



drawing by Sidney Goldsmith

## The NFB's Studio A **Portrait of the animator as a rising star**

**by Michael Dorland**

The animated films of Norman McLaren, to the saying has it, are Canada's best-known export. But McLaren, at 68, is putting the finishing touches to *Narcissus*, a 22-minute film which will most likely be his last. In recognition of a lifetime contribution to animation, McLaren was awarded the Quebec government's prestigious Prix Albert Tessier in December last year.

At the National Film Board of Canada's animation studio A, the post-McLaren generation, a creative core of some 15 animators aged between 35-45, stand ready to continue the tradition that has made Canada a global leader in the field

of the animated film. Under the direction of recently-appointed executive producer Doug MacDonald, the animation unit wagers on the next three years, gambling on a future that presents as inspiring a challenge as it is over-clouded with uncertainty.

### **Organizing the transition**

The atmosphere is monastic; long, silent corridors of tiny cubicles. In each an animator hunched over a slanted animation table; some wear white cotton gloves so as not to leave paint-marks or fingerprints on the celluloid. There is little conversation; only the distant

whirring of animation cameras. The sudden liveliness of the voice of an animated character reminds you that this is a place where the unreal becomes real, where colored beads come alive, where cartoons interact with human beings, where 20 million years ago is today, and deepest space is but an arm's reach away. This is Studio A, the animation unit of the National Film Board, the cornerstone of the Board's world-wide reputation.

Executive producer Doug MacDonald's office possesses the same ambient sparseness—two pinewood tables with matching straight-backed chairs, that

contrast agreeably with the rooftop rows of solar reflectors visible from the window. Here metallic high tech and the rumpled clothing of the artist exist in peaceful cohabitation; before the computer-controlled animation camera, the artist stands in grubby tennis shoes.

"Animation," says MacDonald, a tall, blue-eyed Manitoban, who has been the studio's executive producer since June '82, after seven years as head of the multi-media education studio G, "is extremely labor-intensive. A one-minute animated film can take up to three months to make; a ten-minute film three years.

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"Here the flow of animation goes back 43 years; animation is the cornerstone of the Board's world-wide reputation. I see my job as developing to the fullest the talents we have in the studio and to tempt young animators from across the country in to join us, so that the next 43 years can be as positive as the last."

In the past decade, animation has become a career opportunity, of sorts. The Sheridan College of Art in Toronto now graduates about 45 animators a year; Emily Carr in Vancouver five or six; animation is taught as Concordia, York, The University of Alberta in Calgary, and also at Dalhousie in Halifax, though there still as part of fine arts.

This did not used to be the case: the McLarens and Sidney Goldsmiths of the Board became animators by accident; even the upcoming generation - whom MacDonald calls "the stars about to shine" - learned their art from the bottom-up, getting their start as copyist or painters doing the painstaking drudge work of filling in backgrounds.

Perhaps more in animation than in any other aspect of filmmaking (given its highly individualistic nature), certain almost Renaissance traditions of apprenticeship remain central to the vitality of the art form - and the studio is very conscious of its obligations towards the young animator.

So the impact of three years of budgetary cutbacks, with further cuts for at least two more years - compounded by the post-Applebert gloom that has settled like a fog through the entire Board - has been heart-rendingly felt at Studio A. It has meant the progressive disappearance of the up to 45 freelancers, those whom MacDonald refers to as "the extended family," who once supplemented the core group of 15 staff animators. "Oh, what the Board could do with a little more money," MacDonald sighs, in a moment of utopianism.

The reality, aggravated by the depressed economic climate, is that, outside the Board, animation remains a most precarious line of work. Five out of six graduates in animation are not working in their field. Apart from major private animation studios like Nelvana in Toronto, or a fistful of small studios in Montreal, subject to the boom-and-bust cycles of the film industry as a whole, the Board remains the only place in Canada where inspired, high-quality, and individualistic animation can be pursued.

In keeping with the Board's increased regionalization policies and as a liberating by-product in the rise of the number of sponsored films that are subcontracted out, the unit is progressively finding itself free to pursue what could turn out to be its 'natural' market. Animators have been going forth to conduct workshops running from six weeks to six months, doing animation work with the regional offices in Winnipeg, Vancouver, and Halifax.

For June '83, the studio plans an apprenticeship program. "We want leading animators in Canada and internationally to come spend time here, we want to welcome animators from across Canada to share in the inspiration of working here," says MacDonald. "This is the National Film Board; I want those styles and attitudes reflected."

For its '83-'86 production plan, MacDonald and the animators of the unit have devised eight animation directions or "thrusts" - from the socially relevant "The Way We Live" series, through the continuously pioneering scientific animation of Colin Low and Sid Gold-

smith, to what MacDonald terms "the brilliant idea, for the film that comes along and demands to be done."

At this moment of generational turnover - and ironically to solicit precisely the outpouring of creative energy that the Applebaum-Hébert report found so lacking at the Board - the unit is throwing itself open to Canadian culture.

"Animation as an art form is a central part of Canadian culture," says MacDonald. "I'm looking for stories, I'm looking for scripts, I'm looking to commission works and original ideas."

At present the studio gets two or three script ideas a week from outside the Board. MacDonald would like to increase that input, though he cautions: "We're not looking for Flintstones-type animation."

With 15 animated films in production, 10 releases scheduled for this fiscal year, and eight films being investigated, or still at the research/script development phase, at least four senior animators will be free to direct other projects as of Spring '83, a fortunate - and rare - coincidence that MacDonald hopes to exploit fully, specifically in two of the planned eight thrusts of the production plan.

The first is called "Canadian Accents," for which the studio plans to send animators out on location, working on stories from Canada's folklore.

"This isn't Canadian literature, it's folk culture," MacDonald explains. "I want animators to go out and talk to local people, to sit out on a rock in Bonavista Bay and see what happens, and I want to bring people in from the regions."

The other series, called "Just For Kids," is aimed at children aged 6-12. So

far the unit has signed contracts with three publishers of popular Canadian children's books to produce animated films of best-selling stories. For example, Robert Munch's story "Blackberry Subway Jam," published by Anik Press, is presently being styled by the unit's Bob Doucet and Eunice Macauley (who have both won Oscars for their work in animation), and should be completed within six months. Five other films are planned in the series for the next three years, and the unit is also looking for story ideas for half-hour animation specials.

So MacDonald urges young animators to get in touch with the studio: "If I see at least any potential, I'll ask some of the senior animators in with me. Sometimes all that is needed is encouragement. And we're very civil civil servants here; after all, it's the public that pays our salaries."

"Our *raison d'être* is what Canadians see on the screens - that's where the animators are putting their time, into films that will justify the Board."

"Canadians haven't seen enough NFB films; they just don't get on the CBC a lot. We're making those films for Canadians, and we want it known that what is going on at the animation studio is as deserving of attention now as it ever was in the past."

## The new generation of animator

Some of the names are already internationally known: Ishu Patel, Sid Goldsmith, Eunice Macauley, Grant Munro, Caroline Leaf, and, of course, Norman McLaren. Others are names increasingly associated with the state of the art in animation; these are the rising stars at the Board's Studio A: Meilan Lam, Gayle

Thomas, John Weldon, George Geersten, Françoise Hartmann, Zina Heczko, Les Drew, Bob Doucet, and Gerald Budner. Cinema Canada spoke with a representative foursome who illustrate both the individuality and the interdependency of the contemporary animator.

