

**Les
Autres**



**English Quebec cinema during
the Parti Québécois régime
1976 - 1985**

by Thomas Waugh

It all began in 1976. Well, actually it all began in 1759, but for the purpose of this survey of English Quebec cinema under the *indépendantiste* government that brought us Bill 101 and the 1980 referendum, November 1976 marks the starting point.

Not much was happening that month cinematically speaking, except for a few English-language shoots aimed at the mythical "international market." And, because that market has never existed for either French or English cinema in Canada, this is another way of saying nothing was happening. At the polling booths it was another story: voters overwhelmingly opted for the promises of a perfect alliance of populist nationalist sentiment, social democratic ideals, media charisma, and still untarnished integrity. According to your point of view, the historic vote inaugurated either *Nightmare and Exodus...* or the *Discovery of Ourselves and the Other*. The nine-year transition of Anglo-Quebec cinema from a hegemony of sorts to gradual acknowledgement of its minority status in a minority society (Quebec) within a colonized political entity (Canada) is the focus of the following (admittedly subjective) reflections.

The powerful Anglophone community (more than 700,000 of us or one Québécois out of 10 are still kicking) must be the most media-represented

minority in the world. Our media and cultural institutions are perhaps trimmer, more discreet and more shared since the PQ's coming to power, but their basic power has hardly diminished. Our cinema since 1976 has been eclectic, schizophrenic, and anguished — in short, a normal reflection of a community that has lost its electoral clout to the majority and its economic power to points further west. But it's still a prolific cinema, even compulsive I would say, expressing itself almost out of habits ingrained when we used to be a national cultural centre, and addressing an audience located as much elsewhere as here.

Our cinema is much more complex and daring than the conservative cultural base that we constitute. Isolated and paranoid, we actually aren't really aware of our cinema, and are as servile to the Hollywood movies provided by the distribution cartel as we are to the Liberal Party and to *The Gazette*, the monopoly wire-service paste-up from Southam that is the most complacent, corrupt and provincial of all the major dailies in the country. It's no surprise, then, that there's a yawning gap between us and our cinema: the populism that provides the dominant flavour of our neighbours' French-language cinema is scarcely discernible in ours.

Once upon a time, English Quebec cinema reflected a cultural and economic hegemony. Confident of our leadership, we permitted ourselves the luxury of moral doubts about it: *Don't Let The Angels Fall* (George Kaczender, 1968) questioned the moral emptiness of the life of a Westmount executive; *Prologue* (Robin Spry, 1969) de-

picted English Montreal as a centre of a continental counter-culture of youth in revolt; *The Apprenticeship Of Duddy Kravitz* (Ted Kotcheff, 1974) had its cake and ate it too, undermining the success myth of the immigrant founders of our Jewish community while celebrating it at the same time. Don Owen, the genius of Toronto filmmaking of the '60s, came here to make two of his best films, *Notes For A Film About Donna And Gail* (1966) and *The Ernie Game* (1967). Owen depicted a homogenous Anglophone society — unrecognizable today — and explored patterns of the youth alienation and anomie at its centre. Have the glories of the past (modest glories to be sure, and, in keeping with Canadian tradition, unrecognised ones) today all moved to Mississauga?

The English Québécois have now lived through the disappearance of virtually any kind of culturally pertinent feature film industry in the private sector. What was left were cynical and rootless offshoots of the so-called international market, comprising both a respectable branch (such as the now Toronto-based RSL whose productions varied from the solidly lacklustre [*In Praise Of Older Women*, George Kaczender, 1978] to the execrable [*Paradise*, Stuart Gillard, 1981]), and a "genre" branch (Cinepix, source for *The Surrogate*, 1984, and other monstrous and not-so-monstrous progeny).

Remove these ultimately irrelevant industry offshoots and what is left is a marginal cinema dominated by the NFB. Itself threatened by attrition the state studio still produces, despite everything, our most continuous flow of

"quality" moving pictures. Our cinema is one supported almost entirely by subsidies — even more so than heavily subsidized regional cultures elsewhere in Canada. It's also, symptomatically, a cinema created almost entirely by immigrants, whether American (Bonnie Klein, Caroline Leaf, Lois Siegel), British (Derek May, John Smith), Australian (Michael Rubbo), Hungarian (Robert Lantos, Albert Kisch, George Kaczender) or English-Canadians from other provinces (the Maritimers Martin Duckworth and Giles Walker). Immigrant cultural workers have brought a wealth of fresh blood and ideas to our brain-drained community, in addition to a much-needed objectivity during the recent Troubles. Whether or not they have also contributed to the closing of the gap between artists and community is a question for further thought. (And to be perfectly upfront here, the author of this article got off the boat from Ontario via New York in 1976, while the Anglo critical and film academic establishments in Montreal are also solidly immigrant in composition).

With regard to such a cinema of civil servants, immigrants and marginals, under-estimated, little recognized, and misunderstood, I have space only to discuss in detail the cluster of films, both fiction and documentary, that attempt to define our identity as Anglo-Québécois and to explore our relationship with the Francophone majority. This cluster of images of ourselves and our neighbours is, in fact, a large and diverse corpus with a rich range of filmic formats and contexts (other thematic groupings would, of course, have been

possible, including those with a more international scope). Necessary but regrettable omissions in this inventory and the ensuing discussion will hopefully be redressed, at least in a token way, by a concluding bonus for list collectors: my personal canon of the 20 most significant films from English Quebec during the last nine years.

