

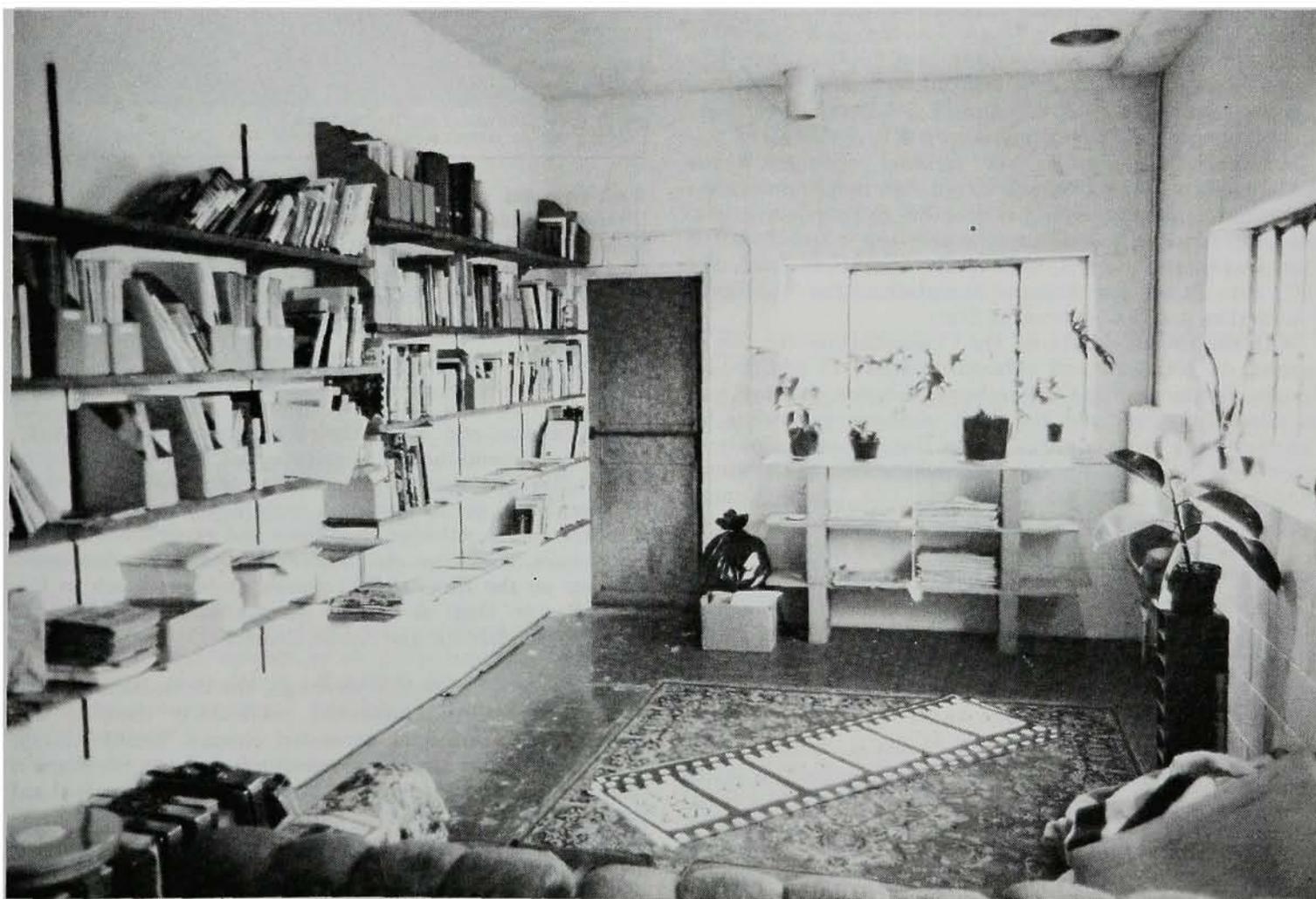
# the pacific cinematheque

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*Cinema Canada's* series of articles on film institutes moves out to the west coast for a look at the Pacific Cinematheque. Kirk Tougas, director, Tony Reif and Kathy Razutis comment on their work while N'eema Lakin rounds out the picture.