Toronto-born Sid Goldsmith at 60, pipe-smoking and soft-spoken, is not exactly part of the new generation, though as the only senior animator who is also a producer he plays an important part in the transition taking place at Studio A. With some 90 films to his credit as animator, writer, director and producer, Goldsmith is best known for his work in the animation of scientific subjects, notably the 1960 animated half-hour *Universe*, still visually accurate after 20 years, and the 1974 *Satellites of the Sun*. NASA, the American space agency, has been a devoted client of Goldsmith's work which has been credited with inspiring films like Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Goldsmith is currently completing *Starlife*, a 20-minute film on which he has worked alone for over a year, depicting the evolution of stars from their birth from interstellar gas to their death as burnt-out cinders. Here Goldsmith's animation technique involves multiple exposures superimposed with computer-controlled camera movement to create realistic images of three-dimensional space.

"There were no film courses in the late '40s when I came to the Board," Goldsmith recalls. "Film wasn't exactly uppermost in anyone's mind and the Board itself was virtually unknown. I came to the NFB, then in Ottawa, as a summer student, doing carpentry on sets. I met the animation staff, applied and started in the lighting department, and was interested in graphic design and calligraphy."

"I'm a painter; I've always painted. But easel painting has a completely different set of relationships from film; the former are static; in film the relationships are constantly changing and so make the illusion of 3-D possible."

"Space is the ideal realm to explore. In entertainment films, there are a lot of misleading and deliberately impressive effects to enhance the drama: the real image of space, because of the exploration of the inner solar system, has become more familiar. It's almost like treating the surface of the earth: in the solar system area space has become less mysterious."

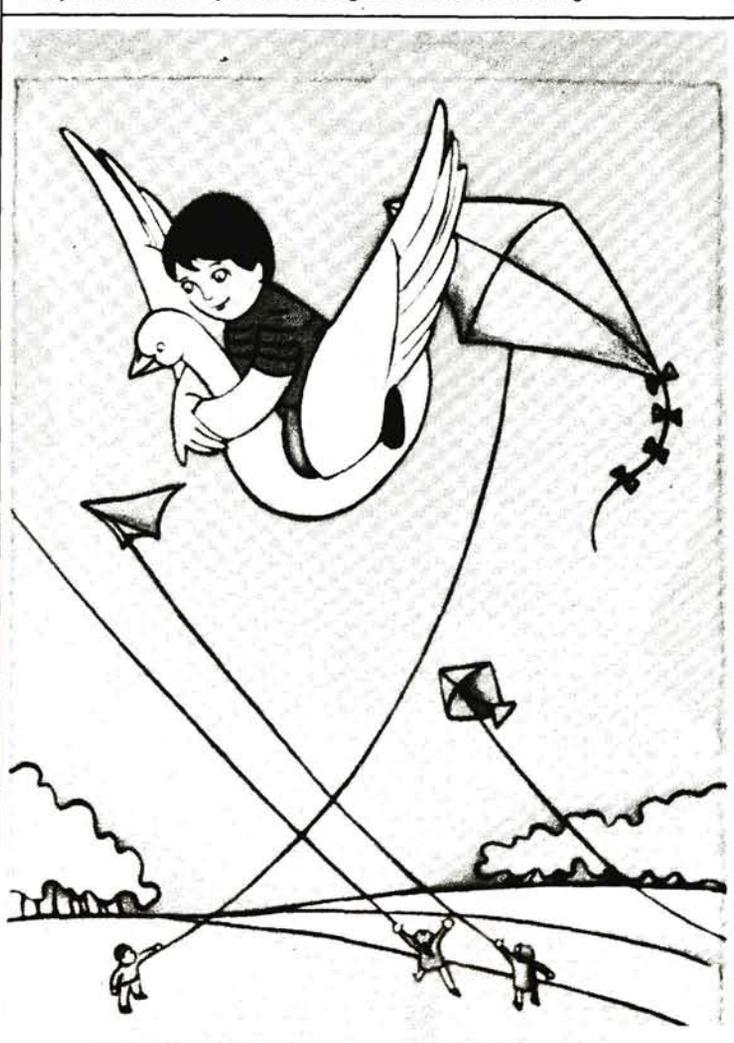
"But when we talk about stars light years away, we have only theoretical models to go by, it's still speculative. It's the last refuge of the animator, who has to go beyond what is known, for animation is the visualization of the invisible."

"As the technology lets us go further and further, the imaginative individual also has to go further and beyond for images. For instance, computer-animated graphics is a tool that is liberating, in terms of manual work, but that makes it that much more of a challenge: it forces creativity."

"Looking back, the most striking change I've seen is in the use of animation for things other than humor. Thirty-five years ago all animation was for humorous purposes; it has matured into a different and wider range of human emotions. I think most filmmakers appreciate the range of animation available; its use in schools, for instance, in a wide variety of subjects."

"I find it hard to judge my own films. I don't have a favorite film but I'm very optimistic about *Starlife*. To me the satisfaction comes in seeing something

● Gayle Thomas' *The Boy and The Snowgoose*: 18 months of drawing



you've imagined and worked towards with manual skills and having it confirm the mental image you had. If you can carry that realization from shot to shot, then you've got an impressive film.

"I think the computer will continue to relieve the animator of drudgery, but I don't think anything is going to change very drastically in animation. The subject matter is already broad enough. It's the imagination of the artist that counts, and it will always be able to keep pace with the abstract development of thought."

Gayle Thomas reminds one of a Gabriel Dante Rossetti painting. And the sketches on the walls of her Studio A cubicle, in styles reminiscent of Doré or Beardsley, further add to the evocation of 19th century art.

Born and raised in Montreal ("That sounds awfully boring next to the people here who have come from all over the world," she says), Thomas graduated with a fine arts degree from Sir George Williams (before it became Concordia), began working in animation for Potterton Productions, and has been at the Board for 12 years.

"I took no film courses, and I had no film background other than a love for Norman McLaren's films," says Thomas. "I just wanted to make animation films, and that's one of the great things about this place: a lot of the people who came here at that time learned through apprenticing.

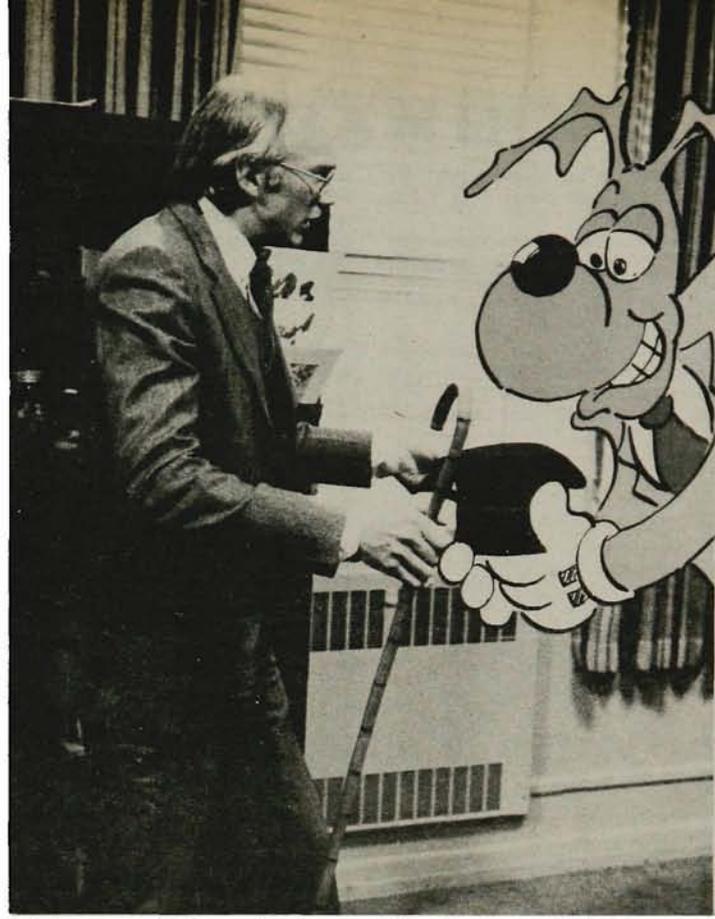
"I saw animation as a developing art form; it seemed like a very good area in which one could explore the arts; so many aspects - design, drawing, music, movement - were very challenging."

