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PORNOGRAPHY AND FILM: NOT A LOVE STORY

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FEMINIST FILMMAKING IN QUEBEC

QUEBEC FILM: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

MEDIA THEORY AND MEDIA PRACTICE

16

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FILMMAKER BONNIE KLEIN AND AUTHOR KATE MILLET IN "NOT A LOVE STORY" (PHOTO:NFB)

"NOT A LOVE STORY"... NOTES ON THE FILM

Martha Aspler-Burnett

Near the end of NOT A LOVE STORY, Susan Griffin, the author of PORNOGRAPHY AND SILENCE, is quoted as saying that «pornography is hating life, hating oneself». This is confirmed by Linda Lee Tracey, ex-stripper, poet and filmmaker who, at the end of a soul-searching odyssey into a world of pornography, claims to be sick and embarrassed by the experience. She has also been deeply moved. More of this later.

The National Film Board has taken a look at pornography. It has fully endorsed pornography as a subject for study (and defended the film's right to bescreened publicly in Ontario, where it was banned by the censorship board), here by filmmakers from the women's studio, Studio D, legitimating any and all images (some of them «shocking»), statistical claimsand an uncertain ideological position. The Board stood behind the film and the film stands behind the Board. «A» pornographic world has been represented such that it is, to the Board's credit, a testament to documentary filmmaking; the sophisticated packaging of interviews, personal statements, filmed images, still images combined with the direct and immediate concerns of the filmmakers. In addition, the film uses the metaphorof the journey/odyssey — a physical and moral one — which ends in the filmmakers gaining knowledge and becoming purified. It is important to examine sequences in the film and to look closely at what is said and what is seen. It is also important to consider what is juxtaposed in the editing process and to question what the filmmakers themselves project as self-image by their presence in the film, and what, ultimately, they would like the spectator to believe.

The film is structured around the presence of Bonnie Klein (filmmaker) and Linda Lee Tracey (former stripper). Both women, each in her own way and for her own reasons, feel that she has a duty to fulfill for the spectator. Duty means nothing less than the communication of a messianic-like message.

This message is primarily about the materiality i.e. the existence (as opposed to the history, the ideology) of pornography. Each feels the necessity to experience pornography first hand **for** us because, believing themselves and the spectator to be good «individualist» products of our culture (i.e. equating experience with evidence) they feel we will learn more as a result. Linda Lee Tracey clearly enunciates the individualist position when she says that she needs to experience everything **for herself** first. For example, she needs to see what it is like to pose for a pornographic magazine. She is photographed by Hustler photographer Suze Randall. Suze does an «operation» on her, transforming her vagina into the requisite «flower». Linda begins to feel uncomfortable. («....but a vagina isn't a flower...»). On camera she grits her teeth and completes the session/sequence, but she feels violated. Earlier on in the film she puts down a women-against-pornography group because she feels, as a result of an interaction, that they put **her** down. As a stripper she felt as much a working woman as any other working woman. She felt the strip club where she worked to be an «honest» arena, and she had devised and performed an act which was in fact a parody of an act... as she put it, «neither porn nor erotic».

Thus, she was alienated from an organized group, (like woman against pornography) yet she was concerned. She becomes a surrogate in the film for Bonnie Klein's purposes: a subject to be worked upon and transformed into the image of liberal feminism. Consider the image of Linda on the beach in the last scene: she is filmed with Klein and then alone, reading her poetry. This scene is very much removed from the image of Linda on stage at the beginning of the film, nude at the end of her act, proclaiming «God bless the working woman-and accepting money from a drunk spectator at the edge of the stage. The film is the medium for Linda's individualist self-expression and the site for her transformation. After a visit to 42nd street in N.Y.C. she will state that she cannot go back to Montreal unscathed. On 42nd street the camera follows her. She is free to roam, to look, to ask questions. She literally climbs upon a soapbox to state her position and provoke bystanders into discussion. She recites poetry she has written.

Bonnie Klein's role could be defined, in part, as that of an actress, who appears in many scenes: she is sensitive to Linda, inquisitive with Suze Randall, a traditional journalist with her «experts», and cleverly subdued (out of necessity, to «get the interview») with a pornographic magazine publisher. She is also, clearly, present as a filmmaker — or more precisely, as a factor of control. Her odyssey parallels Linda's in some instances, (they are present together in many of the same places), but is also more specific in terms of whom she chooses to «visit» and what she feels needs to be seen by the spectator.

In NOT A LOVE STORY, the filmmakers probe people, such as ex-porn stars, a magazine publisher, an expert on aggression, as well as **American** feminists Kate Millett, Kathleen Barry and Susan Griffin. (Why has Bonnie Klein gone to the U.S.? Why is Margaret Atwood filmed at a public speaking engagement as she reads poetry while the American women are filmed in personalized settings? What kind of validation are the filmmakers looking for in their choice of critics or sites of pornography?) One does not get the sense, however, that anyone or any

environment is ever truly probed. In part, the overall editing plan works against this. The film moves too quickly, too neatly from one sequence to another. In the following example we see how deterministic and mechanical the editing is. In covering a series of ideas the editing invokes a closure such that the critique can barely exist within the sequence and is not made, developed or extended elsewhere.

We enter a sex club in New York City. A woman sits in a booth, separated from her clients by both a glass window and a metal grating which rises and falls as silver dollars are deposited. Contact with the Customer is by telephone, linking both sides of the booth. An unseen male customer enters the booth and begins a typical exchange. The camera has been positioned so that it films the woman directly. It is either inside the booth looking in, or it looks over the shoulder of the customers. He has obviously agreed to the set-up. And it isobvious that this is not a «set-up». We hear his voice. We see what he sees, as the woman removes her clothes, we watch. She is trying to keep the customer interested enough in her to keep on depositing silver dollars. She flatters him. She shows him «what she's got». He insults her («I've seen better»), setting up a verbal challenge to which she **must** respond. This scene is followed by une in which Bonnie Klein interviews author Kathleen Barry, who talks about how important it is to «know» about pornography, in order to face up to it and deal with it. What follow sthisscene is, almost predictably, Bonnie Klein taking the place/position of the male customer in the booth. We know this because we see the woman behind the glass, as before, but we now hear Bonnie's sympathetic voice talking to her. Because the woman is being interviewed arid must continue to make money, Bonnie must also deposit silver dollars. The wornan talks about being turned off men and turned off sex, almost to the point of hating men. Her statement is both sad and ironic. She hates what she does for a living, and what she does for a living is to be the object of men's hatred. In this verbal/visual exchange in the «private», «secret» booth, she receives over and over again an encapsulated history and affirmation of man's desire to dominate women. We the audience are not given any sort of meta-critique which might help us understand what is so blatantly there to be enunciated. A short interviewwith a second woman in another booth confirms these sentiments. Next we hear the voice of Kathleen Barry again, talking about how any wornan is a potential victim, as we watch a series of images of brutality, enslavement and child pornography. Several times during the film we are exposed to brutal images. Nowhere are we informed of the prior conditions for the existence of these images: that a woman must be considered less than human, that she must be held in contempt by the pornographer, that she must represent to sexuality what, according to Susan Griffin, the Jew represents to anti-semitism and the black to racism In order to accept images of violence towards women, the pornographer and the consumer of pornography must believe that the body of a women is not simply that of a mother-sister-wife-lover, but the feminine side of himself, which must be destroyed at all costs.

What is wrong with NOT A LOVE STORY, is that it does not account for the background which would give the specrator a fuller political, historical and psychoanalytic understanding of the processes involved in the display and objectification of women, nor a fuller understanding of how brutalization comes to be an extension of this display and objectification. The spectator is not made fully aware of the two subjects the filmmakers were so concerned with in the inception of their project: why eroticism can have no place in pornography and what impact pornography has on the young (female), relative to what Bonnie Klein herself says about her young daughter's confusion at growing up surrounded by images of pornography: «What would she think about her own little body?»

In worrying aloud about her daughter, Bonnie Klein plays yet another role, making all the film's viewers potentially her children. What she does not acknowledge is the fact that, as Susan Griffin says, «...there is nowhere in culture where a woman can evade pornography. She cannot have come to age without seeing at least one of these images. And we know, when images enter the mind, they remain there forever and memory.»

As was stated earlier, here is a film which does too much thinking for us. The conscious or unconscious mernories of these «first» images, the silence and perhaps the deeply buried fears of women cannot therefore be present.

LINDA TRACEY AND BONNIE KLEIN IN "NOT A LOVE STORY" (PHOTO:NFB)

"NOT A LOVE STORY" KNOWLEDGE, POWER AND PORNOGRAPHY

Hart Cohen

A number of serious questions may be raised in relation to pornography: To what extend do images of dominance, submission, and violence affect social life? To what extent do they mirror what social life already contains? Can there be rational limitations set on the sexual imagination? Do the connections to eroticism and voyeurism help map these limitations? What is the importance of sex in an individual life? Can it function as knowledge about the self?

Many answers to these questions may be traced in the numerous forums that have debated the issue of pornography. These extend from the fields of literary and art criticism to the institutional discourses of social psychology and law. More recently, feminist writing, most notably in film theory, has developed complex and original inquiries into many facets of pornography. A key figure is Laura Mulvey whose theoretical work and film practice[1] attempts to locate in both psychoanalytic and filmic discourses the "fetish" of pornography;[2] to trace its contours; to distanciate its objectivity. If pornography is not the object of this particular critical tendency, certainly its pre-conditions and structures are — and examined specifically as a feature of filmic discourse.

In this respect, sexuality is not just knowledge about the self nor about others and its relationship toothers. Mulvey's film tries to "say what cannot be said" by confronting the fetish at the level of one of its representations — in film practice. In doing so, it demonstrated that knowledge about sexuality is particularly meaningful not simply as examination of fetishistic relationships (their de-contexualization) but as a consequence of actively trying to change them. It is from this standpoint — the knowledge claims which "Not A Love Story" makes on its audience — (chiefly as a consequence of the film's investment in de-contexualization) that I wish to construct a review of the film.

"Not A Love Story" is, above all else, a film that dispenses **knowledge** about pornography and sex. The film makes a constant proposal to impart knowledge — the filmmaker learns; Linda Tracy learns and transforms her life; the audience learns (or rather is taught) by way of exposure and initiation into porn, identification with the protagonists, and through capsulized comments put forward by feminist writers and thinkers. The film's humanist stance opposes the reduction that porn effects in relation to the body — that the emphasis on "outer" sexual functions displaces the inner essence of psychic love. This split ("Cartesian" split philosophically speaking), results in the loss of human meaning because it attacks the inner orspiritually creative part of humans. Although the film centers its intervention on behalf of women, it is an intervention in the educational power of porn (its capacity to corrupt) that can only be met with counter-education. Thus the film may be said to subscribe heavily to this anti-Cartesian view within a sustained concern for women and feminist positions. In pursuing the issue at this level of intervention and education, the film itself produces an **object** out of what is actually a complex practice — pornographic practice. In themanner of scientific objectification, the film adheres to the very world-view opposed by its implicit humanist stance. The contradiction is bound by the film's desire to provide knowledge but this desire itself needs close examination.

The film, like other forms of discourse on sexuality, claims a territorial imperative in this "will to knowledge" — the territory is mapped along the axes of power and pleasure; the imperative is to control who shall speak about the territory — the positions and viewpoints that sustain it, the institutions that store and circulate its property.

To designate the film's linkages between knowledge, power, and enunciation is to place the film where it is not: as a film that addresses the history of pornography it is atheoretical; as a film that seeks its own enunciation about pornography it is distinctly ahistorical; as a film that theorizes the use of sexuality as an agent of power it is distinctly antagonistic towards altering journalistic forms of argument and traditional narrative codes of the documentary.

The film economizes at these 3 levels — history, theory, and representation. Instead it sets in place a denunciation — a proclaimed rupture of the link between the pornographic in everyday life and the "critique of repression of sexuality"[3] (popularly acknowledged as an emergent discourse of the last two centuries that has identified and challenged the mechanisms of repression, censorship and denial). That the pornographic in De Sade for example was part of the early transformation of sexual discourse compels a historical contextualization of the rupture. The film, however, speaks about the relation of pornography to sexual representation within the limits of the representation itself. These limits are drawn by the empirical evidence brought forward by the film. No trajectory into the historically guided formation of the pornographic discourse is possible. The absence of any such contextualization is crucial for the very power mechanisms of repression and denial are not contained by their representations, but are emergent in conjunction with bourgeois and capitalist social and economic forms. It is not to claim that this rupturing of pornography is ambivalent — that the power mechanism the film attacks is itself the power it takes on. Rather it is the inability to adequately enunciate in the gaps between representation, in the silences between the discursive productions, a whole new interpretive scheme for sexual discourse itself.

''Not A Love Story'' however, sees itself clearly as struggling against sexism in pornography — its violent and sadistic portrayal of women. The film tries to lead the viewer towards an understanding of how pornography functions in the wider contexts of society.

There are, however, several dangers in the film's approach. The film maintains a social phenomenology that leads far too easily to an acceptance of the actor's/actress's point-of-view. In the film, the filmmaker's experience of pornography leads to a position on pornography (a kind of unexpressed theory of pornography). This position is derived largely from the free-moving autonomy of the filmmaker, Bonnie Klein and Linda Lee Tracey. Their personal journeys lead to a number of questionable truths — moral imperatives that valorize and encourage idealized notions of love and independence; a mystical transcendence of the individual ego. These narrative inspired solution set by the filmmaker's position seem inadequate to the severity of the problem.

''Not A Love Story'' tries to attack pornography by centering it — by presenting it as the ideal point of sexism and of violence against women. The physical acts of sadism and violence against women's bodies are identified with the ''porn'' of pornography. It is porn which is able to subvert sexuality. The film thus evades the question of what permits porn itself to maintain this power of subversion. It allows one to think of porn as having only its own laws and excesses to answer to.

The struggle against sexism (to which this film sees itself as belonging) can best be effective by not addressing porn itself but rather in conjunction with or as a part of the discourse of sexuality. The film tends to map the relationship between pornography and sexuality in a hierarchical fashion: the two discourses arecomplementary but inflexible in their relationship to one another. Pornography dominates while sexuality is dominated; pornography is accepted, sexuality excluded. Neither pornography nor sexuality however, can separate themselves from the strategic play of the other. The film's attack on pornography demonstrates clearly that it is an instrument and effect of power. However as a complexity of cross-cutting practices that have been both punished and tolerated, repressed and liberated, pornography has also functioned as a site of resistance.

The attack on pornography can only paradoxically be advanced by the film if it disengages itself from the very critical framework it has set in place. This means using a less provocative and sensationalist form of argumentation and developing a more precise re-contextualization of pornographic practices.

NOTES:

1. A key essay in Mulvey's work is ''Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,'' in *Screen,* Autumn, 1975. Her film (with Peter Wollen) produced in conjunction with her theoretical work was called "Riddles of the Sphinx."

2. Adapted from psychoanalysis the notion of the ''Fetish'' takes on a central importance in Mulvey's theory of Scopophilia — pleasure derived from the act of looking. Summarized by Marita Tabriz "...women are displayed as objects of her gaze, to give pleasure and to get pleasure from being looked at. But by their being 'woman' (castrated) they also arouse unpleasure in the onlookers — 'the threat' (of castration). One way of the male unconscious to overcome the 'fear' is to disavow the women's castration by turning the female figure itself into a *fetish* so that it becomes desireable rather than dangerous ... fetishistic. Scopophilia builds up the physical beauty of the object/woman and transforms it into something satisfying in itself — a perfect product...".
   Tabriz, M., ''Photo-essay,'' *Screen Education,* 40, 1981/2, Autumn/Winter, p. 11.

3. This phrase is drawn from Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction.* While the film shuns the myth of sexual repression which Foucault refers to, there is a curious parallel in the dynamic of intentionality — witness the following passage from Foucault replacing ''sex'' with ''pornography.'' "...what sustains our eagerness to speak of (pornography) is doubtless this opportunity to speak out against the powers that be, to utter truths and promise bliss, to link together enlightenment, liberation, and manifold pleasures; to pronounce a discourse that combines the fervor of knowledge, the determination to change the laws, and the longing for the garden of earthly delights...'' - p. 7.

COMMUNICATIONS AND JOURNALISM: N.F.B. AND "NOT A LOVE STORY"

Phil Vitone

INTRODUCTION

This article is an attempt to speak about a variety of things involving media theory and practice. Special reference is made to Quebec & Canada and to a few recent films, but the general thrust involves a number of broader issues. The most fundamental concern is the communicational function of audio-visual media, centering on the communication between producer, product, and consumer. Traversing and inundating this relationship is the web of social, cultural, economic & political forces, constraints, procedures, policies, etc., which form both the context of everyday life and the conditions for media production. Identifying & differentiating networks of communication & meaning in this web is the task of research & education, and the task of this article. In Quebec and Canada this type of media analysis has been taken up both formally and informally by a number of people who not only work with media, but who also frequently work out of the government sponsored communications institutions of the National Film Board (NFB) and Radio-Canada/CBC. The simultaneous involvement in media production & investigation and in a government information bureaucracy presents an interesting example of a complex communication network. A closer view of such activity may provide insight on how Quebec & Canadian society understands communication practices and how, in turn, their functionaries derive policy.

LE CONFORT ET L'INDIFFERENCE BY DENYS ARCAND (PHOTO: NFB)

One aspect of the web of social life which has come under scrutiny of late is the phenomenon of pornography and its inevitable relation to media. The film "Not A Love Story" is an example of a recent government funded production (NFB) which attempts to investigate, analyze and explain the function of pornography in all its forms. There can be no doubt that the task is a serious & difficult one, and the producers embark on the project in a fitting manner, claiming to open up to public scrutiny a practice which has been relatively secret. The model they have chosen is a variation on the rather standard investigative journalistic format of interviews, statistics gathering, and on location, "exposé" filming. What stands as a more original technique is the inclusion of images of the filmmaker's own reactions in the on-going process of discovery. Other than this latter aspect, the film can be said to use a news & documentary format that is fairly general & representative of a broad range of subjects. What makes this particular film so interesting is its particular subject matter, pornography.

Pornography is a voyeuristic experience largely understood as exploitative in its objectifying of women for the alienated sexual fantasies of men. Pornography can, and has been perceived to be an excellent example of media exploitation, manipulation & ideological influence. Furthermore, pornography is said to be socio-culturally influential in supporting male chauvinism & sexism. It is financially important as it functions well as a popular commodity, supplying a large male demand as the film indicates. Such an economical value would seem to assure pornography's survival, especially when considering the male hegemony of society's executive positions. Beyond this, from the point of view of some film theory paradigms, pornography, or the pornographic sensibility underlies most audio-visual representation, as the latter tends to be a predominate form of mundane voyeuristic activity.(1) In the view of this theoretical perspective the source of such vicarious experience is frustrated (sexual) desire. Pornography, then, is the literal, direct expression of this desire.

A number of questions arise concerning the project undertaken by the makers of "Not A Love Story." Given the social conditions listed above, what types of constraints can be seen to have been imposed on the producers at the level of the bureaucracy, cultural & traditional attitudes of possible audiences, and at the level of their own expertise in the investigation & communication of problems surrounding the subject of pornography? How well have these constraints been recognized and dealt with and what can be seen to be the consequences of any significant neglect? As will be seen later the unique nature of the subject matter and the value pornography has had for certain theoretical views of visual representation will provide further insight into the communicative function of "Not A Love Story" & for many films of which the former is representative. Two other films also produced by the NFB, will be useful to examine in this regard. Reference will be made to "Le confort et l'indifference" and to "Nose & Tina."(2) The former is significant as it considers the problem of constructing political opinion around the very topical subject of the Quebec referendum on sovereignty-association. The latter is important as it is the short accompanying "Not A Love Story" in commercial distribution. The film's discourse, or more particularly, the discourse of its main characters, "Nose and Tina" on pornographic activity presents a view on the subject not available in the major feature.

Media Institutions & Society

The concept of "class" and its relation to power, mobility and influence in a hierarchical view of society is most often associated with Marxist-based perspectives. Yet from a systems theoretical perspective, that is a model of social organization & development based on notions of communication, steering, & control, concepts as "class" do have a functional role. Systems-based views of society and global relations, particularly as they are researched, developed and practised in modern industrial societies tend to be no more "left" than "centre": the interest in the category "class" is not at the level of describing historical purpose as it is in the accuracy the concept provides in certain areas of communication & control. Class appears as a functional, structural category which major ruling interests groups in society come to think of in a strategic manner in

the on-going project of maintaining or developing interests. Furthermore, class position, apparently, has interesting implications for the flow of information in society.

> Class, however, does not always refer primarily to economic interest. Rather, it often refers to social **status** — that is, to the easier or more difficult access of individuals to the attention, consideration, and respect of other members of the society, and to greater or lesser influence over their actions. The social statusof an individual is the degree of that person's access to deference or respect in society. It is the level of preference or priority which is accorded to the individual's messages in the network and flow of communications in society.(3)

The quote is taken from ''The Analysis of International Relations'' by K.W. Deutsch, in which there are further suggestions that class members freely communicate about their interests amongst themselves, and that cross-class communication is often difficult and self-conscious with higher status groups feeling somewhat more superior & remote.

Class differences notwithstanding, Deutsch's systems model of society can be understood as a variant of liberal democratic pluralism. It **concedes** the co-existence & co-development of various, at times exclusive & opposite opinions & interests within its vision of the world. However, a systems perspective does not, as was seen above, subscribe to the pluralism of the so-called ''free press'' of the western world with the latter's emphasis on free information, notions of equal time & objective reportage. What is interesting to discover in a systems model, is the presence of a model of society oriented to maintaining existing power structures yet using concepts and analyses often associated with more leftist models. Therefore, there is a mutual recognition & valuation (for different purposes) of concrete, identifiable, structural interests groupings (class is a ''general'' one) which interact with and have a certain force relative to other groupings. The nature of the groups and their respective interests are liable to change over time through historical circumstance. Deutsch lists ''the largest banks, investment houses and private business corporations'' with their management, holdings, talent and legal consultants as usually ''among the most effective interest groups...''(4) (p. 59). He goes on to list professional politicians, the military, higher government bureaucracy and the mass-media.

The view of the mass-media as being their own interest group runs counter to usual pluralist conception of a ''free, objective press.'' In the UNESCO debate of the last year over international policies for news coverage, a systems theoretical model would have doubtlessly agreed then with Third World claims of Western press bias in reportage on (at least) issues concerning the underdeveloped nations.(5) Demands by Third World countries to balance reportage by allowing their regimes to control press activity contradicted what western journalists saw as ''censorship'' in principle. Systems guided policy would dispute the latter western claim also, carefully maintaining the notion of bias and including it within a schema for control. In this can be noted the major difference in the ''operational'' pluralism of systems theory and the ''public'' pluralism of the mainstream press. The former must secure clear and concise information, even though it may disturb self-conceptions, or desireable, traditional conceptions of reality in order to exert control. Strategy requires information which does not necessarily conform with any specific ideal vision or belief a group may have in order to ultimately impose their views. The mainstream press on the other hand, has tended to put forward the view that it has no specific interest other than the objective reportage of events. Any controlling interest it may have is either denied or not perceived. Many observers, including Deutsch have thought otherwise. The list of views presented in the media include owners, advertisers, personnel and audience ''...in proportions that vary from medium to medium, from paper to paper or network to network, and from case to case.''(6) Deutsch points to the specific function & purpose of much media activity as involved with the prolonged flourishing of the particular media institution. Unlike systems-based social policy formulation, news formulation does not have to neces-

sarily understand & report external events with the same care, precision & theoretical depth. Ironically, what must be carefully construed is not the subject matter, but the communication & commodity systems of which the product will be a part. Components of these systems include: event, policies, media institutions, product, public opinion. Rigorous analysis, description & explanation runs the riskof being eclipsed in favor of a more desireable, amenable image, fitting as best as possible all the diverse interests which also provide for the ensured existence of the particular media organization.

Information, Mediation & Understanding

Ideology is another concept which has major political & explanatory significance in Marxist social theory. Again, system theoretical models of society incorporate a concept not usually associated with the right, but this inclusion involves a particular purpose & interpretation. Deutsch refers to the human need for "cognitive consonance" in order for the world to appear as a "meaningful and manageable, or at least tolerable whole." The need Deutsch speaks of is considered to be fundamental, existential & perceptual. His definition of the nature of ideology provides for it a role in the obtaining of "cognitive consonance."

> In their quest for cognitive consonance they suppress or reject items of information that do not fit into their image of the world; or they may seek, consciously or unconsciously, for some simplified image of the world that will seem clear, understandable, and consonant to them, and that will relieve their feelings of disorientation, frustration, alienation, and anxiety. An **ideology** is just such an image of the world, or a set of such images, which reduces the disquieting and often painful cognitive dissonance in the minds of the people who hold it. All of us have in our minds such simplifying and possibly more-or-less unrealistic pictures of the world. These pictures most often are partly realistic and partly quite fanciful, but in any case they reassure us through their greater consistency and tidiness. Usually we take them so much for granted that we are not even aware of them. We are sure of our own realism, but we are appalled at the ideological blinkers of other people — or other nations — who disagree with us. The less conscious we are of our own ideology, of our own set of helpful but simplifying pictures of the world, the more apt we are to value and defend them as parts of our own identity and personality. In politics, national and international, many people have preferred losing power, wealth, or life to losing their illusions.(7)

What appears to be suggested here, and there should be no need of endorsing it, is a rather pessimistic view of people's will and ability to understand the order of things which surround them. On the other hand, Deutsch also suggests a sliding scale of simple to complex "visions" depending on how more or "less conscious" groups are of their own ideology. System theoretical notions of steering & control would not exist without the correlative idea of variability of understanding. This is why strategically based bias isseen to be useful, and adenial, in principle, absurd. In the final analysis, a view of people constructing, appropriating & exchanging visions of the world can be useful as it implies the ability to develop & grow. There must simply be caution in the consideration of what the "cognitive **capacities"** of any group are.

As mentioned above, pluralist liberal belief understands mutual co-existence of varied positions: a harmony of dissonance. This principle presents 2 major problems for journalistic practice. On the one hand, there is the implication that a variety of possibly oppositional consonant images may exist simultaneously causing disorientation. On the other hand, certain profound investigations may rupture some of these simple visions. There is every indication that these types of problems have occurred. One solution is the replacing of one simple belief with another. Acts of political corruption may rupture a faithful view of a particular politician or party. This view may be replaced by an understanding of all political process as corrupt. Furthermore, there is the possibility of separating a consonant view from any aspect of concrete reality, of

equating perception with opinion understood as merely a disposition toward real events. Journalistic practice supports these solutions in its emphasis on reporting "facts" or recording events, and placing them within a narrative package. It does not matter (it may be too risky to clarify) that events can be related hierarchically against a historical background of power-oriented, power possessing groups. Relative power, status, wealth, their role in relation to the interests and the development of events, are incidental to the conditions of existence as they are found. System theoretical approaches to steering and control must have an ability to predict and contain, deal with contingency. Journalistic practices are simply observational activities. The former is dynamic, historical and interventionalist in orientation; the latter is static, retrospective, distanciated insofar as its role is conceived as observing "the facts." The former must be systematic primarily to the totality of interactions ("the system") it encounters; the latter, if it systematic at all, is more concerned with the unity of the form of its description: its representational form. There is no necessary contradiction in both approaches, good well-researched, well written investigative journalism does exist, and there is a definite demand, but in terms of the observations made above, the pressures of production make this less than likely on a wide scale.

The NFB Context

Where does this lead to in aconsideration of Bonnie Klein and "Not A Love Story," Cal & Norma Bailey and "Nose and Tina," Denys Arcand and "Le confort et l'indifference?" In terms of the above description of journalistic practice it is possible to suggest that each does not have to face a number of constraints in terms of their investigations, documentation, and production. There are no commercial sponsors for instance, but there are bureaucratic and probably political ones. There are special audience constraints — as the cliché goes, special to the NFB in its attempt to **find** large audiences who would watch how their tax dollars are spent. Another area of constraint is the filmmakers' own ability to understand and organize the task at hand. In this area, and in the former two as well: it is important to be filmmakers, proven media workers who can organize representations. The analysis of the event they are investigating, the depth and rigor of it, would seem to be left in great part to them, with possible political constraints as Denys Arcand's career would illustrate.

A further level of complexity the filmmakers face involves the potentials & limitations of one-way quasi-interactive communication. To illustrate this constraint, as well as the others mentioned, a consideration of certain ideas from interactional theories of communication would be of assistance.

Audio-visual Media & Interaction

Interactionally or pragmatically based communication theory assumes that any 2 members of an interaction relate to each other upon individual sets of premises, derived from experience and cognition. Therefore, A's act understood and anticipated in B's conceptual framework becomes the basis for B's act, which is then received and interpreted by A to become the basis for A's subsequent response and so on. Such a chain based on interpretations of behavior and its possible intention, forms the basis for an on-going interaction. If at some point the communication is perceived to be hostile, so may be the response. If the "originator (A)" then sees the "respondent (B)" as hostile without reperceiving the "original (A)" remark that way, the former individual will perceive the on-going relationship to demand escalation, submission or clarification. Self-reflexive analysis, or mutual reflection on the validity of one's perceptual premises can be understood as "meta-communication." This latter approach attempts to create an intersubjective basis for the interaction.[8] There are surely within any human aggregation, intersubjective understandings at any given time on any given subject. Local sport fans will immediately recognize and agree on many crucial points of their team's performance: but in many cultural, social and political situations, and even in the sports example provided, in referring to subtleties of performance, conflict may arise. A documentary film for example will address an audience directly. Audience members may then respond, either positively or negatively, to themselves about the

imaginary filmmaker, or to others in the audience, or to the filmmakers directly if the latter happen to be there. Media representation has a full history of instances of conflict. There are numerous examples: when Congolese soldiers in WWII were shown Donald Duck cartoons, they started to pelt the screen as they found the idea of depicting a duck talking and in a uniform insulting. A group of Ugandan women when shown a film on bathing babies produced in Nigeria responded with outrage as the film inverted the traditional order or proper washing, and showed the baby naked, as is the Nigerian fashion.(9) Programmes on beauty pageants, and other voyeuristic material outrage ever increasing numbers of women and some men, while they obviously fascinate others.