Feminism

The feminist current, especially the NFB's Studio D, is decidedly world-class (as the Oscars for Beverly Shaffer's *I'll Find A Way*, 1977, and Teri Nash's *If You Love This Planet* testify in their own glitzy way). But it's the everyday good useful films that don't win trophies and keep coming out year after year that are most impressive, from *Louise Drouin Veterinarian* (Margaret Wescott, 1981) to *Dream Of A Free Country: A Message From Nicaraguan Women*, (Kathleen Shannon and Ginny Stikeman, 1984). Thank goodness for the documentary: in sharp contrast to the Francophone milieu, not a single fiction feature has ever been made by an Anglo-Quebec woman (unless you count Lois Siegel's hand-distributed *A Twentieth Century Chocolate Cake* which I've never heard anyone call feminist). There has inevitably been a male backlash, which at the moment seems to be taking over independent feature production (*Mother's Meat Freuds Flesh*) as well as the other NFB studios (*The Masculine Mystique*, *90 Days*, *Other Tongues*). Traditional stereotypes and misogyny are present in various combinations and degrees of offensiveness in all of these films, with the common thread being the validation of the poor boys who are threatened. Is it inconsistent for one branch of the NFB to be funding appeals for solidarity with Third World women (*Dream*) and another branch a comedy about the mail-order merchandising (*90 Days*) of the same women? Has anyone ever accused state cultural bureaucracies of consistency?

Peace

A surprisingly vigorous current of films advocate peace and international solidarity. These come from both the NFB (the series on China by Tony Ianzelo and Boyce Richardson) and from the private sector (Martin Duckworth's *Back To Kampuchea*, 1982, and Ron and Ophera Hallis's continuing series of films on southern Africa). Indeed, the continental and international vocation of our cinema is far stronger than its pan-Canadian identity. The kind of Canadian nationalism you find in Regina is scarcely visible here at all, and it's virtually impossible to see the cream of English Canadian features here (we never got *The Wars*, for example, and we still haven't seen *My American Cousin*). Nevertheless, a few recent pan-Canadian works have come out of Montreal, most notably producer Harry Gulkin's fine *Bayo* (Mort Ransen, 1985) and the embarrassing Genie-cleaning *Bay Boy* (Daniel Petrie, 1984).

Independents

The most encouraging recent phenomenon has been a surge of energetic work by young independent

filmmakers, many of whom are post-76 film school graduates (mostly from Concordia University, I modestly add) and are members of the dynamic five-year-old co-operative Main Film. Filmmakers like Demetrios Estdelacropolis, Tom Berry, and Bachar Chbib have already made a feature or two, and the work in the area of documentary, experimental cinema, and short fiction is impressively robust, with names such as Peter Sandmark and Claude Ouellet coming to mind. Many young graduates still move to Toronto, but the ones who are digging in are fast making a name for themselves.

The Industry

The names of local private-sector producers are almost household words to *Cinema Canada* readers (Greenberg, Lantos, Roth, Kroonenberg, Kemeny, Héroux, David, etc.), but their critical success rate with authentically indigenous projects is dismal, and their box-office record scarcely better. The best films coming out of this setting have not surprisingly been *auteur* films, like Robin Spry's *Suzanne* (1980) or Gilles Carle's *L'Ange et la femme* (1977), both RSL productions. But what is distressing is that some of the most respected Anglo-Quebec directors of earlier years have found only sure recipes for disasters working with these producers, e.g. George Kaczender (*Agency, Finishing Touch*) and Paul Almond (*Final Assignment, Ups And Downs*). One small mercy is that two excellent features for children have somehow emerged from the private industry, one recognized (*Jacob Two-Two Meets The Hooded Fang*, Theodore J. Flicker, prod. Harry Gulkin, 1977) and the other a critical and, in Quebec, commercial hit (*The Peanut Butter Solution*, Michael Rubbo, 1985).

Other

Our experimental and animated cinemas are regrettably outside the scope of this article, but their respectable vitality is already well-known, the former due to sweat and blood, and the latter due largely to the excellence of the NFB's institutional momentum. One representative of each tradition can be found in my concluding canon.

Elections and Marriages

The legendary evening of November 15, 1976, when the PQ victory was announced (and there was dancing in the streets of Montreal), is engraved permanently on our filmic memory. But the image is not the colourful celebration of *15 Novembre*, the official PQ film, but rather a flickering black-and-white video screen in the background of a film that is our semi-official document of the same event. In the foreground and in colour is a mournful crowd celebrating the pyrrhic victory of the Liberal candidate from Westmount, mythic fortress of Wasp capital. The small video screen functions as a window looking out on the world surrounding this besieged enclave. The title is apt, *I Hate To Lose*,



● Politicians of yesteryear from Michael Rubbo's *Solzhenitsyn's Children*: *La Presse's* Paris correspondent Bernard Robitaille, left, with Nixon mask; Rubbo, with Giscard mask