After four animated clips, and four films on which she worked alone, Thomas is working on her fifth, an 8 1/2 minute animated film called *The Boy and the Snowgoose*, which she and co-animator Françoise Hartmann developed in consultation with Montreal school-kids.

"I don't care for things that are terribly cartoony," Thomas says. "*Snowgoose* is stylized on frosted cell, back-painted with paint shading in front, but I wouldn't call it a cartoon.

"Animation is a heavy commitment: it takes such a long time. It stays with you 24 hours a day and it's months of hard labor. You have to be patient, and it can be frustrating. It can be very boring, and sometimes I find myself pulling my hair."

*The Boy and the Snowgoose* will be Thomas' longest film so far: 12 drawings per second represent a total of 18 months' work.



● In John Weldon's *Real Inside*, prejudice gets a novel twist

"The satisfaction is to see it on screen. When you get to see your rushes it's very exciting. You get to see that what you've drawn actually moves, and you might work three or four weeks before seeing that."

Even so it doesn't always work out as planned. Most of *The Boy and the Snowgoose* is painted in monochromatic shading, except for a central dream sequence shot in full color.

"Because there were so many drawings and the lines were too far apart, the sequences came out twice as long as planned," says Thomas.

Thomas' earlier films - *Snow*, *The Magic Flute* and *A Sufi Tale* - were monochrome. Her more ambitious use of color in *Snowgoose* has revealed a challenge she would like to pursue further.

"I'd like to experiment under the camera somewhat more, exploring color," says Thomas. "And here is the place where I can do this."

For over two years now, George Geersten has lived in the past - about 20 million years in the past. Geersten has

almost completed *Early Man*, a 10-minute animated adventure story about the origins of man.

"I had been reading up on anthropology for years," says Danish-born Geersten, "and I thought it might be possible to do something on that in animation, so I made up a storyboard. The Museum of Man in Ottawa thought it was a very marketable item. Eventually we got a program going within the Board, with outside scientific consultants to make sure the details would be accurate. But the challenge here is not so much the scientific side, but to make it come alive, to make the characters believable."

For the style of *Early Man*, Geersten says he was influenced by the scenes in Kubrick's *2001* where the apes discover the use of animal jaw-bones as weapons.

"It was interesting to learn that there were different evolutionary types co-existing at the same time. Fifteen million years ago was a very prolific time; the climate was warm and there was an abundance of animals. Suddenly there was a drought, the animals died off, and man had to learn to adapt, to learn to

manipulate tools, to do things that made up for his vulnerability.

"The whole point of the film is to take an everyday look at 10 million years ago, to get a feeling for the creatures, keeping the scientific side out of sight.

"You're never 100% satisfied with what you've done, though you learn a lot while you're doing it. In the time-frame, *Early Man* is going to work out relatively well.

"There are a lot of drawings - half as many again as normal because in the last half we're constantly talking about groups of people, animals and birds. I felt it was worth making it come alive: it'll go further with that vitality.

"I've enjoyed working on it, imagining questions like 'Here I am at the edge of the forest 15 million years ago; how should I behave?' I've been with this for two years, which is about average for a 10-minute film; luckily I've had a lot of help with the background coloring."

A graphic artist who learned his trade in Toronto, Geersten came to Montreal just before Expo '67.

"I started doing contracts for the NFB, and slid into doing more and more work. For my generation, there was no training for animators, and no-one considered animation as a career. So we came into it through contract-work.

"I'm a month away from having finished *Early Man*: I've got to do a sound-track of primate sounds. We plan to study monkey and ape sounds; and we'll get people who can reproduce these things, we have people here, actor groups, who can do any kind of sound."

Geersten's film work has mainly involved public service messages. But one of his films, *Prisons*, provides a good example of the possibilities MacDonald sees for sending animators out on location. For *Prisons* Geersten received permission to visit the intimidating 1860-built federal penitentiary in New Brunswick. "It wasn't easy to get in; they couldn't understand why anyone would want to go there and draw." The film got an enthusiastic reception in schools across Canada, as well as in Germany and in the U.S.

"Coming from a graphics background, we were probably a little slow in learning the physics of animation," says Geersten. "Inevitably we ended up working in different styles. It's fortunate that here we can pick a style and work in it. It's inspiring to see that variety; that we have that opportunity makes it much more interesting.

"I've seen quite a bit of change in animation: more emphasis on realism,



● Les Drew's safety-minded old lady goes camping



● George Geersten's *Early Man*: evolutionary etiquette

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though at the same time there's been a return to the Disney-type cartoon. The computer still hasn't taken off yet, though in the next 15 years, it will become more and more important.

"The universal problem in animation is the cost, mainly labor costs. A 90-minute animated film can cost \$7-10 million - that's thousands of hours of work by hundreds of people.

"Our records show animation films get a lot of viewing; they do circulate world-wide. Some of our early films are still as popular now as 20 years ago: they're always in demand. If you spend a lot of time with a project and if you get that kind of circulation, then it's paid off. It's the same with early Disney - it's masterful and it's all there.

"The future of animation? Although it's a precarious industry, if you get enough product going it'll compete handily. If people see good animation, they'll want to see more."

The weekend before, John Weldon had burned out the printer of his Apple home computer, attempting to compute animate a new logo for NFB films.

"Some people around here don't like the computer at all. They say it's going to destroy the animator. I don't think so, but then I like computers," says Weldon, a long-haired, pleasantly-disheveled Montrealer whose cubicle, complete with tattered, spring-extruding armchair, has every comfort of a Bohemian garret.

Weldon is finishing the longest film he's directed, *Real Inside*, a 12-minute film which combines live action with animation. *Real Inside*, the story of cartoon character Buck Boom's attempt to get a straight job in the corporate

world through an unusual interview with a personnel director, is a film about prejudice.

"It was done out of a technical challenge," Weldon says, "how to get the cartoon moving objects around. All that was done by producer David Verrall lying on the floor behind the actor and pulling a lot of wires. The carpenters ripped the top off the actor's desk and replaced it with a new top with holes in it for the wires. We had wires running overhead, off-camera and under the desk. We tried to mix all the cuts together so that no-one could see the wires. And if we've done it well, it will all be invisible. I think this is going to be one of the more successful mixes of cartoon and real action.

"Buck Boom was chosen to be like the traditional '30s-'40s animal cartoon. We never get to do dogs and cats around here: in the NFB for some reason there's a great tendency just to do little men. There was no special reason for doing Buck that way, other than that cartoons have been a great concern of mine since childhood and I'm very steeped in them.

"I've been here for 12 years; I came here looking for a job, and I started out as a painter-tracer in animation. Before that I worked in an insurance company. In 1969 I did a comic book that I used to sell on the street for 50 cents; I'm told it's worth \$30 today. I wanted to do cartoons: it could have been newspapers, comic strips, anything: I was interested in comedy. Having the comic book - and I'd done a little animation - got me in the door."

Since then Weldon has co-directed film clips for the metric commission; co-directed with Yossi Abolafia, the logo

for the Ottawa animated film festival; directed *Log Driver's Waltz*, a three-minute Canadian vignette that was released theatrically in 35mm; co-directed *Special Delivery* for which Weldon and Eunice Macauley won an Oscar; four half-hour sponsored films mixing live action and animation; and other films that he couldn't recall. For Weldon the future of animation in Canada is a matter of serious doubt.

"The industry has been contracting; and maybe in a couple of months all this will be shut down. The changes started three years ago with the first cutbacks. It was pretty devastating in terms of the product. It meant less freelancers, it meant that a couple of people who were going to get hired weren't. We went from a high level of activity to empty corridors; people started fighting with each other. It was so unified a few years ago; now there's hostility.

