



A new store-front on the Main.

photo: Lois Seigel

cinéma parallèle

craziness paying off

by Lois Seigel

What do you do if you're a distribution co-op which is slowly – or not so slowly – going broke and the arts councils are cutting off your funds and things couldn't look worse? Build yourself a theatre, of course!



The tea room with its view on St. Laurent street.

photo: Lois Siegel

In 1967 Claude Chamberland was a Montreal rock and roll singer in a band called The Opera Sisters.

"What we were doing was very crazy. No studio wanted to record us. But now craziness pays off."

Claude had always been interested in any experimental orientation to any of the arts. Then he heard about some people who were setting up a new approach to cinema: a center for independent films to be directed by Dimitri Eipides. Claude immediately relinquished his "disco" days and became a projectionist.

And there began his immersion into film. Dimitri founded the *Coopérative des Cinéastes Indépendants* with 15 films and \$2,000 of his own money. Its first theatre was called The Underground Film Center, located at de Maisonneuve and St. Marc in Montreal. Here they invited 40 filmmakers from all over the world, including the U.S., Japan, Italy, Spain and France, to show their films. At this time Claude and Dimitri also organized the first foreign tours of Canadian Independent films and accompanied the films to 14 countries.

But in 1970 the rent doubled, and the Co-op was forced to show films elsewhere: The Museum of Fine Arts, the Museum of Contemporary Art and The Quebec Sculptures Association, now *Conventum*, provided space. And then The *Cinéma Parallèle* was born.

In 1976 they moved again – to *Galerie Media* on Rachel. Claude and Dimitri had always desired a permanent theatre – it was a long dream to accomplish due to money, zoning, construction regulations and health requirements. This year, Claude, with the help of Rainer Schatz, Remi Blackburn, Richard Zurovski and many others, opened The *Cinéma Parallèle* at 3682 St. Lawrence, on Montreal's "Main".

As the first regular showplace for independent films, The *Cinéma Parallèle* holds screenings 7 days a week just like a normal theatre. Also, it houses the *Café Méliès*. The St. Lawrence location is open to theatre, music and poetry; groups or individuals can arrange for screening.

The theatre projector is a 16mm Hortson. It cost \$23,000 new. *Cinéma Parallèle* bought a used one and had it reconditioned. The machine will soon have the possibility of projecting magnetic stripe, or double system: both edge and center track, besides optical sound. The Cinema also intends to buy a super 8 projector capable of rendering 16mm quality.

Claude explains, "The *Cinéma Parallèle* is a non-profit organization. The Co-op now has 200 members. Some Que-

Lois Siegel writes, photographs, teaches and makes experimental films in Montreal.



Claude Chamberland who believed enough to make it happen.

bec filmmakers in 1969 wanted only Quebec films in the Co-op. I said 'over my dead body' – we are working on the principle that we must be of help to any independent filmmaker, no matter what country he comes from."

Money has always been one of the major problems in running the Co-op. "From 1974 to 1977 we didn't receive one penny. Only this year did we finally get a grant from L'Institut Québécois du Cinéma and la Direction Générale du Cinéma et de l'Audio-visuel, which is part of the Ministry of Communications of Quebec."

"Federal money was always a problem. The Co-op had financial difficulties because we always received one-fifth of what our budget requested from The Canada Council. But we survived. We always hoped for some flexibility towards our financial situation, but Penni Jaques and Françoise Picard decided to cut us off completely. We didn't quite understand why they did this. We couldn't provide an audited financial statement because we couldn't afford a bookkeeper and accountant. The money we would have paid those people represented half the money we were getting from The Canada Council, which is ridiculous."

"It was a neurotic situation – after all we'd done, festivals, distribution, promotion, presentations and tours. We were the only group who had permanency in the showing of independent films."

"In July, Françoise Picard told me that before we could get a grant we had to prove ourselves worthy during the next 6 months. I saw her last week (February 21) and she said, 'It's not 6 months, it's one year.' She knew about the Parallèle. She had received an invitation to the opening. So, I guess we'll let it cool off for the time being."

"We've been working on a new catalogue for a year now – off and on because of money problems."

But what benefits go to the independent filmmaker who shows his work at the Parallèle?

"As opposed to the Cinémathèque Québécoise, which does not pay filmmakers, we give \$100 per program. If a filmmaker shows his 30-minute film, he gets \$30. The Cinémathèque in Belgium pays filmmakers. Independent filmmakers need money to make films and to live. We are paying, and the Cinémathèque isn't, although they have a bigger budget. They should have more consideration."

"If an independent filmmaker manages to have his films shown as a short before a feature, say with Famous Players,

he may only get \$110 for a 30-minute film, and the film might be projected 70 times."

It is interesting to note that in the United States a new program has been instituted to show short films by independent filmmakers in commercial movie theatres throughout the nation. Under the auspices of Media Arts, National Endowment for the Arts. "Short Film Showcasing" intends to introduce the public to the development and innovation that has occurred in film.

Warner Bros. and United Artists act as distributors of the under-10-minute films. Each filmmaker receives a \$3,000 honorarium for non-exclusive use of his film. The Endowment fund pays for the blow-up from 16 to 35mm.

This year, The Cinéma Parallèle will host the 7th Montreal International Festival of Cinema in 16mm simultaneously with The Museum of Fine Arts, April 26-30.

The first festival was supported entirely by Dimitri, and then the Co-op received money from the Festivals Office, Secretary of State, in Ottawa.

"But it was the office's wish to have a commercial festival to build the film industry – with big receptions like at Cannes. Everyone was looking for glamor and prestige."

Claude and Dimitri's idea was completely the opposite, and not competitive by any means. "We wanted a showcase for independent films not usually projected on the commercial circuit."

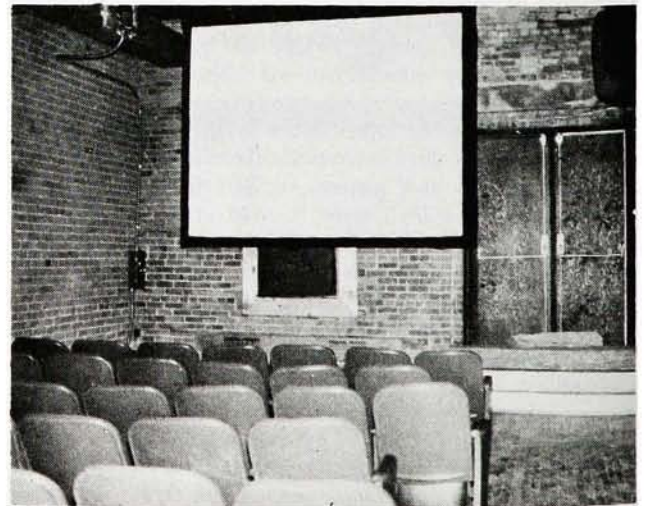
When other festivals were introduced, the independents were tossed aside. "You're not industry oriented. We can't provide the money," they were told.

The financial sources for this year's festival are la Direction Générale du Cinéma and The National Film Board. "These people are helping, but we have to make them understand that a festival such as ours is working in an aura of communication – a festival as a living experience."

And the future: "We intend to institute a production Co-op. We will provide equipment and a permanent technician to demonstrate every phase of filmmaking."

Also, we will invite filmmakers from all over the world to the Parallèle. Taktiko Iimura, the Japanese filmmaker, will be here in April.

Claude's new dream: to keep The Cinéma Parallèle open 24 hours a day. □



The theatre.

photo: Lois Seigel