● Critics will regret savaging Robin Spry's *Suzanne*, with Winston Rekert and Jennifer Dale

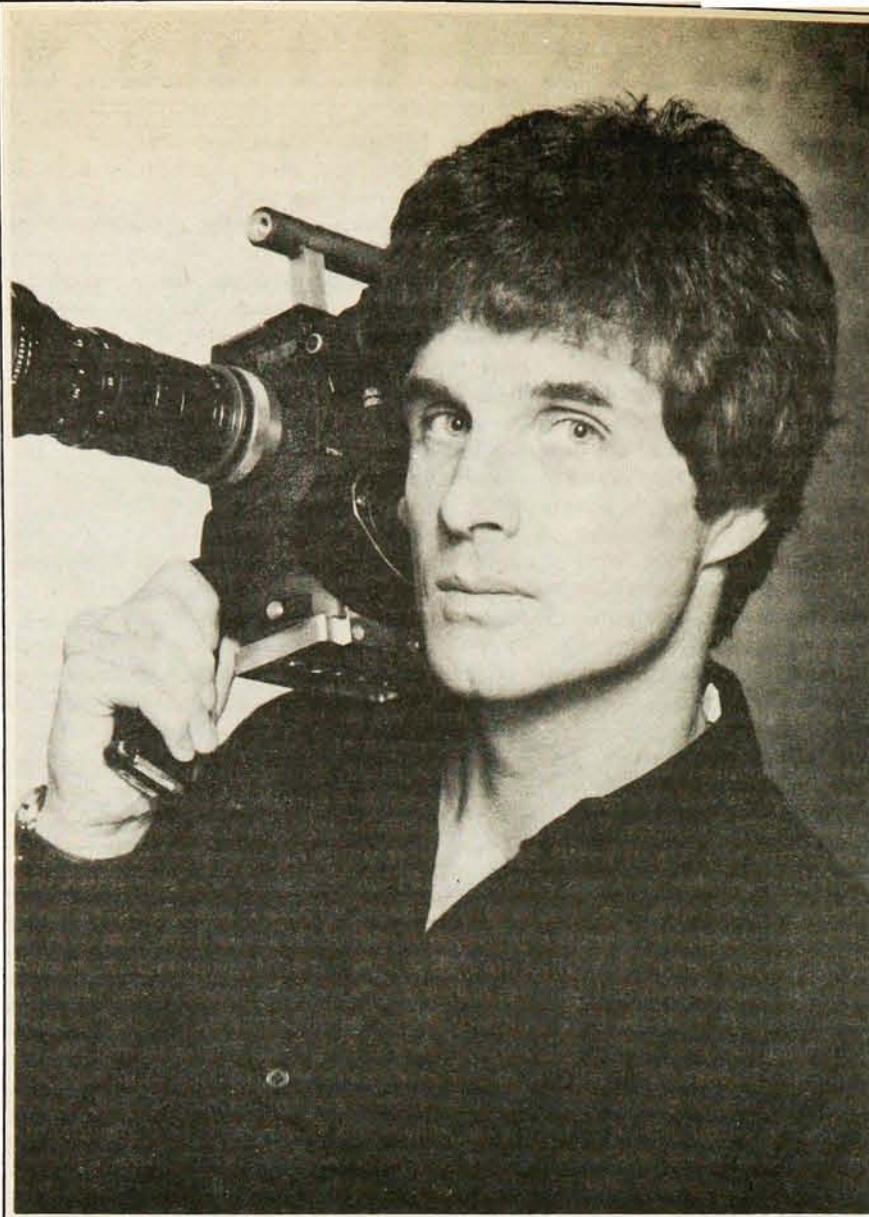


● Montreal Main's main men: Frank Vitale, left, Allan Moyle, Stephen Lack, and unidentified man

and director Michael Rubbo keeps a sense of humour in the middle of a crumbling world, while his Godardian voice-over whispers cynical asides. But this chronicle of the campaigns of three Westmount candidates missed the boat as much as its anachronistic subjects, caught in a diversionary electoral ritual rather than a structural socio-historic shift.

Another key image: "For Sale" signs in front of the solid Westmount homes, under Rubbo's whisper, "Why is nobody home? Perhaps they're house-hunting in Toronto." The same image resurfaces four years later in another documentary of the same genre, **Under New Management** (Tina Viljoen, 1981), on the 1980 referendum (the election genre is very important for Québécois belong to both majority and minority). This time the "For Sale" signs sprout on the West Island cluster of Anglo suburbs. The West Islanders, says the narrator, won the battle of the referendum, but lost the war. This film, if not as humorous as Rubbo's, is somewhat more interesting in that it dispels the individualist mirage of most of the Anglo election films. It also captures, more than most of the films, the essence of the tragedy of the Anglo middle-class: people who lack the will or flexibility to adapt; a culture that sees itself threatened; an economy uprooted; grandmothers whose children have deserted them for Calgary; and, a parting eloquent image, under the final credits, of a high-school graduation parade of which the majority of graduates, statistically, will emigrate. There is one note of hope — among the groups interviewed, some of the youngest are open to the new realities and are integrated with the majority without losing their minority culture.