"In a place like this, if you cut back, say, 15%, you lose something like 35% in spillover. The most vulnerable people are often the ones that disappear. There are people working for private industry today who are doing less valuable work than they could have done here.

"Four, five years ago we had a good peasant economy going here. And what has happened here has happened across the world. There's no money to make non-commercial animation. This has led, for instance, to the total disappearance of independent American animation. The world is suffering from reality overload.

"In terms of the future I hope that whatever their plans in Ottawa, they will have some recognition of that fact that Canada is very, very strong, a global

leader, in this area. I hope they'll see some value in continuing something we're famous for.

"Even so, we've just scraped through the last few festivals. Even if they decide the Board is not the way to go, I hope they have some mechanism that will maintain an art form that is not commercial. It would be tragic to lose something that makes other people feel good about Canada, that makes them not want to drop bombs on us."

## Conclusion

As Jean-Pierre Tadros once wrote, the Film Board is better adapted to function in a socialist economy than it is in a capitalist one.

That remains true, even more so today in the wake of Applebert's artistic Reaganism which sees no economic role whatsoever for the Board. What then becomes of a fragile domain such as animation which is the fusion of industrial technologies of mechanical (or electronic) reproduction with a pre-capitalist tilling of the celluloid? Can that combination belatedly find a market that will support it, as MacDonald would hope, or will the form be obliged to rearrange itself in ways that have yet to be discovered?

The challenge of the next few years at Studio A, then, is one of Darwinian adaptation. As in George Geersten's *Early Man*, the Film Board animator now has to learn to make up for his vulnerability. But if Sid Goldsmith is right about the infinite creativity of the artist, it is still possible that the future of Film Board animation may yet reveal its now illustrious past to have been merely prehistoric sketches.

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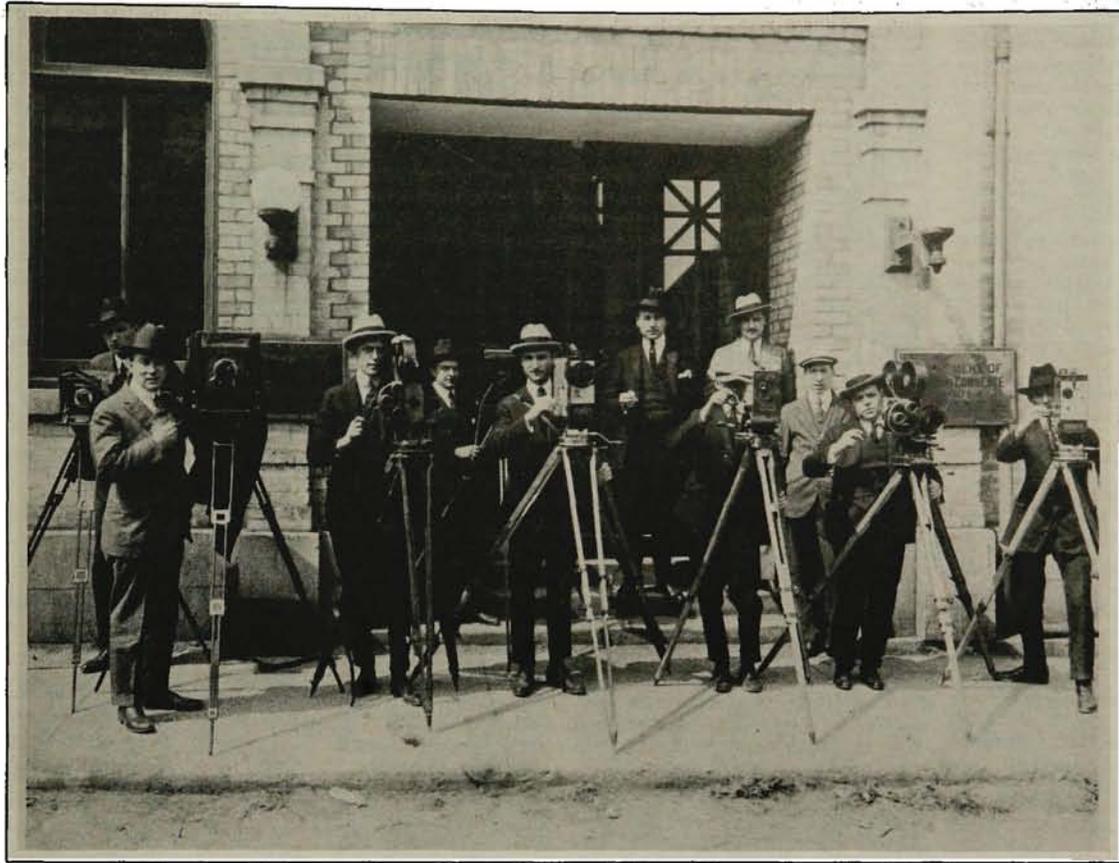


photo: National Film Board of Canada

# As the grapefruit grows

## A short, critical history of Canadian film policy

by Sandra Gathercole

By the 1920's, most European nations had moved to counter Hollywood's domination of the silver screen by establishing domestic feature film industries, or re-establishing industries that had been suspended during the First World War. But in Canada, a man named Ben Norrish, head of Associated Screen News, set the tone for the Canadian approach to the problem when he proclaimed that this country could no more make movies than grow grapefruit.

This bit of definitive wisdom carved itself on the stone of the collective psyche where it prevailed for the next fifty years. In the gathering storm of the Second World War, Canada set up the National Film Board and settled into a comfortable North American division of labour whereby we became world leaders in the didactic, non-fiction film genre while subletting our movie theatres - the pre-television palaces of the imagination - to our neighbour as an

extension of its domestic market.

This tacit agreement had the advantage of avoiding direct competition with the American Goliath. It had the disadvantage of frustrating Canadian filmmakers, creating a whopping balance of trade deficit in the national budget, and a matching deficiency in our national mythology. Canada was either absent from the movie screen, or cavalierly contorted into a nation of tenors on horseback, policemen who always got their woman as they rode through the Rockies just outside Winnipeg.

At the end of the Second World War, the NFB and Quebec filmmakers mobilized a challenge to the ordained view of Canada's incompetence in feature film. This pressure was diverted into the Canadian Co-operation Project wherein Hollywood agreed to generate tourism to compensate for our balance of trade deficit by writing Canadian place names into its scripts as in "That bird looks like a Saskatchewan trush to me" and "The bank robbers musta lit out for Shawi-

nigan, Sheriff." Filmmakers who wanted to work in fiction went into drama at the new CBC/Radio-Canada television stations or followed the well-worn path to Hollywood. The matter of Canadian movies was laid back to rest.

In the 1960's, pressure for domestic feature production resurfaced with sufficient strength that the Federal Government belatedly threw its hat into the big time. On the basis of the 1965 Firestone Report, the Canadian Film Development Corporation was set up - a move that marked a major policy departure, with corresponding structural and political implications, for Canadian production.

Where the government role had previously been based on the European model of proprietor-producer, it now expanded to become pump-primer subsidizer providing artificial support to an underdeveloped private sector. At the same time, the establishment of the CFDC set Canada on a collision course with Hollywood's presumed proprietary rights to the Canadian theatrical market.

In the Parliamentary debate of the CFDC Bill, then Secretary of State Judy LaMarsh fingered the inherent conflict

"I for one am personally advising heads of Hollywood studios and distribution chiefs that they shouldn't be too surprised if someday soon an eager member of parliament stands up and starts demanding quotas to stop the flow of film profits south of the border."

Harold Greenberg in *Variety*, 1974

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and put the theatre chains on notice that, if Canadian films were not voluntarily accommodated in their own market, legislation would be swift. Equally prescient, J.W. Pickersgill foresaw more likelihood of collusion than collision with Hollywood. He warned that we had to ensure that Canada did not wind up making Hollywood's films for them, and paying for the privilege.