The films under consideration in this article are by no means short of examples. Denys Arcand's openly polemical film, "Le confort et l'indifférence," is laden with politically & ideologically partisan images as Lise Bissonette of the daily, "Le Devoir" points out in an editorial (see this issue). Dairy farmers are reduced to appear as opulent ostriches who forsake their patrimony for their own self-interest. Senior citizens are depicted as senile innocents easily falling prey to charming operators who offer social security with a political option. The entire film is peppered with such examples of "manipulation" — much of it carried by media. Those constituencies which are objectified in his perspective obviously do not share it, nor are they so easily mystified.

Pornography & Interaction

A deeply moving and interesting example of tension between the performer & spectator, producer & consumer can be found **in total** within "Not A Love Story." One location "exposed" in the film is a particularly interactive type of "peep show." The audience is placed, via the camera, in a small cubicle. Across a pane of glass is an equally tiny cubicle in which sits a scantily clad woman. Communication is achieved via telephone receivers on both sides and by the insertion of change to raise an opaque screen which descends at the end of a brief time limit. The audience witnesses part of a "performance": the woman's derobing and the conversation between her & a customer. In a subsequent on location interview, the performer says that the object is to keep to the spectator interested so that he may "come." He will continue to put money in if she is successful in maintaining his attention. She is justifiably disgusted with the routine & it is difficult not to be when viewing the filmed encounter. The woman tries to appeal to the man by performing a strip routine while she is holding the phone and enticing him to expose himself. It should not be surprising that the tone of her voice reveals some of the frustration towards the mechanical nature of her task. They exchange words intended to increase the level of arousal activity. His commitment is somewhat restrained to the point where, in response to her inquiry about the quality of her efforts to arouse him, he responds that he has seen better. It is both acomment on the performance to that point, and a challenge or demand for an "improvement" in the performance to come. The situation and the media involved resembles a two-way or interactional television set-up, where the spectator has instant access to the performer in order to provide feedback. The performer builds a representational structure which she imagines will satisfy the spectator. The spectator comments on her attempt and inadvertently guides the on-going process. Both participants objectify each other but in different ways for different reasons. One for sexual purposes (the man) and the other for financial purposes as well as purposes which relate to something like performance skills (the woman). The latter will provide, no matter how revolting it may be, possibilities for increased gain.

The view presented here should not be understood as a justification of such activities, or as a claim of there being an equitable exchange. There are a number of complicating factors involved in such a situation which in an overall sense underprivilege and oppress the woman participant. The constant humiliation of being abused for one's body & sexual identity is forcefully brought out in this sequence of "Not A Love Story" and should not be understated.

The description here serves as a metaphor for the performer/performance/spectator relationship, for the producer/film/consumer relationship. It points to the inevitable enigma of the audience for the performer/producer and the necessity of the latter to objectify the former. Of course the reverse is true, and without feedback or meta-communication, progressive and/or unresolved disjunctures may and will probably occur. The seriousness of the disjuncture will vary in accordance with the nature of the topic and the relative distance or proximity in approaches to it between spectator & audience. Klein in "Not A Love Story" does not by any means, point out such mutual objectification in the interaction she records & does not consider her objectification of the audience, of her performance in her own practice.

The Communication of Premises

It is obvious that a meta-communication approach is at times necessary in order to assure as much as possible intersubjective apprehension. Yet, as illustrated above, the chances for the mutual construction of perception are not very favorable. Journalists or editors rarely indicate the premises or the validity of the premises they operate within. Many times there is no cognizance or acknowledgement of the existence of premises, there is simply the statement of "facts." (How were the first world people who created the baby washing film to know that nakedness was a premise for how to depict a baby?) The reporter, editor is again concerned with some type of unity of representation, thereby usually concerned with description within an understandable framework. Such a description will then unavoidably express the interests and group affiliations of which either is a part. Further, in the notion of equal coverage, equal time, journalists will claim to represent the positions of all involved parties. The press's mediating of these positions, representing them, without any clarification of the premises underlying these representations, creates a potential for disjuncture between their description and that of the actual participants. Recriminations of the press are not unusual in this regard (i.e. Nixon, Agnew, Reagan, most labor unions, etc.), though it is clear that full rectification (even when the press is correct!), even for the rich and powerful is hardly ever possible. Within this dynamic, the press maintains, at certain levels, a quasi-independence even from itself, not fully reflecting the views of its owners, publishers, advertisers, reporters, staffers or readership (this being the negative dimension of the systemic nature of a media institution as related above). In this way, the press serves to promote, both as a conscious, self-appointed mandate and as an occupational hazard, controversy. Ultimately, this controversy is often an end in itself, as debate is by no means organized, categorized or developed. This can indeed be seen to be the case with "Not A Love Story" which inspired a number of diverse & separate reviews & critiques, public pressure against it (St. John), instances of overwhelming support and official censorship (Ontario). The latter case rather telling given the intent of the film.

Logical Confusion of Premises

There often exists a plethora of representations in which facts, observations, interpretations, speculations are formed into a unity on the basis not so much of a process of logical exposition as upon a protocol of representational construction. Untested premises, prejudicial, decontextualized observations, questionable testimony, in and out of context, rhetorical claims exist in the same space and time as policies, procedures and their objective consequences, cross-breeding, devaluing and elevating each other to confuse and conflate their respective specifity and usefulness. It is no wonder that the liberal press confusedly maintains absurd notions of freedom of expression as can be found in the defense of the right of free speech for racist organizations. If the primacy of communicational space is distributed hierarchically as Deutsch suggests, then it is no wonder that the controversy generated by the press rarely challenges in a profound way existing institutions and practices including its own. The reading & study material which accompanies "Not A Love Story" illustrates precisely the problems listed above. In the section "Some Questions for Thought and Discussion" 3 questions are particularly revealing:

— How can we help young people to develop their sexuality so that it is based on true human emotions rather than on media-created fantasies?

— Much of what the film says about the dehumanizing of women in pornography also may be applied to the depiction of children and men in pornography. What is it in our society that causes us to objectify human beings?

— The most frequently discussed strategy for combatting pornography is censorship. However, there is no concensus on this issue. Many who have grappled with the problem are torn between their commitment to civil liberties and a concern for the social consequences of pornography. Is censorship, in fact, an effective method of dealing with pornography? What are alternative strategies?[10]

Pornography, particularly its most violent form, clearly deprives women of anything resembling "civil liberties." The suggestion in the third question that removing pornography would deprive someone of their civil liberties begs the question as to "whom," and seems to be painfully and needlessly self-defeating. The least that can be said is that the issues & concepts have been confused & ill-defined. The second question besides being almost too general to deal with, never intends the consideration of the film's or any other documentary film's possible complicity in such a process. The combination of experts, personalities, victims and villains chosen by Bonnie Klein, portrayed in her objectifying practice and standing as representatives of the discourses which inhabit the world of pornography are not themselves "media-created fantasies"? "Le confort et l'indifference" is also wary of the "media-created fantasies" it confronts but unaware of its own creations. The film depicts some rather vile political rhetoric and turns the existence of this rhetoric into the general attitude of the opposition. The obtuse vision Arcand attempts to accord the other side becomes his own obtuse objectification of his political rivals. The film must speak to a rather limited audience — those true believers — and its opening in the Outremont theatre, a hall in the center of the film's partisan community, indicates just this fact. The NFB (Federal) funding for such a Quebec nationalist film portrays very well the confusing & groundless nature of the Quebec sovereignty issue & debate.

Issues, Opinions & Responses

Issues are often notoriously complex, leaping the bounds of most representational forms. The journalist in, fulfilling a service, and fabricating a commodity must create distinct parameters. Solutions to such a process of abridgement appear in a variety of degrees of proximity to anything which could be called logical. There is often the simple equating of logical anarchy with the notion of diversity of opinion or position; or in the case of certain pieces of advocacy journalism, exemplified by "Not A Love Story" and "Le Confort et l'indifference," the aligning of all facts in relation to a "bottom line," an obvious issue or moral to be supported. In this latter case, the thematizing of the issue serves to unify the presentation of information, and not necessarily work towards its clarification and organization. The moral tied to a series of directly related demonstrations or empirical observations give the argument substantial logical unity. Less direct, more complex aspects of an issue raise controversy and ambiguity whereupon the argument is forced back onto the moral imperative. In so doing, one can create "bad" viewers who are also "bad" people — and "good" viewers who are "good" people. Furthermore, some people may be "good" and "bad" on different occasions, confronting different aspects of the subject as it is found in the representation, in different contexts. It is not hard to conceive of a young male audience responding "well" to "Not A Love Story" in a classroom context, and "reversing" their attitudes and behavior when they are amongst themselves or with their female friends.[11]

The process described above is indeed how "good" and "bad" films are created. Faced with a particular treatment or depiction audiences give or refuse their approval. This does not have to be uniform to any film genre(s) nor absolutely for any film; moreover, it is possible to raise with an audience or individual their premises for evaluation and discuss their validity, opening the way for a developing perception and the introduction of new premises. The emphasis afilmmaker would place in a particular

organization does not have to be the same as placed by any particular spectator. Adolescent women do not share the **same** interest (if any at all) in a James Bond film as their male counterparts, or even older women for that matter. Their respective opinions would provide for an interesting debate on the meaning and value of such films.

Market strategies which are research orientations whose usual interest is financial, will gladly risk a variety of values in order to extend a consumer constituency (i.e. Brooke Shields, child sexuality). In planning for the financial variable other values develop or regress in a relatively unplanned way generating potential and actual crises in those areas where these values were influential (i.e. values of moral sexual behavior, family.)[12] The same situation exists for information and knowledge when the primary variable is representational unity: what is transmitted, its value and context may be distorted; moreover what is transmitted may be of less significance than what is not. It may reflect the predispositions, premises and socio-economic realities of one specific interest group (class) while claiming to represent society as a whole. The emphasis in "Not A Love Story" on a moral choice and enlightenment vis-à-vis pornography, and their relation to violence perpetrated upon women in **general** would seem to fit well with the privileged and educated middle-class. The relationship of pornography to work and making a living, and the possibility of its being more favorable in total "cost-benefit" terms than many other jobs, as is depicted by Tina in "Nose & Tina," would not seem to fit well with such an emphasis. Perhaps "Not A Love Story" could accept the paradoxical situation of a relatively "favourable" economic outlook on pornography — but the tools necessary to understand this difficult situation are not provided by the film and there appears to be a fundamental contempt and pity for this type of "helplessness."

The receiving public or perhaps, publics make their own valuations, based on their respective values and conjectures and are dubiously served by information distribution claiming to serve all interests, but that may be easily suspected of catering to selected and more restricted groupings. At most, it can be said that focussing on an issue maintains its controversiality, and the extended length of tenure of this position may increase the possibility of its increased clarification. It may also be true that there is the possibility of the issue, or more crucially, fundamental aspects of the issue being increasingly fragmented. What remains as a constant is the problematic institutional practice which generates partial and partisan information, while claiming objectivity, comprehensivity & facticity. It may be that some filmmakers find it more favorable in "cost-benefit" terms, relevant to their own material, political and intellectual perspectives, to continue these dubious institutional media practices rather than actually confronting the issues they merely survey.

NOTES

1. Mulvey, Laura, "Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema," in *SCREEN,* vol. 16, no. 3.

2. Bailey, Cal and Norma, *"Nose and Tina,"* a short film produced by the National Film Board of Canada. The film depicts moments from the lives of a Winnipeg couple. Nose is a train employee, Tina a prostitute, both living a rather stable life. The film enters at a point where Nose is arraigned on an incorrect charge of assault. After Tina had been abused by a customer, Nose retaliated and was incorrectly accused of being Tina's pimp. The film follows them to their court appearances. Charges are dropped but they have incurred debts due to large legal fees. Tina must leave for the more lucrative market of Calgary in order to secure the funds. The last scene of the film depicts their warm and calm temporary parting.

3. Deutsch. K.W., *The Analysis of International Relations,* 2nd edition; (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc.; 1978) p. 64.

4. Ibid. page 59

5. There has been an on-going debate in UNESCO concerning this issue. See for example, *News Values and Principles of Cross-Cultural Broadcasting,* Reports and Papers on Mass-Communication, no. 85 (Paris: UNESCO, 1980); *Cross-Cultural Broadcasting,* Reports and Papers etc., no. 77 (1976).

6. op. cit. Deutsch, pp. 60-61.

7. Ibid. page 56.

8. For elaboration see, Watzlawick, P., Beavin, J.L., Jackson, D., *Pragmatics of Human Communication* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1967).

9. op. cit. Cross-Cultural Broadcasting, page 34.

10. Questions are taken from NFB literature distributed at public screenings of "Not a Love Story," under heading "Some Questions for Thought and Discussion."

11. For an example of such a situation see Williamson, Judith, "How Does Girl Number 20 Understand Ideology." *SCREEN-EDUCATION,* Autumn/Winter 1981-82, Pp. 80-87.

12. For further elaboration see Habermas, Jurgen, *Legitimation Crisis,* trans. by T. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press; 1975). pp. 68-92.

THE FILMS OF JEAN-PIERRE LEFEBVRE

Susan Barrowclough

The national cinemas which emerged in the 1960s in the Third World in particular, but also in developed societies like Quebec struggling for their cultural independence, have had to confront the same set of interconnected dilemmas. First, they have to find a filmic language of their own, at once specific to their own needs and free of the accumulated weight of the cinematic traditions of the USA and of Europe. The second dilemma for the filmmakers is how to reconcile their desires to speak both for their country and themselves, i.e. to find a form capable of combining national and self-expression. The problem here is that the two intentions have difficulty converging and more often than not diverge, with a 'national cinema' going in one direction and an 'auteurist arts cinema' going in the other. The third dilemma is how a cinema that aims to speak of a particular social situation can unite concrete social documentation with the more metaphysical portrait of the dreams, emotions and conflicts of characters caught up in that experience. If a national cinema is to avoid becoming stuck in stolid self-description or self-celebration it must somehow unite the real with the imaginary.

Since the early 1960s cinema in Quebec has been living with these dilemmas, as for example a new emergent cinema in the late 1970s in Portugal is now beginning to do. In Quebec, Jean-Pierre Lefebvre has been in the forefront as a critic, an independent producer, a political militant for an independent national cinema and as Quebec's most prolific filmmaker. Among Québécois filmmakers Lefebvre's career is exceptional in that it spans the entire modern history of Quebec's cinema. He has made sixteen features and one short since 1964 and at the time of writing is making his seventeenth feature. This continuity is unusual in Quebec, where many of his contemporaries have almost stopped making films completely (e.g. Groulx — although he now has a new film in post-production after many years of silence); now work elsewhere (e.g. Brault has recently made more films out of Quebec than in Quebec); or have made few films in the last ten years, after the initial upsurge of production in the 1960s (e.g. Leduc, Arcand). He attributes his own survival to an acceptance of the necessary economic ecology in a small country like Quebec. By consistently making films on small budgets — his cheapest feature *Patricia et Jean Baptiste* (1966) cost $14,000, his most expensive the France/Quebec co-production *Le Vieux pays où Rimbaud est mort* (1976), cost $350,000 and the film he is making at the time of writing has a budget of $303,000 — Lefebvre has always made films that financially bear a relationship to the potential of the Quebec box-office.[1] Also, by forming with his wife Marguerite Duparc their own production company, *Cinak*,[2] he has been able to retain his independence as a filmmaker and to build up a body of work unequalled in its continuity by that of any of his contemporaries in Quebec.

Lefebvre's career is exemplary in relation to the three dilemmas of a national cinema sketched above. Like the other filmmakers who began to make films in Quebec in the 1960s, he had to struggle to find a cinematic language which would be appropriate to the country and its people, but a language which would also be personal to his own version of that country's experiences. During his time as a major film critic in Quebec for *Objectif* he had the opportunity to study European cinema in particular and came to form a firm set of preferences, which one could say has saved him from eclecticism. Influenced by these acknowledged preferences — the documentary style of Italian neo-realism, the humanism of Renoir and the slow pace and iconographic imagery of Mizoguchi, for example — he has managed to forge his own way of making films. Some of his early films are often said to recall Godard's work of the same period, but it would he more relevant to say that these films are the ones in which he was feeling his way. Probably the greatest influence on his work came not from outside but from inside Quebec. i.e. the emerging documentary school in the 1960s.[3] But Lefebvre made a significant choice from the start — to work in fiction. As he has said himself, he sought to extend the codification of Quebec life begun by documentary-makers, by creating characters and situations which would imprint themselves on the Quebec imagination and which would explore a new fictional form that was not borrowed from elsewhere. This marriage of fiction with a desire to talk of a precise social reality might seem to recall Italian neo-realism or the modern social realism of Ken Loach. In fact, Lefebvre has always rejected naruralist mimeticism and the constraints of linear narrative. What has always concerned him is a cinema of social comment deeply rooted in the reality of Quebec. but which goes beyond the tangible to concentrate on the dreams, the fears, the historical make-up of a people and the *personal* apprehension of a *collective* experience.

This article cannot, in the space available, hope to cover all of Lefebvre's work or all of the discussions it has provoked. What it would like to do is to follow through some of the recurring themes and practices and to implicitly ask: to what extent can his films be thought of as a manifestation of a continuing national cinema in Quebec? Lefebvre's vision of his society, often explored through the relationship of two people, is a personal and subjective one. But, while he is certainly the author of' his films, his prime commitment to the naming of

Québécois society and to the critical examination of what it means to be Québécois places his films in the context of Third World oppositional cinemas, rather than in that of European art cinemas, where personal expression is rarely used in the overtly political way of giving a country and its people's search for identity a cinematic expression.

CHARACTER AS COLLECTIVE

> The fact that my films don't have a fixed story is inherent in our indeterminate situation. My characters are undefined because there is not a definable Québécois. The only responsibility of an author is to increase the spectator's awareness even if only retranslating this lack of definition (J.P. Lefebvre).[4]

Lefebvre does not make conventional narrative films with a clear beginning and end. Instead he sketches collective portraits and gives us not stories as such, but a few days in the lives of different sections of Quebec society. His films are frequently about the interpersonal relationships of a man and a woman, or of a family. These characters are individuals in their own right, but at the same time they are types, representative of a collective experience, defined in a loose and exploratory way by the reality, past and present, of Quebec society. These portraits — unromantic, without nostalgia, sometimes brutally critical, but always tenderly evocative — testify to a need for self-discovery and self-image that was entirely absent cinematically in a country like Quebec until the 1960s.[5] These period-types in Lefebvre's early films seem weighed down by their colonial past, struggling, at first hopelessly and then in later films more confidently, with the imprint of Catholicism, the nagging pull of their French ancestry and the stultifying power of the family unit. At the same time they seem buffeted by the stirrrings of political change and the passage from a rural life, increasingly associated with the past, into the new constraints of modern, urban life. For these characters too, Nature is as much a force in their lives as their social make-up — the huge landscapes, the harsh winters and the brief, hot summers. So dense is Lefebvre's evocation of these forces that, however individual his characters may be, they can only be understood as Québécois, which is why when his own audiences see them they feel a shock of self-recognition. This self-recognition is not always a comfortable one. While Lefebvre has much sympathy for his characters and their situations — they are after all as much autobiographical as national — his films work against the mystification of self-mythology and the escapism of folklore.

In *Le Révolutionnaire* (1965), a band of young men, armed to the teeth, arrive in the country and set up training camp. Their base is an old turreted farmhouse, scattered with beautiful old artefacts which suggest an older set of values. Their autocratic leader controls their every move, their every thought, even forbidding them to dream. In the deep snow they train and take orders, like so many toy soldiers isolated and cut off from the society they presumably want to transform. A woman arrives and is taken prisoner. In the end she is the only one to survive. Lefebvre uses her to embody a fairly stereotypical set of feminine symbols (and it is particularly interesting with this character in mind to see how his depiction of women changes in his later films). As woman/love/peace she unsettles the leader presenting him with the choice between personal happiness and political sacrifice. The pace is slow, the group is waiting, unsure of themselves, their aims and their strategy. What they are preparing and waiting for is never articulated. Through a series of misconstrued orders they kill each other and their leader betrays them to what appears to be the English Canadian state. This film, made in 1965, when the FLQ[6] had begun guerrilla activities in favour of separatism, had a precise purpose as Lefebvre explains:

> . . . at the time, I know there was a lot of interest in the Cuban Revolution, and I was living with a number of intellectuals who were all dreaming of starting a similar revolution in Quebec. That was also the time of *Parti Pris,* of *La Révue socialiste* [political magazines] and many things like that — really the first thoughts, the first *open* thoughts about politics and ideology . . . I was simply fascinated by the idea that everybody was talking about the possibility of a revolution in Quebec and that nobody was doing anything. It was only a dream. Similarly, a lot of people were dreaming about making films but not making them. So I had this idea of making a sad comedy about that situation.[7]

Patricia et Jean-Baptiste (1966), his next film, sketches the life of 'a typical Québécois,' in this case a young worker, just at the moment when the passivity ingrained by centuries seems about to change. It is a playful film, reminding one perhaps of the good-hearted Chaplin character, who always somehow manages to get the worst end of the stick. Jean-Baptiste is named after the patron saint of all religious and patriotic Québécois and the film is dedicated 'to my ancestors, products of the People's Almanach.' He is the only Québécois employed in a carpenter's shop and his subservient, resigned attitude towards his life means that he is treated by his European employer as a child or a rather slow adult. His life revolves around his job, the beer tavern, the Saturday night hockey game and a sort of automatic, ingrained Catholicism. Nothing seems either to excite or to anger him — his life is a perfect caricature of the *status quo*, Asked to take the new French secretary around Montreal, he is gradually humiliated and bossed around by Patricia's demands on him and his time. The balance of their relationship hints at Quebec's uneasy relation to France: her confidence is contrasted to his docility. Nothing very much happens in the film, as in Jean-Baptiste's life, but the tentative friendship that develops between them, his lack of courage and his final gesture in the film, provides an allegorical framework for a portrait of a people, lethargic and passive yet on the verge of waking up and taking hold oftheir future. At one point in the film when they are at a hockey game, Jean-Baptiste, given confidence by being on his own turf, goes to kiss Patricia, but backs out. The voice over tells us:

Jean-Baptiste is on the point of acting, Jean-Baptiste in whom the ancestral revolt is rising, Jean-Baptiste who will be defeated routed, humiliated once again.

For this is the Québécois just before the Quiet Revolution.[8] Lefebvre himself plays Jean-Baptiste, for it is as much an image of self-mockery as it is of his society — he is part of that society.

Abel, in *Il nefaut pas mourir pour ca* (1966), provides another image of Quebec, another aspect of Homoman's, the revolutionary's, and Jean-Baptiste's collective make-up. Although a tender, affectionate film full of passing jokes, the Québécois caricature that Abel represents is one of retarded adolescence, whose development has been stunted by his milieu and who is sleep-walking through his own life. Abel is a grown-up naïf, living in his own private world, incapable of decision, choice or action and infantilised by a matriarchal society. Historically in Quebec the man has often left the home to work elsewhere, in the north or in the USA leaving the mother to become the dominating centre ofQuebec family life. In the case of Abel his father has been working in Brazil for many years. His life seems to revolve around three women — his dying mother, an old lover and his present lover, a militant journalist. Unable to decide on the larger questions of life — what to do, who to live with — he complicates even the act of getting up in the morning by a confusing collection of toothbrushes, dressing gowns and breakfasts. It is the little, everyday side of Abel's absurd life that Lefebvre chooses to emphasise. His life is marked by abortive gestures: a compliment to a woman in a shop is answered by abuse, the dress he buys as a present for his girlfriend she turns out to have already. He obsessively collects tiny insects, model planes, jars of colourful sweets. The past that holds Abel hack is as much Freudian as historical. *Il ne faut pas* is about immobility and in many of Lefebvre's films the weight of the past is never spelt out directly but is suggested.

In his next film, *Mon amie Pierrrette* (1967), it is the woman who seems as trapped as Abel and once again by the family. Pierrette is caught in a vice by her mother's little homilies to the effect that 'her reputation is the most valuable asset a girl has' and by Yves, the young man whose love seeks to ensnare this as yet unformed person in a marriage as traditional as that of her parents. The film is set around the weekend they spend by the lake; it is there they meet Raoul. He is an artist and constructs strange Dada-like artefacts which interest Pierrette who has never seen anything like them, while her mother laughs at them and Yves seems bored. Raoul is full of energy, a sort of undirected anarchism, and in the evening, while the men all rock ritualistically in their chairs on the porch as the sun goes down, he rails against the patience and the resignation of the father's generation and speaks excitedly about the need to invent, to organise, to be proud. Yves is resistant to these new ideas and is much more at home with the settled way of life of Pierrette's parents. Raoul's and Yves's characters offer two sides of Quebec and of its future. Pierrette, it seems, is more open to Raoul's new ideas, and his welcome disruption of the routine acts as a catalyst and a comparison for her. She is waking up as if from centuries of lethargy. In an unmelodramatic sort of way, one senses that she doesn't want Yves and the life of her parents and her life is just beginning.

In this group of early films the characters seem to detect a quiet momentum ofchange just around the cornu, but they seem unable to grasp what it could mean for their own lives. This model is in fact faithful to the early days of the Quiet Revolution in Quebec. Homoman 'has had enough,' the revolutionaries 'are just waiting' and Jean-Baptiste constantly looks forward to

the fact that 'it will be spring tomorrow.' In the case of Abel he writes on his blackboard every morning, 'I want to change the course of things.' But by the end of the film the course of things has changed Abel, rather than vice versa. Without his actually doing anything the present has sucessfully challenged the past — his life has been changed by circumstances. In this group of family portraits Lefebvre presents this accumulating tension of trying to become free of the past as a low-key tender caricature carried by the little events of everyday life, not by didactic speeches or great drama.

It is useful to compare Pierre Perrault's films of the same period with Lefebvre's While apparently so different — one documentary, the other fiction — they share a common need. Perrault's trilogy in the 1960s, *Pour la suite du monde, Le Règne du jour* and *Les Voitures d'eau,* proved a turning point in Quebec's cinema. He filmed the work and life of the Tremblay family (fishermen, cultivators and boat-builders), and in one of the films their visit to France, the home of their ancestors. However, Perrault did not simply 'capture' a way of life on film, but created an image of a section of Québécois society, created it in much the same way as Flaherty did in *Nanook* by reconstructing old work-methods and directing situations and conversations. Perrault's desire to show the Québécois themselves, to let them speak for themselves, thus created a social anthropology on film that had not existed in Quebec up until then. Lefebvre's project, although constructed by fiction, allegory, provocation, was derived from the same need, not merely to reflect a social reality but to create one both in the films and in the minds of the viewers. As Jean-Louis Comolli pointed nut at the time in *Cahiers du cinéma:*

> These are images which are constructed simultaneously on the screen and in the consciousness of the viewer: hence an image not of the Other but of Oneself in search of an identity of difference. For the viewer, therefore, an encounter with his own difference, his own identity. It is a whole society which is revealed and confronted in Lefebvre's 'case studies'.[9]

These films, mostly made in the 1960s, although including *Les Maudits sauvages* (1971), *Les Dernières fiançailles* (1973) and *Le Vieux pays où Rimbaud est mort* (1976), together make up one distinct group. In retrospect they can be seen as the creation of a cinematic family album, of images taken at a moment when society as a whole and individuals themselves begin the struggle, both comic and anguished, to get some control over their fate. The films themselves, not only of Lefebvre but of other filmmakers of the period like Perrault, Jutra, Groulx, Arcand, etc. did as much to create this *prise de conscience* as to document it.

It would be misleading to schematise the work of a filmmaker who has shown such remarkable continuity over a long period of time, but one could contrast the gentle satires which sought to shake Quebec out of its timidity (as discussed above) with another harsher set of films examining Quebec's insertion into the more alienating features of North American life. There is no clear progression from one type of film to the other and they cannot sharply he divided between the 1960s and the 1970s. However, in this second group of films Lefebvre recoiled from the violence of American life and American media and the debasement of sexuality, particularly in the flood of pornographic films made in Quebec in the late 1960s. He recoiled from these not primarily because he was a political nationalist, but because of necessary cultural protectionism and because these tendencies affronted the humanism (of a kind that some may find unfashionable) that permeates so many of his films. Lefebvre's premise as a filmmaker remains the same — an authentic cinema that speaks of people's real experiences in their own voice — but it is now 'sameness' rather than 'otherness' that provides the critical concern of his films. It is Quebec's increasing Americanisation that he criticises. In this group of films he investigates conformity, indoctrination, the mass media, advertising, pornography and the repressive activities of the police and state institutions. These experiences are as much Québécois as those of Jean-Baptiste or Abel, for Quebec is after all part of North America. It is the tendency of these alienating experiences to separate people off from the collectivity and isolate them, that concerns Lefebvre most.

