

Activist archivists

*The Cinémathèque québécoise:
a quarter century of conservation,
dedication*

BY MARY J. MARTIN

Animals, fish, amoeba – they don't usually need much storage space except for winter provisions and room to breed. They don't squirrel aside memories and history in a panic to not forget, to not lose track of the past, the way we feel we must. Because we are stuck with this preoccupation, we sometimes find ourselves applauding those who collect well – those who do it for us. Bag ladies carrying remnants of their personality aren't really so very far away from the achievements celebrated this year on the 25th anniversary of the Cinémathèque québécoise.

The Cinémathèque's mandate is essentially the answer to any and all wishes of anybody connected with movies, within the boundaries of certain differences in tastes. It reaches all levels, from fans to dilettantes to masters. Through the acquisition and preservation of films and their documentation, and through making these available to the public, the Cinémathèque hopes to promote greater awareness and understanding of the art and

industry that is film. With ever-expanding archives at its core, the work of unveiling and illuminating reaches outwards.

Conceived by a group of Montreal-based cinephiles, the Cinémathèque québécoise passed through some revolutionary times in Quebec politics and, at the outset, operated within a certain ideology that made up some of the members' intentions. Since 1972, as curator and director, Robert Daudelin has nurtured the growth of the Cinémathèque. This past spring, Stéphane Leclerc was appointed to undertake the management responsibilities, while Daudelin became the director of the collections, performing something akin to what artistic directors do for theatres. "My territory now covers the collections, public screenings, and the publications," he says. "Anything that touches on the domain of film culture."

Daudelin sets the tone

While Daudelin says that much of the work is done in a cooperative spirit among the various full- and part-time employees, the members and volunteers, the board of directors, and himself, it seems that Daudelin has nonetheless set the

THE CINÉMATHÈQUE QUÉBÉCOISE HAS PUBLISHED A COMMEMORATIVE ALBUM ON THE OCCASION OF ITS 25TH ANNIVERSARY. THE PHOTOS, ILLUSTRATIONS AND HOMAGES REPRINTED HERE ARE TAKEN FROM THE ALBUM AND ARE USED WITH PERMISSION.

Mary J. Martin is a Montreal-based freelance writer.



The cinémathèque staff: first row; Linda Poirier, Manon Viens, Gisèle Coté, Carmen Rivard, Louise Beudet, Stéphane Leclerc, François Auger. 2nd row; Alain Gauthier, René Beauclair, Carmelle Gaudet, Pierre Jutras, Nicole Laurin, Julie Dubuc, Lorraine LeBlanc, Michel Boulet. 3rd row; Michel Martin, Marc-Antoine Daudelin, Pierre Verroneau, Robert Daudelin, Michelle Francoeur, Serge Desaulniers

PHOTO: ROBERT PARENT

LES
DOSSIERS
DE LA
CINÉMATHEQUE
Numero 17

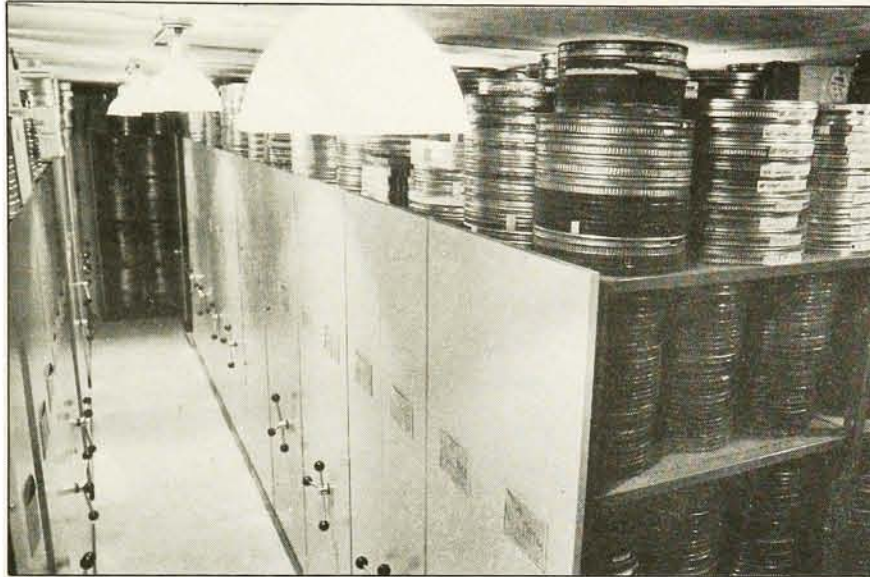
Pierre Veronneau

Résistance et affirmation:
la production francophone
à l'ONF-1939-1964

(Histoire du cinéma au Québec III)