The bulk of election films can be classified as pre-referendum films, designed by the NFB and the CBC principally to interpret the Quebec situation for English-Canadian audiences and head off the final rupture: **Yes Or No**, **Jean-Guy Moreau** (Michael Rubbo, 1979), **Two Dreams Of A Nation: The Fortin Family Of Quebec And Alberta** (Boyce Richardson, 1980), **Twice Upon A Time** (Giles Walker, 1979), **Riel** (George Bloomfield, CBC, 1979), **The Inheritance** (Les Johnson, John Kramer, 1980), and **The Champions** (Donald Brittain, 1978). Is it the NFB's fault if most Francophones shrugged off these films as too little too late? Brittain, the finest artist on the list, establishes a historical and cultural context for the careers of rivals Trudeau and Lévesque that is much more complex (and more dramatic) than the others, profiting from existing archive resources astonishing in their richness and aptness. But can the evolution of national sentiment in Quebec really be reduced to the mythic combat of two champions, Trudeau and Lévesque, or two brothers, Daniel and Pierre-Marc Johnson? Or is this still the myth of an enclave that has never known its neighbours, seeing only mobs and titans, or an electorate, fickle or headstrong, unitary or polarized, but never classes or intersections of economic and cultural forces? The best of the Francophone election films, from **Bingo** (Jean-Claude Lord, 1973) to **Le Confort et l'indifférence** (Denys Arcand, 1981), repudiate all temptation of the naive



• Master documentarian Paul Cowan

• Derek May, parabalist of Confederation



electoral faith the English films take for granted.

Several fiction films also concentrate directly or indirectly on the minority situation of Anglophones in Quebec. The resources of invention enable the best of these to escape the traps of elections, champions, "For Sale" signs, and the bias of stock shots. The fiction films may be divided into those that offer a historical viewpoint and those that deal with the present.

Among the films of historical fiction, the most ambitious was Robin Spry's **Suzanne**, an attempt by the private industry and one of Quebec's finest filmmakers to encapsulate the roots of cultural conflicts. Spry's story follows the destiny of a working-class Anglophone girl, daughter of a Francophone mother and Scots father, from her '40s childhood to the founding of her own family during the Quiet Revolution. On the surface a love story with autobiographical elements coming from scriptwriter Ronald Sutherland, **Suzanne** keeps its allegorical rigour until the heroine's final alliance with her patient, intellectual, Francophone husband. Of course post-76 Anglo filmmakers did not invent the allegorical bicultural couple: remember Gilles Groulx's (autobiographical) alliance of Francophone male and Anglo-Jewish female in **Le Chat dans le sac** (1964), or Duddy Kravitz's betrayal of poor Micheline Lanctôt? The allegorical text is at odds with the other ingredients of the recipe, namely the melodrama (stripper mother, puritan father, ne'er-do-well Anglo lover, and unwanted pregnancy) and the nostalgia ('50s rock'n'roll, biker boyfriend with James Dean haircut). However, the critics overreacted, savaging it without pity, and it's getting dumped by the distribution cartel didn't help either. Still, it's an honest, respectful and moving work that one day may be rediscovered as an eloquent testimony of its day.

The other major works that forage in our collective history and sometime mythologize the present are: **Two Solitudes** (Lionel Chetwynd, 1977), earnest but misguided adaptation of Hugh MacLennan's prophetic 1945 novel, one of the first Anglo novels to recognize the Other; **Riel** (George Bloomfield, CBC, 1979), equally earnest and misguided, but a ratings success; **Joshua Then And Now** (Ted Kotcheff, 1985), injecting the timely theme of exile into the buoyant Jewish-Montreal mythology of **Duddy Kravitz** and **Lies My Father Told Me** (Jan Kadar, 1975), but draining energy and morality from the mythology at the same time; and **Empire, Inc.** (Denys Arcand and Douglas Jackson, 1983).

The last of these is by far the most important. A mini-series, allegedly **Dallas**-inspired, **Empire, Inc.** succeeds less as an imitation of the lurid and decadent original — Jennifer Dale is no match for Victoria Principal's glamour, but the divine suffering of Martha Henry is in another galaxy — than, on its own terms, as an essay on capital, and as a nostalgic but cathartic history of a powerful elite. The series tempers our mythology of the hydro-electric industry (another theme borrowed from MacLennan) with an irony that is both Brechtian and Canadian (our famous self-deprecation and archetypal male losers). Along the way are more allegorical couples: the patriarch abandons and

photo: NFB

photo: NFB

betrays his French-Canadian mistress, who shoots back and unaccountably misses, but his son, a Bethune-type progressive doctor, settles down with his French-Canadian wife in St-Henri. Naturally one ends up feeling a kind of compassion for these poor rich Protestants who can't love. The intricacy of the series was compounded by the shared directing: Jackson is relatively straightforward, but Arcand, as Quebec cinephiles well know, can come up with an icy version of U.S. soap trashiness (the scene where the magnate's faithful spinster secretary sobs that she has loved her boss for 30 years and then proceeds to sell him down the river is luxuriant camp), as well as a brutal cynicism (the acerbic sub-plot about philanthropy is right on target in a town where the very word means Bronfman).