Jusqu'au coeur (1968) is as Lefebvre explained: '...a film about the daily aggression we have to face, the violence of television, Vietnam followed by a soap commercial.'[10] Anticipating the theme of *Ultimatum* (discussed later in this article) but also reiterating the sub-text of many of his films, there are two competing, rival discourses in the film. There is the theme of the couple, who try unsuccessfully to resist the roles which society has allotted them, and the theme of an aggressive totalitarian system which hunts them down and tries to educate the male in the ways of war. Verging on science fiction, there are obvious references to Vietnam and conscription in this film. *Q-Bec, My Love* (1969) takes the flood of pornographic films — made in Quebec in the late 1960s following the revision of the censorship laws in 1968 — as its parody framework to make a statement about Quebec's political estrangement. Unfortunately, this film shows all the weaknesses of the enthusiasms of the year in which it was made. The equation of the American and Canadian states as the masculine aggressor and Quebec as the dominated, enslaved woman, now seem unusually heavy-handed for a filmmaker as nuanced as Lefebvre.

On n'engraisse pas les cochons à l'eau claire (1973) is a much cleverer film. Bob Tremblay is a young man in a small town in northern Quebec who works as a double-agent for the Mounties, infiltrating drug rings at the university. Lefebvre really wanted it distributed as a 'B' movie in the type of town in which it itself was made and which lives on a cinema diet of Alain Delon and Jean Gabin gangster 'B' movies. On one level the film can be seen as a low-key gangster film, shot in sharp black and white with all the iconographic references to the genre. Bob gets caught in the middle; first he is almost killed by the dealers and then he is actually done in by the police themselves. At a secondary level Bob is another of Lefebvre's indecisive and irresolute Québécois portraits, manipulated by both sides when he thinks he's in control of the situation and ultimately destroyed because he can't choose his own path.

L'Amour blessé (1975) also figures in these studies of violence and social isolation. A young working-class woman who has left her violent husband and now lives alone is shown at night alone in her apartment. She listens to and rings into a radio hot-line. This brilliantly disciplined film is about loneliness and the myth of mass media communication, but it is also about a strong woman charmer who has learnt to say 'No' and it is therefore ultimately an optimistic, hopeful statement on sexual relations. *(L'Amour blessé* will be discussed in much greater detail later in this article.)

Lefebvre's most recent film. *Avoir seize ans* (1978), was based on a real news story of school vandalism in Quebec. It offers an image of a CEGEP (pre-university college) as a rigid, military or factory-like institution, where personal expression and sensibilities are regimented into an alienating conformism. When Louis. a working-class, poetic young man, commits sacrilege out of frustration with a system that denies him his own individuality — he breaks into the school, smokes pot at the teacher's desk, throws the standard-issue crucifix in the bin and sets off a bomb — the retaliation of the school and the police seems our of all proportion. He is sent to a psychiatric clinic and when he returns his close links with other people have, the film suggests, been subtly broken. In this demonstration of over-kill there is an implicit reference to the over-reaction ofthe institutions of state in the October Crisis of 1970.[11] Lefebvre and Pacquette (the co-scriptwriter) spelt this out in their

preface to an unpublished copy of the script:

> In this 'true' story, what really struck us was the recognition that institutions of a secondary order and the people in charge of them are a direct relation of the primary order — those of the top politicians, top civil servants, top technocrats. Briefly, this 'true' story developed in the same way as the October Crisis in 1970. We would even go so far as to claim that this story couldn't have taken place in the way it did without the October Crisis as a model...[12]

While Lefebvre's films attest to a strong belief in the social individual and life and history as a collective experience, his films also confirm a strong defence of the autonomy of the individual and the danger of institutional infringement of this independence. Thus between the lines of his films is a humanism that at its limits is a-political and anti-Utopian. Even if Quebec was politically independent and separated from Canada, Lefebvre seems to imply that one government would be much the same as the other. The message of *Avoir seize ans,* made in 1978 after the election of the Parti Québécois,[13] is that governments change, but institutions remain the same.

CULTURAL ICONOGRAPHY AND THE USE OF SIGNS

> In all my films, my preoccupation has always been the same: to build up the number and the form of the signs . . . To add to the contractions and the oppositions. And to keep myself at a distance from them, not to interpret them, merely to organise them. So that the spectators will have to interpret them themselves, so that they will have to find a new path through the objects and things they have always known, but between which they have never made a connection.[14]

For a filmmaker committed to naming real things and real characters, Lefebvre does not reflect that reality in a mimetic naturalism, but instead provides a set of cultural references and signs by which the spectators can create it in their own minds. There is thus not *one* possible reading for his films — the reading of this article, for example — but *many.* These references go beyond the externals of everyday life and anecdote, to signify the attitudes, anxieties, historical influences which constitute the inner experience of this reality. While each film offers a key to this iconography/symbology/allegory, various levels of meaning are not immediately evident, but have to be read into them and put together by the viewer and the listener. Such films have to create a certain kind of audience for them to be understood. Lefebvre has not always found this audience in Quebec and hence his films have had an uncertain and mixed reception among his own people while neither federal or provincial film institutions have even begun to explore new forms of exhibition.

The specificity of Quebec as the site of the films is often established, for example, by a particular iconography of the Catholic Church. Lefebvre chooses to make his comment on catholicism and its profound effect through these indirect visual references. It is only in *Les Maudits sauvages* that he deals directly with the church and its history in Quebec. L'Homoman sleeps in a bed that looks like a piece of church furniture and the city he escapes to is in ruins, except for the churches and cemeteries that persistently survive. The leader in *Le Révolutionnnaire* surrounded by his disciples takes on the suspicious attributes of a new type of priest: his baptismal-like ritual of washing his hands, his unquestioned authority and leadership, imply a spiritual source. Jean-Baptiste has a photo-collage on his wall — 'my family album' — with pride of place given to Quebec's thirty bishops in full regalia surrounded by a *Playboy* pin-up, Canadian prime-ministers and the Queen of England: in his mind the religious and political powers are of equal importance. The jokey iconoclasm of *Mon Oeil* (1966-70) shows a nun changing into secular clothes in a bar, and a priest, his skirts held up as he clambers through the countryside, but the film ends on a more serious note with the woman character standing dwarfed at the door of an enormous church which frames her on both sides as she emphatically repeats 'NO.' Crucifixes are everywhere, on the bare walls of the bedroom in *Les Dernières fiançailles* and in the college rooms of *Avoir seize ans.* Significantly, no one is ever seen actually going to church. Its edifices, its icons and the weight of' its influence, however, pervade every situation in his earlier films.

The landscape and the seasons of Quebec, more often than not rural landscapes in winter blanketed in snow, are crucial images in Lefebvre's films, They become characters in themselves and determining Factors in either the depiction of character or event. Many of the films are framed by opening and closing shots of snow. *Le Vieux pays où Rimbaud est mort,* for instance, starts with aerial shots of a blizzard over Montreal — as Abel leaves by plane for France — and at the end as he returns there are shots of the enormous icefloes of the St. Lawrence. To a viewer outside Quebec such shots give a forbidding image, but in this film they signify home to Abel. In opening and closing so many of his films with shots of winter landscapes, Lefebvre perhaps implies that these unyeilding, external factors are just as much factors in the social make-up of the Québécois as their historical and political estrangement. Certainly, the sense of time in his films, the slowness and the measured pace could be seen as the cinematic transposition of the psychological implications of this hard physical environment.

It is probably in *Le Vieux pays* that Lefebvre most fully develops his treatment of landsacape and corresponding colour plan, using it to structure the entire film. In this film, Abel, of *Il ne faut pas,* now older and more confident, makes the journey to France, which many Québécois and many films, plays and novels from Quebec have made. He goes as he says:

> Because the French came here centuries ago and then forgot us here . . . So I came to see if there are any Frenchman left in France, to see if they still look like the ones who came here . . . And to see if I look like them.

His travels take him to the places where Rimbaud lived, was born and died. In Paris, where he has a series of ab-

surd encounters with stock French character-types who seem right out of a film themselves, the colours are predominantly greys, blues, neutral. When he goes to Charleville in the north with his friend Jeanne, whose husband has died from an accident at work, whose father is a drunken, violent man and whose mother has just committed suicide, the whole situation is drawn in the tones of a Zola novel and the colours are appropriately sombre. When he goes to Provence in the south and meets Anne, a woman who herself is in search of her roots and has returned to her mother — 'the best part of me' — the landscape of the south is presented in the sharp blues and whites of Matisse and the rock browns of Cézanne.

It is not so much *what* happens to Abel in France — not much does happen; a few encounters, a few conversalions, a few impressions — it is *how* he apprehends these that is the subject of the film. The France he sees remains distant and dislocated for him. The group of drinkers in a Paris bar is frozen as if in a Modigliani painting. The real landscapes of the south seem just as much representations as the Cézanne copies sold in the Paris streets; to Abel they seem like 'postcards.' Even Anne's mother, the character Abel is most at home with is shot with a reproduction of Cézanne's *Mother* behind her, undercutting her apparent reality and placing her in a museum as it were, part of 'La vieille France':

> The France of his ancestors, the France he has come to find, exists only in the museums and in his imigination.[15]

At one point when Abel and Anne are sitting together looking out at the sea, with the landscape at their backs, he compares it to 'a postcard, that I don't know who to send to,' and explains that she would feel the same if she went to Quebec. For, as he says, his mind is full of 'snow and forests.' The cultural difference — of landscape, colours and history — is complete. He can go home now to the snow and the forests, free of the mythology of France which he had been brought up to believe in. But having exorcised the past, there is still the problem of the future. For the image that Abel draws in Paris and takes home in his suitcase is that of a black rectangle, inside which is the emptiness and vacuum of a white space, entitled KEBEC. Unlike France, 'an old, tired country,' as Anne describes it, Quebec's history and culture is yet to be made.

Another recurrent set of images, allusions and opposirions in Lefebvre's films is that of the country and the city. Many of the characters are related to one or the other, but not to both — they are forced to choose. These are, of course, still real choices for the Québécois, as Quebec's urbanisation and the population's move to the city occurred relatively recently, since World War II. Furthermore this theme and opposition are to be found in many Québécois films as they are to be found in the new cinemas of recently modernised countries like Portugal. In Quebec, the return to the country is variously drawn as a return to primitivism and violence *(Contre coeur,* Jean-Guy Noel, 1981) or as the return to peace, tranquility and contemplation *(Le Chat dans le sac,* Gilles Groulx, 1964), or as the site for male escape 'back to the woods' as it were (*Le Loup blanc,* Brigitte Sauriol, 1973). In the case of Lefebvre's films the significance of the rural choice changes. In *Le Révolutionnaire* it is seen as a hiding place, cut off from society, for the urban revolutionaries. The few beautifully crafted icons of the past that furnish their old farmhouse base — a jug, a chest of drawers — represent the values of the past that the group are indecisively set on destroying. In *La Chambre blanche* the couple are divided by location. The woman is shot most often in the country, the man in the city. Indicatively, their haven, the place where they are happiest and at one with each other, is in their white room, in the country — a room which has windows on three sides and outside the snow, with the couple thus cocooned in a soothing sort of womb. The Montreal of Jean-Baptiste is a rigidly divided one, divided by class, money and language. The small town of *On n'engraisse pas* is the site of small-scale criminality and police corruption, with Bob carried along by its momentum, while in *L'Amour blessé* the city is the site of social isolation and fear. His characters always seem happiest in the country, although as in *Ultimatum* violence and aggression penetrate the country also. However, a rural existence is never portrayed as a viable economic alternative, but rather as a spiritual refuge. A working life on the land as shown in *Les Dernières fiançailles* perhaps dies with the two old people.

While many of the cultural references in Lefebvre's films are designed to establish their location as unmistakably in Quebec, there are many others that announce, as the prologue to *L'Amour blessé* does, that '...Quebec is after all part of North America.' Images of big cars, super-highways, fast food, Coca-Cola, round-the-clock delivery service, advertising, pornography and the mass media testify to the relentless erosion of the particularity of Quebec life by the North American economy. One of the unstated implications of *Les Dernières fiançailles* is that the distinctive, time-honoured rural life of the old couple is being invaded from outside: their mail consists almost entirely of unrequested publicity circulars and the television programme that Rose watches is a game show in English, which she probably cannot understand.

One of the most exciting and rigorous aspects of Lefebvre's use of image as sign is the way in which he endows images with greater meaning by paring them down to an almost skeletal simplicity. It is this simplicity that enables them to signify more than the contextual meaning in the narrative or the implications for the characters in any one film. It also perhaps explains why the films of Lefebvre have been the most successful Québécois films outside Quebec, for this device extends their reference from the particular to the general. Some scenes and images are rid of all extraneous particular reference, so that they are lifted out of their narrative context to take on a separate and larger significance. In *Ultimatum,* the insertion of impersonal, silent still photographs of the arrest, interrogation and death sequences (to be discussed later) provides a separate nar-

rative thread for the film and gives it a much wider context of significance than Quebec in the autumn of 1970. Depending on who you are, these images could stand for the French repression in Algeria, for example, or post-Allende Chile. In *Avoir seize ans,* Louis's arrest and imprisonment are presented non-naturalistically by means of a shorthand of signs — a bare empty room, a desk, a chair and a light — while a voice-over gives descriptions of police brutality. Prison is merely represented by an image of iron bars. The cumulative effect of this is to make the film not just the story of Louis, but also that of others like him and of police repression in general.

Not only does this distancing mechanism widen the political implications of the films, its use also inserts another level of meaning: the politics of aesthetics. In this context Lefebvre has often been compared to Godard. Certainly the construction of certain images, the structural use of colour and the depersonalisation of both dialogue and monologue in some of his films remind one of Godard. But while Lefebvre has undoubtedly been profoundly receptive to Godard's work (and one must bear in mind that this is Godard's earlier, mostly sixties films), the comparison between their films can be facile. To make a generalised point: a statement about the ideology of filmmaking has often been Godard's prime concern, but for Lefebvre this has never been the case. Lefebvre above all wishes to set up a dialogue with his audience about a number of key questions in his society. While the politics of filmmaking can he said to be part of that dialogue, the use of so-called 'Godardian techniques' is above all a way to open out the political meaning of his films from the constraints of realism and anecdote. Their use is not, as one could argue is the case with Godard, a study first and foremost of the methodological practices of filmmaking.

In this respect Lefebvre's work is perhaps closer to the thinking of Brecht than to that of Godard. For Brecht, the use of new aesthetic techniques, in particular the attempt to show known, apparently 'obvious' situations and events in a different and unfamiliar way, was motivated by the desire to provoke self-knowledge, political consciousness and ultimately action. Thus such techniques, such a meta-discourse in Brecht's work, always served the primary, political discourse of the text. In Godard's work it is often the reverse; his prime concern has often heen with the meta-discourse, the methodology of filmmaking, while the discourse (what happens in the film) has often been relegated to secondary importance in the service of an investigation into the politics of filmmaking. In Lefebvre's films it is the ethical discourse that is of prime importance and it is his ability to integrate the aesthetic meta-discourse *in the service* of the ethical/political which makes his films so radical and so different to those of late 1960s and early 1970s Godard.

L'Amour blessé illustrates particularly well Lefebvre's ability to use a radical minimalist aesthetic to defamiliarise and depersonalise an emotional situation and to create a political resonance beyond the immediate context of the given character, location and event. Peter Harcourt is surely wrong to attribute this minimalism to 'the budget.'[16] True, the film was made on an incredibly small budget of $54,000 and shot in two nights, but Lefebvre would have made exactly the same film on twice the budget: he made the film he wanted to make. His choice was a deliberate one, to have one person on screen, to shoot the whole film (except the opening and closing shot) in a small apartment and to have the main character be the incessant chatter of the radio hot-line. This strategy was chosen precisely to convey the barrenness and isolation not merely of one life, but of a whole society of strangers whose need to communicate is exploited by radio programmes everywhere. Lefebvre makes this strategy quite explicit in quoting Bresson:

> 'The art of the cinema consists in showing nothing, I mean representing nothing. The image should not be a representation, it should be a sign.'
>
> *L'Amour blessé* is intended essentially as the sign simplified to extremes, of a civilisation which knowingly, politically, ideologically and economically, feeds the solitude of the individual in order to separate him from the collectivity. And cinema, like the radio hot-lines referred to in the film and like the electronic bugging hinted at, play a growing role in this kind of society. That's why *L'Amour blessé,* as a film, is itself a sign stripped down to its essentials, barren of psychological torment, fragile anecdote and lyrical imagery.[17]

AESTHETICS AND ETHICS

> My deepest rule is that every subject has to have its own form. Language is never separate from the form, or the form from the subject. That is why I never talk of technique or art and why I dislike directors who always use the same form. (J.P. Lefebvre.[18]

The iconographic and signalling aspects we have heen discussing, like all of Lefebvre's formal decisions, are never aesthetic choices alone, but are defined by the subject and the ethical position of the film. The timing, the editing, the narrative structures and the use of camera — i.e. the aesthetics — are therefore not separate from the ethics of the film, but are one and the same thing. Crudely speaking Lefebvre has always searched for a way of making films that is at one with the characters, landscapes and the rhythm of life in Quebec, in a conscious attempt to break with the two prime influences on Quebec's cinema, Hollywood and French cinema. It is in his slower, more rigorous films above all that his sense of timing creates a unity of form and subject, and his own style comes into its own.

It is worth going back to look at Lefebvre's aesthetic evolution to see how he has developed both a Québécois and a personal film language. In his first film, *L'Homoman,* the short inter-titled sketches and the absurd, burlesque antics of the character recall Chaplin and Keaton. At a moment when Quebec's cinema was starting out and Lefebvre was making his first films, it was as if he decided to go back to the beginning. The black, match-like ligures against the white landscape in *Le Révolutionnaire* have the same silent-movie feel to

them. The comic-strip section in the film (an historical parody) scratched onto the film adding wigs, swords and feathers to the actors recalls Méliès. Its deliberate measured pace becomes the hallmark of his best films. What the Québécois critic Christian Rasselet has said of *Le Révolutionnaire* could also be said of many of Lefebvre's later films:

> This slowness. this immobility, this static quality, are they not characteristic of the Québécois themselves? *Le Révolutionnaire* offers a mirror in front of which we can identify ourselves, but also through which we can perform a healthy self-analysis.[19]

It is probably in *Les Dernières fiançailles* and later in *L'Amour blessé* that Lefebvre's use of time most perfectly represents and conveys the films' subjects. *Les Dernières* is about the last three days of an old couple living in the country, working on the land. There is not a shot or an image extraneous to their lives. They are always framed in their environment: the flowered wallpaper, the numerous ticking clocks, the photographs of them when young (which insert the past into the present), the bare functional kitchen, the cross on the wall of the cell-like bedroom. outside the wooden frame house where they have lived their lives, there are the trees they have seen grow, the small patch of land they have worked year after year and beyond there is the road that circles their world, where people and lives speed by impinging on the edges of their order. The film minutely chronicles the routine of the last days of their life. Three dawns rise on three exterior shots of a house and landscape in the sunrise and the early morning rituals get underway of winding clocks, putting water on to boil, stoking the fire. The quiet drama and suspense of this film is conveyed by the way in which this order gradually breaks down as their lives come to an end. By shooting this film to a large extent in real time and by adopting the same deliberate and slow pace of the lives of his characters through long takes, slow panning shots, Lefebvre's aesthetic renders homage to his subject. This attention to the collapse of gesture and routine can be found in a very different film: Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman* (1975). Interestingly, Akerman had seen *Les Dernières* and had told Lefebvre she greatly admired it. As we shall see later in *L'Amour blessé* in particular and in many of his films, Lefebvre in *Les Dernières* manages, without the use of flashback, to combine the past, the present and the future. It is above all a film about time. The old people's photographs, their regretful conversations about a son who died, their affectionate walk through their orchard, arm in arm like young lovers, and Armand's compliments to Rose's youthful beauty, quietly suggest their past and the length of time that binds them together. Their last labours are in the garden planting seeds. The image of the seeds in her hands receives one ofthe rare close-ups in the film and thus takes on a transcendental significance, a little gesture of faith in the future.

The films of Lefebvre in which the aesthetic and ethic are most rigorously united are those in which filmic time is either real time or comes close to being so. In these films he refuses to chop up temporal sequences by quick cutting and it could be said that it is this attitude to time that gives his films their distinctive character. Lefebvre himself says that his sense of timing borrows the rhythm of life in Quebec, where long, bleak winters last six to eight months and the cold and the snow force a deliberate, measured approach to life. As he says:

> ...you have to know Quebec, in a way, to understand Québécois films. It's like Mireille Amiel [who is French], my co-scriptwriter on *Le Vieux pays,* who had always loved my films, yet who still thought that they were a little bit slow and that if I could only speed them up a bit I would have a larger public. But when she first came here one winter to finish the script with me she said that now she understood why my films were so slow.[20]

However, not all of Lefebvre's films take up this rhythm and aesthetic: it depends on the subject. *Jusqu'au coeur,* for instance, employs on a formal level the same violence it aims to denounce: the rapid juxtaposition of sound and image is intended to imitate the aggressivity of television advertising. Thus the first three scenes of the film are conceived of as commercials in the form of a detective story. Single frame images are used to induce subliminal reading, using the same techniques as indoctrination processes or advertising at its extreme. Narrative disturbances and fragmentation are also produced by the use of colour:

> Colour, because it's easier to perceive, was chosen For all the parts of the film referring to society, black and white for the individual and the tinted parrs to act as a corridor between the individual and society (J-P. Lefebvre).[21]

When Garou is taken to the de-personalisation clinic, placed in front of an enormous television screen and forced to watch snakes devouring frogs (a demonstration of the fight for survival as they attempt to indoctrinate him in the male role of war), the aesthetic is pure science fiction. At other times the film conveys a late 1960s feel (it was made in 1968), as for example at the end of the film when Garou is press-ganged into the army by flower-wearing hippy soldiers (this is perhaps a hint at Marcuse's warning — even the marginals can be recuperated).

Ultimatum, like *Jusqu'au coeur,* is constructed around two competing discourses which interweave and at times dovetail. (Lefebvre has called it his 'holiday film'; made at a rime when he was wondering whether to go on making films, this film plays around with a number of ideas and styles and has some of the feel of a home-movie.) The love relationship between a man and a woman during the course of a summer provides one strand. This narrative thread is broken up as the characters tell stories which show how their sexual identities were formed. In exploring the politics of their own relationship they explore the arbitrariness and hidden traps of language itself. This narrative is shot predominantly in reds and yellows for the interiors while greens and blues fill the screen for scenes in the countryside, changing at moments of danger into black and white. A second narrative that could be seen as a discourse of death interrupts the colour scenes of love and summer with a series of black and white still photographs, which gradually

build up to become the only narrative in the film. They show Charlotte shopping in the city. It is winter. She is followed by a strange man in dark glasses, arrested, taken to a small room, interrogated, stripped and killed. While waiting for her in a park, Arthur is approached by the same man, taken to the room, stripped and strangled. (These are oblique references to the arbitrary arrests, interrogations and violence which took place during the October Crisis of 1970.) The use of still photographs for these sequences, intermittently inserted in the film, perfectly suggests conspiracy, surveillance and the sense of being watched. But, as Lefebvre has said, 'it has all and nothing to do with the October Crisis.' To repeat an earlier comment, the power and the openness of some of Lefebvre's images can he attributed to the fact that he seeks to go beyond a realistic representation of a specific historical conjuncture. The insertion of these still photographs in *Ultimatum* represents October 1970 in Quebec at one level, while at another they are intended as representations of the way public paranoia and offical violence menace the tenderness of private life in western society as a whole. By 'generalising' the imagery of repression, therefore, Lefebvre wants us to see October 1970 as only one sinister moment in the life, not just of Quebec, but of other 'democratic' systems. To further this idea the death text does not remain separate from, but also pervades the love text. Love scenes luxuriant in nature are suddenly disturbed by the sound of gunfire and circling planes overhead and by images of the couple fleeing from an unseen enemy. Interior shots of Arthur spying on someone with binoculars from a window as Charlotte reads him poetry, and his casual flipping through a police weapon catalogue of guns, riot shields and helmets, establish the death text as part of their everyday life.

L'Amour blessé takes another distinct approach to the aesthetic problem of investing particular situations with larger significance. On an ethical level this film is concerned with the isolation of people in modern cities and their separation from social collectivity. In using the radio hot-line (phone-in programmes) as the framework for the film's narrative, Lefebvre has chosen a brilliant device for exposing a society obsessed with communication, yet failing miserably to achieve it. It is on the whole a medium which exploits, distorts and finally confirms the solitude of those who listen and those who need to speak.

Louise alone in her apartment at night turns on the radio and listens to people ringing in to confide their intimate problems to the radio presenter, the bland pseudo-psychiatrist of the air-waves. The confessions are rudely interrupted by aggressive commercials, which demean the seriousness of these confessions. When Louise hears a distraught woman talking on the hot-line about the violence of her husband, she telephones the radio station and explains that she too had been in that position, but she had learned to say 'No,' even if it meant living alone. Later, her hushand, who has heard the programme, telephones her and threatens to come and kill her. As Louise walks from room to room of her small apartment fearing her husband's arrival, the radio chatters on. She cannot help hearing the couple in the next apartment — rowing and insulting one another. The stranger through the wall is drunk and later he and the woman brutally struggle to make love. We never see them. Louise lies awake in bed tortured by the groans of their sexual combat.

The whole film is in real time. But Louise's whole past is retraced and inserted into the present through the soundtrack — the woman's story on the radio and the noises of sexual aggression of her neighbours next door. Again, Lefebvre has united the past and the present into one time. The insistent visual absence of the other characters, the medium-shot photography for most of the film and the use of real time, depersonalise and depsychologise a highly emotional situation and allow Lefebvre to distance himself (and us) from the subject. Throughout the film the camera rests at the level of the radio — the main character in the film — and often lingers in a room after Louise has left it, but where the sound continues.

In other films Lefebvre has used sound to contradict the image, to counterpoint it or to question the one-dimensional limitations of the image. In *L'Amour blessé* its structural importance is that it enables him to reduce the content of the visual images to the minimum, so that they can better suggest the isolation of the main character. The whole film, except tor the opening and closing shot, which shows somebody hidden in a van in the street hugging someone's phone, is filmed in the closed walls of Louise's small flat. The cramped space of her flat is as closed as her life. The fact that we never see the other characters — those on the soundtrack — reinforces the sense of her fear, her isolation and estrangement. It demands that the spectator/listner 'listen to the image and watch the sound' (Lefebvre).[22] It is only through the two telephone conversations she has that we learn anything of Louise's life.

The uncertain weight of the past is a related subject that runs through many of Lefebvre's films. In *L'Amour blessé* the past in question is the personal nightmare of Louise and other women; in other films the Québécois characters are defined as individuals in relation to the cumulative influence of Quebec's history. In his early group of Québécois portrait films, the power of the past is seen to be giving way to the change of the present. In *La Chambre blanche* (1969) the couple is presented as if newly born beings, freed from the constraints of any past. Together they learn to speak, to see and to smell. Even in this film, however, a cultural past scents unavoidably to re-assert itself through the choices presented by Jean's more modern life as a professional in a busy city and Anne's more traditional life in the country. And their relationship centres around one room, a retreat from what seems an unbearable reality — that of Quebec? Like most people, Lefebvre's attitude to the past is ambivalent; on the one hand he seems to suggest that the Québécois must change, free themselves from their past, but on the other that they must be reconciled to their past in order to live in the present and to control

their future. Abel's pilgrimage to the land of his ancestors in *Le Vieux pays* is very much an exorcism of the past, a demystification of what the Québécois had been educated to think of France and its culture. This image had stuck in a time groove and Abel finds that the France of Rimbaud is dead and that he has little in common with these long lost ancestors. The mythology of the past is thus dismantled. By contrast, in *Les Maudits sauvages* — 'an almost historical film 1670-1970' — the past is transposed into the present and we are reminded that 'no-one is responsible before history; we all are.' This ethical stance determines the narrative structure of the film in which the seventeenth and twentieth centuries freely intermingle, again without flashbacks, in a continuous time flow.

The historical framework of the film is that of Quebec's early history as a French colony of missionaries, wood-cutters, fur trappers and tradesmen. It focuses particularly on the fate of the Indian peoples whose land, liberty and culture were usurped. The fate of the native peoples is embodied in Tékacouita, one of the mythological heroines of Quebec (the first Iroquois to be converted to the Catholic faith). It is 1670: a fur trapper sells alcohol, cigarettes and a transistor to the Indians and in return is given Tékacouita, the chief's daughter. As he takes her from the Indian camp to the town, it becomes a journey from past to present. Their road is marked by the signs of modern life — traffic lights, electric pylons. When they enter the town it is by turns a seventeenth-century settlement — for example the missionary, torn between the desire to convert the 'savages' and guilt for his implicit participation in the colonial process — and modern-day Montreal. The trapper, for instance, goes info a café where he watches a television interview with the French Governor of 'La Nouvelle France.' His references to terrorism in the colonly and the need for stronger measures from France to maintain law and order suggest a correlation between Quebec's past as a French colony and its present as a reluctant part ofthe Canadian confederation. Understanding nothing of possessions or ownership, Tékacouita is introduced to consumerism as they walk through the neon-lit streets, and as a travesty of her rituals she ends up working as a topless dancer in a bar.