CINÉMATHEQUE QUÉBÉCOISE/MUSÉE DU CINÉMA



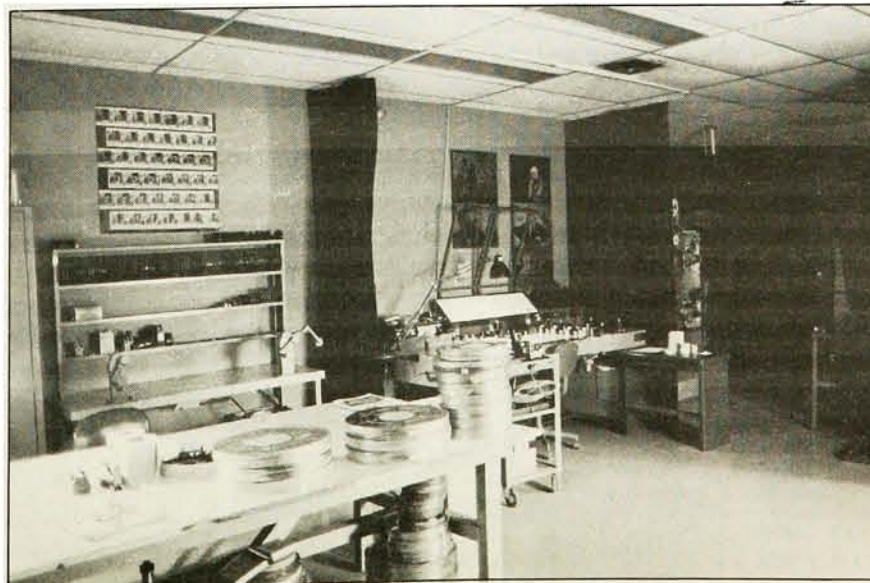
The Boucherville archives

tone for the past 16 years. His most obvious influence springs from his personal film preferences. "I'm much more curious about films *d'auteur* than about large, commercial films. Of course this has nothing to do with our archival policy." He says this by way of explaining the recent revitalized contacts with anglophone filmmakers outside Quebec. In the '60s and '70s, the Cinémathèque paid much more attention to them, both to their drama and documentary productions. "For example, very early on, the Cinémathèque honored *This Hour has Seven Days*, and we were the first to save films by Larry Kent," Daudelin says. Then for a while, "especially in Toronto, the industry was oriented towards commercial films for what has been quite a number of years, and this was helped by Telefilm Canada. I don't think it succeeded very well, and then suddenly there was some hope - *A Winter Tan*, *Family Viewing*, *Mermaids* - all at once! It's wonderful because these are new films *d'auteur* all over again. These are original, novel, and they don't have this suicidal preoccupation with having an American actor or aiming at the American box office."

A room of one's own

The long bureaucratic shuffle to having all the services (excluding vaults) under one roof ended successfully in 1982 when the Cinémathèque québécoise moved into its downtown Montreal location. In this renovated school, paid for with a 25-year mortgage backed by the Quebec provincial government, there is a research library with material dating from 1895, and debatably the most comprehensive file of film press clippings in Canada. The state-of-the-art Claude Jutra Theatre, where more than 500 times a year films are shown, undergoes tests every week or so. "As a film museum, we must make certain that people can see films from all eras, just as they were intended to be seen," says Daudelin. This includes respecting the film ratio, and having a piano player at as many of the silent films as possible. There is also an exhibition space with frequently changing displays. Of course, the administrative offices are located in this building as well.