Leaving retro fiction behind and coming to the fiction of the present, two films stand out at the beginning and end of our period as especially worthy and significant: Spry's *One Man* (1977), an excellent NFB socio-thriller whose inexplicable fading from view suggests the kind of conspiracies that are the mainstay of its plot; and Mark Blandford's tri-production on CBC of *Balconville* (1983), the stage play by Montreal's best-known playwright David Fennario, Marxist champion of the forgotten Anglo working-class neighbourhoods of Verdun and Pointe-St-Charles. Both works seek in Anglo working-class settings and in the cohabitation of two founding cultures the true and necessary images of our existence as Québécois.

Balconville's merit must, of course, be seen as an adjunct of the play's prestigious career across Canada. The backyard slice-of-life drama offers yet another allegorical couple, this time an Anglo man and a Québécois woman, a dreamer and a realist, represent "the future" in Fennario's schematic manner, but fortunately are not the principal roles. More convincing are the larger, less sentimental tableaux: take the one where the Francophone protagonist, employed in a factory in "the Point", and his Anglophone neighbour, an unemployed ex-rocker, are watching the same Expos game on the same balcony — but on different sets and in their respective languages. Language seems to be a comic side-issue as the two groups suffer on equal terms from the real problems of the district: poverty, unemployment, alcoholism, environmental health problems, and arson. These problems must be tackled together, not by the blind electoral faith of the NFB referendum films, but by community organization. Adapted with a respectful and understated theatricalism, *Balconville* effectively carried one of the rare homegrown Anglo-Montreal artistic voices to international stature during the PQ period.

Aside from *Suzanne* and *Balconville*, other films take the couple as symbol of our collective life. A 1979 private-industry melodrama *Yesterday* (Larry Kent) was a pitiful flop, while an NFB docu-drama variation of the same formula, *Other Tongues* (Derek May, 1985), was a trifle better, thanks to an interesting documentary setting in the St. Louis neighbourhood, textured with a history of union radicalism and its mosaic of immigrant cultures. (Parenthetically, it seems significant that the

vast majority of films dealing with immigration, the central fact of our demographics as a community, have appeared on the Francophone side of Quebec cinema rather than our own.) But for the most focused and ultimately most successful of the sub-genre of the allegorical couple, we have to return to the pure documentary tradition, with an earlier film by May, *Mother Tongue*. Autobiographical, *Mother Tongue* explores May's marriage to actress Patricia Nolin and their roles as parents. The images of wintry urban landscapes are as melancholy as the unresolved tensions that keep surfacing on the screen; the probing of the crevices, both real and metaphorical, between the respective vulnerabilities of the two spouses and the two cultures, has wit, insight and, above all, tenderness.

Finally, one last documentary serves to bring into relief all of the foregoing self-portraits, whether fiction or documentary. *No Place Like Home* (Tanya Ballantyne-Tree, 1985), an NFB-CBC co-production that appeared in abridged form on *The Journal*, is the sequel to one of the more famous texts of our film history: *The Things I Cannot Change* (1966). A portrait of the Bailey family of Pointe-St-Charles, this founding film of the NFB's "Challenge for Change" programme of social activism, raised so many ethical, aesthetic, and political questions when it emerged during the combined heydays of the New Left and *cinéma vérité* that no one really noticed its richly suggestive image of working-class Anglo culture in Montreal. The same is true of the portrait of the Baileys 20 years later, who have miraculously survived their cycles of despair and unemployment and have put down roots on the South Shore. Ballantyne-Tree's resuscitated *vérité* still hasn't resolved the ethical and other questions it originally posed, but her cultural documentation is all the more vivid. The evidences of change are everywhere. The blindness of the 1966 original to the culture of the majority is no longer possible; several offspring have moved to Vancouver; the inner-city slums have given way to vacant terrain plotted for gentrification; and the eldest daughter now speaks French in her new job as receptionist, her language skills having been perfected during her years as waitress.

The waitress is an enduring archetypal presence in the Québécois cinema of both languages, as well as in the theatre of both Tremblay and Fennario. "I can't be strong enough for both of us," shouts Fennario's waitress at her drunken husband and then continues doing just that. Mrs. Bailey, who seemed a passive victim in 1966 as she was having her *n*th baby, is now the serene matriarch and it is clear that she too is strong enough for all of them. In both Fennario and the Bailey family, the cultural conjuncture is less strategic than the economic. And, even if *vérité* can rarely discern economic forces with any sharpness, it can hear the characters articulating their poetry of anger and despair, venting their internalized oppression and formulating their mechanisms of survival. This capacity ensures its eloquence.

Having passed from the sellers of homes to those who have never owned one, from the millionaires of St. James Street past to today's Baileys, one per-

ceives in our cinema a gradual acceptance of our status as a minority. If *Empire, Inc.* bade ritual farewell to the myths of yesterday, it did so without regret, and now *No Place Like Home* replaces *I Hate To Lose* as the emblematic title of the future of our cinema, full of both the complexes and the stubborn energy of minorities everywhere: people who dig in to stay.