Tékacouita, never talks, but the fate of her people is lamented in her voice-over soliloquies, and as in *Ultimatum* still photography is used to suggest repression and loss of liberty:

> Each one is delivered, voice-over against a black-and-white still of her riding a horse [see cover]. This still both suggests the movement that is denied her and a sense of arrested flight. Furthermore, each time a soliloquy occurs, we move in closer to the picture as if to trap her so that the last soliloquy shows her body in mid close-up, as if denying her her horse.[23]

Lefebvre's choice to update Quebec's formative historical period is a political one. The separatist movement in Quebec has always claimed the right to French culture and language. Yet Lefebvre insists in this film that Quebec's position today was historically won at the expense of another people's culture and language. (Arthur Lamothe, in his documentary series *Inu Asi,* also takes up the cause of the native people in an analytical way and shows a second-class citizenry, struggling to survive with a language and a way of life which have been imposed on them.)

But Tékacouita, also represents women, who traditionally were traded, controlled, with no right to speak or to decide their own fate, and who represent opposing values at odds with those of men. Her death at the hands of her Indian lover is as much about the pride of a humiliated people as about masculine pride. The end of the film (often misinterpreted), when a group of hippies sit around the Indian camp and smoke hash, is not a celebration of hippie values, but a jibe at their naive appropriation of a ritual, the origins of which they do not understand. For what Lefebvre's transposition of past to present implies is that the Québécois, the Canadian and colonial nations elsewhere have exploited and destroyed the ways of life that would have offered them much — if they had only listened and learnt. And that in fighting for the future, this past and their responsibility for if should never be forgotten.

SEXUAL POLITICS

Lefebvre's depictions of women, male/female relationships and sex provide either themes or sub-themes for all of his films. They are particularly interesting because they have changed with time, and because they are in such marked contrast to the treatment of such themes in so many other films from Quebec.

In his earliest films, *L'Homoman, Le Révolutionnaire* and even in *La Chambre blanche,* woman is represented as the symbol of rather stereotypical feminine virtues. She represents love, peace, tranquility and hope. She is often associated with a quiet, traditional, rural existence. She represents more an idea, and an ideal, than a real person. In contrast the male character, whom she completes, is agitated, lost and certainly not at peace with himself. In other of his early films — *Patricia et Jean-Baptiste* (although complicated by the fact that she is French), *Mon amie Pierrette* and *Il ne faut pas* — the women are not defined by association with the virtues of the feminine and are more decisive, coherent characters than their male companions. Yet in the case of the two latter films, they are present only to complete or to bring out the weaknesses of the male character.

In his niore recent films, the women are characters in their own right. They are much more nuanced, complex beings. Louise, of *L'Amour blessé* and Jeanne of *Le Vieux pays,* are women who have suffered greatly; Louise from her violent husband and Jeanne from her drunken father. Anne, also in *Le Vieux pays,* is suffering in a less obvious way from the insensitivity of her workaholic intellectual husband and from her life in Paris, cut off from her birthplace and her mother in the south. In these films Lefebvre reveals an enormous understanding ofthe private and public violence done to woman, and the specificity oftheir problems, their ways

of thinking and feeling.

Running through many of Lefebvre's films is the optimistic belief in the possibility of an egalitarian relationship between man and woman, which would be both tender and sharing, intellectual and sensual. This belief takes different forms. In *Ultimatum,* such a relationship is suggested by the integration of scenes of physical pleasure with those of conversation between the man and woman. These conversations deal with the arbitrariness and the misuse of the language of love and of language itself, and with their childhood memories and fears which help to explain their sexual identities as adults. *Les Dernières fiançailles,* the study of a man and a woman in old age preparing for death together, takes the question of sexual relations out of the context of sexuality *per se* and into the area of human obligation.

Lefebvre's tender, thoughtful depiction of sexual relations is in marked contrast to the way in which these subjects are treated in other Québécois films, where sex seems to play either a disturbingly violent role or a mystical, unwordly one. Relationships between men and women are often associated with alcohol, bars, drunkenness, and the portrayal of sexual encounter is either rape itself, as in *Contre Coeur* (Jean Guy-Noel, 1981), or is so violent that il appears like rape, as in *Les Bons débarras* (Francis Mankiewicz, 1981), although the violence in the latter film is as much by woman to man as man to woman. In other films, particularly those of Gilles Carle *(La Vraie nature de Bernadette, La Tête de Normande St-Onge),* woman and sex are presented in a mystificatory, costumed never-never world of fantasy and theatricality. Woman are represented merely as the objects of a vague, escapist male fantasy. Even in a film as overtly, if crudely feminist, as *La Cuisine rouge* (Paule Baillargeon, Frédérique Collin, 1981), the rebellion of a group of women against their drunken, chauvinistic male companions is depicted in a way which fantasises the feminine as much as the films of Carle do, with the women clowning around in funny costumes and taking baths in the open air.

Lefebvre's remarkably different insertion of sexual themes in his films shows a clear progression from abstraction to a profound and sympathetic understanding of his female characters. Their status in his films changes from support roles, amplifying and explaining that of the main male character, to centre stage as in *L'Amour blessé.* He has, however, been consistent in his studies of working-class women, with the problems of jobs, managing house and suffering the constraints of rather traditionally-minded men. There are perhaps two reasons for his different approach to these subjects. Many of his films are concerned with looking forward to the future, a future when Quebec's great social and political changes of the last twenty years will hopefully have been channelled into the creation of a new sort of society. For him, a new way of thinking about the sexual and moral relations between men and women is just as important: the personal is always political. Secondly, his approach to these subjects could he an oppositional and conscious reaction against the way in which they have been treated in Quebec films from the Catholic melodramas of the 1940s and 50s, to the flood of pornography in the late 60s, to the muddled and often exploitative form they have taken in so many Québécois films of the last ten years.

The films of Lefebvre are inseparable from the political and social changes that have taken place in Quebec in the last 20 years and from the emergence of a new Québécois cinema in the 1960s. Like the work of others — Groulx, Arcand, Leduc, Dansereau, Lamothe, to name a few — his films have played and continue to play their part as catalysts and provocations, in articulating these changes. They raise the question of what a radical national cinema could be. Lacking any dogma, didacticism or nationalist propaganda, his films articulate the process of struggle for nationhood and explore the incoherences and inconsistencies of a country like Quebec (or any country, come to that). His films defamiliarise and distance viewers from this apparently 'known' reality and disturb their relationship to it. At the same time, while one of Quebec cinema's present problems is repetition and the lack of change, Lefebvre's work testifies to a constant renewal both of a conception of nationhood and of the polirical aesthetics of film-making.

NOTES

[1] See the *Filmography* for the budgets of all his films.
[2] See the *Filmography* for the list of films that Cinak has produced.
[3] See the *Introduction* for more details on Quebec's documentary school.
[4] *Le Quartier Latin,* Montreal, March 1969.
[5] See the Introduction for more details on Quebec's cinema before 1960.
[6] See the *Introduction* for details on FLQ (From de la Libération du Québec).
[7] Peter Harcourt, *Jean Pierre Lefebvre,* Ottawa, Canadian Film Institute, 1981, p. 107
[8] See the *Introduction* for more details on the Quiet Revolution
[9] *Cahiers du cinéma,* October 1967.
[10] *Cinéma Canada,* July-August 1972.
[11] See *Introduction* for details on the October Crisis.
[12] Quoted from Edinburgh Film Festival programme 1979.
[13] See *Introduction* for details on the Parti Québécois.
[14] *Cahiers du cinéma* No. 200-201, April-May 1968.
[15] Jan Dawson in *Take One,* Montreal, November 1977
[16] Harcourt. op. cit., p. 58.
[17] *Cinéma Québec,* Montreal, Vol. 5, No. 6, 1977.
[18] Taken from *An Interview with Jean-Pierre Lefebvre,* published in this Dossier.
[19] Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, *Cinéastes du Québec,* No. 3, Conseil Québécois pour la Diffusion du Cinéma Montreal, 1970.
[20] Harcourt, op. cit., p. 107
[21] *Cinéma Canada,* July-August 1972.
[22] *Cinéma Québec,* Vol. 5, No. 6, 1977.
[23] Harcourt, op. cit., p. 49.

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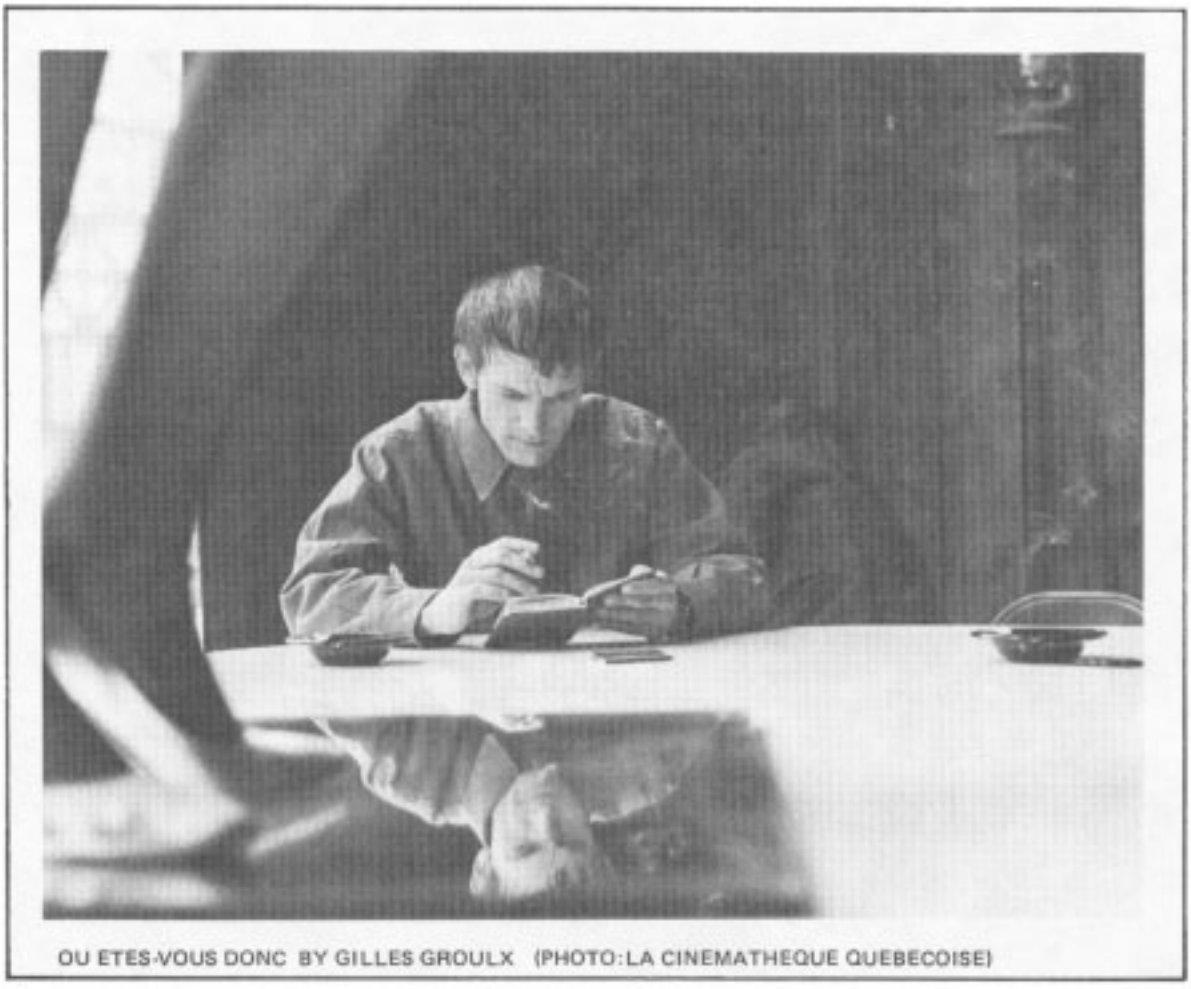

OU ETES-VOUS DONC BY GILLES GROULX (PHOTO: LA CINEMATHEQUE QUEBECOISE)

THE CRISIS OF THE DOCUMENTARY AND FICTIONAL FILM IN QUEBEC

Ron Burnett

At a meeting of Quebec filmmakers that I attended in the spring of 1981, Gilles Groulx (one of the most innovative of Quebec's cinéastes) stood up and made the following declaration, which I can only paraphrase, because the transcript has not as yet been published. He said that the cinema here was in a crisis, not only because it had lost sight of its roots, and its political concerns, but because even its fiction films were derived from the documentary, inhabited and instilled with the ethos of the National Film Board. To an outsider it may seem heretical to state this, because the Film Board has an extraordinary world-wide reputation. But in Quebec, the Film Board has drawn upon the pool of filmmakers who are active in the culture of the province, to a degree that would be unimaginable in any other country. Most of Quebec's best filmmakers, have, at one time or another, been employed there, or have received support to do a project. An independent or even alternative film industry does not exist, and it isn't as a result of a lack of effort.

The Film Board's masteryof the low to medium priced documentary film makes it a very attractive place to work. It is precisely its dedication to the documentary, its history as a developer of the genre, and its seeming concern for social issues that Groulx is reacting to. Paradoxically, its self-professed desire to educate through film fits in with the dominant tradition of didactic films made in Quebec. Its concern with conserving the Canadian heritage parallels the concern in Quebec, with building an archive of images to preserve a culture and a way of life that is unique in North America. But, as we shall see, there are some serious problems with the social and supposedly progressive thrust of the N.F.B. It is these problems which Groulx tried, in a very subjective way, to decode.

The Board's effects upon the film culture in this province go beyond its presence as an institution. It has effectively taught a whole generation of filmmakers, how to make films. The **French Unit** at the Board, was, as David Clandfield has illustrated in an earlier issue of **Ciné-Tracts** (No. 4), concerned with using the camera as a tool to depict the social reality it was examining. In this sense, the Board satisfied a desire on the part of the filmmakers to see their work as political, as part of the growing awareness that Quebec was developing (1958-64) of its social and economic history. The filmmakers implicated themselves in the crucial debates of the day. Their cinema was viewed as a "prise de conscience," as the focal point for keeping alive, via images, all that was threatened by English and North American culture. But these desires were not really different from the aims of the N.F.B. They in fact, coincided with John Grierson's original goals for the institution. What **was** different, and would lead to later conflicts between the Board and the filmmakers, was the strength of the nationalistic impulse in Quebec. Quebec, a colonized country, used the cinema as a vehicle to recover its own identity. In many ways the Film Board was not, and has never been ready to accept, the depth and commitment of that impulse. But at the same time it could not reject what the filmmakers had to offer. In the gap created by these contradictions slipped a whole generation of cinéastes. There is a profound difference between Canadian and Quebec nationalism. The former is not perceived as much of a threat, either politically or economically, except to foreign capital. The latter however, is seen as a threat to the very fabric of the **binational** identity of Canada as a society. The Film Board was, and is, an institution that has tried to unify these differences. Quebec sees itself as a nation, as a community. We see, here, the roots of an irreconcilable conflict between the federal institution, the N.F.B., and Québécois filmmakers.

The medium of film is not simply to be found in the cinematic object, but in the institutions which make that object possible. The filmmakers, (including Groulx, Pierre Perrault, Jacques Godbout, Michel Brault, Claude Jutra, Jean Dansereau) did not attack with any great strength, the Film Board's hold over them. Rather, they cloistered themselves into a very tight group with a particular identity within the Film Board. They developed their identity even further, by appropriating and then developing a sophisticated version of cinéma-vérité. Here is Gilles Groulx describing this development. "We said to ourselves: 'The English have a very rigid outlook on the cinema. They don't in essence capture the reality that they film.' When they make documentaries they take five shots of a guy walking in the streets. That has no relationship with a document, or even with a documentary! It's fictional cinema made under the guise of the documentary." **(Cinéma D'Ici,** by Gilles Marsolais, Lemeac, 1973, pp. 77-78.) Or Claude Jutra: "The Québécois quickly took over the philosophy and direction of Cinéma Vérité. We turned it into something distinctively Québécois. It was very personal: we were more emotional and expressive than the English and we didn't play any of the games with objectivity that the Anglo-Saxons at the Film Board did." (Ibid) Part of the frustration of these filmmakers grew out of the institutional practice of which they were a part. It was the acceptable limits of the National Film Board that they were working within, not only, or, in any strict sense the documentary as a genre. This is not to suggest a monolithic Film Board directing and controlling all of the work done by its filmmakers, but the institution subtly defines the parameters of its own practice. It supplies permanent employment to a pool of filmmakers and in one sense that seems

to be an act of support and encouragement. It can be seen, however, as a very direct way of legitimizing the role, and power of the state, in the production of culture. Protesting this is difficult, since an outcry may lead to the destruction of the institution, and consequently, to the loss of one of the few contexts where the production of documentary films is actually legitimate. The circularity of this problem, the anguish of being, in effect, the Voice of Canada to the world, when all that you wanted was to speak on behalf of Quebec **to** the Québécois, that anguish and that circularity, defined a large part of the documentary window that Québécois filmmakers opened up.

The Film Board is not only about film, but about a concept of Canada. It, in itself, is a medium for the transmission of Canadian national aspirations, in almost direct contradiction to the deeply felt Quebec nationalism of the early sixties. How did the filmmakers deal with this? They began, in effect, by cataloguing the society around them, inventorying the activities of the people, and thereby transforming history into a vast encyclopedia, replete with images that froze forever that which seemed to be slipping away. The archive that they tried to create was by no means neutral, though it partook of one of the problems of the archival: the contradictory layers and levels of history are difficult to maintain within the context of the archive. The result is not a denial of heterogeneity but a regularization of historical phenomena and events into a series of categories which almost become rules for seeing and understanding the world. The documentarians who worked for the Film Board were desperately stripping away one illusion, to create a far more complex one. They were slowly creating the cultural infrastructure that made the documentary, the gathering of documents, event the use of documents politically, predominant. The elevation of the documentary film from **one** of many possible genres that could reflect the particular reality of Quebec, to the **only** style that accurately reproduced "notre caractère national," made the relationship between the Film Board and Quebec's filmmakers, a symbiotic one. However, the desire to capture the real and make the everyday life of the people the 'subject' of their films, was inspired by their politics. The image, the people inhabiting it, what they said, was supposed to stand **for** what the filmmakers themselves could not say within the limitations of the institution for which they worked. This delegation of authority away from the cinéaste to the people, was a convenient way of adapting to the exigencies, of an institution that could not condone (even within a relatively liberal framework) the more serious oppositional tendencies represented by the turmoil in Quebec.

Almost from the beginning, the members of the French Unit at the Film Board fought with the institution. One of the most notorious censorships took place around the film, **On Est Au Coton** (1970). But the stage for this censorship, which I will discuss in a moment, was set many years earlier. As an example, consider what happened to Arthur Lamothe around his film, **Les Bûcherons de la Manouane.** "Even though they (the Film Board's producers) demanded that I cut a number of shots, they did not realize that I had practiced a form of auto-censorship anyway. In terms of information I wanted to go much further than they would let me. I'm aware of the fact that when you work for a federal institution, you have to be ready to censor yourself and to be careful about what you say. Ironically, the text for **Les Bûcherons** had been accepted by the Board. In the first version of the film I said: 'Our earth belongs to a foreign monarchy. The capital that runs our companies is American. Our managers are anglo-saxons. English is the language of our masters.' They made me cut, English is the language of our masters and they also made me cut that our managers are anglophone." (Ibid, p. 89) There is, in what Lamothe says, only a partial recognition of how the institution is affecting him. Could he expect those he categorised as colonisers to allow an anti-colonialist statement to be made? Surely not. Was he fighting the institution from within? Yes, but to what purpose? Though to some extent, the struggle of a Lamothe, or a Brault, or a Groulx changed the institution, it could not change its fundamental direction. Though the French Unit managed to separate itself from the English side, it was never completely autonomous. In effect, the filmmakers had to give in to some degree. I would suggest that their obsession with the 'candid eye' type of film was an

attempt to subvert the censorship, since, if all that the camera and crew did, was 'come upon' a scene and if those scenes in Quebec were 'inherently' political, then the phenomenonological moment would represent 'truth,' without looking like a distortion. Thus, they had to believe in the power of their archival instincts. The Film Board, had, in large measure, co-opted them.

On Est Au Coton, was at one and the same time, the clearest expression of this crisis and an attempt to break with it. Denys Arcand, the director took a strong political stand and did not in any way attempt to hide his nationalism. The film was also anti-capitalist and a severe critique of the textile industry in Quebec. It took its politics seriously enough to make them an over-determining factor in, not only the representations that it chose, but in the general approach that it took to the documentary form. The Film Board responded to the film by declaring it to be "unrepresentative" of the problems in the textile industry, and not "objective" in its presentation of the facts. The filmmaker was branded as being insufficiently neutral in his approach. When the then commissioner of the Board, Sydney Newman, was attacked for censorship and for being anti-working class, he defended his position, by pointing to the many N.F.B. films which depict working class life, and which defend the rights of the workers. He was correct that the Film Board had a large inventory of so-called 'working class' films, but he misunderstood the criticism. For Newman, and for the Film Board, a working class film was one which partook of a distant phenomenology: a film which showed exploitation but was careful in revealing any causes; a film, which like many of the Candid Eye series had more of an archival intent than a political one. The Film Board had a catalogue of voyeuristic looks at the depressing and inevitably hopeless task, faced by the poor and by workers in their struggle. The desire in these films, is to depict the real, as if reality is never mediated by the representational process. The filmmakers try and enter a reality that they can only experience as voyeurs, a moment in time where the representation of defeat and defeatism, seems to fit with their own guilt at being unable to effectively change the story that they were carrying out from the slums to their audiences.

Obviously the Film Board could not allow films to be made that **challenged** the middle of the road position that **everyone,** the whole populace of a country, was responsible for the economic, social and political mess that they were in. Everyone, the Canadian collectivity, everyone, the worker and the boss, are united within an identity that makes class struggle, peripheral, or at best, old hat, redundant. This is of course, the error of a narrowly focused cultural nationalism, one that elevates **identity** beyond the actual context to which it is referring. The Film Board films on workers all reveal a variety of tensions in our society — we **are** given pictures of daily life — but only to the degree and extent, that contradiction and contradictory forces are muted, silenced, by a representational process that screams for change, but that must defend itself against the possible consequences of the outrage. Conflict must co-exist with harmony and possible solutions to problems. **On Est Au Coton** proposes precisely no solution and simply foregrounds conflict as a call to action. This polemical use of film is what ultimately angered Newman. It is after all the function of a polemic to stir up the neatly embroidered patterns of conventional discourse, and to shake up the carefully structured lethargy of institutions.

There is within Québécois filmmakers a deep desire to break with the Board and a contradictory desire to be supported by it. **On Est Au Coton** highlights these contradictions. **On Est Au Coton,** compares the life of a worker with that of his boss in textiles through a parallel structure that looks at their daily lives. There is at one and the same time a kind of inevitability to the statement, those that oppress are worse than we think, and an intensity to the politics that is very profoundly related to the national struggle in Quebec. But there is confusion, also, about how film fits into all of this. Whereas Newman saw an immediate threat, the film itself reveals a great deal of ambiguityabout the direction that the workers must take. It is an ambiguity born of the problems that the militant cinema-direct has not in a self-reflexive way commented upon. It is an ambiguity that is partially related to the difficulty that the cinema has in effectively changing the very contradictions that it depicts. It is much like the problem faced by a teacher who

may try and speak clearly about a particular political reality and be confronted with an audience, students, who only recognize in a partial and fragmented way what he/she is trying to say. Often rather than trying to take this process into account the teacher will move to a level of greater emphasis and intensity, become even more didactic, rather than less, and attempt to perfect the presentation of the material. A bind results. As the material becomes more and more hermetic, and complete, the audience's fragmentation increases. Communication, rather than improving, continues to break down. In film, ambiguity is built into every representation. To enunciate in film is to enunciate ambiguously. In an attempt to fill these gaps, **On Est Au Coton,** overstated its case. It did not break the permissible boundaries of the documentary film, it simply extended **the direct** into the didactic and it was the implications of it as a pedagogical device that scared Newman. He of course partook of the same viewpoint as Arcand, as regards the power of film to affect its audiences. The documentary must be careful because it is after all a serious educational tool. So, though they both came to film with differing points of view they both misrecognized film's effectivity. Newman saw the truth distorted and assumed the mirroring of that distortion in the mind of his audience. Arcand structured the film in the hope that the truth that he was depicting would also be mirrored in the audience. Ironically, because film produces ambiguity, a multi-leveled signifying text results that can be read in a wide varietyof ways, sometimes in complete opposition to the desire of the film itself.

On Est Au Coton is also about something that Arcand clarified in an interview published in 1971. "What the workers understand, in reality, is their weakness. And there is very good reason for this. Worker power is actually diminishing in our society. This is one of the major problems that traditional Marxist thinking now faces. In absolute numbers, in relation to the rest of the population, the traditional power of the working class is less and less important." This in itself is not a position that the Film Board would be uncomfortable with. However, in the same interview Arcand proposed a more radical position. "We are dealing here, with the problem of ideology and not simply one of worker organization. There are alot of institutional structures within which the working class operates (unions, local organizing committees etc.): creating an organization that would bring all of these forces together, into an autonomous political group would not be too hard. But I don't think that this is the essence of the problem, the crux of this whole thing is ideology." (p. 26) "Practice must come from theory which must then be verified again in practice. What is missing in our situation right now is theory."

It would not be a generalization to suggest that part of the problem that Arcand faced in working at the Film Board was the absence of theory, in an ironic parallel to what he suggested to the Quebec working class. By absence of theory I mean an absence of debate about how filmmaking is never simply an expression of the personal interests of the filmmaker, but is an activity that operates within historically bound institutional frameworks. As such, a theory is needed to explain the cultural and political conjuncture that made a particular film genre dominant at the Film Board. Furthermore, we need to explain **why** the documentary — direct cinema — became a vehicle for the expression of the perceived interests of the Quebec people. Arcand's attempt to focus in on ideology was a start towards this theorization. But he essentially saw film as an adjunct to political action and as an educational tool. He privileged what he felt were the **content-areas** that needed examination by the cinema. Those content-areas reflected an essential pessimism about working class struggle (and it would be of interest to reopen the debate around **On Est Au Coton,** which is a film that ostensibly proposes a militant line, but, removed from the context of the Film Board appears to be quite harmless, almost tentative in its exploration of worker oppression), not only and singularly because of Arcand's outlook, but in part, as a result of the many contradictions that come with the documentary film.

The "site" of my argument is therefore two-fold. In the first place it is not an accident that the Film Board made the documentary and the direct the vehicle for its films and

their content. Secondly, the dependence of Quebec filmmakers like Arcand upon the direct cinema (and there is a need to examine why the term "direct" is acontradiction in terms) is linked to their desire to politicize their audiences, a desire, the theory of which they have not examined in very great detail.

The preceding has, in effect, been a long introduction to the new film by Denys Arcand, made at the Film Board, entitled, **Le Confort et l'indifférence.** Following this article there is an intense and polemical criticism of the film by Lise Bisonnette. It was necessary to try and 'contextualize' the critique that I am about to make. The film is a synthesis of the present outlook of a deeply divided nationalist grouping in Quebec. It is essentially the story of their failure to win a referendum on the future separation of Quebec from Canada. The film is brilliantly edited, mixing together a variety of images that build into a pyramid of contradictions about the essential conservatism of the 'people' and their inability to understand the future, their inability to risk the present **for** the future. It uses all of the elements of cinéma-vérité and joins those with the more traditional documentary style. The film pivots around an actor who plays Machiavelli. These "fictional" moments are philosophical interludes, meant to contextualize and explain the preceding footage. The film's critique of the 'ordinary' desires of ordinary people is profoundly cynical and non-stop. Lise Bisonnette summarizes the approach that the film takes, quite succinctly. For our purposes the film is perhaps the most complete display of the problems that I have been raising. It submerges itself in the national question as if class is unimportant. It bemoans the loss of innocence that Quebec went through and tries to tear away the veil of illusions that the Québécois have about Canada.

In a sense Arcand is struggling with precisely the same things that the filmmakers in the early sixties did. Except that this time his film **is** an archival collection. Events are filmed, such as the Queen inspecting an honour guard, and this is carefully clipped to fit not only its location in the film but also to be preserved as **the** example of the national oppression of the Québécois. Using the Queen as asymbol of oppression is equivalent to the trademark that a company uses to identify itself. Arcand is not trying to set the record straight, he is simply making sure that the record will never be forgotten. He reduces the complexity of both political action and political understanding to a simple moral formulation of right and wrong. What is interesting is that this condemnation of the federal state could survive the Film Board. Arcand has succeeded where none of the early filmmakers could, at least that is the way that it seems on the surface.