Outside of town a little, in Boucherville, are the archival vaults. Before the construction of these vaults, the Cinémathèque québécoise'



The workshop at the Boucherville storage site



PHOTO: SERGE DESAULNIERS

In many ways 1963 was an auspicious year for cinema in Canada: Claude Jutra's *À Tout Prendre* and Don Owen's *Nobody Waved Goodbye* were both released that year and they are definite milestones in the historical development of the feature film in both official languages. It is appropriate, therefore, that the Cinémathèque was established that year to conserve French-language film and to promote and develop the art of the film in Quebec.

At first glance the Cinémathèque's mandate for the acquisition and conservation of films produced in Quebec would appear to conflict with that of the Moving Image and Sound Archives in building a national collection, but in fact the two programs have been co-ordinated to ensure that as many films as possible have been protected for all Canadians with no duplication of effort.

Quiet efficiency and economical solution to problems have always been characteristic of the Cinémathèque's operations over the years, and the dedication of a small staff have enabled them to make a contribution to Quebec's cultural life out of all proportion to their numbers (or the Cinémathèque's always inadequate budget!). For the Cinémathèque has served this generation in making the rich resources of Québécois and world cinema accessible to its theatre audiences as well as the generations to come in safeguarding the patrimony in film and television.

I join with my colleagues at the National Archives, and my colleagues at the Canadian Centre for Advanced Film Studies in saluting the achievements of the first quarter century and to wish them every success in the years to come.

Sam Kula,
Director of the Moving Image and Sound
Archives Division, National Archives

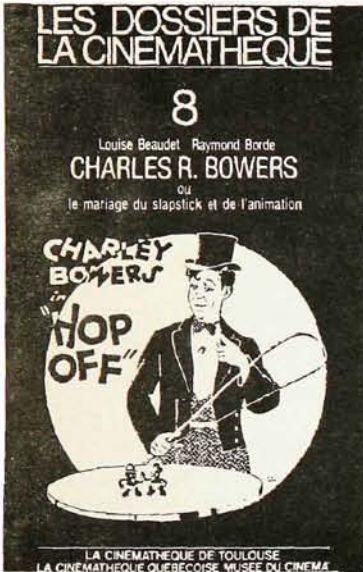
PHOTO: SERGE DESAULNIERS

Archives reflect their environment. Montreal is a sympathetic city, a breath of fresh air amidst the plastic conformity of North America. To the visitor the Archive exudes the same warmth. The library is full of researchers, the theatres' concern are both cultural and cosmopolitan. There are numerous in-house publications in the foyer which show that original research is a high priority, and the exhibition area actually has changing exhibitions.

From a film point of view the Cinémathèque québécoise is always associated with animation. Every archive should add a specialist concern to its responsibility for safeguarding heritage. I think this interest in animation also contributes to the environment. Humour is a necessary ingredient to all activities. Also, animation bridges the gap between the pre-cinema toy and the cinema itself. It is therefore perfectly logical to find that the Cinémathèque has an important collection of pre-cinema and cinema apparatus and ephemera.

An archive is also influenced by its Curator. I am envious of Robert Daudelin because he seems, even during the period when he was Secretary General of FIAF, to take administration in his stride and have energy left for the cinema itself. In the Good Archive Guide, the Cinémathèque québécoise would have several stars.

David Francis,
Curator, National Film Archive,
British Film Institute



1929 silent Soviet classic *New Babylon*



worked for five years at the Cinémathèque, from 1969 to 1974, at a time when a documentation centre on film and Canadian filmmakers amounted to the four empty drawers of two filing cabinets and several boxes filled with press clippings, typed notes and manuscripts, photographs... Francoise Jaubert was director; Robert Daudelin would soon be taking over. Gisèle Côté was everyone's assistant and Carmen Rivard took care of the books.

Everything was upside-down in that hole-in-the-wall. There was no living-room; everything was "in the kitchen". The only thing which was there was the passion for film which inspired this team, feeding its work, screenings, and the company of the filmmakers who created this cinémathèque.

Quebec film and filmmakers owe a lot to the Cinémathèque. Beyond the painstaking work of conservation, archive-making, research and publishing which never cease to enrich our cinematographic heritage and which make it an exceptional place of reference, the Cinémathèque was and continues to be the only real driving force of cinematographic continuity in Quebec...