Twenty important films

Anglo Quebec cinema's fragile sense of belonging to the majority Francophone cinema is not a universal premise. Untranslated English films are still excluded from the annual *Rendez-vous du cinéma québécois* (though not a soul in the audience would have missed the last three Woody Allen in their original untitled release), and Francophone critics' indifference to the specificity of this cinema is as widespread as that of Anglophone audiences. Nevertheless, this sense of belonging is the premise to this article and of the canon of Anglo-Québécois cinema from 1976 to 1985 that I will now propose.

To establish the corpus, I do not use the criteria in force at Telefilm Canada or the Academy of Canadian Cinema, but that commonly assumed by most people discussing Quebec cinema: cultural relevance. I require of the films, in a somewhat subjective way, a reflection of the cultural, social or geographical content of the Anglo-Quebec community, whether on the level of content or of our cultural traditions. Three categories of local production in English are disqualified: the miles of film shot in English in Quebec for Québécois productions that have nothing to do with us, from Claude Fournier's Harry Reems' flic *Les Chiens chauds* (1980) to Jean-Claude Lord's *Visiting Hours* (1981); American films shot here, whether crypto-American *Agnes of God* or pretend American (*Agency*); and finally the productions of federal cultural institutions, notably the NFB (except in those cases where they reflect the communities immediately surrounding them). My criteria are at the same time flexible enough to include a Franco-Québécois director, Denys Arcand, who signed half of *Empire, Inc.* All this having been said, problems of definition are symptomatically intricate. What happens to Anglophones who have directed in French, such as Mark Blandford, *Empire's* producer, who also signed an equally prestigious French mini-series, *Duplessis*, or George Mihalka, young Anglo genre director (*My Bloody Valentine*) who is responsible for one of the biggest French-language hits of Quebec film history, *Scandale* (1982)? All of this is to suggest that perhaps the old cliché about the "two solitudes" concept has been obsolete for generations because i) of the Allophone buffer zone, ii) the two working-classes were never able to afford the luxury of "solitude", and iii) that it was a symptomatically academic McGill University concept in the first place.... In the future let's hope that ghettoizing articles like this one will be

just as obsolete, and that the barriers between minority and majority cinemas will be as inconclusive as the polyglot credits on every film I have mentioned.

The following alphabetical tally of the most significant films of the PQ period are chosen as much for representativity as for merit (two categories that have almost equal value for me as a teacher). The list will hopefully fill some of the gaps necessarily left by the discussion above. One remaining gap will be the names of certain NFB producers whose essential creative contribution to the films is unacknowledged only because I mention directors, and would include such producers as Tom Daly, Dorothy Hénaut, Adam Symansky, Kathleen Shannon, and Andy Thomson.

1. *Balconville*, Mark Blandford (CBC-Tapestry-Carleton), 1983, 90 min. Sober and respectful adaptation of a play that is the most important English cultural text to appear in Quebec under the PQ. Socialist realism comes back to life in Pointe-St-Charles with Jayne Eastwood as the archetypal waitress.

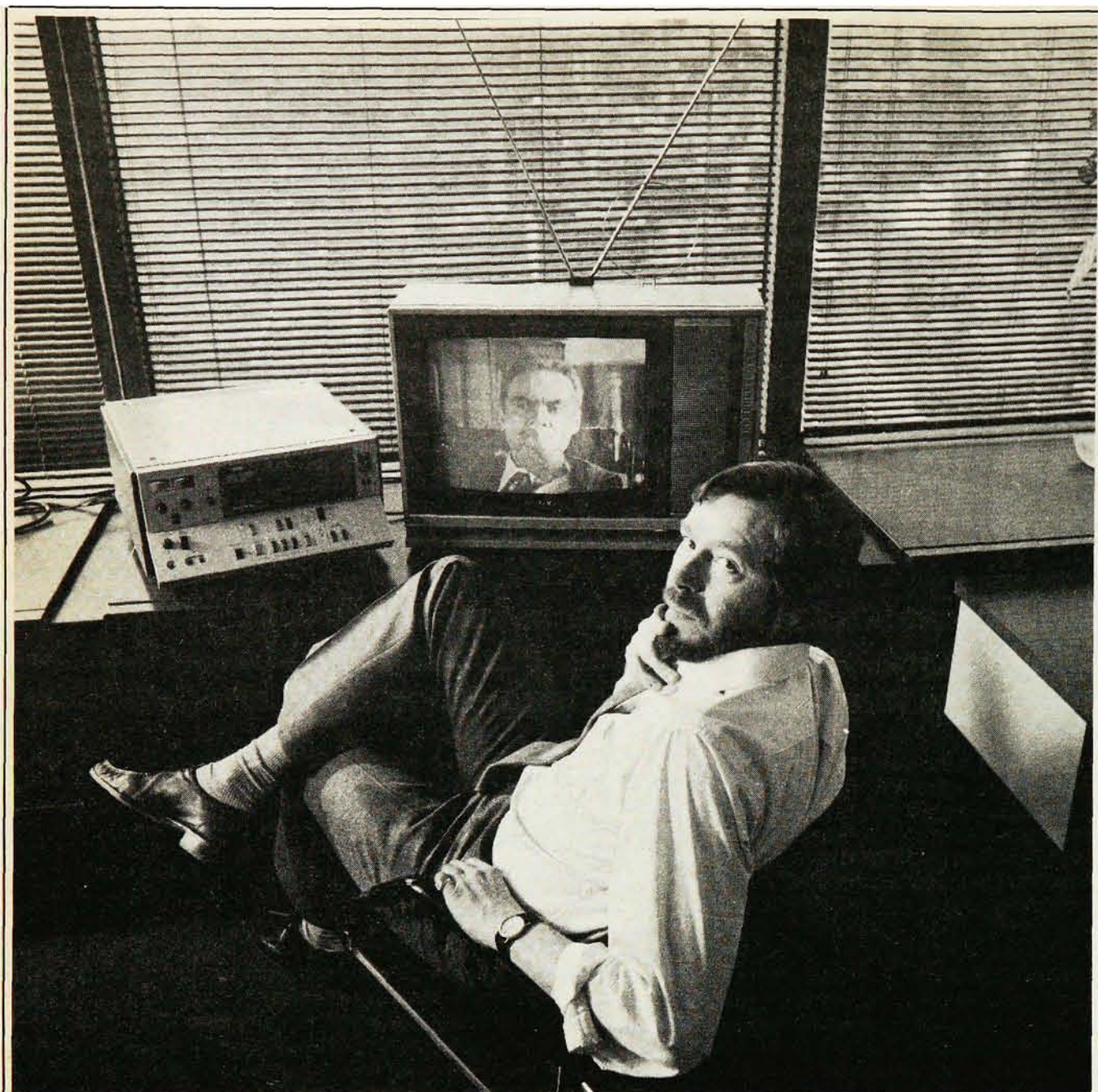
2. *Democracy On Trial: The Morgentaler Affair*, Paul Cowan (NFB), 1984, 59 min. A docu-drama enacted by its own central character, Dr. Henry Morgentaler, the pioneer of free choice in Quebec, and one of the few Anglo-Québécois whose fame transcends the two solitudes (alongside Norman Bethune, Leonard Cohen, Corey Hart and perhaps Brian Mulroney). Disguised as an essay on juridical precedent in deference to the NFB political tight rope, this montage of documents and dramatization on women's right to abortion is a lucid and moving masterpiece whose merit is confirmed by the CBC's refusal to broadcast it.