As image after image passes by of silly politicians making frivolous promises and arguments about the future of Quebec, and as Machiavelli intervenes to point out the grand stupidity, the film becomes more a condemnation of the working class as a whole, than it does of their politics. It begins to situate itself very much in the mold of many Film Board films. Its critique hardly glances at the root causes of fear. In one scene the camera tracks into a van being displayed in a show. The van is outfitted and furnished in the most garish way with a false fireplace, false shelves, false everything. For Arcand this is a synoptic image of those who voted against Quebec. But is it? Can the private pleasure of this man reveal something about workers as a whole? I think not. Arcand, instead, has taken the very traditional view of the worker as a symbol of false consciousness. And precisely, in this way, he duplicates the thrust of many N.F.B. films. As they wander through the desert deprived of knowledge, the workers become victims of their own lacks. Their false consciousness is a simple mirror reflection of the ideological desires of the federal state. This simple determinism is conveniently re-enforced by Machiavelli, who plays the role of the all-powerful paternal figure ruling over this cynical mess, providing the grammar, as it were, for the cynicism. There is a pathetic scene in which a petit-bourgeois intellectual cries about the loss, one almost hopes that the film is self-reflexively critiquing his position, until we realize that he in one sense represents the film's stand. The most devastating criticism is laid at the feet of Prime Minister Trudeau, who is not only a traitor because he is French and a federalist, but because, for Arcand he is the fullest incarnation of the paternalism of anglophone

culture. How did this film pass through the Film Board? It is in part a sign of the change that the institution has undergone, responding to the ascendency of a pro-separatist party in Quebec. More importantly, the film is not really a threat. It is made for a very narrow audience. Its constituency is not the workers that it laughs at. Its constituency is precisely those people who it is **not** critiquing. Its cry of pain at the way that history has unfolded, paradoxically says more about the institution from which it is coming than it does about the society to which it is directed.

What must be recognized here, is that the N.F.B. is, too all intents and purposes, one of the few institutions in Canada where afilm like this could be made. The film's journalistic look and tone is a result of its news clip format, a conventional N.F.B. collage-montage of events that are not analysed in any great detail. Its determinism reflects its isolation, coming from an institution that must be isolated in order to function. The N.F.B. is like a think-tank. We rarely gain an insight into how it works. No films have really been made about it. A powerful authority is gained from working within it, though the actual research that makes many of its films possible is never foregrounded so that we may understand its premises more clearly. It is not an accident that the nationalist drama should play itself out within the confines of the institution. As a preserver of history and culture the Film Board's role is ultimately a pedagogical one. While Arcand's film does not fit into the 'direct,' it certainly mixes cinéma-vérité with an intense didacticism that would only be threatening if it could transcend its cynicism. Though it might be brutal to say this, the film is the equivalent of a Sunday morning show on television that looks with a pitiful eye upon the handicapped, trying to overwhelm the audience with guilt, filling them with easy categories of what is true and false, moralizing, endlessly...

It does not examine the social or economic relations which gave rise to Separatism. It skirts the issues of its own nationalism and thus does not work out the more profound questions surrounding national identity. What are dealing with here is nationalism as it has always been understood and practiced by the Film Board. ''Chauvinism is moreover predominantly an 'either/or' relationship to other nations, just as individualism is to other individuals. In contrast, nationhood, like individuality, is a both-and relationship. What predominated here is not atomism, but relationship; not divisiveness, but connectedness; not competition but cooperation; not paranoia, but realism.'' **(The Imaginary Canadian,** by Tony Wilden, Pulp Press, p. 114).

On Est Au Coton was censored because it struck hard at economic relations in Quebec and Canada. **Le Confort et l'indifférence** was not censored because it transformed the very complex problems facing Quebec into a morality play, obscuring the very reality it was so desperately trying to depict. The film lays down a challenge that no institution could find threatening. We are all, irrespective of our class interests, lost, and now with the referendum over, there is very little left for us to do, but shrug and bear it. Though the very ideology that he is decrying emanates from the institution that employs him, though the state apparatus is represented by the N.F.B., Arcand's determinism smashes only one foe, **an Imaginary** one.

MOURIR-A-TUE-TETE (PHOTO: JULIE VINCENT, LA CINEMATHEQUE QUEBECOISE)

QUEBEC FILM 1966-1980; AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Louise Carrière

I. High and Low Points of an Era (1966-1970)

First of all, an opening remark: since the major moments of its rebirth in the 1960's, the Québécois cinema has been seen and known by fewer and fewer film-goers. We go now to see individual Québécois films, such as **Mourir à tue tête, Mon oncle Antoine, Les Plouffe,** or **J.A. Martin, photographe,** but the Québécois cinema as a whole escapes us. In effect, the film-goer is no longer able to keep up with the various tendencies or products of the Québécois cinema. Only a few critics possess the means and the time to hunt down — at retrospectives, press screenings, and festivals — the scattered and sparse output of the Québécois cinema.

This erosion of Quebec cinema may be traced to a number of factors. The situation within it has changed, but audiences have done so as well. Increasingly, the term ''acculturation'' is used to describe the current desertion by young people of the established media and means of expression. Nevertheless, youth listen in large numbers to music, read comic books on a massive scale, and continue to be interested in a wide variety of things. No doubt, cultural changes in leisure activity and the rising costs associated with film explain in part the lower interest in the cinema here. The phenomena still must be studied. For example, as concerns film distribution, it should be noted that no stable and easily-accessible circuit exists in the province for bringing Québécois cinema to the public on a regular basis. A uniform network of ''parallel'' screening rooms, linked to leisure centers, educational institutions, and neighbourhoods, and which would bring cultural expression, including films, to the public, does not exist.

With all their limitations, the film societies **(ciné-clubs)** of the 1960's at least enabled many Québécois films to be viewed. In addition, the subject could be pursued through debates, meetings with the filmmakers, and weeks devoted to the new cinema. Student newspapers commented on the latest films of Jean-Pierre Lefebvre or Pierre Perrault, and the work of Jacques Leduc, Gilles Groulx or Denys Arcand was well-known. Polemics would arise over the virtues, or lack thereof, of the films of Claude Fournier or Denis Héroux. **Parti-pris, Objectif** and, later, **Champ Libre** and **Cinéma Québec** would publish interviews or analyses dealing with the Québécois cinema, so as to occupy some of the ground which today, for the most part, is the province of reviews and criticism published in newspapers or general-interest magazines.

Polemics, and a certain degree of dialogue between the public and the authors, no doubt contributed to the high profile Quebec cinema possessed at that time, and helped as well to develop a greater interest on the part of film-goers in the Québécois cinema.

In those days, as well, the Québécois cinema was part of the wider current of new world cinema looking for a thematic and formal renewal. Glauber Rocha, Jean-Luc Godard, Alain Tanner, Gilles Carle, Claude Jutra, Milos Forman and Michel Brault all belonged to the same world. We loved the cinema, and that was enough.

The relative uniformity of the first Québécois films may also be traced to a broad political consensus. We were becoming aware of national oppression, and expressing the contours of Quebec reality took on a certain urgency. This was to result in what some might call a "family album": many productions dealing with Québécois personalities, or about our traditions and heritage. This was still the period of the Quiet Revolution.– Above all, it was a question of a common front aimed at the application of reforms in different sectors. To combat the cultural policies of the status quo, one fought against the Liberals and Unionists.– Filmmakers were to be part-and-parcel of this movement. This gives many films a demanding tone which one would be hard pressed to find in later years: **Québec: Duplessis et après, Les voitures d'eau, St-Jérome dans le temps, Nominingue n'existe plus,** etc.).

II. Hope for a National Cinema (1970-76)

By the end of the 1960's, a higher degree of polarization within the filmmaking community and among audiences began to make itself felt. Some talked about cultural decolonization, others of increased profitability. In order to support this second tendency, in 1967, the Canadian Film Development Corporation was created and granted initial funding of ten million dollars. This body, whose mandate was that of encouraging the Canadian film industry, tended more and more to become a spring-board for medium and large-sized film companies. It provided major financing to sexploitation and blockbuster movies. In the 1970's, with its policy of supporting international co-productions and allowing tax write-offs, it would accentuate to an even greater degree the gap between big productions and Canadian filmmaking on the whole, and between anglophone and francophone productions.

> The francophone and anglophone sectors have not felt the effects of the depreciation allowance in the same way…. In the two years following the creation of the Canadian Film Development Corporation, the francophone sector experienced growth enabling it to produce an average of 14 films per year, but this outburst was shortlived inasmuch as production fell to 7 features

— La révolution tranquille — this refers to the period 1959-1966 during which Québécois société was "modernized, urbanized, industrialized."

— L'Union Nationale was the party formed by Maurice Duplessis in the 1920's as a reforming nationalist party which became increasingly marked by rightwing populism and Conservatism during his régime. The party has all but disappeared in Quebec since the provincial elections of 1970 when they lost to the Liberals.

in 1977. While francophone producers have not reacted immediately to the stimulus brought by the depreciation allowance in 1975, anglophones, on the other hand, have practically doubled their production.

In opposition to this national tendency in Canada, many producers and directors would privilege, as a starting point, an artisanal Québécois cinema financed by the Quebec government. Later, these people would differ in their satisfaction, or lack thereof, over the creation of the Institut québécois du cinéma in 1976. For the moment, it should be emphasized that, around 1970, a major consensus existed within the profession: over the necessity of establishing a national cinema (a term which was, however, rarely defined) in opposition to "foreign" interests. In this respect, a preoccupation of many filmmakers, critics and film-goers was that of ridding the Québécois cinema of American monopoly. This was a battle-line from the time of the first manifestos issued in 1964 (again briefs presented to the Secretary of State of Canada by the APC, and to the Premier of Quebec) through to that written in 1971 by the APCQ (the Association professionnelle des cinéastes du Québec) and which bears the meaningful title, "Cinema: The Other Face of Colonized Quebec." Among other things, this text said the following:

> The problem of the cinema in Quebec is not simply an economic one, as statements by the Fédération québécoise de l'industrie du cinéma would have us believe, but very much a political problem. The Quebec government (whichever it might be) has never assumed its responsibilities in the face of the American invader, despite its many promises in this respect .... We therefore call upon the Ministre des Affaires culturelles to rectify the state of public opinion by denouncing the foreign companies (Famous Players-Gulf, Cinepix) which dominate and exploit the Québécois people .... By taking appropriate measures to break monopoly control over the production, distribution, and marketing of films in Quebec.

The APCQ manifesto came in the aftermath of the October events,— which were rich in lessons to be learned concerning the power of the state and its control over the media, whether it was the cinema or the press (not to mention television). Stormy debates had already run through the profession over these questions of cultural decolonization, or over the social role of the "artist," the filmmaker's way of bearing witness to the lived experiences of a society. In the United States, reflection and protest movements were growing up around all sorts of issues — the war in Vietnam, employment policies, life-styles. In France, after May 1968, the climate extended into film circles, who held their Etats généraux. During this period, Quebec, with its major student struggles, its battles for unionization, and its struggles over the national question, gave us some very interested and **engagé** works of the cinema. We can cite, among others, **24 heures ou plus, Chez nous c'est chez nous, La Richesse des autres, Où êtes-vous donc? On est au coton,** and **Les ordres.** Also, during this same period, several filmpmakers felt the need to organize outside of large companies, whether on a co-operative basis, as in the case of the ACPAV (Association coopérative de productions audiovisuelles), or simply by following a less monopolized road, that of video. In this particular context, new themes would be developed within Québécois cinema. These included: the role of the young radical, an examination of Quebec's past, a denunciation of the government's housing and relocation policies, showing the effects of the exploitation of the

— In October 1970 following the kidnapping of the British Trade Commissioner to Montreal and of a Quebec Cabinet minister who was later found murdered, the federal War Measures Act was declared. During enforcement of the Act police and RCMP security forces were able to hold citizens on suspicion without right to a hearing while civil rights were suspended. Thousands of nationalists and leftists of various parties, and other "undesirables" were arrested and records seized.

Quebec people on the cultural and work levels, as well as in neighbourhoods. Numerous films on the condition of women emerged during this period, as well as films on the role of the family and of the couple. These films hearkened back to the more politicized tendencies in Quebec cinema, which would be generally less visible throughout the remainder of the 1970's. Another current, which would continue its parallel existence, was that of sexploitation films. **Valérie, Deux femmes en or, Sept fois par jour** showed the less well-known sides of Québécois reality. On the pretext of liberating and instructing us, these films filled the pockets of several producers who were well organized within the very select Association canadienne de maisons de production cinématographique.

Finally, the rapid growth of a third tendency within Quebec cinema of this era: that which was more openly nationalistic. If it can be said that the radical wing of filmmakers took as their slogan "Quebec for the workers" and the second tendency, "Quebec for the financiers," then this third current, on the receiving end of the Quebec state's involvement in the cinema as a means of regulating the profession, had as its motto "Quebec for the Québécois." Here can be found such overtly pro-PQ films as those of Mignault **(15 novembre, Le Québec est au monde),** Perrault **(Voitures d'eau, Le goût de la farine)** as well as such less specific, but equally indépendantiste or nationalist, films as **La veillée des veillées, La nuit de la poésie, La Gammick, Les Vautours, Mon oncle Antoine,** etc.

This period also saw Québécois cinema become increasingly institutionalized. Filmmakers returned to the NFB. Bodies such as the Conseil pour la diffusion du cinéma québécois unfortunately disappeared, and many new small companies closed up shop, such were the hopes raised for the filmmakers by a change in government.

III. After the Fall

The creation of the Institut québécois du cinéma came more than a year and a half after the adoption, in Quebec, of the General Law concerning the cinema (in 1975). The institute became the control lever so strongly desired in the areas of film production and distribution, as well as in script-writing and research. It should be remembered, in fact, that with the Canada Council, the C.F.D.C., and the expanding role of the NFB in Quebec feature filmmaking, supporters of a strong Quebec state, united against Ottawa, saw in the creation of the Institute the means to their end.

Many people were convinced that the Institute would serve as a balance between the powers of Quebec and Ottawa. And indeed several middle-sized production companies, (producers like Claude Godbout), have found the Institute a profitable instrument. But for a variety of reasons most of the hopes that were raised ended in disappointment. Of course, the Institute's creation came in the midst of a world economic crisis:

> The main problem is still inflation, which has struck the cinema much more seriously than other sectors of the economy. Not only do we have to cope with the rise in the cost of money (interest rates), but laboratory costs have increased, not to forget technicians' salaries.

One would of course have to add to these considerations the consistent hesitation of the Quebec government to act to limit the importation of foreign productions, in other words to establish a precise quota of screening time for Quebec film from all the production houses. More and more it is also becoming apparent to some observers that a cinema involved in and committed to Quebec culture, as opposed to sheer financial speculation, is not the first priority of the Institute. On this subject we eventually will have to return to a more exact analysis of current Institute policies. (See Part Two, Ed. Note) But at first glance it does seem to privilege films with commercial appeal, those with much larger budgets than other productions — in other words it

seems that the Gilles Carle-Denis Héroux - Claude Godbout style of "exportable" film with slick photography clearly takes precedence in Institute policy over more critical and polemic films such as La **Cuisine Rouge, Une histoire de Femmes,** or **Plusieurs Tombent en Amour.** These critical and polemic tendencies will not be encouraged in the future:

> Our priority is the international market. We are about to announce the opening of a European office, which is already active over there . . . We very much favor films costing between four-hundred thousand and a million dollars, which doesn't mean we wouldn't go beyond that in certain deals . . . Where we have more doubts is maybe the independent short documentary. It's not that we don't like them . . . it's just that they no longer have any sales appeal.

Since the Parti Québécois came to power, certain developments have been building up which should be briefly mentioned. First of all, there seems to be a very close collaboration and complementarity between the federal government (film policy) through the C.F.D.C., and the policies of the Institute. There's also a growing tendency towards monopolization in film production, which is what Denis Héroux was referring to at the time of the creation of the A.C.M.P.C., when he called it the way to separate the big boys from the little ones. The splits between, on the one hand, teaching and research and professional circles, and, on the other, between the public and the filmmakers, became almost total. Defense groups have yet to act together in concerted action. For over four years, the reports have piled up. This silence may be traced in part to the popular "let's-give-them-a-chance" philosophy in certain cases, and to the well-defined interests of others in maintaining the benefits they have been receiving for several years now.

With respect to the training of filmmakers, dissension exists at a number of levels over the necessity, or lack thereof, of a professional film school, and over the orientation of such training. Should it only favor highly specialized technicians who would be at the service of directors and industry-at-large? Should professionals encourage these initiatives when unemployment in the field is currently almost 90%?

Throughout this period, we have also been struck more and more by the thematic uniformity of a large number of Quebec films. In effect, filmmakers are more and more favoring historical, folkloric or allegorical themes. Major commericial successes such as **Cordélia, L'Affaire Coffin, Les Plouffe, J. A. Martin,** for example, deal with the past. They thus denounce, in the present, **but for the sake of the past,** injustices which nevertheless have their counterparts in present-day Quebec. However, allusions to the present, or any possible relevance, are absent more often than not. One wonders, in fact, whether Roger Lemelin would be willing to change the setting of Les Plouffe from the second world war to 1981, with the threat of new wars, and with well known nationalists and federalists in the traditional role of the priests. Certainly, works dealing with the past can also function to shed light on the present. Unfortunately, that has not been the case here. Other, more didactic works, particularly ethnographic films, have resurfaced over the last few years. Some refer to these as "macramé films." Finally, allegorical films such as those by Fernand Bélanger **(De la route et du restant)** and Jacques Leduc **(Chroniques de la vie quotidienne)** among others, offer evidence of a deep malaise, but are not always explicit about the contradictions of present-day society. Their choice of allegory leaves more questions unanswered. We are also perplexed by the disappearance of the works of Gilles Groulx and Arthur Lamothe from circulation. Their films are shown at impossible times, when they are shown at all. Short Québécois films by companies like Les filmes du Crépuscule are shown only rarely on television, and even less frequently in movie houses. How can the public evaluate films it has never been able to see or to appreciate? In effect, many interesting films remain on the shelves. Given the overall climate surrounding the cinema since the fall of the Liberal government, it might be worthwhile to collectively debate the future of the Québécois cinema, to genuinely question state policies, and to

organize concrete action aimed at expressing disapproval of current policy. It is urgent, Robert Favreau wrote recently in **Format cinéma,**

> to question our modes of production, conception and shooting — to put collective artistry back in its place. If not, inevitably, we will be reduced to seeing an ever-increasing number of big-budget blockbusters.

Finally, it is perhaps time to rediscover once again the combative tradition in Quebec filmmaking, by making films, not **about** people or a mythical past, but **with** people, and their very real present.

QUEBECOIS CINEMA, WHERE ARE YOU? (PART TWO)

The first part of this article on the state of the cinema in Quebec looked at the historical development of recent Québécois filmmaking. We identified the major tendencies, and dealt with the slow-down in the production of film committed to contemporary Quebec culture, versus the promotion of expensive historical costume dramas.

The record for the year 1981 should also be taken into account here, with only a few fiction features distributed to commercial theatres. Gilles Carles' **Les Plouffe,** Francis Mankiewicz' **Les Beaux souvenirs,** and then what? . . . At the same time, several interesting non-fiction features have had to contend with difficult completions and less profitable distribution circuits: Guy Simoneau's **On n'est pas des anges,** Yves Dion's **La surditude, C'est pas le pays des merveilles** by Hélène Doyle and Nicole Giguère, Manon Barbeau's **On est plusieurs, beaucoup de monde, Métier Boxeur,** etc.

It might be worthwhile to continue our look at the Québécois cinema by dealing with the demands of filmmakers, and by identifying the principal problems to be found in the current situation, and their possible solutions.

WHAT DO THE FILMMAKERS WANT?

In discussing the state of the cinema, Jacques Leduc recently asserted that filmmakers no longer constitute the homogeneous block they did in the 1960's.[1] **The eldest had been involved in the construction of a national cinema;** today's young filmmakers belong to the audio-visual generation. It is thus more difficult to find evidence of common concerns, and even rarer to find common demands being made. The **polarisation** of ideas thus extends into the world of film. The effects of this situation on film-scripts. and on the different interests of filmmakers' groups should be considered.

It should be remembered that, at the beginning of the 1970's, the unity of action of filmmakers organized around the APCQ (Association professionnelle des cinéastes du Québec) was high. Most were in agreement on the need to work towards **a Québécois film center** "free from any political interference, from any discretionary power on the part of the state or its employees, and from any wheeling and dealing on the part of the state or its employees, and from any wheeling and dealing on the part of people in the industry."[2] The Liberals were the enemies to be gotten rid of, and this contributed as well to uniting the profession. As a result, filmmakers occupied the office of the Censor Board (now called the Bureaux de surveillance) for over a month. The results of this were positive. We leave it to François Dupuis, current treasurer of the Association des réalisateurs et réalisatrices du Québec, and a film activist of long standing, to explain its importance:

> The occupation of the Bureau de surveillance in November, 1974, was a moment of major mobilization within the profession. At that time, Bourassa and several Quebec ministers were talking a good deal about cultural sovereignty. The moment was ripe for intervening there where the government still had

power, which, in the case of cinema, is over the question of film circulation. By occupying the Bureaux de surveillance, we hoped to block the opening of films theatrically by preventing them from obtaining control visas.

In this way, the occupation disrupted the circulation of films for over a month. We pressed the government into taking up our main grievance, the fact that access by Québécois films to theatres was hampered by foreign domination of our distribution and exhibition systems. The GATT agreements had already enshrined the principle of free circulation of goods between the United States and Canada. The Quebec government was not willing or able to put a halt to the dumping, since the Federal government has jurisdiction in these areas.

As filmmakers, we asked, on the contrary, for a rationing of films coming from outside the province. The demand for the establishment of quotas has yet to be met, even though we came close toreaching a consensus in 1980...[3]

As far as the cinema is concerned, Quebec is not generally a foreign market for American companies. They profit from a high degree of freedom, however, and American films make up more than 50% of the films shown in Quebec theatres and close to that on the various television networks (with the exception of Radio-Québec).

THE SITUATION IMPROVED GRADUALLY . . . BUT NOT FOR LONG

As the result of pressure from small and medium-sized film companies, and from obstinate filmmakers, the Federal government created institutions aimed at promoting Canadian films. Quebec filmmakers insisted that the Quebec government do likewise. In 1976, the **Institute québécois du cinéma** was created, bringing together different services, such as government film production and archives.

The setting-up of the Institute was generally a sound and regenerative move. Before the Institute, there was only the Office du film du Québec, which meted out funds from ministries; now, a higher level of co-ordination between the government and the companies has been established. Still, the Institute is far from ideal. When film finally came under the Department of Cultural Affairs in 1980, we thought there was reason to hope for certain improvements related to quotas on foreign films and a greater aid for the production and distribution of Quebec films. Unfortunately, the budget for films has not grown, even though there is inflation and costs have increased enormously. In addition, the government has preferred consulting with people in the profession, for the "nth" time, over improving its legislation. The familiar series of meetings, commissions, briefs, projects for laws, etc., has begun all over again. Even the possibility of establishing a permanent film study commission to take up and deal with long-term issues and policies has so far been rejected. In addition, certain reforms, such as that concerning the sub-titling in Quebec of foreign films, have yet to be consented to. Many of us have noted that the Institute does not reflect all the tendencies in the current film milieu, and even less the most dynamic of these. We have the impression they act under pressure from the larger associations and interest-groups; this has given a certain incoherence to the Institute since its inception. The Institute is becoming institutionalized, and we think that with their most recent film study commission they are trying to play for time and not run counter to the interests of the big financiers. Throughout this period, the situation for Québécois directors, and for the Quebec cinema has a whole, has gotten continually worse.[4]

Historically, film producers have tended to be reticent about constant state intervention. There was sufficient confusion between public and private before the Institute came on the scene, in their opinion.

The major causes of this confusion have been frequently denounced by the Association des producteurs de films du Québec:

1 - conflicts of jurisdiction and interest;
2 - a lack of co-ordination;
3 - direct state involvement in production;
4 - the unreasonable competition of the state through Radio-Québec.

We therefore wish to put forth a first principle: The state should not involve itself in an area of activity where private enterprise, in our opinion, operates in a satisfactory fashion.[5]

Clearly, what this means is that the state should concern itself only with the administration of subsidies. The bulk of the business belongs to us. There is no question of strongly encouraging a national cinema, and even less a popular one. "Made in Quebec" would not be very profitable. It is these contradictory interests surrounding the cinema, undoubtedly, which delayed following up the 1975 legislation. At that time, the Liberals had faced widespread criticism, and the PQ government would not escape these.– The oscillation of responsibility for the cinema between different departments and ministers, which has gone on for some time now, and the shrinking of its program for dealing with cultural issues and communications, are signs of their current difficulty and indecision.

As far as filmmakers themselves are concerned, we think the weak response on the part of the profession as a whole should be seen as one factor in the delaying of firm film policies. There has been an almost total absence of direct action on their part since 1974, and few organized links with mass movements in Quebec. What emerged as a stimulus to Quebec productions in the early 1970's — community distribution, "collective" script-writing, a concern with improving the social situation — now seem to mean nothing. Were they just passing fashions?

As a result, many filmmakers have chosen individual solutions and thus contributed to weakening the effectivity of Quebec cinema. A militant and dynamic Quebec cinema had begun in order to construct a political alternative which was **opposed to** culturally elitist policies. Is it because they are now burned-out that many filmmakers stick their heads in the sand and remain silent? Or is it because they no longer know what to continue to fight **against** or what to speak out **for** that many films show such a weak interest in issues related to the current economic situation, or to the concerns of youth?

Has the blind nationalism of many of those involved in filmmaking affected their lucidity?

Fortunately, this "tactical retreat" on the part of many of those in the profession has begun to be questioned in a loud voice. The tone of many of the briefs submitted to the Film and Audio-visual Commission testifies to this:

> ...for twenty years, since the very first appearance of our cinema, we have watched the following take place:
>
> 1) The human capital invested (very often without financial reward) by those working in the Quebec cinema has been quickly turned into cultural capital.
>
> 2) This cultural capital is in turn transformed into political capital (as much for Quebec as for Canada, who is proud to finally see its flag fly in glory at Cannes).

— The Liberal Party held power in Quebec from 1960 to 1976 (with a Union Nationale government from 1966-1970), when it was replaced by the nationalist Parti Québécois, the present government.

3) The political capital acquired in this way has attracted finance capital.

4) This finance capital has neutralized, either by recuperating, or by discarding it, the political, cultural and human capital acquired thanks to those working in films.[6]

As a quite recent exemple of these symptoms, filmmakers saw in the last World Film Festival yet another affront to their many and repeated demands for support for the Quebec cinema. This festival, organized last August in Montreal, benefitted in a big way from public funds and contributed to reinforcing the "world-wide prestige" policy. "The World Film Festival is simply evidence in 1981, of our age-old state of servitude," François Brault says. "Consciously or not, this festival remains a cultural agent in the service of foreign, and, particularly, American cultures. And the party to which we are invited is ultimately nothing less than a collective burial in the guise of the so-called opening onto the world."[7]

A very lively demonstration was thus organized, to celebrate, in its own manner, the grandiose opening of the festival.

In the name of numerous people from the film community, meeting in front of Place des Arts, Janou St-Denis read a manifesto denouncing the government's cultural policies.

> ...We came in large numbers in 1979 to show our profound disagreement with the World Film Festival. Why, then, have we returned this year? It's not because we want to pay a visit to Gina Lollobrigida. We came, quite simply, to say that the wall of silence which has been erected between we filmmakers and the public is more and more insurmountable. At this great summit of the 7th Art, there will be more and more talk of profitability, of sure deals, of massive consolidation, of block-busters, of new records . . .The hunt for subsidies brought the festival more than $500,000 this year. How can the government throw so much money into a single event lasting ten days, when it does nothing to resolve the on-going problems which have confronted us for so many years?[8]

THE LAST STUDY COMMISSION?

The PQ government decided in January, 1981, to put new funds into research and studies aimed at finding out the needs of people in the field. A commission was set-up to study the cinema and audio-visual fields, consisting of five members "representing neither the industry, nor interest groups or associations, but chosen for their knowledge of the film milieu and their relevant experience."[9] It is to study aid to the cinema with regard to education, excises taxes, funding, the conservation of films, and is to give its opinion on the role of broadcasters, financing, etc. This mandate thus touches on several aspects of cinematic life in Quebec, and it is not surprising that the commission is the central topic of many debates these days, and the object of hope... and skepticism on the part of many filmmakers. The very nomination by the government of the film commissioners failed to create unanimity.

Micheline Lanctôt, then president of the Association des réalisateurs et réalisatrices de films du Québec reacted strongly in the name of its members. "...We deplore the unacceptable procedure by which you have named, and made public, without consideration or prior notice, the names of those who will sit on the film study commission."[10] **Format Cinéma** and its group share this point of view. In their December issue, they reprinted the "comradely address" sent to commissioners in question before Christmas. The gifts accompanying this message included, among other things, a paddle-ball game (the ball always comes back), a bag of popcorn, an old brief, etc.

The commission held its public hearings last autumn. Associations and individuals

presented a variety of highly diverse briefs. The Film Producers Association, the Canadian Institute for Adult Education, the Fédération des femmes du Québec, the union of film professionals from Abitibi-Temiscamingue, independent video co-operatives and distributors were among those represented.

Several interesting proposals emerged from some of the submissions. The text from the Association pour le jeune cinéma, "An Alternative for an Accessible and Popular Cinema," reminded the government of the principles concerning cultural development defended in the White Paper of 1978. Many generous assertions were advanced therein: "Cultural concerns the daily existence of each of us. It is not the privilege of an elite."

> The citizens should have free and easy access to all cultural goods, regardless of geographical, economic and social constraints. . . . He or she should be able to participate, along with his or her fellows, and according to their interests, in every group of which he or she is a part, in the development of a living culture, one which expresses his or her identity, and, at the same time, his or her existential choices.[11]

It is necessary, the association asserted, to move from declarations to action. For its part, the Association des femmes du Québec saw fit to concentrate on the insufficient notice taken of sexploitation programming in theatres. The text dealt particularly with the important fact of pornography and the consequences of government toleration of the "degradation, through pornography, of human and social relations." With many facts as support, the brief condemned the propensity of these films towards "contempt, hatred and violence directed at women."[12]

Associations from outside Montreal insisted on the role of regionalization in the field of culture. Film culture is still centered in Montreal. Many major cities within Quebec receive little service from the government or from film-oriented cultural association (cinematheques, equipment, community, TV, varied programming).

