

# BOOK REVIEWS

## A PLACE FOR EVERYTHING

**Catalogue des acquisitions de documents cinématographiques 1974**  
by Pierre Allard,  
published by Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec, 1976, 313 pages.

Rare it is in this world of malcontents that we find someone who truly likes his job. Rarer still are people working in a large bureaucracy who do their job well. Such a man is Pierre Allard, curator of the collection of books and documents on cinema at the Quebec provincial library. Sandwiched between the censor board and the prisons department in a government building located near the docks in historic old Montreal, the *département de documentation cinématographique* houses a truly astonishing number of publications on cinema. It is said to be among the most extensive collections of its kind in the world. At last count the library included 13,000 books, 36,000 periodicals and 200,000 press clippings directly related to film. I remember attending a large American university offering a program in cinema and being impressed with their library of three book shelves filled with books and periodicals about film. I figured that they must have scoured the ends of the earth to come up with those thousand or so volumes on this arcane subject. I almost fainted when I met Mr. Allard back in 1970, and his place continues to amaze me.

The history of this unique collection is a fascinating combination of private and public enterprise. Many years ago, Guy Côté, a director at the National Film Board and a film scholar long before the field was even heard of, started collecting magazines and books about film. His house soon became like a movie itself (a Marx Brothers one at that), with books in the kitchen, books in the bathroom and books piled up under the bed. Because he had gone into this game so early, and since he was one of the few people even interested in the field of film literature, he managed to get hold of some very valuable material.

Ron Blumer teaches, broadcasts and writes about film. He has just finished *Beyond Shelter*, a film about the aged.



Pierre Allard, director of the library, looking at one of his 36,000 magazines

(About thirty years ago Harvard University's library threw all their film books into the garbage — an impressive testament to academia's interest in the subject.) His documentation on the early history of Canadian cinema is only now proving its full worth, and without his efforts much material would surely have been lost or scattered. When it became clear that Mr. Côté was either going to have to move out of his house or be smothered in books, he decided to sell his collection. He was offered a considerable sum for his books by the federal government, an offer which spurred the ever vigilant provincial government into believing that they were about to lose a valuable cultural resource to the enemy. They grabbed the books from the cellar and the bathroom and the attic and in October of 1970 the *ministère des affaires culturelles* declared this specialized library open to the public.

Which is where Pierre Allard comes into the story. Putting M. Allard in charge of a collection of over one hundred thousand film publications was like giving a heroin addict the poppy fields of Turkey. He is a fanatic (in the best sense of the word) with a mania for film documentation. When he first started with the film library, he would spend ten hours a day cataloguing and cross referencing and then spend his evenings clipping film reviews out of newspapers

as a hobby. Under his devoted management, the library has grown so rapidly in the past five years that Mr. Allard and his assistants are slowly being squeezed out of the back door.

The library presently subscribes to over 500 film publications from around the world and receives pretty well every new book on the subject that comes out in both English and French. A recently issued catalogue of acquisitions for the year 1974 alone comprises 313 pages and is itself a valuable biographical tool. Included in the listing of new books and current periodicals are 26 pages of names and addresses of film book publishers and 45 pages of names and addresses of current film magazines. The catalogue is available free to any library or university in Canada.

With a collection so complete, one is constantly stumbling across amazing material, private documents, letters, scripts and obscure publications. As a resource for research it is remarkable, simply because it is so easy to follow up on things. While reading a book on smellavision you might find a reference to *Monster Film Review* of April 17, 1935 and by jingo the library has it. With all these documents, Allard has several ongoing projects of his own. One is a listing of Canadian film periodicals, past and present, and he has come up with an astounding 125 different titles. He has amassed biographical material on 3000 Canadian films and is working on the 15,000 others. They have biographical filmographies on 750 Quebec filmmakers, and boxes of clippings on any film you are ever likely to have heard of.

The library is open to anyone studying film. It is wisely not a lending library, although some of the material is available to other libraries on inter-library loan. The *bibliothèque* can be contacted directly by mail, 360 McGill Street room 101, Montreal H2Y 2E9, or by telephone at (514) 873-5398. But it's best to come and take a look for yourself; it's an amusing but losing game to try and find something that they don't have.

Ronald H. Blumer



# FEATURE FILM IS A LAWYERS' MEDIUM OR MR. DRABINSKY LETS THE PUBLIC INSIDE

**Motion Pictures and the Arts in Canada:** The Business and The Law by Garth H. Drabinsky, McGraw Hill Ryerson - \$14.95, 201 pages.

In this compact volume are found all the legal and business elements involved in making and selling a feature film in Canada. It is concisely written, well indexed, legally sound and best of all, readable. The stated purpose of the book is to assist "those engaged in the feature film industry, and those who aspire to be so engaged, to understand the workings of the business and their rights and obligations... (and) to help the reader to recognize problems about which expert advice should be sought". Mr. Drabinsky succeeds in his purpose.

The book moves through the legal fundamentals into their application in the negotiation of agreements that, when reduced to writing, will fill the drawer in a filing cabinet. These agreements, together with the out-takes, are the unseen elements of a feature film. The author reveals the complexities while communicating the challenge and excitement of the business side of feature films in Canada. It is a business in which the negotiation and preparation of a distribution agreement or completion bond can cost as much as the acquisition of the property and its development into a shooting script, involve as many printed pages, be more intricately plotted and use up as much creative energy. It is not surprising that feature film has been described as a lawyers' medium, having its own parallel hierarchy of legal stars known only to those on the inside. Mr. Drabinsky lets the public inside.

The temptation existed to fault the book for its failure to go deeper into the elements of the agreements, the

*George Campbell Miller, Toronto lawyer, has long been involved in feature filming. Among other projects, he has worked on Lies My Father Told Me and, more recently, on The Clown Murders.*



Garth Drabinsky

uncertainties of income tax law, the quicksands of film funding, the shell game of attempted recoupment and the confusion inherent in government policy on such matters as quotas. Had the author done so, he would have been forced to double the size of the work and to evangelize his own solutions, all of which would have been detrimental to his purpose in describing the business as it is. On balance one can assume the decision was conscious and, in the reviewer's opinion, correct. A comprehensive bibliography has been included for those who wish to go deeper.

The book is a cold shower to the "let's make a movie" school of producers, but provides a good introduction to the business for the serious or curious and with the bibliography is an excellent tool for the professional. **Motion Pictures and the Arts in Canada**, or as it is more accurately subtitled, **The Business and The Law**, is the first and only book of its kind published in Canada and should be welcomed to the library shelf.

**George Campbell Miller**

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