Armed with toothless threats in lieu of legislated market protection, the CFDC ventured into the deep waters of the North American movie business and quickly drowned. The effects of limited access and revenues in our own and foreign markets had emerged clearly when a new Secretary of State, Gérard Pelletier, announced the "First Phase of a Federal Film Policy" in July, 1972. This statement amounted to a promissory note for a second phase of the policy which would deal with the distribution dilemma:

*"We are aware of the (distribution) problem, and we have begun studying closely the system of distribution in Canada and abroad. Unfortunately I cannot tell you exactly what recommendations we will make on the basis of this study. I can only say that we are... looking into quota systems... and the problem of foreign ownership of our distribution companies and film theatres."*

No such recommendations were forthcoming (and the second phase of the policy has yet to materialize a decade later) despite the public complaint of the CFDC's Executive Director, Michael Spencer, that Canada's role in many films unofficially co-produced with American studios had devolved into that of hewer and carrier.

By 1974, the market lockout on Canadian features had made cost recovery virtually impossible, and the private investment the CFDC needed to operate economically irrational. That investment dried up. When the CFDC appeared before the Commons Standing Committee in April, 1974, Council of Canadian Filmmakers' Chairman Peter Pearson appeared with them to tell the parliamentarians:

*"We commend the government for its bold concept in taking Canada into the feature film industry. The taxpayers have committed \$20 million in expectation of seeing Canadian films for the first time in their neighbourhood theatres. These films have seldom appeared. In six years we have learned that the system does not work for Canadians. The film financing system does not work. Thirteen major features were produced in English Canada in 1972; 6 in 1973; only 1 in 1974. The film distribution system does not work. In 1972 less than 2% of the movies shown in Ontario were Canadian, less than 5% in Quebec - the supposed bedrock of Canadian cinema."*

*The film exhibition system does not work. The foreign-dominated theatre industry, grossing over \$140 million at the box office in 1972, is recycling only nickels and dimes into future domestic production. Clearly something is wrong. It is no wonder then that the Canadian Film Development Corporation cannot possibly work, and neither can we."*

In the following year, Pelletier's successor, Hugh Faulkner, applied a conciliatory poultice to the dual problem of financing and distribution. He simul-



● The difference between us and them...

taneously increased the capital cost allowance for private investors in Canadian film from 60% to 100%, and negotiated a voluntary agreement with Famous Players and Odeon under which the chains were to guarantee a minimum four weeks per theatre per year to Canadian films, and invest a minimum \$1.7 million in their production. The voluntary agreements represented an attempt to circumvent the dilemma of provincial jurisdiction over theatrical exhibition. Ironically, they had the effect of dissipating a momentum that had been building in at least Ontario, Manitoba, and Quebec for legislated screen quota/levy mechanisms.

The Council of Canadian Filmmakers labelled the Faulkner moves "diversionary" and "a major step backward," and predicted the voluntary agreements would be approximately as effective as voluntary income tax. The industry-wide assessment that the definition of a "Canadian" film for purposes of the CCA was sufficiently loose to invite derivative branch-plant production was borne out in the subsequent tax write-off "boom" of 1978-80.

However, the significance of Faulkner's policies lay more in their philosophical foundation than in their practical impact. Inclined to Neville Chamberlain-style faith in cooperation rather than confrontation strategies, Faulkner articulated the paradoxical concept of "supporting what is Canadian without

interfering with what is American." This status quo double-think was quickly ordained as the prevailing wisdom, replacing Norrish's grapefruit policy.

The following year the new approach emerged in a costly management consultants' study of the industry known as the Tompkins Report. Tompkins acknowledged, and quantified, the extent of foreign market domination: disproving the CCFM claim that 80% of total distributors' rentals from the Canadian box office were being paid to the Hollywood majors, it established the actual portion as 93%. The report then proceeded to the conclusion that the problem was not the minuscule Canadian share of the Canadian film market, but the competition for that share offered private producers by the NFB.

In 1978, yet another Secretary of State, John Roberts, presented Cabinet with the only potentially effective policy initiative of the decade: a complex but clever sidestep of provincial theatrical jurisdiction wherein federal powers of taxation would be applied to exhibitors' revenues in negative proportion to the screen time allocated to Canadian films. Presto, a built-in quota. But Cabinet, still bleeding from the Bill C-58 confrontation with American vested interests in Canada, succumbed to not-so-veiled threats of U.S. retaliation against the proposed measures and Roberts' strategy died on the Cabinet table.

In retrospect, Roberts emerges not as

"We wish to voice our belief that the present system of film production/distribution/exhibition works to the extreme disadvantage of the Canadian filmmaker and the Canadian film audience... We believe that the present crisis in the feature film industry presents us with an extraordinary opportunity. The half-hearted measures taken to support the industry to date have failed. It is now clear that slavishly following foreign examples does not work..."

The Winnipeg Manifesto, 1974

"The film workers in the English Canadian film industry have my full support in their attempt to obtain the necessary legislation to improve and encourage Canadian filmmaking. As a Canadian filmmaker working aboard, I certainly understand their position."

Norman Jewison to David MacDonald, Conservative, MP, 1976

"There is no question that the film industry requires a firm financial base if it is to prosper. Indeed, in every country in which the industry thrives, assistance is given to the indigenous industry to enable it to compete on world markets. A Canadian-content quota and a box-office levy are one method of creating a fund to assist the film industry."

Stuart Smith, head of the Liberal Party, Ontario 1977

"Symes warned that government policy has allowed tax shelters without requiring significant benefits to Canadians, and in effect has provided subsidies to American and European film production."

From a press release: Cyril Symes, culture critic for the New Democratic Party, 1979



● If it's snowing it must be Canada, as the fine-print reveals

# POLICY

he compromising conciliator he appeared at the time, but as the only minister prepared to confront American market occupation on a practical as well as rhetorical level. The failure of his levy/quota attempt established that the philosophy of American accommodation extended beyond the Secretary of State's office, and could not be corrected on that level.

This trip down memory lane leads, of course, to the latest Federal film policy proposals presented by the Federal Cultural Policy Review (Applebaum-Hébert) Committee. In what is arguably the weakest section of a generally deficient document, the Applebert committee has brought more good intentions than good ideas to bear on the film industry's central problems, the dimensions of which were clearly beyond its competence.

The Applebaum-Hébert Report has carried forward the policy tradition of capitulation to American domination thus stranding the private sector with its present dependence on American sales for cost recovery. It has simultaneously advocated that the socially-mandated public agencies (the country's most important cultural institution, the CBC, as well as its world-class National Film Board) which have provided what little immunity Canadian film has enjoyed from the cold economic realities of the North American marketplace, be cannibalized by the private sector.

Specifically, the Report recommends

that the sustaining government role of proprietor/producer, manifest in the NFB, be eliminated by dismantling the Board's production capacity, and re-directing its resources to the private sector via the CFDC. It rejects as "protectionism" market mechanisms such as quota and levy which might secure access and revenues for Canadian production. The traditional theatrical exhibition dilemma is dismissed in eight lines with the observation that there is a Federal-provincial jurisdictional deadlock. This we knew. Applebaum-Hébert's solution to the problem is moral suasion. This we tried.

The cumulative effect of these recommendations, were they ever to be implemented, would be to complete the Americanization of Canadian film by concentrating its resources in the centralized, commercial, English-language feature film area (at the expense of more economically marginal French, regional, native and non-feature production) while maintaining that sector's over-reliance on foreign sales. This export-oriented industrial strategy is difficult to reconcile with the Committee's stated objective of distinct and distinctive Canadian production; its assumption of French, regional and non-feature production; and the priority it attaches to cultural rather than industrial objectives in policy formulation.