The submissions made to the Film and Audio-visual Study Commission made little mention of the working conditions of those working in these fields. It should be noted that the unemployment situation in the artistic professions in general is becoming more well-known, as are the low income levels of many artists and technicians. Still, this would have been worth going into more concretely. We therefore put the question to François Dupuis.

> Filmmakers talk a lot about money. It's true. They have to deal with the industrial aspects of filmmaking. The budgets allocated in filmmaking have not kept pace with increases in the cost of living, if they have risen at all. In practice, this has affected the working conditions for filmmakers and the budgets allocated to films. The Association des réalisateurs et réalisatrices du Québec is a professional union which has existed since 1972. Many film-makers are free-lance and have no guarantee of work for more than a few months out of the year. This is widespread. In addition, it may be noted that a few costly productions have artificially raised the salaries of people in the profession, but without guaranteeing them a more stable and consistent in-come from one production to another. It's always the technicians who end up absorbing the film's production difficulties and budget cuts. Production co-operatives are attempting to fight the situation. For example, in the Association des productions audio-visuelles (ACPAV). directors are involved in the draw-ing-up of budgets and in any decisions made during production. They're not asked to foot the bill, which is encouraging. Nevertheless, in cash terms, we're still badly paid. In the Association des réalisateurs et réalisatrices, working conditions and pay scales are going to concern us more this year.[13]

It is no accident that, in the bleaker economic situation of the 1970's, and faced with the

low level of hiring by big production houses (NFB, CBC, etc.), many filmmakers opted for forming co-operatives, or small parallel or alternative distribution companies. This helped many Québécois filmmakers and productions to survive. Still, organization does not solve all problems. We discussed this with Louis Dussault, vice-president of the Association Vidéo et Cinéma du Québec, and himself an employee of a distribution company, Les Films du Crépuscule, Inc.

> To begin with, it should be noted that AVEC is itself a group of non-profit bodies and co-operatives working in distribution, production, marketing, broadcasting, preservation, education, information and co-ordination with respect to film and video which is itself concerned with art, research, and intervention within Quebec. It has been in operation for more than a year and already has brought together 14 groups and co-operatives. It's a sort of protective railing around cultural filmmaking, occupied for the most part with small budget, 16 mm documentaries. Under difficult conditions, we have made films like **Plusieurs tombent en amour** and **La cuisine rouge.** We believe that it is precisely this kind of cinema which the Institut du cinéma québécois tends to stifle. Companies like Les productions Mutuelles walk off with all the large subsidies. Astral-Bellevue-Pathé and people like Greenberg who throw Hollywood-style parties at Regine's, and companies like Télé-Métropole or Sonolab put enormous pressure on the government and are listened to. They stand for the notion of economic profitability. For them, there is no question of establishing a cultural infrastructure for cultural advancement or cultural "profitability."

These large producers wind up filming directly in English more and more, depending on the policies of the Quebec and Federal governments, which are not all that different when it comes to filmmaking.

The Parti Québécois has stopped talking about a popular culture, and instead extols the virtues of the established culture. This was made all the more clear by the latest five-year plan for the Institut du cinéma québécois. They are not out to encourage more than one type of film. There are **Les Plouffe,** and then the type of films which we are making. For them, the choice is a clear one; it's **Les Plouffe,** and no money is left for the others. We're limited to making half-hour films, which poses enormous problems in terms of scripts — developing a story, for example, or a problem, characters, etc. Later, our films are reproached for not being sufficiently polished. In AVEC, we are not saying that the Institute should turn down films like **Les Plouffe,** but they should not bebarriers to the existence of a more culturally-based cinema . . . The question of the public must also be dealt with. Why don't young people today go to see Québécois films? There is no encouragement by the government in this direction. It's a major acculturation phenomena whereby disco has replaced a national and popular culture. Still, there should be a place for a Québécois cinema whose ambitions are cultural and not simply financial. The majority of films made here are films which are often very close to reality. Despite this, it is the minority of investment-oriented films which are widely distributed and therefore accessible.

> ...We wanted to react to this situation and began to organize public action to make people aware of it. In June, 1981, we organized a party on the corner of St-Denis and de Maisonneuve in central Montreal. A rally, and the distribution of a pamphlet describing the state of Quebec cinema took place simultaneously.
>
> We showed **Speak White,** the film by Pierre Falardeau and Julien Poulin. As a result, four of our colleagues were arrested for having 'disturbed the peace.' Last August, during the international festival, we expressed our disapproval. Something has to happen, since many of the groups which we represent find themselves in difficulty. We are suffering the results of the Institute's policies,

which risk threatening the survival of a very necessary part of the Québécois cinema.[14]

THE SOLUTIONS CONSIDERED

For the Association du jeune cinéma, the democratization of the Quebec cinema will come with the establishment of an infrastructure of Super-8 Films. For AVEC, this democratization requires above all a recognition of the double reality of industrial and cultural filmmaking. In this regard, AVEC insists that the Institut du cinéma québécois stimulate, in real terms, the production of documentary, experimental, and animated shorts and features. François Dupuis, speaking for the Association des réalisateurs et réalisatrices, says they have yet to come up with definitive solutions. Some have put forward the idea of a national ticket office to finance the Quebec cinema; certain members have even proposed the nationalization of Quebec film theatres, others, the disappearance of the National Film Board from Quebec. In its recommendations to the film study commission, the Association called for supportive involvement by the Quebec government, through the Institute and subsidization, on the one hand, and through enlargement of the current commission's mandate and budget, on the other.

Many filmmakers have spoken out on a personal basis in favour of the development of pay television in Quebec, as a means, in their eyes, of reviving the film industry. They also hope that cable companies will invest seriously in film production in Quebec so as to increase the Canadian content of their programming. Subscriber-based television has already been the object of major lobbying of the CRTC, which deals with the granting of licenses and with Federal policies in the field of cable. This market isalready monopolized and in the hands of large Canadian and American investors.[15]

Finally, though this does not relate directly to the current state of Quebec cinema, but, rather, to a larger overview, some former filmmakers have now chosen (?) to work in video. They have found in the medium a tool which is not only less expensive, but which allows for a greater freedom of expression. Hence, the video **engagé** of Pierre Falardeau and Julien Poulin, and productions by Vidéo-Femmes, Groupe D'Intervention Vidéo, etc.

UNDERSTANDING SO AS TO ORGANIZE

This rapid overview of the different solutions proposed for resolving problems testifies to the diversity of the interests involved in this field, and also to the different ways in which the same problems are understood.

For example, two themes are frequently adopted by filmmakers as points of reference, but in different senses. In many texts, a **democratization** of Québécois cinema is the issue, as are notions of a **national cinema** or a **popular cinema,** linked to state involvement.

For many filmmakers, often associated with parallel distribution circuits, the terms **national cinema** and **popular cinema** are equivalent; a cinema with cultural concerns is likewise spoken of in similar terms. This sense would also apply to films of an "artistic, expressive, investigatory or interventionary nature (which does not preclude profitability)."[16]

Films made in this manner often favour a semi-documentary, semi-fictional form, and deal with youth, the environment, the modern couple, and social and cultural milieus. Many of them thus testify to the discontent of people confronting the current social situation. This cinema is less well-known to the public, since it does not always meet the marketing criteria of the major cinemas or television programmers. In addition, many of these films, through their refusal to dramatize, their lack of mechanisms for identification with leading characters, and their quest for a more modern cinematic

language, demand from the viewer a very different attitude while viewing them.

Other filmmakers and critics tend more to defend the notion of a national cinema for Quebec. By this they refer more to fiction features, and occasionally documentaries, in which characters are highly individualized and at the center of the story. On the narrative level, these films often function like the traditional cinema, with a chronological story-line and regular action to hold attention; psychology is important in these cases. The favoured subjects are usually the tightly-structured journeys or social transformations of characters **(Kamouraska, Cordélia, Les Plouffe)** or the films of Pierre Perrault, **(La mort d'un bûcheron, Pour quelques arpents de neige,** etc.) who represents in part, in the most successful of these, the collective national destiny.

The concept of a national cinema is a loose one which changes with time. While, in the early 1960's, the Québécois national cinema presented examples of national oppression, it had become more radical by the end of that decade. Many films seek, not only to take note of this oppression, but also to clearly take a stand against it. This may be said of the so called national cinema of the 1970's. In these films, the nation is largely a background, a geographical space in which the Québécois evolve; nostalgia becomes in many cases the trademarkof our view of our country, so that Quebec is seen in terms of the past more often that those of the present.

The distinctions and choices dealt with at such length here are rarely debated or questioned within the film profession. Nevertheless, the justification and taking of sides demand substantial discussion. Otherwise, those involved in very different sorts of filmmaking risk never arriving at common positions or demands. This also results in demagogic, rather than constructive, judgements as to the strengths and weaknesses of different tendencies. For example, in the brief submitted by the Association professionnelle du cinéma du Québec, we find these words on a national cinema as opposed to a different sort:

> Let us abandon our folkloric frame of mind and those overly-sociological documentaries. Let us give the Québécois the films they want to see, and the distasteful problem of quotas will disappear of its own accord. The cinema is a **cultural industry,** but the cultural aspect should not supersede the industrial aspect.[17]

Without taking up each of these assumptions, it may be asked whether films by Denys Arcand, such as **Réjanne Padovani** or **Duplessis et après,** Michel Brault's **Les Ordres,** and other films like **Le grand remue-ménage, C'est pas le pays des merveilles** would not fall into the category of those films which we should not encourage because they "are overly-sociological." And does not the very assertion that we should "give the Québécois the films they want to see" lead us to favor such well-known "commercial successes" as **Les deux femmes en or** or even **Un enfant comme les autres** much more than a **Mourirà tue-tête** or **Une histoire de femmes,** which are so "full of sociological presuppositions."

The second aspect of this polemic concerns the claims made centering on the democratization of Québécois cinema. Much is said of the importance given to expanding the commercial distribution of Québécois films, of the right of Québécois to see these films. The right of filmmakers, of any tendency or aesthetic inclination, to express themselves, is likewise defended by many filmmakers. Nevertheless, the texts by individuals and associations limit the question of the democratization of the cinema to aspects of distribution and questions related to equipment. This leaves aside many aspects of the issue: in effect, how can one talk about a democratization of the Québécois cinema without taking up the questions of teaching, training, refresher courses, or research? There is also a danger in dealing only with those aspects of the problem related to distribution, screenings, programming and quotas without investigating **as well** the film-going habits of the Québécois viewer and his or her real

prejudices against Québécois cinema, or against any cinema different from that of Hollywood.

This of necessity should lead us to determine our own roles as moderators, teachers, cinephiles or as simple citizens in relation to the current situation. Responsibility for the situation does not fall on our heads, but this in itself may be improved.

To talk about democratization should also lead us to question our attitude towards what we take to be the role of the state. Should one, as many are suggesting these days, demand greater subsidies without questioning the overall cultural policies of governments in office, and the elitist conceptions thereof?

> ...International organizations, such as governments and social groups, have always systematically refused to consider the **right to culture as meaning,** on the one hand, the right to practice one's own culture, and, on the other, the right to accept or to refuse official culture. In short, it is the right to cultural choice.[18]

Can one demand all this without organizing widespread popular support?

All questions related to the content of films should be part of this debate as well; the links to be established between filmmakers and the Québécois population, or between history and cinema should be discussed. All of this requires more than just structural and financial solutions.

Finally, shouldn't all these alternatives and important issues currently being debated lead most of those involved to pose the problem in greater depth, and, above all, to ask the question: **What kind of cinema do we want to be involved in?**

Those at the heart of the development of a popular cinema in Quebec are already asking themselves this question:

> Given the necessity of working towards overthrowing the dominant culture in order to establish a true popular culture, what kind of cinema are we building here? In what form will it be adequate to the overall collectivity? . . . We have thought — too easily, perhaps — that the importance, or social and historical necessity of our work, went without saying . . . I think it is time to redefine the ways in which we analyse our own work, or risk losing it in the near future.[19]

Rather than seeing things in the simple terms of good spectators and bad directors, or, conversely, in terms of good Québécois directors confronted by audiences who seek to understand nothing, we should regroup the collective energy necessary for a genuine debate of all these questions. In this respect, a General Estates of Quebec Cinema a few months from now might be worthwhile — a carefully prepared General Estates which is open to mass or union organizations, students, skeptical or optimistic individuals, and, basically, everyone who is fed up with the present situation.

I certainly think so, anyway.

Louise Carrière, January 1982

Translated and edited by
Will Straw and Alison Beale

FOOTNOTES TO PART TWO

1. *Copie Zéro,* no. 11, journal of the Cinématheque québécoise, proceedings of the Canadian Film Studies Association colloquium dealing with Québécois cinema. October 1981, p. 5.
2. *Le cinéma au Québec, Bilan d'une industrie,* 1975, p. 16.
3. Interview with L.C., November 1981
4. Ibid., no. 3.
5. Ibid., no. 2, p. 21.
6. Brief submitted to the Film and Audio-Visual Study Commission by the Association des Réalisateurs et Réalisatrices de Films du Québec, November 30, 1981, p. 2.
7. François Brault, Cinéaste, in *La Presse,* September 8, 1981, p. A7, (It's not clear whether "François Brault, Cinéaste" is the name of the article, or whether it's an article by Brault, "Cinéaste.")
8. Test supporting the "solitaires-solidaires" demonstration against the World Film Festival of 1981, A *l'ombre des soleils immobiles,* and signed "Des cinéastes en colères," August 20, 1981.
9. Mandate of the Quebec Government Film and Audio-visual Study Commission, 10-page text.
10. "M. Vaugeois et les cinéastes," Tribune Libre, *La Presse,* February 25, 1981, p. A7.
11. Brief, November 1981, pp. 2-3.
12. Textes from the colloquium on *Volonté politique et pornographie,* May 25, 1981, presented to the Commission.
13. Ibid., no. 3.
14. Interview by Réal Larochelle and L.C. in October 1981.
15. Articles by Michel Nadeau on "La télévision payante," in *Le Devoir,* September 22, 23 and 24, 1981.
16. Brief from AVEC, November 23, 1981, p. 4.
17. Brief from the Association des Professionels du Cinéma du Québec, December 3, 1981, p. 6.
18. Hagues de Varine, *La culture des autres,* Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1976, p. 16.
19. Jean Chabot, *Format-Cinéma,* no. 9, L'Aventure québécoise, 2. "Je pose la question préalable," December 15, 1981.

GLOSSARY

(This glossary explains most but not all of the names and abbreviations in Louise Carrière's article. See also her notes.)

A.C.P.A.V.
Association cooperative des productions audiovisuelles. This is the oldest and most successful production co-op in Quebec, dating from 1971. See their tenth anniversary issue of **Copie Zéro** (No. 8, 1981).

Conseil Québécois pour la diffusion du Cinéma
Created in 1969 following the 1968 Congrès du cinéma québécois, it was the agent for setting up the Cinémathèque québécois and other projects for encouraging and documenting film-festivals, publications, policy proposals etc. until itsclosing in early 1977.

Arts Council
Canada Council for the Arts. The federal government body that funds projects and final training in all the arts, as well as museums, publications, etc.

C.F.D.C.
Canadian Film Development Corporation. A semi-independent public corporation set up by the federal governmentmostly to encourage big productions through tax deals, co-production agreements, and subsidy. It has no direct involvement in distribution.

Institut Québécois du Cinéma
Set up in Quebec after the election of the P.Q. in 1976. See text, part two, for details.

A.P.C.
Association des professionelles du Cinéma. Founded in 1976, after a technicians strike, it replaces the earlier Association professionelle des cinéastes du Québec

(1968) and the original Association professionelle des cinéastes (1963). See A.R.F.Q.

Crépuscule
A production and distribution co-op for socially committed film from Quebec and elsewhere, established in 1978.

Format Cinéma
A Montreal newsletter and agit-prop in the cinema community, operating with a low budget, set up in 1980.

Les Plouffe
The best known family in Quebec. Transformed from Lemelin's novels about working class Quebec city in the 40's to television in the fifties, and re-translated into film (3 versions — English, Québécois and international), and television (English and French) in 1979.

Roger Lemelin
Writer, scenariste, producer, newspaper editor, he has presided over the mediatization of popular culture in Quebec since the fifties. Pro-federalist, eminence grise, and power broker in the Quebec media mafia.

A.R.F.Q.
Association des réalisateurs et réalisatrices de film du Québec. A militant association of film directors, established in 1973, its creation reflects the split in the A.P.C.Q. between directors and other film workers in 1973.

Bureau de surveillance
The censorship office of the government of Quebec.

GATT
General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, this is the legislation, periodically amended, which regulates trade between Canada and the U.S.

Film and Audio-visual Study Commission
Set up by the Quebecgovernment to develop policy in this area, it has received briefs from many of the groups mentioned in this article and is due to report in June of this year (1982).

A.V.E.C.
Association Video et Cinéma. An umbrella lobby group for the smaller and more socially committed producers and distributors, set up in 1980.

Association pour le jeune cinéma
The main activity of this group has been to support student filmmaking, especially in super-8, through an annual international festival held in Montreal.

PHOTOS: CLAUDE MAHEUX (COLLECTION, LA CINEMATHEQUE QUÉBECOISE)

THE RHETORIC OF META COMMENTARY: ANOTHER LOOK AT

LES VOITURES D'EAU BY PIERRE PERRAULT (PHOTO:NFB)

THE EARLIER FILMS AND WRITINGS OF PIERRE PERRAULT

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The ensuing article grows out of a study published four years ago in **Ciné-Tracts,** in which I argued that adistinctive identity could be accorded to many of the documentary films produced by the French Unit at the National Film Board in the period of the late fifties and early sixties.[1] This identity, which set them apart from other forms of "uncontrolled documentary" of the time, such as American C-V or the "Candid-Eye" films of Unit B at the N.F.B., could be located in their "formalizing tendency," their "reflexive tendency" and their "expression of solidarity with a public about whom and for whom many of these films were made" (p. 60). I suggested that this rhetorical identity stood in continuity with the "cinéma de la fidélité" of such peripatetic, amateur filmmakers of an earlier generation as the Abbés Proulx and Tessier; but that this latter tradition was broken by the French Unit's preoccupation with the ethnography of modern urban rituals and by their apparent endorsement thereby of the goals and ideology of the Quiet Revolution. I had finally suggested that the extension of the rhetorical tradition enunciated above might be sought most profitably in the works of Pierre Perrault.

The most thought-provoking analysis of Perrault's first five feature films was written by Michel Brûlé.[2] As a sociologist of cinema, Brûlé deployed the critical apparatus developed by Lucien and Annie Goldmann in their writings on literature and cinema.[3] Genetic structuralism, as Brûlé uses it, serves to bring into focus the homology of emerging global structures in cultural constructs such as a body of novels or films on the one hand and the encompassing socio-economic tensions of the historic moment on the other. The argument traced through Perrault's films develops into a global statement which embodies the ideology of a liberal, nationalist movement:

> "La vision qu'on nous donne du Québec dans ces films correspond assez bien à celle développée par Jacques Dofny et Marcel Rioux avec leurs concepts de "classes ethniques" et de "conscience ethnique." En effet, dans tous les films de Perrault, le Québec est traité comme une entité homogène, comme un groupe dont les membres partagent les mêmes intérêts fondamentaux et poursuivent les mêmes buts. Certes, Perrault présente des conflits entre générations, des différences d'attitudes devant la vie selon qu'on est patriarche comme Alexis, dans la force de l'âge comme Laurent ou dans des années d'apprentissage comme Michel, mais tous savent se reconnaître une certaine parenté de pensée quantà la nécessité de sauver le fait français et de lutter contre tout ce qui pourrait le menacer.
>
> Il y a une concordance certaine entre ce qui nous est montré et l'évolution d'une certaine partie du Québec; une certaine partie seulement, soit la petite bourgeoisie regroupée autour du Parti québécois et de certains éléments de l'Union Nationale." (p. 143)

The theoretical underpinning of such an analysis rests upon the positing of the filmed oeuvre of Perrault and the broader historical, social context as materially objective entities whose interdependence engenders the homology revealed by structural analysis. An analysis drawing upon post-structuralist and hermeneutic categories engages texts in a different fashion. The processes of formation and the spectator's implication in those processes are no longer clearly distinguishable. Hermeneutic criticism directs attention to the problematic relationship between reader/spectator and text, and may seek interpretative strategies within the text itself, within what traces may subsist of authorial processes of construction or within the cultural context which controls the reader/spectator's capacity for interpretation. Post-structuralist criticism equally denies the autonomy of the text and the possibility of constructing a unitary whole from the processes of interpretation.[4]

In what follows, I attempt to rehearse the formalizing and reflexive tendencies in Perrault's early and middle works, and to show how the rhetoric of sincerity central to the **cinéma-direct** movement in Quebec inevitably fails in any attempt to implicate the spectator into a continuing process of cultural transmission. Not only will a number of Perrault's film and written[5] works be considered, but most importantly as a starting point the three filmscripts which demonstrate clearly Perrault's development of a new kind of "found poetry."[6]

In most cases, published filmscripts, perform a mnemonic or referential function for scholars or any interested public. In some rare cases, the filmscript will include valuable prefatorial material to help reader/spectator adopt an appropriate "reading" strategy or strategies.[7] Otherwise, published filmscripts either display a thesaurus of notation devices whose goal is to provide a conventional transcript, or else they are adapted to conceal or mute their derivation from a filmic artefact, representing the diegesis by means of codes usually associated with the novel. The latter two kinds of filmscript have little hermeneutic status within the filmmaker's oeuvre. Perrault's filmscripts are, however, different. Not only do they provide a conventional transcript of the finished films, they also constitute the traces of a developing tendency to provide a controlled reading of each film. More and more, specific segments are highlighted or

privileged in different ways suggesting a hierarchy of responses to the text, while never allowing the derivative nature of the printed text to be forgotten.

In **Le règne du jour** script, the traditional shooting script format is observed, with two columns. The right hand column holds the dialogues (with some description of the tone or delivery), while the left hand column carries the description of the visual image. Clear typographic conventions are observed: the visual images are described in upper-case Roman, for example. To distinguish the dialogues on the Ile-aux-Couldres from those on the trip to France (they are often intercut), the former are transcribed in lower-case Roman, the latter in lower-case Italic. The songs sung by characters (and the song composed by Perrault for the film) are privileged by being written out in verse-form in upper-case Italic. In some of the dialogues, rhythms are indicated from time to time by the use of dots to break up the flow.

In the **Voitures d'eau** script, the two-column format has been abandoned, and instead visual shot-descriptions (in upper-case script) are interspersed with dialogue from the sound-track (in lower-case script). In the latter, the choice of typeface no longer serves to distinguish the loci of action. Instead, Roman and Italic script are used to distinguish ordinary dialogue from that which is privileged as "found poetry" by the filmmaker. In this way, dialogue contained within the film is raised to poetic status by the choice of script, the lay-out into various shapes and stanzas, the rejection of capital letters at sentence heads and the use of an introductory title (usually containing the words **petit poème sur...).** There are 29 such interventions in all in the script.

With the **Un pays sans bon sens** script, the range of typographic conventions has been further extended. In addition to the conventions used in **Voitures d'eau,** three shades of paper, are used (white for the film description, black for the page of notes accompanying and introducing the segment-title which appears in the film, and grey for Perrault's often extensive reflections about certain images either shown or spoken of in the film-sequence preceding). Different sizes of type are used, and heavy type is used for quoted keywords in the reflective notes. Privileged spoken parts of the film text are still clearly distinguished, and include not only historical extracts from Cartier's **Relations** and the words of the poet Alfred Desrochers, but also the definitive speech of the geneticist Didier Dufour on **les souris canadiennes-françaises-catholiques,** Grand-Louis' reminiscences about his schooling and a collective (i.e. intercut) poem for five voices on **le terrible temps de la misère.**

As we read through these three filmscripts, we find two tendencies growing side by side: the desire to privilege certain speeches, oral interventions and anecdotes by the characters of L'Ile-aux-Couldres or elsewhere caught in their natural surroundings; and the desire to catch these raw poems (which he calls **chouennes** or **parlêmes** in the preface to a collection of his own poetry)[8] up into a reflection upon the rich untutored cultural heritage of his **pays.** The former ambition reaches its apogee with the appearance of **Discours sur la condition sauvage et québécoise** in 1977, a collection of the "found poetry" assembled and collated by Perrault over many years of taping and filming.

Just as the filmscripts were abundantly illustrated with frame enlargements from the films, so too is this anthology illustrated with stills. The traces of a living oral culture are accompanied by the traces of living faces.

> "j'ai dressé un inventaire de la parole, cette littérature des pauvres . . . Mais la parole a aussi un visage. Et ce visage il est cinématographique. II est aussi parfois photogénique . . . C'est un simple album de famille. Le temps et la distance changeront peut-être ces souvenirs en mémoire, ces balises en poésie."[9]

The Romantic aspiration to see the simple, specific and rough-cut utterances of one

place and time mellow over the years into the cultural heritage of a new collective **(ces souvenirs en mémoire)** and acquire the privileged authority of poetic discourse **(ces balises en poésie)** is clearly articulated in this appeal to an unsophisticated, authentic past.

Having thus documented the rise to prominence of the "found poem" in Perrault's hermeneutic guides to his films, we should now examine the meanings accorded to this appropriated literature. In our readings of Perrault (in print or in film), we discover the importance accorded to popular/folk culture (vs. "high" culture), the continuity of this culture across other codes (in addition to verbal ones) and the submersion of individual enactments in the commemorative culture of a people.

Perrault's earliest poems already give voice to the privilege accorded to autochonous utterances of an untutored people:

> "nous avons vécu le meilleur
> entre les mains de ceux-là
> de ceux qui ne savaient
> ni la lettre ni le chant
> .....
> nous avons vécu le plus haut
> entre les doigts qui ne savaient
> ni lire ni écrire" ("Naguère")[10]

The culture which must be rejected is the imported, institutionalized one, embodied in a past colonial heritage:

> "ceux qui ont appris à vivre en lisant **Le Cid** de Corneille ... refusent de se connaître"
> **(Un Pays sans bon sens** — script — p. 184)

or the ossified language fixed and conserved in institutional records and dictionaries:

> "Je ressens parfois l'étrange désir de tuer dans l'oeuf tous les mots qui n'ont d'autre but que celui d'exprimer. Tous les mots qu'on emprunte aux lexiques et qu'on n'a jamais parcouru ... ni fréquenté ... ni même rencontré dans une géographie des découvrances."
> ("Témoignages" in **La Poésie canadienne-française,** Montreal/Paris. Fides, 1969, p. 558)

> "le langage en dit plus long sur l'homme québécois que l'histoire et la littérature et les registres ... et les annuaires ..."
> **(Un Pays sans bon sens** — script — p. 42)

> "et s'il advenait que toutes archives de l'âme soient le fait des mémoires négligées de littérature comme un fleuve et tout le langage à sa source vous ne me ferez pas renier le moindre mot de la bouche des misères qu'ils ont vécues sans l'assistance des dictionnaires opulents"
> **(Gélivures,** L'Hexagone, Montreal, 1977, p. 191)

In the films, Perrault focusses our attention upon those who best embody this tradition: the Tremblay family and Grand Louis in the setting of the Ile aux Couldres, Hauris Lalancette in the Abitibi films. But the opportunity to establish the contrast between the homegrown culture with other more sophisticated cultures is enhanced cinematographically when it occurs.

In **Le règne du jour,** the exoticism of the hunting aristocracy is underlined by showing us shots of the hunt while the soundtrack carries Léopold's account to the folk of

l'Ile-aux-Couldres, in which he emphasizes the distance which separates him from this aristocracy. In **Un Pays sans bon sens,** one sequence intercuts the garrulous Grand-Louis in his outdoor working clothes seen against a background of small trees and bare river with the articulate young Franco-Albertan professor seen in his Paris apartment, and where an artful rack-focus shot draws our attention progressively from the name Vermeer on the wall-poster to the elegant tableware adorning the foreground. The subject of discussion, the relative merits of different kinds of education, is explored orally by the characters, visually by the camera, and syntagmatically by the use of intercutting. Again, in the same film, the sequence of shots of the Maillol nudes in the Tuileries, which accompanies the young professor's rapturous discourse on the sensuality of the Parisian environment, includes in the frame a Parisian streetworker apparently unimpressed in his lot with such images of ideal beauty. High culture again is juxtaposed with an image of alienated poverty, which, as the Tremblays, Grand Louis or André Lepage demonstrate elsewhere in the film, is capable of generating its own culture.