But this cinémathèque didn't happen by itself. Behind all this activity and events there is a remarkable team which is still in the kitchen and which has succeeded, under Robert Daudelin's direction, to put what was upside-down in order. We cannot celebrate the 25 years of the Cinémathèque without paying homage to them. After years of work this passionate team has become an irreplaceable group of specialists and researchers... They are the Cinémathèque. And it is because of them that the Cinémathèque will always be my *alma mater*.

Carol Faucher
Administrator,
National Film Board
(Translated from the french by Naomi Guttman)

Could it be that we aren't rich enough to afford a cinémathèque? The Peruvians, Yugoslavs, the Cubans, the Greeks... have theirs. This is what I wrote 25 years ago. What a road we've travelled since!

... We haven't finished dreaming about it, our cinémathèque. For months a "small committee" has met with the same passion as another used to meet 25 years ago to imagine the cinémathèque of the next 25 years: this magnificent project of a 'Museum of Moving Images.'

I don't know what this project will be, but it makes me dream: "An immense light space with doors, where we open those which interest us to find ourselves in small rooms, medium-sized rooms, or very small rooms; rooms where the screen takes up a wall or a ceiling or a whole space; rooms for black and white, others for colour; rooms for animation, documentary films, fiction films, art films, peaceful rooms, electric rooms; rooms where we watch standing up, or sitting, or lying down, or on our knees (the very small ones) and on downy-soft 'prie-cinemas'! rooms, rooms, rooms, where the young and the not-soyoung enrich themselves, partaking in the thousand and one human experiences lived in Québec... and in the three other corners of the planet."

Who could have foreseen the road we have travelled in 25 years?

Who can foresee the road we will travel during the next 25 years?

Blé d'inde, I can't wait to see it.

Rock Demers
Founding member and producer

acquisitions were scattered from Washington, D. C. to the National Archives in Ottawa to the NFB offices in Montreal. These vaults "respond to the most modern standards of conservation," Daudelin says, "and with the recent \$1,175,000 provincial grant, they will be quadrupled in size and have the addition of cold storage chambers!"

At a recent meeting in Montreal of the executive of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAPF), members from all over this planet praised the Cinémathèque and its storage facilities. Eileen Bowser, curator of New York's Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) film collection claimed to be envious of the Boucherville installations. "Our vaults aren't that good yet," she grieves. "In addition the Cinémathèque québécoise has looked all around the world and they have seen where there are some gaps in their archives, and animation certainly was a good idea in my opinion. (The Cinémathèque has the world's largest collection of animated films.) They've also emphasized a lot of Third World productions - they take up the slack wherever they can find it."

Guido Cincotti of the Cineteca nazionale in Rome used terms like "great importance," "estimable work" and "remarkable" to describe the Cinémathèque's results. Portugal's Luis de Pina enjoys frequent contact with Montreal, and three years ago had a Québécois film festival in Lisbon. UCLA's Film and Television Archives' director, Bob Rosen, admires the "relationship

between archives and programming and how mutually supportive they are. The Cinémathèque québécoise does this extraordinarily well."

Many filmmakers of international note have been invited to visit the Cinémathèque. In 1963, Jean Renoir graced the first year of the institution. Since then the likes of Jean Dreville, Tahar Cher'aa of Tunisia, Bob Clampett, Arthur Penn, Frank Capra, and Johan van der Keuken, among a wide variety of others, have come to Montreal, often for retrospectives in their honor, or that honor their specialty or country of origin.

Bougeoisification?

The Cinémathèque's Canadian reputation has much to do with its being the oldest Canadian film institute of its kind, and the only one in Canada that is a member of FIAPF. Iolande Rossignol, past-president of the board of directors, current board member, and now head of independent television drama at Radio-Canada notes that, "the 'cinémathèques' in Vancouver and Winnipeg are young, and aren't really yet cinémathèques because they're not really archives. And the vaults necessary for archives are such complex things... they call for enormously specialized conditions." Rossignol feels that while the Cinémathèque does provide the technical advice requested, it lacks the

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Behind all cinémathèques there are people who truly love film. They are most knowledgeable and are deeply dedicated to collecting, systematizing and carefully preserving the works of the past and the present.

We film makers owe a great debt of gratitude to all cinémathèques, and especially our own Cinémathèque Québécoise who arranges its public screenings in such meaningful ways, giving us an over-view of the many faceted aspects of films and their makers, and a clearer understanding of the art that we practice. Norman McLaren.