4. *Empire, Inc.* (mini-series co-produced by Mark Blandford for the NFB and the CBC), Denys Arcand (episodes 2,5,6) and Douglas Jackson (episodes 1,3,4), 1983, 52 min. each. It may be symptomatic that our *Plouffe Family* deals with a mega-wealthy capitalist dynasty, but this series was one of few success stories of the PQ period (critically, plus box-office), a final farewell and a ritual absolution of our collective myths of yesterday.

5. *I Can Hear Zimbabwe Calling* (Ron and Ophera Hallis, 1980, 50 min.). This modest celebration of Zimbabwe independence is a document of young people returning home from their Mozambican exile, smiling into the lens as they embody the hopes of a continent.

6. *Incident At Restigouche*, Alanis Obomsawin (NFB), 1984, 46 min. A border conflict narrated in fluid documentary language by a multi-talented Native filmmaker whose people fish more salmon from the Restigouche River than the Quebec government think proper. The most accessible of several Anglo-Quebec films dealing with the life of Quebec Native People, threatened in this case by a new generation of PQ technocrats.

7. *Jacob Two-Two Meets The Hooded Fang* (Harry Gulkin producer, 1977, 92 min.). In the specialized territory of children's fiction, I prefer the nightmarish expressionism of Gulkin's little-known production of Mordecai Richler to Michael Rubbo's Outremont realism in *The Peanut Butter Solution*.



• Mark Blandford (with Empire Inc. hero James Munroe on TV screen) produced some of the most important cultural texts of the PQ period

photo: Ron Levine

8. **Joshua Then And Now**, Ted Kotcheff, 1985. More from Richler, the most adapted of our writers, **Joshua** is a grouchy essay on Montreal Jewry, the most filmed of our ethnic entities. The most expensive and, in proportion, most unsatisfactory of five Richlers to date, **Joshua's** amoral lassitude both overturns the pietism of **Lies My Father Told Me** (Jan Kadar, 1972-75) and lacks the energy that vitalized **The Apprenticeship Of Duddy Kravitz** (Kotcheff, 1974). Still, **Joshua** didn't quite deserve its chorus of pans. The anachronistic flavour of **Joshua's** rage against his ethnic heritage and the Westmount Wasp elite, lends this film of exile a certain historic validity, if not a layer of nostalgia. Furthermore the film is not without some achievement in the area of performances, design and dialogue. Of course, some felt that the finest irony lay in the casting: the Wasp princess played by an actress who happens to be a Péquiste princess.

9. **The Long Sleep And The Big Good-Bye**, Julian Samuel, 1983, 14 min. The only representative of experimental cinema on this list (a genre that seldom goes well with lists in general), **Sleep/Good-Bye** explores with the ideas, experience, anger and anarchic humour of its Pakistani-Canadian author. The Anglo avant-garde milieu, as dynamic as it is under-financed, in-

cludes talents as diverse as formalists Robert Rayher and Raphael Bendahan (whose recent **Le Jardin (du paradis) The Garden** demonstrates a new autobiographical direction), social activist Peter Sandmark, inter-media essayist Rick Raxlen, collagist Veronika Soul, and whimsical portraitist Lois Siegel.