The complexity of the oral culture which Perrault foregrounds in his work not only stands in vivid contrast to the mummified rituals, artefacts and writings of an exotic elite. It actively resists adequate representation in written codes:

> "Un vrai discours ne s'écrit pas. L'intonation et la tissure même de la voix, l'odeur du souffle, la dent noircie, la rondeur du palais, la conviction, tout s'évanouit: il ne reste qu'un squelette."
> ("Discours sur la Parole", **Culture Vivante,** I (1966), 19-36)

> "le mot n'est pas le signe du langage parlé mais seulement son support grossier. C'est l'intonation, le ton, le débit, l'homme parlant qui donne un sens aux mots. Je ne réponds pas du langage. Je ne le défends pas non plus."
> **(Un Pays sans bon sens** — script — p. 41)

But expression in a culture whose written transmission has in any event been expropriated by a distant elite is not only limited to verbal codes. Poetic celebration may be discerned in the agility of gesture or the graceful manual dexterity of the craftsman or the corporeal rhythms of the dance:

> "Geste incalculable dans l'alchimie du poème, réunissant les adresses du félin, la grâce du discobole et les mystères des prérogatives aux imaginations pures ..."
> **(Toutes Isles,** Montreal/Paris, Fides, 1963, p. 192, describing children catching eels)

> "un canot bien fait, en forme de poème"
> **(Toutes Isles,** p. 197)

> "Le tambour est récit, le tambour est acte, et sans le tambour intérieur la marche insoutenable se briserait aussi bien qu'une danse sans tambour ... Et la danse aussi intraduisible que le langage préserve et démontre le mystère."
> **(Toutes Isles,** p. 227)

Although Perrault clearly delineates the autonomy of cultural codes, insisting upon the futility of attempts at translation or "transcodage," at the same time Perrault denies a hierarchy of verbal and non-verbal codes, according to gestural and verbal enactments of cultural events equal value, to the extent that the one merges into the other as communal celebration:

> "La pêche aux marsouins est aussi une aventure du langage."
> (Interview, **Cinéma Québec,** I, 1 (May 1971) p. 27)

"Car la chasse devient exploit du langage. Et enfin le langage lui-même devient l'exploit."

(Un Pays sans bon sens — script — p. 42)

Returning now to the film works, we are now armed with the injunction to accord equal value to both the recounting of exploits and the exploits themselves. In **Pour la Suite du Monde,** the most compelling visual sequence of the island fisherman planting the sapling poles into the river for the beluga-trap is accompanied by the voice of Alexis Tremblay describing the traditional stages of the hunt. The relationship between voice-off and image is not the traditional didactic, explanatory one. It shows two levels of enactment of a cultural heritage: its physical enactment and its mediated oral enactment. The same is true of the **fête du cochon** sequence in **Le règne du jour.** Here, a traditional pig-killing in the Ile-aux-Couldres is intercut with a similar traditional ceremony in Bupertré, France, which the Tremblays are visiting. The sound track carries Léopold Tremblay's voice at one point describing, but not accurately, the process to his friends on returning to Ile-aux-Couldres. The specific differences between the two communities may indeed be important in the context of Perrault's insistence on the specificity of cultures to territories. However, the importance of the differences between the enactment of the ritual and Léopold's account of it does not lie in any inference that the explanatory value of the account is undermined. What is important is that Léopold, in recounting the story in a way which mutes the differences, is responding to imperatives of his own cultural tradition, and that while the deep structural meanings of the rituals may be similar, there is a same need for them to be expressed through a variety of codes (gestural, oral) and that changes inevitably emerge in the surface structure.

Nowhere is the filmmaker's desire to demonstrate this clearer than in the famous "louse story" **(histoire du pou)** recounted by Grand-Louis in **Un Pays sans bon sens.** Twice over a period of two years, Perrault had occasion to film the village raconteur, Louis Harvey, telling a story from the old days of the workcamps. He has intercut the two "performances" of the story, clearly differentiated by the age of Louis' hat and the background. Once again, the focus shifts from the narrative of the story to the subtle changes in its telling from one enactment to another.

Again, in **Le Retour a la terre,** accounts of the opening up of the Abitibi region as told to the filmmakers are juxtaposed with the films of Maurice Proulx shot at the time. If on one level there is an ironic distance opened up by the differences between the promises of the thirties (mediated through oral and filmed accounts) and the evidence of their collapse, at the same time there is a consonance between the two mediations of the collective experience in the past which are accorded equal value in the cultural memory.

This reference to communal memory brings us to the consideration of the process whereby Perrault projects individual utterances (oral performances, gestural re-enactments, etc.) into the collective celebration of cultural identity. The privileged individuals, such as Alexis Tremblay, Louis Harvey, Didier Dufour, Hauris Lalancette, Cyrille Labrecque, Camille Morin, are not to be taken as artistic exemplars. They are not to be taken as individual poets celebrating the freedom of autonomous imaginations. Rather they are shown embedded within a social and historical context by the filmmaker, and thereby serve to embody the continuity of cultural experience and aspirations which define **un pays** in human terms. Perrault makes frequent reference to the collective memory of **un pays** and the commemorative value of cultural re-enactments:

"Car la danse n'est qu'une façon de mettre au présent les exploits passés, les chasses à venir . . . et toutes paroles du tambour s'insinuent dans cette mémoire immense, comme l'acte même fomenté à l'avance et à jamais dans cette messe du caribou-dieu."

(Toutes Isles, p. 229)

"La mémoire est une faculté vivante. Le langage est une oeuvre de mémoire. Un pays trouve aussi, dans la mémoire épargnée, son inspiration."
(Interview in Pierre Perrault, **Cinéastes du Québec 5,** 2nd edition, Montreal, Conseil québécois pour la diffusion du cinéma, September 1970, p. 23)

"Il est incontestable que les pays prennent naissance dans la mémoire et que la mémoire ne manque pas d'imagination."
("Discours sur la Parole" in **Culture Vivante** 1 (1966) pp. 19-36)

Such references call to mind what Eugene Vance has called "commemorative" discourse in reference to the medieval culture which bodied itself in orally recited epic poetry, and in particular the **Chanson de Roland:**

"By 'commemoration' I mean any gesture, ritualized or not, is to recover, in the name of a collectivity, some being or event either anterior in time or outside of time in order to fecundate, animate, or make meaningful a moment in the present."[11]

Perrault himself invokes this medieval commemorative culture on more than one occasion:

"La pêche aux marsouins est aussi une aventure du langage. À la manière de la chanson de Roland. Le poète de cette chanson de geste écrivait pour la suite du monde."
(Interview, **Cinéma Québec,** I, 1 (May 1971) p. 27)

and in writing about the sequence of reminiscences about the years of grinding poverty ("le temps de la misère") in **Un Pays sans bon sens:**

"C'était là leur poème, leur chanson de geste, une sorte de tableau "ti-pop" de la misère des chantiers."
(Un Pays sans bon sens — script — p. 184)

Throughout this process of the selection and foregrounding of certain popular utterances as living poetry (distinct from the fossilized official culture), multiply encoded (in speech and gesture) and illustrative of the processes of commemoration, we must be aware of the profound irony implicit in the project. "Found poetry" can be described as natural discourse appropriated, de-contextualized and presented as fictive discourse:

"Any verbal structure — ... — can be isolated from its original context and presented in such a way (lineated, for example, or read aloud in a studied manner) as to suggest poetry and to invite our response to it as such, that is, as a verbal artwork, the representation of a natural utterance in an implicit dramatic context, designed to invite and gratify the drawing of interpretative inferences."[12]

To be sure the distinction between natural discourse and fictive discourse is not necessarily clear when we consider the original status of the speech acts appropriated into the fictive discourse of the films. Some of the accounts (Grand Louis' "histoire du pou," for example) recorded and edited into Perrault's films have already acquired the status of fictive discourse in the community in which they are told. Again, BarbaraSmith has incisively described the process:

"...the family anecdote becomes a tale, a fictive 'telling,' relished now as much for its structure, rhythms, predictable details, and bits of quaint dialogue as it was initially, perhaps, for the amusing image of a once-young parent in a sorry

> predicament. An episode of domestic history has acquired the status of family lore somewhat as in a nonliterate community, a fragment of presumably true national history becomes part of a natural utterance in a context of **reportage;** but, in becoming a 'tale,' its identity and interest become independent of that context. The factuality of the subject does not compromise the fictiveness of the tale, for it is not the events told that are fictive but the **telling** of them. That telling is set apart from reports of past events and from such allusions to them as may occur in natural discourse."[13]

The transformation of natural discourse into fictive discourse is one of the important processes in Perrault's films, either presenting us with a mediated demonstration of the process already complete within its community context or conducting the transformation themselves by the act of appropriation of discourse in its natural phase. The acknowledgement of such a transformation does not fully account for the nature of this "found poetry." To expand further upon this understanding, we can turn to hermeneutic criticism for its insights into the nature of poetic discourse as distinct from "ordinary" texts. For Gadamer, the essential difference does not lie in the sense of formal beauty or the different structure of writing, characteristic of poetic utterances.

> "According to the hermeneutic account . . . what is said is as important as how it is said, and the essential difference between the two sorts of texts lies in the truth**-expectations** (Wahrheitsanspruch) of the texts."[14]

The difference is one of degree, related to the greater clarity and specificity accorded by the reader to the ordinary text and the greater opacity and generality accorded by the reader to the poetic text. Poetic discourse affirms its presence to the reader by standing as tradition, tradition working itself out in the present, within the reader or audience.

Perrault's project then consists in capturing both pre-existing cultural events and discourse and in converting other incidents and moments of natural discourse into poetic discourse in order to proclaim the continuation of cultural tradition through the mediations of his own films.

To complete the critical analysis of Perrault's cultural project, it is important to consider the processes of mediation as they are described by him or as they are revealed to us in his films.

There are three stages of mediation in evidence in the making of a Perrault film. There are the raw pro-filmic events whose enactments (physical or verbal) constitute the extrinsic mediation. It is extrinsic to the filmic process as such although the presence of the filmmakers may have served as a catalyst for the enactment. At a second stage, accompanying the enactment is the use made of the camera, which may try to isolate the act or speaker from an environment or may look critically or ironically at that environment, using pans, zooms or rack-focus to draw our attention to specific details at particular moments. At a third stage, is the editing, whose principal interest may consist in the sequence of scenes which follows a certain logical argument transcending the internal logic of the accounts within each scene; or it may consist in careful intercutting of two scenes whose similarities and differences can best be seen by moving back and forth between them; or it may lie in the combination of one scene (reduced to soundtrack) with another (reduced to visual images), in other words, asynchronous sound-image editing.

What is uncontrolled then is the pro-filmic event. It constitutes the manifestation of some effort to plunge into the collective memory of a community. These may be local customs like the beluga hunt in **Pour la suite du monde,** the pig-killing in **Le règne du jour,** the boat-building in **Voitures d'eau,** the various activities associated with clearing the land in the Abitibi series. These may be more deliberate excursions in search of a collective past, such as the journeys to France in **Le règne du jour, Un pays sans**

bon sens or **C'était un Québécois en Bretagne, Madame!** The characters may be recalling an historic past as documented: Alexis Tremblay with **Le Brief récit** of Jacques Cartier, or the inhabitants of the Abitibi who can refer to Maurice Proulx's films celebrating the growth of their region. But whatever the activity, physical ritual or oral account, its projection into the world of the film is clearly marked as an attempt to define the identity of a collective, whose demands, grievances and aspirations spring from a common memory.

Interestingly enough, Perrault describes the shooting of the film as a process of memory, the storage of the evidence of a collective memory expressing itself:

"On peut définir le tournage comme une mémoire..." etc.[15] It is not however passive reception. The role of the cameraman (or **caméramage** as Perrault calls him[16]) is a questing one, seeking out the visual correlatives, the visual details which will complement or throw into relief the primary subject. The finest examples of such a questing camera may be found in **Un pays sans bon sens.** The frame showing the arrival of migrating geese, which is accompanied by the reflection of the Dufours on the homing instinct and the sense of territory, also shows the looming hulk of the multi-national corporation's big freighter which is spelling the end of the local economy. Later, as Didier Dufour struggles to understand the way in which a territory can leave its imprint upon a consciousness, the camera moves round and with selective focussing picks up two lovers on the shore some distance away for whom presumably this territory is now acquiring an indissoluble link with their courtship. Most spectacularly, in the scene in which Chaillot, the young Franco-Albertan struggles to find a cultural identity, a homing-point which is neither Alberta or Paris, we see him by the banks of the Seine speaking with the Dufours. As he seems finally to light upon Quebec as a new home, a barge passes slowly behind him — the camera shifts our attention to its name: L'Emerillon, the name of one of the three ships which brought Cartier from France to the shores of Quebec. In each of these three cases, however, the meaning we ascribe to the background detail is not articulated in the dialogue. To the extent that we accept the authenticity of the filmmaker's claim to unstaged, uncontrolled filmmaking, we may feel free to accord other meanings to these details, either by attempting to reconstruct the cameraman's motives for showing the detail or by viewing the detail as an element of figurative discourse whose meanings are not unitary or precise, but which resonate poetically.

Once the "capture" has been made and the material has been stored in the filmic memory (the shooting is over), there begins the long period of processing, selecting and ordering (editing). This process Perrault calls a reading of the real (although this had already begun, of course, through the kind of in-camera editing mentioned above), a reading which leads directly and indissolubly into a writing:

> "Le montage serait donc une sorte de 'lecture du réel' comme disait Yves Lacroix. Mais cette lecture devient une écriture à partir du moment où je me préoccupe de fournirà un spectateur les outils de perception pour qu'il puisse pénétrer à l'intérieur et le plus profondément possible de la matière vécue qui est en jeu. ... Donc, après avoir fait cette lecture attentive du réel ... je dois parler, écrire. raconter, réciter mon propos."[17]

The process of expressing what had been previously captured in a rich memory and subsequently re-ordered by reflection and mediated through the conventions of cine-matographic constructions is, finally, offered as a replica of the processes which had led to the original pro-filmic event. This homology, then, could be the solution to the problem posed by the empirical style (distanced and detached) for the filmmaker who wishes to declare solidarity with the culture to be projected, and to implicate the film in an unbroken process of cultural communication.

This was the point reached in the first three drafts of this study. When the paper was

read to the Canadian Film Studies Association in Ottawa, May 1981, a certain dissatisfaction was expressed over the apparent comfort with which a sense of closure was reached in this conclusion. This sense of dissatisfaction has led to a deconstruction of my initial readings and a radical reversal of the original thesis.

The appropriation of oral discourse into written texts as "found poetry" or into filmed and taped documentaries as "outils de réflexion" (as Perrault has called them) is essentially and inevitably a process of de-contextualization. The speech acts of men and women living in their community are being uprooted from their natural surroundings, are being "disembedded" to use the vocabulary of cognitive psychology. Such a "disembedding" process may be necessary to pass from a sense of parochial identity to a sense of national identity. Indeed this is one of the key messages of **Un Pays sans bon sens.**[18] The implantation of these isolated speech acts in the new discourse of the filmmaker constitutes the passage to higher-order cognitive processes, to a sense of cultural identity which transcends the local parish and its modes of communication.

This passage ultimately undermines the meanings we accorded to "found poetry" earlier: the primacy of popular nonliterate cultural expression, the multiple coding of such expressions and the submersion of individual acts into the commemorative culture of a collective.

With the use of print or film to transmit these moments of cultural expression, the book editor or filmmaker has rendered absolute the separation of performer and public, teller and listener, enactor and spectator. There is of course no longer a sense of living exchange: the discourse has moved from the illocutionary act to the perlocutionary act; the two-way street has become a one-way street. Moreover, having de-contextualized and fragmented these moments of cultural expression, the re-constructor may freely create his own hierarchy of discourses, dividing them up into **petits poèmes** and recitatives as Perrault does in the script of **Voitures d'Eau,** for example. That hierarchization of discourse has passed from the autochthonous control of the local communities or individuals from whom came that discourse into the hands of the privileged individual or elite of individuals who have access to the technology of print and film. It is for this reason that, notwithstanding the bonds of solidarity that Perrault may have forged in the acquisition of the ethnographic data which informs his writings and films, the continuity of cultural transmission is radically ruptured by the recourse to modern communication technology. And yet it was the negation of codes of expression controlled by distant elites which constituted the argument for the primacy of popular nonliterate or oral cultures in the first place.

Finally, deep within the Perrault project, there lies the rhetorical contradiction implicit in all appropriations and metacommentaries of this kind. When, in the demonstration of cultural expression which is declared authentic and valuable, a medium is chosen which posits the relationship between speaker and listener in a radically different way (absence supercedes presence), the hierarchy of codes collapses. Perrault's work on the one hand declares the primacy of community-based oral and gestural culture and on the other hand implicitly elevates itself (as metacommentary) above that oral culture to celebrate it. The multiple coded "language" of that culture is now subsumed in the codes of a language-system which is foreign to it. Finally, and this is the final irony, in making access to the commemorative cultures of relatively isolated communities more universal, the Perrault project has, assumed the control of that collective memory. If we were to ascribe an ideological label to the project it would be that of liberal paternalism. But ultimately, the true ironies exposed by the deconstruction of the project point more to the impossibility of promoting the continuity of living, interacting cultural traditions by the engraving of their enactments in inert matter.[19] The **cinéma-direct** is not and cannot be direct.

ENDNOTES

1. "From the Picturesque to the Familiar: Films of the French Unit at the N.F.B. (1958-1964)" in *Ciné-Tracts,* I, 4 (Spring-Summer 1978). pp. 50-62.

2. Michel Brûlé: *Pierre Perrault ou un cinéma national, essai d'analyse socio-cinématographique.* Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1974.

3. See Lucien Goldmann, *Pour une sociologie du roman,* Paris, Gallimard, 1964; Annie Goldmann, *Cinéma et société moderne,* Paris, Editions Anthropos, 1971; also Michel Brulé's analyses of Jean-Pierre Lefebvre's early films and two film adaptations of novels by Claude-Henri Grignon in *Cahiers Sainte-Marie* 29 (1971) 17-62 and *Sociologie et Sociétés* VIII, I (April 1976) 117-139.

4. My major sources for such criticism have been: David Cozens Hoy, *The Critical Circle: Literature and History in Contemporary Hermeneutics,* University of California Press, 1978; T.K. Seung, *Structuralism and Hermeneutics,* New York, Columbia University Press, 1982; Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman (eds.), *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation,* Princeton University Press, 1980; Josué V. Harari (ed.), *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism,* Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1979.

5. Perrault's interviews may in fact properly be described as written texts since he has always insisted on the right to amend in writing any such texts before publication.

6. Pierre Perrault, Bernard Gosselin, Yves Leduc, *Le règne du jour,* Montreal, Lidec, 1968: Pierre Perrault, Bernard Gosselin, Monique Fortier, *Voitures d'eau,* Montreal, Lidec, 1969; Pierre Perrault. Bernard Gosselin, Yves Leduc, Serge Beauchemin, *Un Pays sans bon sens,* Montreal, Lidec, 1970.

7. E.g. Alain Robbe-Grillet, *L'Année dernière à Marienbad,* Paris, Minuit, 1963.

8. Pierre Perrault: *Chouennes,* Montreal, Editions de l'Hexagone, 1975, p. 7.

9. Pierre Perrault: *Discours sur la condition sauvage et québécoise,* Montreal, Lidec, 1977, in the preface (unnumbered).

10. First published in the anthology *Portulan,* subsequently in *Chouennes,* Montreal, Editions de l'Hexagone, 1975.

11. Eugene Vance, "Roland and the Poetics of Memory" in Josue V. Harari, *Textual Strategies,* Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1979, p. 374.

12. Barbara Herrnstein Smith: *On the Margins of Discourse: the Relation of Literature to Language,* Chicago/London, University of Chicago Press, 1978, pp. 54-55.

13. *Ibid.* pp. 127-128.

14. David Cozens Hoy, *The Critical Circle: Literature and History in Contemporary Hermeneutics,* University of California Press, 1978, p. 148.

15. Interview in *Pierre Perrault, Cinéastes du Québec* 5, Montreal, Conseil Québécois pour la Diffusion du Cinema, September 1970, p. 28.

16. Interview with Pierre Perrault and Bernard Gosselin in *Cinéma Québec.* V, 5 (1976) p. 13.

17. As in note 15 above, p. 30.

18. One of the titles in *Un Pays sans bon sens* reads "Peul-on renier le village pour retrouver le pays?"

19. The reference to deconstruction refers more closely to the concept of the "grammatization of rhetoric" delineated by Paul de Man in "Semiology and Rhetoric" (Josue V. Harari, ed., *Textual Strategies,* Ithaca. N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1978, pp. 131-140) and glossed in T.K. Seung, *Structuralism and Hermeneutics,* New York, Columbia University Press, 1982, pp. 269-272. See also Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading,* New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979.

THE FEMINIST FICTION FILM IN QUEBEC: "LA VIE REVEE AND LA CUISINE ROUGE"

Brenda Longfellow

Introduction

> There is no such thing as an essentially feminist film, there is no singular feminist position or critique. There is only difference and differences are articulated in differing languages. That is integral to the dilemma of attempting to build a new language of film.[1]
>
> (Claire Johnston)

A survey of the work produced by women in Quebec over the last 10 years clearly illustrates the difficulty of defining a feminist film aesthetic. The heterogeneity of individual styles, approaches, political strategies and concepts of feminism resists any attempt at simplistic generalization.

Given that qualification, however, one can point to two very general characteristics of the feminist cinema in Quebec that immediately distinguish it, particularly from that of English Canada, which, to a great extent remains polarized between the experimental[2] and the documentary.[3] The first has to do with the degree to which fiction has been employed as a vehicle for the expression of the feminist imagination.

Of the 21 feature films listed in the **Copie Zéro,** "Des Cinéastes Québécoises," which covered the period up to 1980, over half, or 12 were fiction films. In a general survey of English Canadian production over the same period, only[3] feature fiction films directed by women were discovered.[4]

While the majority of the features in Quebec were produced independently, many in film co-operatives, the fiction film has historically played a major role in defining French women's production at the NFB, beginning with **De Mère en fille,** directed by Anne Claire Poirier in 1967. The En Tant Que Femme Séries, which initiated the first collective grouping of women filmmakers in Quebec, produced two realist narratives — **Le Temps De L'Avant,** a film about abortion, **Souris Tu M'inquiètes,** examining the frustrations of a bourgeois wife and mother and **Les Filles des Roi,** a fictionalized poetic documentary presenting women's historical contributions to Quebec society. The En Tant Que Femmes experiment was eventually discontinued in 1975, and while a series of 8 documentaries were produced by Poirier from 1976 to 1978, the focus came to be increasingly concentrated on the production of fiction features — **Mourir À Tue Tête,** and the yet to be released **Les Quarantaines.**

The second general characteristic involves the concern, shared by a broad range of films, with investigating and expanding the formal possibilities of film language. This concern with form, moreover, is never isolated in the experimental genre, but occurs as an integral part of the project of redefining documentary and fiction to feminist purposes. One thinks of the haunting Duras-influenced **Strauss Café** by Lea Pool, certain documentaries that express themselves in a mix of interview and dramatized representation — **Le Grand Remue Ménage, C'est Pas Le Pays des Merveilles, Fuir,** and the self reflexive didactic strategies of **MourirÀ Tue-Tête, La Cuisine Rouge, Anastasie Oh Ma Chérie, La Vie Rêvée.**

What I propose to do is look at two films — **La Vie Rêvée** and **La Cuisine Rouge,** both fiction films incorporating a concern with for examining the textual strategies they develop in the light of their very differing contribution toward the creation of a feminist language of film.

The Feminist Fiction Film in Quebec

Why the consistent commitment to fiction given its greater financial and production demands? While any adequate explanation would have to include institutional histories and a political economy of film production in Quebec, certain general reasons suggest themselves that have to do with the particular characteristics of Quebec cinema and the women's movement.

By the early 1970's, the original enthusiasm of the cinema direct movement had been nearly exhausted, its critical investigation of reality pushed to the formal limitations of the genre itself.[5] For many of the leading figures of the movement, the desire to 'approfondir' their investigation of the nation was accompanied by a desire to progressively restructure that reality in a dramatic mode. Increasingly, the fiction film and the fictionalized documentary came to be appropriated as the venu for a nationalist and class conscious political cinema. Certainly the enthusiasm and presence of these films — their qualified success in infiltrating the Quebec market, in creating an audience for the Quebec feature, provided an inspiration for women filmmakers.

Apart from the expanding possibilities of a national cinema, the specific orientation of the feminist movement nurtured, and indeed, demanded a very different concept of filmmaking. Mireille Dansereau, speaking of the making of **La Vie Rêvée,** the first, feature to be directed by a woman in Quebec, commented that:

> They (l'ACPAV) didn't want me to make this first film. The men thought that if I made a film on women, it should be militant. A sociological-Marxist analysis, or something like that. A very political film. But you see, that is a **man's** idea of

> what is revolutionary about women. They think we should get together and form a political party and fight, and give intellectual ideas about the problem of women as related to our society and to Quebec. Men thought that what would bring a change in the status of women is a clear analysis of women: sociologically, politically, and financially. They couldn't accept my intuitive, very emotional and personal approach.[6]

While the personal approach was also developed to great effect in documentaries such as **D'Abord Ménagères, Les Servants du Bon Dieu, C'est Pas Le Pays** etc., clearly the fiction film held a very strong attraction as a commercially accessible and powerful means of exploring feminist concerns.

Part of this attraction was born of the same forces that inspired the very strong feminist traditions in theatre (Théâtre des Cuisines, Théâtre Expérimental des Femmes) and literature (Brossard, Cardinal, Bersianik, Theoret etc.), which established struggles in language and representation as prominent parts of the feminist struggle in general. Many of the women film directors were drawn to fiction from backgrounds where such elements had figured, such as actresses Denyse Benoit, Micheline Lanctot, Paule Baillargeon, and Frédérique Collin, and writer Marthe Blackburn.

"It all happened at once," said Blackburn of the period, "the 'prise des paroles des femmes'... there was an excitement, an electricity in the air that inspired us all. Suddenly, after centuries of silence, women were speaking and writing."[7]

A large part of the attraction to fiction, however, was and is bound up with the properties of the medium itself — its tremendous emotional and psychological appeal and its particular mode of production. Fiction allows for a conscious ordering and construction of meaning through language, an imaginative freedom in the representation of reality. That, of course, had been the discovery of the 'prise des paroles' — that through language reality could be challenged and reinvented, and that what had been silent and invisible through history — women's experience, could be made real.

For films such as **L'Arrache Coeur,** — **Ca Peut Pas Être L'Hiver, On N'a Même Pas Eu D'Eté,** — **L'Homme àTout Faire,** and **Le Temps De L'Avant,** fiction became a vehicle for exploring the emotional and psychological depths of women's experience, a means of representing and validating the "quotidienne" or quotidian dramas that structure a woman's life: the relationships between mother and daughter, widowhood, suburban romance, pregnancy. And in giving life and words to an array of rich and complex female characters, these fiction films provided new role models, new points of identification for women spectators.

Apart from these traditional narrative strategies, a politically conscious fiction allows for an ordering of experience and representations that moves beyond the level of description to analysis, that seeks to demonstrate the interrelatedness of things. Such fiction dislocates us from reality, undermines the imaginary relations that bind us to an acceptance of a given order as natural and inevitable. Such, I believe, is the fictional impulse of **La Vie Rêvée** and **La Cuisine Rouge.**

La Vie Rêvée / La Cuisine Rouge

"A woman is not born," said de Beauvoir, "she is made." Such is the point of departure for both films: to investigate the process of construction of woman as feminine subject. It is to examine the traditional iconography of woman as erotic spectacle and domestic, and to displace these definitions from the realm of myth — whose operations, as Barthes revealed, naturalize oppression by posing it as eternal and inevitable. The strategy shared by the films is twofold: 1. to deconstruct patriarcal images of women and 2. to pose alternative representations, utopic visions which suggest the possibilities of liberation.

Apart from their manifest intent, the radical innovation of the two films is inscribed in their specific modes of production. Each was produced through a co-operative effort — **La Vie,** with the financial, technical and creative input of at l'ACPAV and **La Cuisine,** which was created through improvisational workshops with the participating actors.

La Vie Rêvée

On one level, **La Vie Rêvée** is structured as an episodic narrative which concerns the developing friendship between two women — Isabelle and Virginia and their joint fantasy for an older man. The film, however, absolutely resists being reduced to a description of its narrative, for it is above all a rich amalgam of dreams, memories, fantasies and consumer images which speak in the language of the unconscious — in symbols, lapses, condensations of meaning.

It is a highly self-reflexive film, employing a number of devices to draw attention to the material practices which produce representations — its own and thoseemanating from the patriarcal definition of women. At one level, the reflexivity of the film is inscribed in the narrative where Isabelle and Virginia are found to be working in a commercial film house, the setting furnishing the pretext for providing us with a privileged glance into the making of sexist commercials and for the frequent visual references to consumer images of women. At another level, the language and structure of the film — the use of heterogeneous elements which comment and refer back to each other, the play with codes of slow motion and film grain, the whimsical editing and self-conscious camera, reinforce the film's consciousness of its own constructedness.

In an interview in **Cinéma Canada,** Dansereau spoke of the film as realist — "I decided every frame and the atmosphere of lighting, because I wanted it to be a very realistic film...even if there are a lot of dream sequences — the dreams are true — and as real as reality."[8] The reality effect, however, is very different from the one we are habituated to expecting in cinema. The fantasy, dream and memory sequences, rather than reproducing, serve to undermine the status of the narrative as privileged bearer of the 'real.' These sequences, moreover, question the authenticity of the liberal notion of the individual as conscious centre and controller of her/his universe and point of the role that certain unconscious forces play in structuring individual life decisions.

La Vie Rêvée is a film about female desire, about females who are subjects, actors and initiators of desire. It is a film in which the voyeuristic gaze is turned on a man as the object of female desire. But what desire? The crisis in psychoanalysis has always been — what does a woman want. How to speak of an authentic female desire in a patriarcal society which organizes such desire to perpetuate its own aggrandizement. The fantasy and dream sequences are concerned to investigate this structuration of female desire, showing how our primordial experiences in the family, the condensation of memory and the subliminal fixations induced by consumer advertizing, organize our desire and predetermine our object choices.