Norman McLaren's eloquent tribute to the Cinémathèque québécoise

creative contact with English-Canadian filmmakers. "Montreal isn't a city open to Canadian (English-language) films." She too cites *Mermaids* and *Family Viewing* as having increased the communication. The directors of those two films became members of the Cinémathèque by invitation (the only way at the moment to become a member). But she considers this approach too random. "The Cinémathèque must depend on something a little more systematic in the use of its collections for more frequent screenings of English-Canadian talent. But the situation is already getting better."

Rossignol also suggests that positive change is coming because "of those people who, at the time of the beginnings of the Cinémathèque, were very left-wing, have now changed their attitudes. It's not necessarily the values that have changed, but the way they deal with the public. That's really changed." For her, this was well illustrated in the 25th anniversary gala at Montreal's Place des Arts, a fairly bourgeois concert hall. Whereas 25 years ago, even 15 years ago, there would have been some struggling collectivity of filmmakers going to watch some private screening... somewhere, here there were a variety of classes and interests willing to pay up to \$100 per ticket to see the North American premiere of *New Babylon*, a restored 1929 silent film from the Soviet Union about the Paris commune. Chamber group 1

Musici de Montreal performed the original Shostakovich score.

"It was good," Rossignol says. "It's important that different people end up at the same place. That's the dialectic. The different

poles well represented, and the people talk to one another. It's very important to invite a wider audience to participate."

What's important to Daudelin now is to reach the public with as many elements of the collections as possible. "It's not because we're nuts about film that makes us save crates of films. We conserve them so that they can be seen. From now on, along with our conservation and acquisition work, much of our effort will be directed at projects connected with the idea of access." He talks of the poster collection containing some irreplaceable pieces from France in the '30s, soundtracks, photographs, over 100 years of film and photographic equipment, and the films themselves. There are two cross-Canada tours planned for 1989: The Great Canadian Cartoon, a collection of animated films of the last 15 years from outside the National Film Board, and The Unknown Norman McLaren, made up of experiments McLaren made before shooting some films, and of just plain experiments.

While the Board of Directors examines feasibility studies for a Museum of Moving Images to find funding and space for the physical futures of the Cinémathèque québécoise, Quebec's filmmakers maintain the always-close ties with the Cinémathèque, and more and more English-speaking Canadian filmmakers from outside and within Quebec develop and solidify contact with the Cinémathèque. In December, Daudelin has plans to show eight recent films from Toronto and Halifax. "We simply have to look very closely at what people like Rozema, Egoyan, and MacGillivray are doing because there's something new going on in English-language film production. That's for certain." ●

Jean Renoir, subject of the cinémathèque's first tribute



Some Facts

- Dates**
- 1963: Founded as Connaissance du film
 - 1964: Changed name to Cinémathèque canadienne
 - 1967: Decide on specializations: Quebec filmmakers, and animation
Requested to create film pavilion at Expo 67
 - 1968: Bilingual newsletter instituted: Nouveau cinéma canadien/New Canadian Film
 - 1971: Name changed to Cinémathèque québécoise
Quebec's filmmakers maintain the always-close ties with the Cinémathèque, and more and more English-speaking Canadian filmmakers from outside and within Quebec develop and solidify contact with the Cinémathèque.
 - 1975: Storage facilities at Boucherville. First of their kind in Canada. 375 m²
 - 1979: Robert Daudelin becomes first North American Secretary General for International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF)
Begin publishing *Copie Zero*, a French-language thematic magazine
 - 1981: Produce an exhibition at the request of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts Museum entitled "L'Art du cinéma d'animation"
 - 1982: Acquire own building

Budgets

- (a private, non-profit corporation)
- 1963-64: \$7 600
- 1972-73: \$124 744
- 1988-89: \$1 600 000 (approx.)

Staff

- 25 full-time
- Membership: over 400

Collections

- 22,000 Quebec, Canadian, and foreign films, including 4 000 animated films
- 8 000 film posters
- 200 000 photos
- 500 pieces of film apparatus dating from 1870 (Canada's only historical cinematography collection)
- 4,500 manuscripts, scripts, documents, sets, soundtracks.