10. **The Masculine Mystique**, Giles Walker and John Smith (NFB), 1984, 87 min. I don't hide having no sympathy or respect for this whining docu-drama of male backlash. Yet it must be acknowledged that the general public have enjoyed to some degree this spectacle of men who can't adjust to modern women, and that its even more slick and complacent sequel **90 Days** has proven to be an even greater hit. Without necessarily going along with the *vox populi vox dei* principle, any hit that makes it out of the NFB in the current political atmosphere has to be welcomed. And who could complain that the NFB has finally discovered, for the third time in its history, the recipe for low-budget docu-flavoured fiction that is suitable for our economy-sized national cinema.

11. **Mother Tongue**, Derek May (NFB), 1979 47 min. A self-portrait of the filmmaker and his bi-cultural family, this handsome parable of Confederation offers a wry tenderness and ironic lyricism that almost absolves all the other

sins of the NFB male narcissists.

12. **Not A Love Story: A Film About Pornography**, Bonnie Sherr Klein (NFB), 1981, 68 min. Whether or not you agree with it, this is the most controversial, celebrated and masterful of Studio D films. Now that the dust has settled, it looks absolutely critical with its Griersonian moralism and its formula of the conversion of its main character, the stripper with the heart of gold.

13. **One Man**, Robin Spry (NFB), 1977, 87 min. Little recognized a decade later, this is by far the best fiction feature to appear during the period. Spry, the Martin Ritt of Canada, produced an ensemble of exceptional performances from Len Cariou, Jean Lapointe, August Schellenberg, and Jayne Eastwood, as well as an intelligent scenario, a polished *mise-en-scène*, and fine Montreal location-work. This political thriller sets an investigative journalist on the trail of crippling pollution in an industrial neighbourhood but he ends up discovering capitalism and his own conscience instead.

14. **Or'd'ur**, Bachar Chbib, 1983, 35 min. A pseudo-*vérité* fiction about a male brothel, this film represents the best of our own young generation of film-school whiz-kids brought up on cult movies and now aiming for international markets. Chbib's tale of a taboo sexual subculture may lack the political

awareness of its ancestor, Harry Sutherland's gay-lib tract **Truux** (1978) as well as the emotional authenticity of its other ancestor, **The Rubber Gun**. But it has an integrity lacking in the film to which it is most often compared, the dazzling **Mother's Meat Freuds Flesh** (Demetrios Estdelacropolis, 1985). It has also had the honour of being refused, along with **No. 9**, from the Festival international du nouveau cinéma.

15. **Rubber Gun**, Allan Moyle, 1977, 86 min. The last testament of the Moyle-Vitale-Lack gang we once thought represented the great Anglo hope of Quebec Cinema. This well-textured caper film reflects the energy of forbidden desire, and the sad romanticism of the twilight of the '60s Anglo counterculture of the Main.

16. **Solzhenitsyn's Children Are Making A Lot Of Noise In Paris**, Michael Rubbo (NFB), 1978, 88 min. The *nouveaux philosophes*, high priests of French trendy thought, are encountered in Rubbo's famous first-person style. This is no doubt the best title from the NFB star *auteur's* final winding-down period, but was it really necessary to leave the studio to sniff out an ideological shift?

17. **Speaking Our Peace**, Teri Nash and Bonnie Sherr Klein (NFB), 1985. This film represents Studio D's world mission at its most encyclopedic, and the studio's "exemplary portrait" formula at its most stirring. Avoiding the talkative excesses of last year's other *magnumopus*, **Behind The Veil** (Margaret Wescott), this film on women who work for peace is much tougher on the struggles in the West (e.g. the footage of the Greer au' Common women's peace camp) than on its quixotic forays into the Soviet Union.

18. **The Street**, Caroline Leaf (NFB), 1976, 10 min. Yet another Richler and surely the best, this skilful narrative was based on a story of childhood by our most versatile animator. **The Street** is St. Urbain of course, but the film's realist and literary bent doesn't necessarily reflect the huge range of interests and styles of English Animation at the Board, for which it is this list's token representative.

19. **Suzanne**, Robin Spry, 1980, 102 min. Less steady in the social melodrama than in the social action flick, Spry all the same brought some fine accents to this classic *Bildungsroman* of an Anglo girl who matures at the same time as the Quebec society around her. One day the critics will be sorry for the job they did on this one.

20. **A Wives' Tale**, Sophie Bissonnette, Martin Duckworth, and Joyce Rock, 1980. Officially belonging to the French-language canon (honoured by the Prix de la critique), and better known here as **Histoire de Femmes**, this feature documentary shot primarily in English in Ontario by two Anglo-Québécois and a Franco-Ontarian suggests the futility of all labels. This moving story of miners' wives awakening during a strike at the Sudbury Inco plant raises the issues of gender and economic powerlessness more than it does the tacked-on linguistic factor. It incidentally confirms Duckworth as one of the best direct cinematographers in Quebec, and, alongside Brittain, Cowan, Spry, Klein, Rubbo and May, as one of Anglo Quebec's most distinguished *auteurs*.