Like the Tompkins report, Applebert has listened too attentively, and too discriminately, to the demonstrably specious assertions of private producers that the public purposes of Canadian

production can not only be accomplished in the marketplace, but can be more effectively and efficiently, achieved there. At the same time, it appears that the Committee has not fully comprehended the rationale for public-sector production as the backbone not only of the Canadian industry but of virtually all non-American film industries. Neither does the Committee appear to have taken into account the legislated market protection which would be prerequisite to - but by no means a guarantee of - the private sector's ability to assume the blatantly uneconomic mandates of the public agencies.

In other words, what Applebaum-Hébert has recommended is that we kill the goose that has laid the golden egg in the hopes that the gander may be capable of taking over the task. This, of course, assumes an imaginary gander. It also assumes an imaginary private sector, composed of individual creative artists rather than grasping middlemen: a business world where cultural concerns have priority over profit objectives. This, in turn, ignores the experience of the Capital Cost Allowance boom which demonstrated that when large-scale public subsidies come down the line, "individual artists," be they English, French, regional or native, are straight-armed away from the trough by carpet-baggers who know more than the CBC and NFB combined about how to pad a budget, skim a profit and scorn all objectives that do not directly increase personal profits.

In the fifteen years of progressive privatization of Canadian film since the establishment of the CFDC in 1968, massive direct and indirect public subsidies have artificially stimulated rapid in private-sector production. There has been no comparable expansion of private production's contribution to Canadian cultural objectives. On the contrary, the film industry has experienced the same direct equation between privatization and Americanization that has defeated Canadian television.

The public interest requirements of Canadian production are not being met in the marketplace, nor can they be, for the simple reason that, when social policy demands meet economic counter-demands, the latter win out in an unprotected market. Until such time as policymakers recognize that unique, as opposed to imported, production requires unique, rather than imported, economic structures. Private-sector activity will be characterized by the boom-and-bust branch plant syndrome of the CCA, and the current "branch pants" fiasco in pay television.

In this environment, further public subsidization of private production will, in terms of social benefit, amount to pouring money down an open drain. To do so at the expense of public production is to invite the final submersion into an integrated North American system which would inevitably follow.

Portuguese explorers called this country 'Kanada' which meant in their language 'nobody there.' The literal meaning of utopia is 'nowhere.' Reading Applebaum-Hébert's prescription for a Canadian utopia reminded me of the literal, rather than colloquial, meaning of these words. The film industry that would result from the Report's recommendations would be marked with the stamp of branch plant production: films made about nobody and nowhere in particular. What we have here is no policy, no culture, no direction, and no films that would matter. No way.

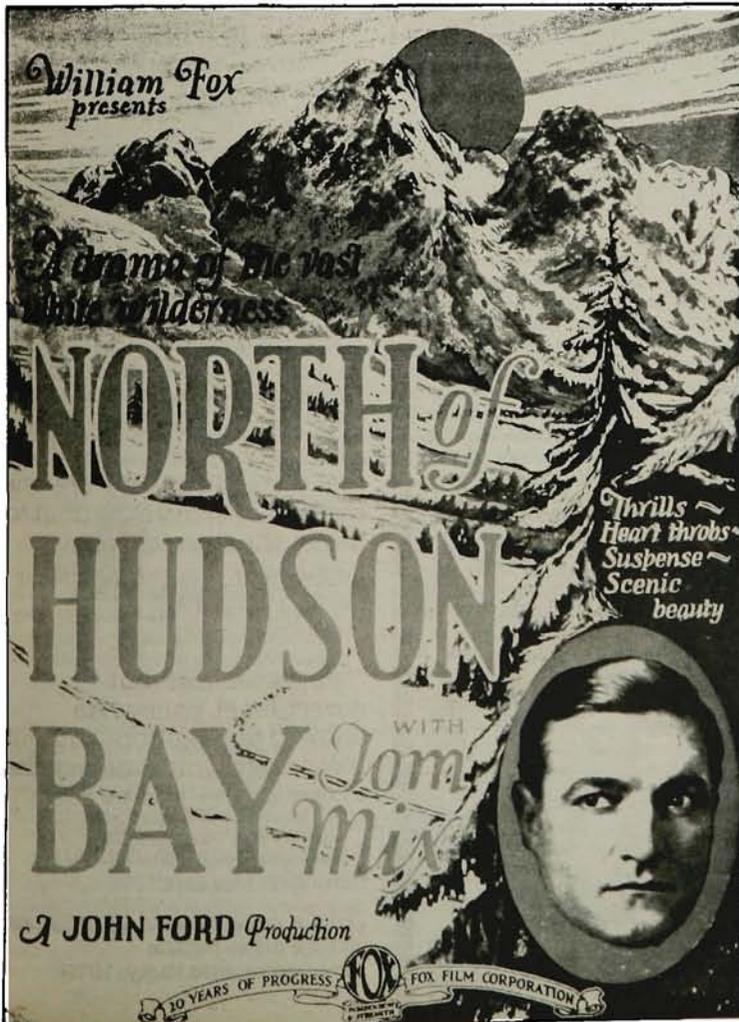
"Most Canadians already have more television choice than any other nation in the world - and it reflects less of what Canada is than does the television of any other country reflect what that country is."

Albert Johnson,  
president of the CBC, 1980

In response to a question about what the Americans would do if the Canadian government were to legislate a national film policy:

"I think Jack Valenti would like to declare war! All I know is I had a meeting in Washington some years ago, two years ago, with Jack Valenti who is president of the Motion Picture Association of America, which is the highest paid, plushy, lobbyist job in the world. Johnson got him that when he left Washington. And Valenti was so terrified of the Canadian Government threatening the quota or a slice of the pie or taking a piece of the action, he was so terrified that he came to me and he said could I arrange for the then Secretary of State to come to Washington for a meeting? And I said, Jack if I were you I'd get on a plane and get to Ottawa because you've been ripping off my country for the past 40 years and I really believe that. We are the biggest consumer per capita of American films in the world - Do you know that? - in the world! We're the the biggest market for American films in the world, this country... And I said, they're gonna take a piece of the pie. Now they didn't do it, they didn't take a piece. Instead they created the CFDC and I don't know what happened. It all kind of fell apart."