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by N'eema Lakin



The library and conference area where good schemes are hatched

There are many people in the Vancouver community who feel that prior to the formation of the Pacific Cinematheque, no viable alternative existed to the films presented in commercial theatres. The exceptions to this situation were few. University-based film societies such as UBC's Cinema 16, and the Vancouver Film Society provided limited series programming. The Varsity Theatre maintained an annual summer festival of international films (only several weeks long, and scarcely enough to satisfy anyone seriously interested in either film aesthetics or historical perspective on the film art).

As far as the selection and distribution of Canadian films was concerned, the sole determinants and arbiters of taste were the commercial distributors, who consistently showed only the work of such "bankable" directors as Gilles Carle, Claude Jutra, and Don Shebib. Promising but unknown filmmakers, particularly from the west coast, were either forced to depend upon sources in eastern Canada for commercial exposure, or to find some independent means of distribution.

It was partially in response to this situation that the Pacific Cinematheque was formed. Functioning as a non-profit regional film exhibition and distribution center, the Cinematheque maintains a special responsibility for the exposure of the work of local filmmakers, while bringing a wide variety of films to an audience for whom they would otherwise be inaccessible.

The Pacific Cinematheque originated as an offshoot of the Vancouver Filmmakers Co-op, itself a branch of Intermedia, a loosely-knit collective of local artistic groups. The Vancouver Filmmakers Co-op was originally founded to provide a much-needed avenue for west coast film production and distribution. However, the distribution aspect of the Co-op failed to materialize, as most of the Co-op members concentrated upon the production aspects of filmmaking, and because there was little market for unknown films.

In 1971, Kirk Tougas, a Vancouver filmmaker, member of the Co-op, and former co-ordinator of UBC's Cinema 16 series, was approached by Intermedia's Werner Aellen, and the then director of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Tony Emery, to organize a weekly mini-series in the gallery.

Eventually, interest by the regional director of the National Film Board, Bruce Pilgrim, led to an association between the Cinematheque and the NFB. Support was gradually supplemented by associate membership in the Canadian Film Institute, and funding from the Canada Council, the B.C. Arts Fund, the Koerner Foundation, the Vancouver Foundation, and the Secretary of State.

With this financial backing, the Cinematheque was able to expand its activities and enlarge its staff. In addition to Tougas, functioning as Cinematheque director, the staff now includes: Tony Reif and Jeff Wall, who are responsible for Cinematheque programming; Kathy Razutis, extension programming; David Tompkins, distribution; Mary Crawford, administration; and Yoshi Yoshihara and Lenore Coutts, exhibition.

The Pacific Cinematheque's expanded program now presents five different films each week. To accompany these films, the Cinematheque's Jeff Wall compiles a monthly schedule, including extensive film notes concisely detailing the style of the directors involved, film chronology and an analysis of film genre as well as plot description and character analysis.

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*Neema Lakin holds an MA in communication studies from Simon Fraser University, where she has also worked as a teaching assistant. Having made some animated films and been active in founding the Burnaby Mountain Film Society, Ms. Lakin is presently working as a freelance writer in Vancouver.*

The low price of admission (one dollar) is affordable for the majority of people. There is also the option to buy a five-dollar membership, which includes receiving the monthly Cinematheque mailings, and two complimentary passes each valid for a single admission.

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#### **Tony Reif:**

*"Film selection is primarily determined according to the contributions made by various film directors, particular film genres, and stars, as well as individual films themselves in terms of thematic development and style. Audience feedback, input from other film centers and preferences of the Cinematheque staff are also factors in film selection.*

*"Of particular interest are films which manage to maintain a personal perspective within the context of a film industry based on the profit motive, or those films which illustrate the social values of an era.*

*"In our American comedy series, we selected films partially as a means of illustrating the mutual influence of film, and television and radio comedy during the years 1948-1966."*

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David Tompkins and Tony Reif at work

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#### **Kirk Tougas:**

*"We've received a lot of criticism for our extensive presentation of American films. However, it is our contention that since American films constitute an important influence in the development of film both in its artistic and commercial forms, it only makes sense to avoid a nationalist bias in this area."*

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This eclectic and open-minded approach to film has enabled the Cinematheque to offer their audiences films incorporating such diverse topics as gay films (a few of which were unable to get by customs), early animation techniques, films by women, ethnographic films and experimental films, *films noirs*, westerns etc. There is also a regular series focusing on the films of well-known directors (such as Godard, Renoir, Ozu) as well as lesser-known directors (such as Hellman, Melville, and Robbe-Grillet).