The home movie sequence, which occurs repeatedly throughout the film shows a man carrying a little girl to the sea. Shot in slow motion on extremely grainy stock, it is like a dream, an idealized memory of a utopic past. She is laughing and clinging tightly to the man — daddy, the god-like figure of the child's first romantic fantasy, her protector, her lover. The first moment of desire, captured in the home movie, its naive memory revealing the psychic dramas underpinning the nuclear family.

According to the classic Freudian paradigm, the resolution of the Oedipal complex for the female child occurs as she becomes conscious of sexual difference. She discovers her shame — her wound — her lack of the most desired object — the phallus. Henceforth she rejects her mother, condemning her for having produced her as an inferior being. She directs all her desire and sexual attention to the father, wants to have a baby with him and develops her feminine characteristics to wean him away from the mother. It is this first heterosexual encounter that provides the model for all future relationships, based

on an endlessly repeated pattern of paternal dominance/female submission.

Isabelle's fantasies, where she consistently represents herself as a little girl, dressed in white crinoline and headband, quite literally and vividly reiterate this pattern. The gestures and positioning of the figures in the mise-en-scène of the fantasy, as well, graphically illustrate the political dynamic of the fantasy relationship. In one, Isabelle is sprawled on the rug at the feet of J.J., whom we see only from the knees down, as he hands her books — gesture of paternalistic intellectual. In another, she is crouched, doggy position in the garden, exposing her behind — a child's gesture of polymorphous sexuality, to J.J. who again stretches above her and out of frame.

The dynamic is repeated in the fantasy where J.J. and Isabelle are greeted by a flock of journalists and bombarded with banal questions on world events which elicit equally banal replies from J.J. Here we see the classic positioning of men and women within the power hierarchy of patriarchy. He is leader, authority, granted access to the world of power, politics, ideas. She is the adored object, the planet orbiting around his sun. It is through him she gains access to the world, living vicariously through his achievements, abnegating responsibility for her own self-definition.

"The emotion of love" says Janet Preston, in her study of Harlequin romances in a recent edition of **Fireweed,** is "inextricably bound up with the emotion of powerlessness."[9] The fantasy life and sexual identityof the individual, while explicable in terms of the Freudian analysis of the nuclear family, are also over-determined and reproduced within the power structures of a patriarchal/capitalist society.

Romantic fantasies are not simply psychologically motivated — they are Big Business — the standard fare of domestic melodramas, pulp novels, Hollywood and pop music. Lacking any real access to positions of political or economic power, we are offered the vicarious thrill of Love and Romance — mass produced escapist fantasies feeding multi-billion dollar industries.

But it's an escape which ultimately proves to be debilitating. We remain paralyzed in positions of desire, of desire for desire, of desire for some confirmation of the fact of our existence, of the desire for a rich emotional life which is refused in reality. "I'm going to write a paper on why young girls always desire unattainable men," Isabelle's childhood friend informs her.

But this hermetic circulation of desire around itself is precisely the pattern with which consumer advertizing manipulates and cultivates our desire, by the constant repitition of appeals which maintain the consumer in a perpetual state of desire — to consume — a desire which can never be satisfied, only constantly recirculated. Isabelle's fantasy is a product of this excess of desire. Her fantasy is connected to consumer images through juxtaposition and the doubling of visual imagery — a scene of the genre, "It's Better in the Bahamas" repeated code for code in her fantasy, including body position-ning and lighting. All her fantasies in fact have the same kind of glowy, classless feel of the lifestyle ads which capitalism uses to sell utopia. At one point, someone even mentions that J.J. ressembles a model in an advertisement.

By the end of the film, however, Isabelle has had enough of the frustrations of unsatisfied desire. "I'm tired of dreaming," she says. She wants to live and to do so she must undergo a cathartic liberation from the oppressiveness of a fantasy which has paralyzed her. Urged on by Virginia, she arranges an amorous rendez-vous with J.J. which proves in the end to be something less than the utopic fulfillment of her dreams. But she is freed. In the last shot, an embarrased J.J. skulks away as Virginia bounces into the apartment. The two women collapse in laughter and proceed to tear down the commercial posters that adorn the apartment in a defiant gesture of their liberation from consumer fantasy and their commitment to live in the 'real world.'

The investigation of the construction of the female subject is also posed in certain non-narrative eruptions which serve a kind of bracketing function. What these eruptions intend, I believe, is to break the bind of personal identification which the narrative inspires and to recall the ways in which the image of woman has been historically and systematically exploited by patriarchal culture. How it has been used, as Mulvey pointed out, as the blank screen on which male fantasies are projected; how it is transformed into a reified object, the leitmotif of erotic spectacle, connoting sex itself.[10] "She is cunt," says Andrea Dworkin, "formed by men, used by men. Her sexual organs constituting her whole being and her whole value."[11]

The first of these sequences involves two grotesquely sexist adds, one for yogurt, the other for underarm deodarant, in which we see women reduced to plastic mannequins, coiffed, made-up, mouthing the words of industrial capitalism. They are hilarious. But it is a hilarity with a keen political edge. It is the excess of the commercials, the exaggeration of the codes — the self conscious movement and dialogue of the women, the heavy makeup, the forced smile, the banality of the text and the ludicrous association of sex and yogurt which confronts us with the utter transparency of their ideology.

The second sequence, which we presume to be a 'cattle call' for a porno flick, shows naked women, framed from the waist to mid-thigh, parading in front of a fat cat, Robin Spry, posing as Anglo-Canadian porno director. This repetition of 'cunt' after 'cunt' and the clinical detachment with which they are presented represses voyeuristic pleasure and forefronts the complex issue of our response to the naked human form. Who is looking, we are forced to ask. Reverse cutting connects the images with the director's gaze. We see them as he sees them — pubic hair up front and centre, so much soulless flesh.

Suddenly reality intrudes and the self satisfied gaze is ruptured. The last model stands before us with a tiny visible mark of her humanity — a scar delicately etched above the right side of her genitals. This is suddenly no longer animal flesh we are viewing — but a human being, who is alive, who has a history, is vulnerable and can be really hurt and scarred in reality. It is a masterful and brilliant stroke.

The third sequence composes a mysterious dream image where a young girl, 5 or 6, clad in a white nighty stands in a garden and slowly lifts her gown, revealing her genitals to the camera. Dansereau herself shed some light on the image in an interview when she referred to it as one of the dream sequences she felt succeeded. "C'est le moment où la petite fille en blanc par terre voit l'homme rêve et qu'elle essaie de le rejoindre." It is a moment of cinematic excess where the illusory unity and plenitude of the cinema is ruptured. A freaky moment when the cinema momentarily halts the illusion to address the spectator directly, for it is he who dreams, lost in his contemplation of the young female form, who, composed and coy, becomes a willing participant in his fantasy. Perhaps it is a kind of mocking gesture at a pathetic sexuality whose desire is fed through voyeurism for she is not diminished by the gaze, on thecontrary, she returns it. It is a difficult image and the fact of her complicity remains problematic.

La Cuisine Rouge employs very different tactics in its endeavour to deconstruct established codes of sexuality, borrowing, as it does from Brechtian epic theatre — a natural evolution as Baillargeon had been one of the founders of the very Brechtian styled, **Le Grand Cirque Ordinaire.**

Perhaps it is the use of distanciation in the film, its exaggerated theatricality, that has alienated so many from the film, for **La Cuisine Rouge** resolutely refuses to provide us with that fullness, the imaginary unity we are habituated to expecting in film. While **La Vie Rêvée** engages us with its use of narrative and characters we can hook our need for emotional identification on, **La Cuisine** provides no such relief. In contrast to the rich symbolic imagery of **La Vie, La Cuisine Rouge** employs a flat minimalist style of representation, anti-natural acting, and long mise-en-scène séquences with a minimum of editing.

Strange it is indeed, but a strangeness born of a very conscious political strategy. Brecht has said that the central quality of epic theatre is "perhaps it appeals less to the feelings than to the spectator's reason. Instead of sharing an experience, the spectator must come to grips with things."[12]

Given Brecht's admonition, we can see **La Cuisine Rouge** as a kind of moral drama whose intent is to produce knowledge of sexual role typing in patriarchal society. This knowledge is produced in typically Brechtian fashion, by rendering the familiar, unfamiliar, by inscribing the critical distance between spectator and representation, inscribing the 'terror' that Brecht claims is necessary to all recognition.

The film presents itself as theatre enacted on a stage in an imaginary construction, taking place in an imaginary nowhere. As Carol Zuker points out, characters enter by a door and exit by the same door at the end of the film, like a curtain which falls at the end of a theatrical production.[13] The point of this theatricality is to foreground the artificiality of representation, and, by analogy, the artificiality of sexual roles themselves.

There is an absence of linear narrative or a casual relation between events. Rather the film proceeds through a series of episodes, presenting a set of behaviours, gestures, and discourses which have been coded as sexual identity for clinical observation. It is ritual theatre, as in Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, where the community comes together "to act out its destructive impulses and to express its deepest fears, ... and through the use of satire and exaggeration... sting(s) society into looking at itself in new ways."[14]

In this ritual re-enactment, the film alternates between two tableau which correspond to the sexual division of labour — the women's sphere — the kitchen and fantasy garden and the male — the cavernous bar, littered with the debris of some drunken debauchery.

In both spheres there is a sense of the imminent decay and dissolution of a world rigidly dichotomized by sexual difference. The marriage which opens the film, the traditional happy ending promising rebirth and regeneration, marks the onset of degeneration. There is the oppressive heat, the disorder, the unwashed dishes. No one has cleaned for a week. There are potatoes sprouting in the cupboard and apples that spill out of the oven. The juke box and cigarette machine no longer function. The eggs refuse to be cooked.

This disorder is traced to the madness of the women inhabiting the domestic sphere-the unique site of their paranoia and hysteria, the fragmentation of language and identity. The domestic sphere, as we have come to understand through feminist analysis, is the critical site of women's oppression, where we have been systematically condemned to a life term of unpaid, unvalorized labour in the service of others, robbed of our bodily integrity and denied any authentic means of personal self-realization. And in a world where, as Phyllis Chesler has pointed out, "characteristics such as self-sacrifice, masochism, reproductive narcissism, compassionate 'maternality,' dependency, sexual timidity, unhappiness, father worship — and the overwhelming dislike and devaluation of women"[15] are defined and institutionally enforced as the standards of sanity for women, madness seems a very sane response.

In **La Cuisine Rouge,** madness is their defence and rebellion. They have stopped caring — the habitual cycle broken — the urgency of dishes and breakfast suspended indefinitely. The fragmentation of identity and bodily unity, however, is also connected to the very real violence and dismemberment of women in the 'outside,' rumours of which filter into their hermetic little universe.

The men, meanwhile await a breakfast which only appears at the end of the film. They bond, coalesce in the instant solidarity of a sex that has access to power and the public domain. They argue politics and hockey. Beneath the surface of these male rituals,

however, lies a tangible violence that explodes in the terrorizing antics of Thibault. Male bonding, says Chesler: "the containment of explosive and crippling male rivalries, the systematic containment of indiscriminate acts of male violence... the containment of the Oedipal dilemma, the containment of the urge toward male homosexuality — through glorification of obedience to male 'superiors.'"[16]

Distanciation is also created in the film by the absence of a single unifying consciousness, a subjective point of view with which the camera identifies. This absence situates the point of view in the detached observation of the camera and the feminist directors. It is they who control the field of vision and as spectators we are positioned in the field of their ironic gaze.

The camera style serves to reinforce this sense of detachment — the extreme ironic high angle shots which open the film, the long sequences enveloped in a single shot, the slow camera choreographed to the movement of the ensemble rather than a single individual. In addition, the shallow depth of field and the absence of editing strategies which create perspective presents us with a flat perspective where actors, like cartoon figures are set in a unidimensional world — a world we are compelled to examine, criticize and reject.[17]

> "Epic theatre gives life to its people whom it classifies purely according to function, simply using available types that occur in given situations and are able to adopt given attitudes in them. Character is never used as a source of motivation, these people's inner life is never the principal cause of the action and seldom its principal result. The individual is seen from the outside."[18]
>
> (Bertolt Brecht)

The characters in **La Cuisine Rouge** function as markers of the rigid sex typing of patriarchal society. They are bearers of social definitions assigned to them — the women — erotic objects, domestic servants and the men — artist, marxist, businessman, macho etc. It is their very extremism as symbols that confronts us with their ideological origins and reflects back on the whole process of the construction of sexual identity in society.

I think this self-reflexiveness is what critic Claire Johnson talks about when she refers to the use of iconography as a political tactic: "Because iconography offers in some ways a greater resistance to the realist characterizations, the mythic qualities of certain stereotypes become far more easily detachable and can be used as a shorthand for referring to an ideological tradition in order to provide a critique of it, by disengaging the icons from the myth."[19]

Disruptions are set up in the second level of signification in which myth operates, between the connotations establishing sexual identity. Connotations such as female biology/erotic spectacle/nurturer/domestic/mother etc. The fact that the naturalness of theseconnotations is challenged allows us to effect a radical separation between the individual and a role we come to identify as socially constructed and imposed on individuals through economic, social and cultural pressures. We are left with an understanding of life as a stage of which men and women enact these preconstructed roles in a language and repertoire of gestures written and directed by others — by a history of class and sexual exploitation.

One sequence which is particularly revealing of this process of 'denaturalization' is the strip which occurs at the close of the film. This strip, far from being an erotic spectacle, is placed immediately in the context of work — part of the daily monotonous routine the women are compelled to undergo to earn their economic livelihood. 'No, we don't want to go,' as they explain to Estelle, the young girl. "It's something we have to do to buy food, but we'd rather not."

The strip spectacle is completely denuded of the illusion of compliance between woman and male spectator — that she is acting out her own desire, her desire to be looked at, which in the ideological fix of patriarchy represents the projection of male desire itself. The scene, which has to be the most boring strip in the history of cinema begins when the bride suddenly stands up, yanks her dress over her head and sits down again in the most desultory, perfunctory fashion, obviously under duress.

All conventions associated with the strip are completely and utterly flaunted — the reassuring ritual and exoticism, the tease of the striptease — the tantalizing play of concealment and disclosure, the building of suspense and expectation, played to the end of cultivating the desire of the other, all of which as Barthes points out aim at establishing the woman right from the start as "an object in disguise," "the signification of nakedness as a natural vesture of woman... the nakedness itself remaining unreal smooth and enclosed, like a beautiful slippery object."[20]

In **La Cuisine** it is her very reluctance, her visible and willful non-compliance with her own objectification which denies her object status. In the moment of revelation, her nakedness is revealed not as a 'beautiful slippery object' but as a mark of the real economic social and cultural vulnerability and physical dispossession of women.

I have already said that there are two strategies in the political projects of **La Vie Rêvée** and **La Cuisine Rouge** — the deconstruction of traditional sexual identities and the complementary strategy of presenting us with a utopic vision of women's sensuality, friendship, relationship to her own body and to her own desire.

Adrienne Rich has spoken of the 'double life' that women lead — the fact that even in the institutions of heterosexuality and the family, women have always attempted to create a community of support among other women as a means of surviving patriarchy, as a means of discovering the emotional intimacy and friendship that in the majority of cases, were lacking in their heterosexual relations. This subcultural community, Rich notes, by the very fact of its existence, poses a challenge to the patriarchal order and to the hegemony of heterosexuality as the single pattern of adult intimate relations.[21]

Both films pose this community as an alternative to romantic fantasies and to the sexual and domestic servitude exacted by patriarchy. In the friendship of Isabelle and Virginia, in the garden idyll of **La Cuisine Rouge,** women recreate that community, where, having escaped from the authoritative regard of men, they are free to indulge their pleasures, eat, drink, sing, play tricks on others, (the William Reich fan in **La Vie),** muck cake in each other's hair, dress up and paint their faces. It is the sensual, delightful world of the child, before her entry into the public domain as sexual commodity; a world of polymorphous sexuality, fantasy and play. Like children, there is a freedom and largesse in their language and corporeal movements, for the women it represents a re-establishment of control over their own bodies, a rediscovery of their own body sensuality.

Despite the fantasy for the older man, it is the two women who form the real couple in **La Vie Rêvée.** It is they who bond in a world of intimacy to which all male characters (real or imagined) are ultimately exempt. Within the threesome set up for their forest vacation, it is the two women who sleep together, both rejecting their intellectual friend as potential sexual partner. Even the heterosexual consummation of the fantasy — which usually marks the termination of bonding between women and the formation of the REAL couple, only strengthens their solidarity.

In contrast to the emptiness of a consumer fantasy, their relationship provides for a real exchange of feelings where real human needs for intimacy are met. It is a relationship founded on equality, instant psychic communication and identification. There are numerous verbal and visual references to doubling and identification between the two women — the similarity of body type, hair style, the sharing of clothes, the similarity of

experiences they relate concerning their first lovers.

Although their relationship is not explicitly sexual — it is sensual and physical. There are numerous scenes of the two women naked together, picnicking in the graveyard, changing at the swimming pool, etc. and there is a great deal of physical contact between the two — hugging, running and skipping together.

In **La Cuisine Rouge,** it is the moment when the women step into their tropical garden fantasy that the symptoms of their madness disappear. There is a freeing of language — they no longer speak in the throttled, fragmented discourse of the hysteric, and a liberation of desire. They rediscover their physical integrity and enter a kind of communion with their bodies through rituals of adornment, bathing, eating and drinking, consuming the cake and champagne of the wedding party. Their repressed, creative energies are released and they invent music, create art and dance.

It is a place of sanity and a restoration of wholeness. We are all 'motherless daughters' says Chesler, commenting on the sources of women's madness, "starved for maternal nurturance." Driven into adulthood, we become surrogate mothers to men and reproductive mothers to children, but for women, in the institutions of heterosexuality and the family, there is no possibility of an imaginative return of an original source of nurture. In part, this bonding between women is an attempt to recreate the original wholeness of the relationship between mother and child. Certainly the oral and tactile sensuality of the garden and the bathing scenes where each woman is nestled, fetal-like in her own womb/tub in **La Cuisine Rouge,** and the nurturing relationship between the older Virginia and young Isabelle in **La Vie Rêvée,** would suggest the same.

FOOTNOTES

1. Lesley Stern, *"Feminism and Exchanges,"* **Screen,** Winter 79-80, Vol. 20 #34, p. 93.
2. Joyce Wieland, Kay Armatage. Patricia Gruben, Betty Ferguson. Lois Siegal. (see B. Martineau, *"Canadian Women Filmmakers,"* **Cinema Canada** no. 71, Feb. 1981 for complete list).
3. English Canadian documentary filmmakers include: independents — Laura Sky, Holly Dale and Janis Cole, Bonnie Kreps, Dianne Corbin; Studio D directors, Bonnie Sherr Klein, Dorothy Henault, Margaret Westcott, etc. NFB regional directors, Norma Bailey, Ann Wheeler, Lorna Rasmussun, (see Martineau article).
4. **Madeline Is,** dir. Sylvia Spring, 1970; **The Far Shore,** dir. Joyce Wieland, 1976; **I Maureen,** dir. Janine Manatis, 1978. **Love,** a feature anthology produced by Renee Perlmutter is yet to be released.
5. *"La Sequence du Long Métrage,"* M. Robert Boissonnault, **Cinéma Québec,** Jan., Feb., 1973, no. 5, V. 2.
6. M. Dansereau, *"La Vie Rêvée,"* Interview by A. Ibranyi-Kiss, **Cinema Canada,** no. 5, Dec.-Jan., 1972-3, p. 29.
7. Marthe Blackburn, interview with author, April 6, 1982.
8. M. Dansereau, Interview, **Cinema Canada,** Dec.-Jan., 1972-73.
9. Janet Preston. "Consuming Passion," **Fireweed** Issue 11, 1981, p. 20.
10. Laura Mulvey, *"Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,"* **Screen,** Vol. XVI, no. 3, Autumn, 1975.
11. Andrea Dworkin, **Pornography, Men Possessing Women,** Perigree Books, 1979, p. 110.
12. B. Brecht, **Brecht on Theatre,** ed. and trans. John Willett, Hill and Wang, 1977, p. 23.
13. C. Zuker, *"Les Oeuvres Récentes d'Anne Claire Poirier et Paule Baillargeon,"* **Copie Zéro,** no. 11, *"Vues Sur Le Cinéma Québécois,"* 1982, p. 54.
14. James Roy MacBean, **Film and Revolution,** Indiana Press, 1975, p. 54.
15. P. Chesler, **Women and Madness,** Avon Press, 1972, introduction, p. xxi.
16. P. Chesler, **About Men,** Bantam Books, 1978, p. 248.
17. See Brian Henderson's, *"Toward a Non Bourgeois Camera Style,"* in **Movies and Methods,** ed. B. Nichols, University of California Press, 1976.
18. Ibid, Brecht, p. 48.
19. C. Johnston, *"Women's Cinema as Counter Cinema,"* in **Sexual Strategems,** ed. Patricia Erens, p. 135.
20. R. Barthes, **Mythologies,** trans. Annette Lavers, Granada Publishing, 1973, p. 85.
21. A. Rich, *"Compulsory Heterosexuality,"* **Signs,** Summer 1980, (see Julia Lesage *"Celine and Julie Go Boating,"* **JumpCut** 24/25 for extensive film analysis applying Rich's argument).

DENYS ARCAND AND "LE CONFORT ET L'INDIFFERENCE"

Lise Bissonnette

In 1970 Arthur Lamothe[1] made a deeply moving and radical film on the construction industry in Montréal. The film was both a social document and a call to action. **Le Mépris n'aura qu'un temps** (roughly translated, **Hell, No Longer)** was, in its time not only the effective title of a film but an accurate metaphor for the feelings of the working class in Québec. It was and still can be used as an accurate way of depicting the frustration of people in Québec. During the referendum on Sovereignty-association[2] there was no other way of expressing the deep resentment of our people in the face of a Jean Chrétien,[3] laughing at the language of the Québécois, or a Monique Bégin playing upon the fears of elderly women, or a Pierre Trudeau promising the Rockies to those who cannot even see or afford the Laurentians.[4]

Le Mépris n'aura qu'un temps, is both a beautiful and biting condemnation of the contempt that the upper classes and politicians have for the working class. Contempt is an easy emotion to fall back on when judging people from a position of superiority. One realizes, looking at Denys Arcand's[5] latest film, that contempt has not yet had its day, so to speak, and that perhaps it has even changed sides.

Le confort et l'indifférence, (Indifference and Living in Comfort) the title says it all, is not a settling of accounts with those who abused the Québécois during the referendum campaign, it is rather an insulting film by intellectuals against the little people who voted NO. At the Outremont Cinéma,[6] in a town of the same name, M. Arcand will undoubtedly score an immense success. The press kit that I received yesterday morning at the screening of this recent National Film Board production[7] should have forewarned me of the real direction that the film was going to take. Included in the kit was an interview with Arcand, who makes the following pretentious complaints: *"...the Québécois are spoiled rotten by the tokens of wealth thrown their way by the United States, there is no hope..."* He accuses them of only *"thinking about their salaries"* instead of trying to transform Québec into a Denmark or better yet Norway.

To Arcand the Japanese workers seem to have more national pride and independence than the workers here, but I'd like to wait for his film on Japan before I judge either him or the Japanese. We are after all in Québec, whatever that may mean to him. The film uses a fictional character as the central pivot for its montage **and** its philosophical outlook. That character is a resurrected Machiavelli, who speaks in the cold and distant fashion of a Pierre Trudeau, and explains from time to time, between scenes, how the people have, and will always sell out and how easy it is, as a result, to manipulate them. Arcand is trying to **shock** us into an awareness of our frailties; all he really does is proclaim the cowardice of the people.

To Arcand, all that the Québécois really cared about during the referendum was money. We see the image of a former employee of Radio-Canada[8] (a federal institution) expressing fear about possibly losing his pension. In an old peoples' home, the aged fear the loss of their pension.[9] A farmer, surrounded by expensive machinery, filmed to make him not only look rich but look guilty for being rich, expresses the stupid fear that he may suffer economically. We see a supporter of the NO option turned into a caricature, a "dumb" member of the Kiwanis club who seems more concerned with his two colour televisions and his four radios than with his children. Briefly, vulgar images of parasites who obviously don't exist in Norway or, heaven forbid, Japan.

In addition the Québécois are ridiculously stupid. Think of it, they play Bingo; they go to the Floralies;[10] they worship hockey idols like Guy Lafleur and Serge Savard who are pictured giving away autographed hockey sticks in the same way that the early colonizers gave mirrors to the Indians; they are seen being "duped" at an evangelical meeting in the Olympic stadium, a huge image of Christ overhanging the people surrounded by billboards advertising Steinberg's and Miracle Mart; they have the nerve to play "Gens du pays"[11] on an electric organ... All of the above is meant to be a critique of the servility and weakness of those who voted NO, those, who in effect destroyed the dream of independence and for whom the practicalities of life outweigh all other considerations.

Even with all of this negativity Arcand tries to console us in his own way and give us something more positive to work with. We go to the country, to a "gardener" who explains, with his voice trembling, that *"he didn't vote for his silly little pension,"* that for him the 20th of May[12] was painful, almost impossible to bear. He cried that night on the way to his cottage and had to be consoled by his wife "in front of the children" who, in witnessing his breakdown lived out the paradoxical drama of our collective lives. What's worse is that he wanted to die. Here most certainly, says Arcand, are the noble thoughts of a brave Québécois in contrast to the small-mindedness of the fearful pensioners.

In the final analysis the Québécois are ridiculed. Arcand takes his camera into an exhibition hall dominated by a display of converted vans, which have been transformed by their owners into a variety of garishly designed homes. We see wall to wall carpets, expensive stereo systems, here a false fireplace, there a stuffed animal. The owners show off the vans with excitement, proud of their houses and even prouder to have them filmed. But the film's editing will change all of that and recontextualize their activities, transform them into banal representatives of an underclass which cannot match the more "tasteful" concerns of intellectuals for whom the popular is synonymous with the mundane.

However, to be fair, **Le confort et l'indifference** is more subtle than I have made it out to be. The film does after all create a priestly pulpit for Machiavelli, from which he can hold forth and reassure spectators about the truth. Some Québécois have the power that comes with

education and they see clearly where the people have failed and what they are unable to understand. The film's metaphors are constructed to appeal to some mythic lowest common denominator. René Lévesque[13] gets a medal, The legion of Honour, from Giscard d'Estaing, while in comparison Pierre Trudeau is seen reviewing the troops with Queen Elizabeth II. (We are supposed to understand, I hope, that the former is based on emotions and national pride, while the latter is simply another example of the misuse of power.)

"The good people are not all that stupid,'' says the film and gives us the example of a couple living in the Abitibi who supported the YES option, as if to point out in desperation that the intellectuals of Montréal are not alone. Yes, yes, the Québécois were afraid to **say** YES. So, they drink Molson's beer and enjoy it, and yes, their fears were played with and often their ignorance was used as a weapon against them, in order to make them vote NO. Yes, Machiavellianism played a role in this process and if, as the film suggests it is universally a part of the political game then we are not the exclusive place in which it happens. But I will never be able to understand why a filmmaker who dreamed so intensely about the YES option ended up by paying hommage to his adversaries. He secretly agreed with them in the most Machiavellian of ways that the people must be seen **with contempt.** He says to the people that they are stupid and cowardly and makes himself appear to be courageous for saying it. In a funny and perhaps ironic way the referendum results can be better understood after viewing the errors of this ''masterpiece.''(?)

This first appeared in "Le Devoir'' Newspaper in late February 1982.
Translated and annotated by Ron Burnett.

1. **Arthur Lamothe:** Independent film maker based in Montreal. He has made a number of prize-winning films including an ethnographic series on Quebec Indians.
2. **Sovereignty-association:** A term coined by the ruling Parti Québécois government to describe a new relationship with Canada. Quebec would be independent as a country but economically associated with the Canadian Federal context.
3. **Jean Chrétien:** Minister of Justice in the Canadian Government and a well known anti-independentist.
4. **Laurentians:** Mountains north of Montreal.
5. **Denys Arcan:** One of Quebec's most famous filmmakers and an innovator in the development of Cinema Direct.
6. **Outremont Cinema:** A local Montreal alternative and repertory cinema.
7. **"Le confort et l'indifference":** Produced by Roger Frappier and Jean Dansereau in 1982, at the N.F.B.
8. **Radio-Canada:** The French side of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.
9. **Pension:** During the referendum on Sovereignty-Association the elderly were scared into believing that they would lose all of their social security benefits via the Canadian Federal System.
10. **Floralies:** A giant international exhibition of flowers held in Montréal in 1980.
11. **Gens du Pays:** A well-known song by chansonnier Gilles Vignault that has become the equivalent of a national anthem in Quebec.
12. **20th of May:** Date the referendum was held.
13. **René Lévesque:** Parti Québécois Premier of Québec.

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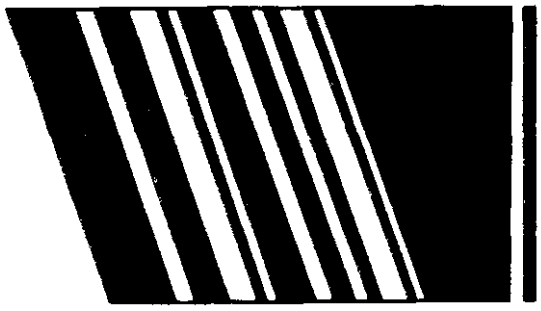

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