Norman Jewison,  
Canadian Images, 1980



Canada as Nowhere; in England this film became *North of the Yukon*

# A different kind of Red Scare

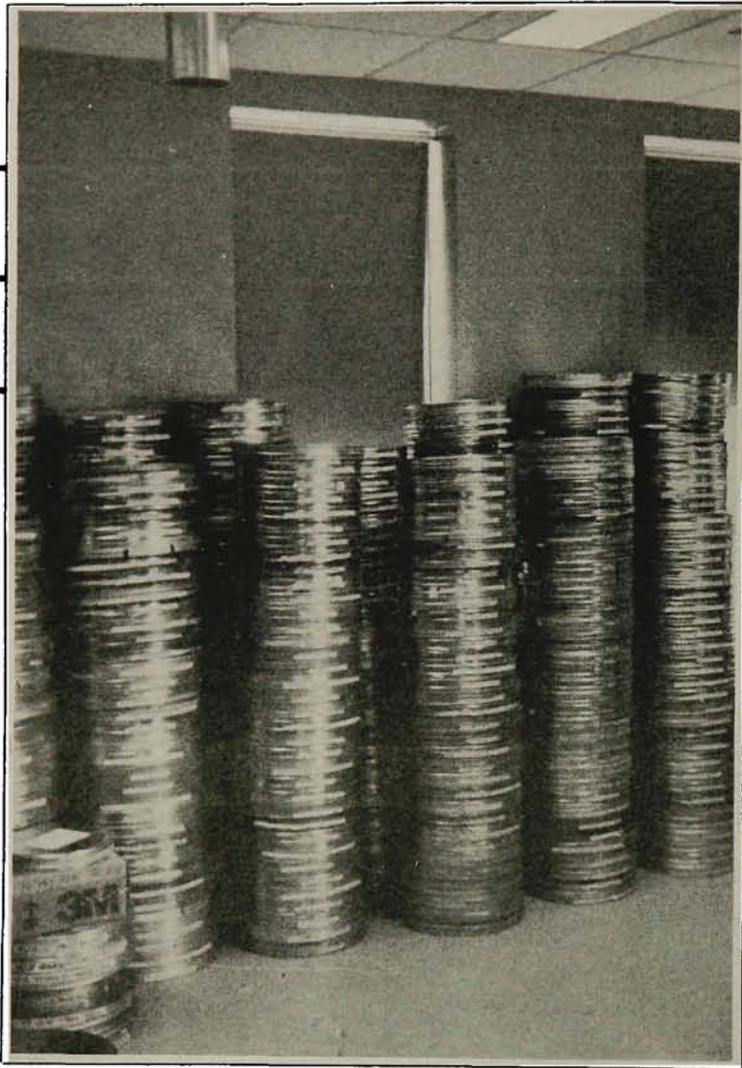
by Mark Henderson

The capacity audience at Ottawa's National Arts Centre was waiting expectantly. In a few moments, a 70mm, stereophonic print of Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* was going to begin, but unknown to them, a difficult decision was being made high up in the projectionist's booth. Cy Foley, the NAC's veteran projectionist, was in a quandary. He had screened the film earlier that day only to discover that the print was so badly faded it was almost completely red. The other colors had retreated to the point that the film was almost unwatchable.

With typically quick judgement, Foley shoved a makeshift color-conversion filter in front of the lens, hoping to absorb enough of the red to compensate for the severe color imbalance. It was not the first time Foley had been forced to take such action, and the problem wasn't about to disappear overnight. A print of *Gone With The Wind* was shown at the NAC previously, and the color was so badly faded that every exterior scene seemed to have the famous Atlanta fire raging in the background.

The list of examples goes on and on, from Canadian classics like *Goin' Down The Road* and *Kamouraska* to the biggest and gaudiest Hollywood blockbusters. Color fading is a fact of life for every projectionist and anyone who catches an older film on the late show or at the local film society or repertory house. And the film doesn't have to be that old either, for the majority of films produced in the past thirty years have used color film stock which is sure to fade within as little as two or three years, under average room temperature conditions. In short, our cinematic heritage is quickly turning beet red or garish purple while the solution to the problem is at arm's length.

Most films which fade are shot on Eastman Color film stock, and given that corporate giant's pervasive hold on the international market, color fading knows no national boundaries. This means that the Canadian film industry is in danger of having its efforts nullified unless preventive steps are taken immediately. Although some Canadian films



are being protected in cold storage vaults, a large number are suffering from exposure to the ravages of heat and moisture: the main enemies of color film.

Color films will continue to fade quickly unless they are placed in atmospherically controlled cold storage vaults or protected through a procedure which uses black and white separations to preserve each color component. Both methods are expensive and the logistics of locating and collecting films for archival protection can be mind boggling.

Canadians such as Sam Kula, director of the National Film, Television and Sound Archives in Ottawa, and Len Green of the National Film Board, have been concerned with the problems of color fading for some time. It has never been a secret that the color dyes used in the film products of Kodak, Fuji, and

others are "fugitive," but the institutions Kula and Green represent are lacking in proper preservation facilities to varying extents. And with sufficient funding not forthcoming in the foreseeable future, color fading remains a chronic dilemma.

It is ironic yet somehow typical that the impetus for immediate action has come from south of the border in the person of Martin Scorsese, the director of *Taxi Driver*, *Raging Bull*, *New York, New York*, and others. This bearded, slightly built, 40-year old New Yorker has been aware of the effects of color fading for several years now. He has seen some of his earlier films such as *Mean Streets* suffer from density loss in their cyan and yellow dyes, resulting in a red or magenta hue that utterly destroyed the original color balance. As a filmmaker who takes great care in utilizing color for aesthetic effect, Scorsese's

artistic intentions have been rendered futile. Yet it was not until Scorsese read a pioneer article on the subject by Bill O'Connell in late 1979 (*Film Comment*: Sept.-Oct., 1979) that he became aware of the urgency and magnitude of color fading and decided to do something about it.

"I finally just couldn't stand it anymore," says Scorsese. "Forget about me as a filmmaker. I'm just sick and tired of it as a movie-goer. I've had it. I'm getting older and I'm sick and tired of seeing these pictures year after year get worse and worse."

Obviously angered by the situation, Scorsese quickly availed himself of the facts and figures on color fading. With the help of associates and experts, he set the wheels in motion and in April, 1980, he launched his campaign against color fading. The war of publicity and words was underway.

Scorsese proceeded to circulate a petition among the international film community, including the Hollywood studios and all major film archival centres. He then sent a list of the petition's 300 signatories to Eastman Kodak in Rochester, New York, along with a strongly worded letter demanding the development of a new permanent release, or print stock. Laying the blame squarely at the feet of Kodak, he warned:

*We believe that Eastman Kodak must recognize its responsibility to the people it services, and must assume a major role in the research and development of a stable color film stock. We ask and expect your full cooperation in this matter, and beseech you to act immediately. We will not accept token gestures... We care so much that we intend to use every means at our disposal to find the solution that threatens our work. We know that the solution exists and we feel it is long overdue.*

Among the people Scorsese recruited for support was director Steven Spielberg, whose early box office hit *Jaws* is already showing signs of deterioration. As Spielberg has noted, "after only five years, the blue is leaving the water of *Jaws*, while the blood spurting from Robert Shaw's mouth gets redder and redder."

Another Scorsese supporter was the

● The Cinémathèque québécoise's cold storage vaults in Boucherville



internationally acclaimed cinematographer Nestor Almendros, who photographed such films as *Days of Heaven*, *The Marquise of O*, *The Black Stallion*, and *Kramer vs Kramer*. He speaks for his profession when he says, "in ten years, the films I've made I'm sure will have vanished. The museums of the future will have lots of black and white films and nothing from our time. This doesn't belong to private enterprise. It's a cultural heritage. I think governments should provide funds."

The Scorsese campaign apparently took Kodak by surprise and generated a host of newspaper and magazine articles, setting off a flurry of concern throughout the film world. Archives, laboratories, distribution companies, and business and cultural organizations were forced to re-examine their operations as well as the needs of their film preservation facilities. The net effect was overwhelming emotional support for the survival of color movies, and bad publicity for Kodak and the other film producing companies.

The first victory came surprisingly quickly. In short order, Eastman Kodak broke the tradition of secrecy surrounding technical information and released its color stability statistics, a move unprecedented in the history of film, both still and moving.

A point that Scorsese attempted to emphasize and which was ignored by the majority of press reports is the scope of the problem of color fading. Scorsese didn't want to merely pressure Hollywood into preserving films made on Kodak or Fuji stock, he wanted to find a solution which would rectify the color problem for all films, from the home movie level upwards. As his campaign assistant Mark del Costello points out, Hollywood films "are just the tip of the iceberg. We're talking about anthropological and historical films, all of which are made on the same stock. Then you have amateur films, which are the biggest part of the iceberg." Costello believes that the technology and the specialized facilities required to preserve color films from deterioration should be made available especially to those who cannot normally afford them. This is where government funding, corporate responsibility, and the organization of film makers and producers become important factors.

Still, the role of Eastman Kodak in finding solutions to color fading was a primary objective of the Scorsese campaign. Henry Wilhelm, a private, Iowa-based film researcher and former employee of Kodak, is blunt in his criticism of that company, charging that it "has been negligent in informing the public on just what the projected life of their dyes is. I know they have the capability to do substantially better... Is it alright for Hollywood movies to disappear? Documentary footage? Television film? I really can't believe that is an acceptable state of affairs."

