.

"The choice of actors and the work I do with them represents for me pleasant worries," writes Richard Roy. *Transit*, and above all *Sonia*, are two of the most beautiful Québécois films of 1986, and this they owe in great part to their actors and to the importance that their directors attach to actors, the love they give them. I underline this as a way of making amends, for I became aware, while watching *Sonia*, that I have often written on film without saying a word about performance.

If 1986's production is characterized by the trend of docudrama and confession films, a trend I hope won't last, it's also characterized by the appearance and the success of the genre film – the thriller, *Pouvoir intime*, and the comedy of manners, *Le Déclin de l'empire américain*. It is a new phenomenon in Quebec cinema, which up to now hasn't produced traditional genres. Influenced by *cinéma direct* and the French 'New Wave', *Québécois* cinema was an *auteur* cinema, searching for new forms. The critical and commercial success of those two films – respectable for the former, dazzling for the latter – will they have consequences? And if so what will they be. If the result is an increase in the kinds of films being produced, that will be to the better. One must make all kinds of films (except bad ones). If it is to make us believe, one more time, that there is a recipe, a formula for success, and if they're going to bring out a series of sub-*Pouvoir Intimes* or sub-*Déclins*, that will be too bad.

There is no formula, no recipe. The good films at the *Rendez-vous* (those I have mentioned and others), belong to many different genres – Gaston Ancelovici's *Récits d'une guerre quotidienne* is a political film. Luce Roy's *Oniromance* is an animated film; Yvon Provost's *J'ai pas dit mon dernier mot* is a commissioned film on language; Michel Régnier's *La Casa* is a documentary; Jacques Leduc's *Trois journées dans l'histoire récente du Québec* is *cinéma direct*. They utilize all kinds of techniques... Even the films that are less good do. A year which saw the release of 28 features, the release of *Déclin*, *Sonia*, and the others, is a good year! 1986 was a good year. I hope it lasts!

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