To complement the film showings, the Cinematheque also sponsors talks by filmmakers, particularly those in the area of experimental or expanded cinema. Lenny Lipton, (author of *Independent Filmmaking*), has shown his Super-8 films in open workshops. Filmmakers such as Richard Patton, Tom Chomont, and David Hykes have also appeared. Having the filmmaker present along with his or her work helps to add another dimension to work which may other-



The screening room showing Arthur Lamothe answering questions

wise be perceived by the audience to be obscure and inaccessible.

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**Kirk Tougas:**

*"People have to be willing to take a chance on experimental films, or the films of a director with whose work they may be unfamiliar; and then different types of films attract different audiences. The films of a director like Jean-Pierre Melville, or Robbe-Grillet for example, will tend to attract the French community and those people who are familiar with Robbe-Grillet's work as a novelist. Yet other people, unaware of his tremendous influence upon French cinema, may stay away.*

*"It is most interesting when you get many different perspectives in a single audience. At one of the silent film showings, for example, an elderly woman, who had seen the film as a child, came with her granddaughter and both of them enjoyed the film in their different ways."*

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Although Vancouver-based, the Cinematheque has extended its exhibition services to other areas of the province. Kathy Razutis, as extension co-ordinator, is in charge of a program which enables libraries, community centers, and interested groups in the smaller towns of B.C., to show films ranging from Charlie Chaplin shorts to **Ten Days That Shook The World**, to **Cul-de-Sac**.

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**Kathy Razutis:**

*"The reception given to the films we send varies from town to town, and depends on the films involved. Some are more popular than others. However, in general the series have been quite successful, and the program is now entering its third year."*

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The Cinematheque has also assembled the beginnings of a film catalogue through which it is now possible to rent west coast films in 30/60/90-minute units. According to

Dave Tompkins, who is in charge of film distribution, this will allow individuals or groups to book a film package consisting of films that are unified stylistically, thematically, or in terms of a particular genre.

In their new office (1616 W. Third Ave., Vancouver) the Cinematheque has also started a small film study center and a film archive. The film library contains film periodicals, books, and catalogues. The archive contains a collection of the work of west coast filmmakers (covering a ten-year span and numbering approximately 100 titles) including the work of filmmakers such as Al Razutis, David Rimmer, Byron Black and Al Sens.

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**Tony Reif:**

*"It is a fairly comprehensive anthology of west coast films of artistic merit, ranging from Denis Wheeler's **Potlatch** to films by promising unknowns who are encouraged to bring in their prints."*

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The other section of the archive is comprised of prints which have been scrapped by the NFB, and which the Cinematheque wished to keep available on the west coast for reference and study. A small circulating collection of film classics has also been started.

The Cinematheque is now offering the use of its film archives and screening facilities to students, teachers, and organizations interested in film education projects. Special showings of regular Cinematheque programs will also be available, providing a basis for discussions concerning film aesthetics, the socio-cultural aspects of film, and film history.

At present, the only factors restricting the Pacific Cinematheque's activities are the lack of space in the comfortable but small (82-seat) NFB theatre, and the absence of 35mm equipment, which in turn limits what can be shown. There is a growing audience for Cinematheque showings and extra late-night screening have had to be added for some films.

Typical programming includes: a series of Quebec films, American comedies (1948-1966), a Mizoguchi retrospective, a Rossellini series (emphasizing period films concerned with historical figures), an early Renoir (1930s) program, a Fassbinder series, and ethnographic films.

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**Tony Reif:**

*"In presenting the ethnographic series we are trying to provide a view of other cultures and cultural groups which is different from that traditionally shown in both commercial 'documentary' film and on television. We hope the series will provoke some thought in terms of the responsibility of the western world towards these cultures vis-à-vis cultural maintenance and ecology."*

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In this fertile environment, a tremendous resurgence of interest in film has developed. Film societies have been organized at all levels and are now viable. The awakened interest in film has spread and there is now some kind of film society or group at every junior college in the Vancouver area, as well as public libraries and art galleries. This in turn influences the programming presented by the Cinematheque. All in all the situation for the filmmaker, film student, and the general audience has brightened considerably with the coming of age of the Pacific Cinematheque. □



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