Wilhelm asserts that the fading of color motion pictures is a relatively easy problem to solve and that Kodak could accomplish the task at little cost to itself. He mentions the fact that the old Technicolor process which was dominant in Hollywood from 1935 to 1952 was infinitely more stable but was phased out for economic reasons.

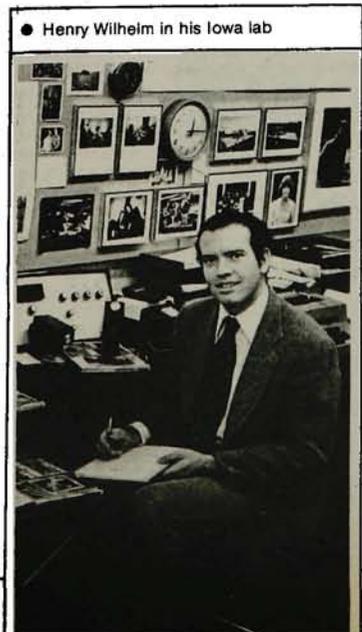
Kodak's chief information officer, Henry Kaska, takes up the defense of his company's past performance by arguing that it was merely supplying what its customers demanded. He cites the failure of Kodak's Low Fade color stock in

the late 1970s to generate significant interest as an indicator of Hollywood's "apathetic" attitude to the problem of color fading.

Another point of view is offered by Klaus Henricks, a widely reknowned researcher and Canada's reigning expert on the chemistry of photography. An employee of the Public Archives of Canada in Ottawa, Henricks thinks it is unfair to blame Kodak for unstable color film, because in 1952, "the film companies honestly didn't know how (the new) color dyes would behave." He feels that Kodak can't be faulted for simply satisfying market needs and places the question of color fading in a more philosophical perspective. "There is an inherent law in our capitalistic economic system and that is: there isn't a thing in the world that some can't make a little cheaper. People who go by price alone become that man's lawful prey."

Henricks points out that the Eastman Color process in a chromogenic one, whereby the film's color is added in the development stage. With this process, colorless dye couplers imbedded in the film emulsion combine with an oxidation product of the developer to form dyes during the actual development stage. Because of the chemical nature of the chromogenic process, it is impossible to make the dyes more stable. The Technicolor imbibition process which adds dyes directly to the exposed black and white film strips (there are three - one for each primary color), doesn't need dye couplers and produces a much more stable color image.

Arguments attempting to determine exactly how the Eastman Color process came to dominate the world film market at the expense of Technicolor (which phased out its imbibition labs between 1976 and 1978 due to lack of demand) is a complex one incorporating the nature of cinema as an industry and an art form. But the simple fact is that Eastman Color has been with us for 30 years now. A recent Kodak pamphlet sums up the mentality which has ignored color stability to the point where Kodak's Low Fade stock was not used because it cost a mere 10% more than the standard Kodak color stock. In part, it states: "dye stability has not generally been a paramount consideration, because the useful life of the theatrical print is generally much shorter than the time required for any visible fading to occur." It is this attitude that must be dealt with today, and one which Scorsese addressed in



● Henry Wilhelm in his Iowa lab

his campaign to persuade Kodak to develop a permanent print stock.

There are many cold storage vaults for film throughout North America, including several in Canada. One of the most advanced is located in an industrial park in suburban Montreal. It is owned and operated by the Cinémathèque Québécoise and has separate vaults for color, black and white, and nitrate films. The color section is the largest of the three, containing many recent Canadian productions and a smattering of films from around the world.

Upon entering the Cinémathèque's vaults, one is confronted with controlled mayhem. Row upon row of plastic and metal film cans are piled from floor to ceiling, spilling out into the cramped office space at the front of the building. Depending on the film's type, the temperature is kept between 2 and 10 degrees Celsius with a relative humidity of 50%.

The vaults have gauges which are regularly monitored to ensure that atmospheric conditions remain constant. In addition to prints, the Cinémathèque also holds original negatives and materials from the various intermediary stages of film production. There are over 8,000 titles in all, and with operating costs for 1981 totaling \$22,420, the expense for one year is less than that of producing black and white separations for a single film.

There is some disagreement between the advocates of cold storage and those who feel that black and white separations are the best way to preserve color film. It seems that cold supporters are in a majority, however, including Giséle Côté, the chief conservation officer of the Cinémathèque québécoise. She feels that the cold storage unit is her institution's most valuable single possession, ensuring the survival of thousands of rare or valuable films. Without cold storage, future Canadians would be deprived of seeing their cinematic heritage as it was originally conceived and intended.

When one looks at the archival situation at Canada's two main cultural institutions, the urgency of some kind of protection for color film becomes painfully evident. The National Film Board, unbelievable as it may sound, does not have a cold storage vault for its color films, resulting in a situation which Wilhelm has labelled "a disaster... The Film Board produced the first full-length feature on Eastman Color print film... *The Royal Journey*... in 1951. It has faded tremendously. I visited the Film Board two years ago and was told they do not have cold storage, so a lot of material is now, I'm sure, unprintable."

Instead of cold storage, the NFB keeps its color films in a dark vaulting area at 20 degree Celsius and between 40 and 50% relative humidity. While this may retard the deterioration process somewhat, it is clearly not suitable for long term preservation, and is certainly inadequate for a filmmaking entity of the size and stature of the NFB.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is Canada's other major institution which shoots its productions on Eastman Color film. The negatives and prints from CBC productions are stored at the Public Archives vaults in Ottawa, which does have cold storage, but which has been called by an anonymous source, "a joke." Apparently, the Public Archives is having problems keeping the vault's humidity constant, a factor which will cause color film to deteriorate.

The NFB, CBC, and Public Archives



● Scorsese assistant Mark de Costello

depend exclusively on government, or public, funding for their continuing operation and survival. Without proper storage conditions, their work is being seriously undermined, indeed rendered futile, by the lack of support from bureaucrats and policy makers who have consistently placed cultural matters on the back burner of their list of priorities.

There has been a positive development, however. While color films made in the last 30 years are still in serious jeopardy, it seems as though the future for color film looks much brighter (as opposed to redder). This year, Kodak responded to the pressure exerted by the Scorsese campaign and announced the introduction of a new, more stable color film stock that will replace all existing color stocks now on the market. Identified by the numbers 5384 and 7384 (for 35mm and 16mm respectively), accelerated laboratory testing has shown that these new stocks are up to 10 times more fade resistant than existing color film. Sam Kula, the director of the film archives in Ottawa, feels this is a great step forward. "If the labs switch to the new Kodak," says Kula, "we will automatically pick up 15 to 20 years of fading resistance at room temperature instead of six or seven. In 25 years or so, dye stability will no longer be a factor, because we will have overcome the present limitations in the existing technology."

Whether Kula's prediction is an accurate one is a major bone of contention among archivists and filmmakers, but it is clear that improvements in the preservation of film are forthcoming and will be implemented if the funds are allocated quickly and adequately.

Only time will tell whether the developments and explosion of interest in preventing color fading over the past three years have been sufficient in checking the serious situation color film now finds itself in. If any more time is taken arguing and pondering over the methods and strategy to be used, instead of rushing to place all color films in cold storage, our cinematic heritage will turn an ugly red; a testament to our society's blatant disregard for the cinema. Now that the counterproductive forces of secrecy, apathy, and ignorance have been challenged, subsequent generations will thank Martin Scorsese and all the other concerned individuals who brought the plight of color motion pictures to widespread public attention. The cinema has now achieved a certain measure of dignity for itself and Scorsese has assured that it has a fighting chance to achieve the lasting respect it deserves.