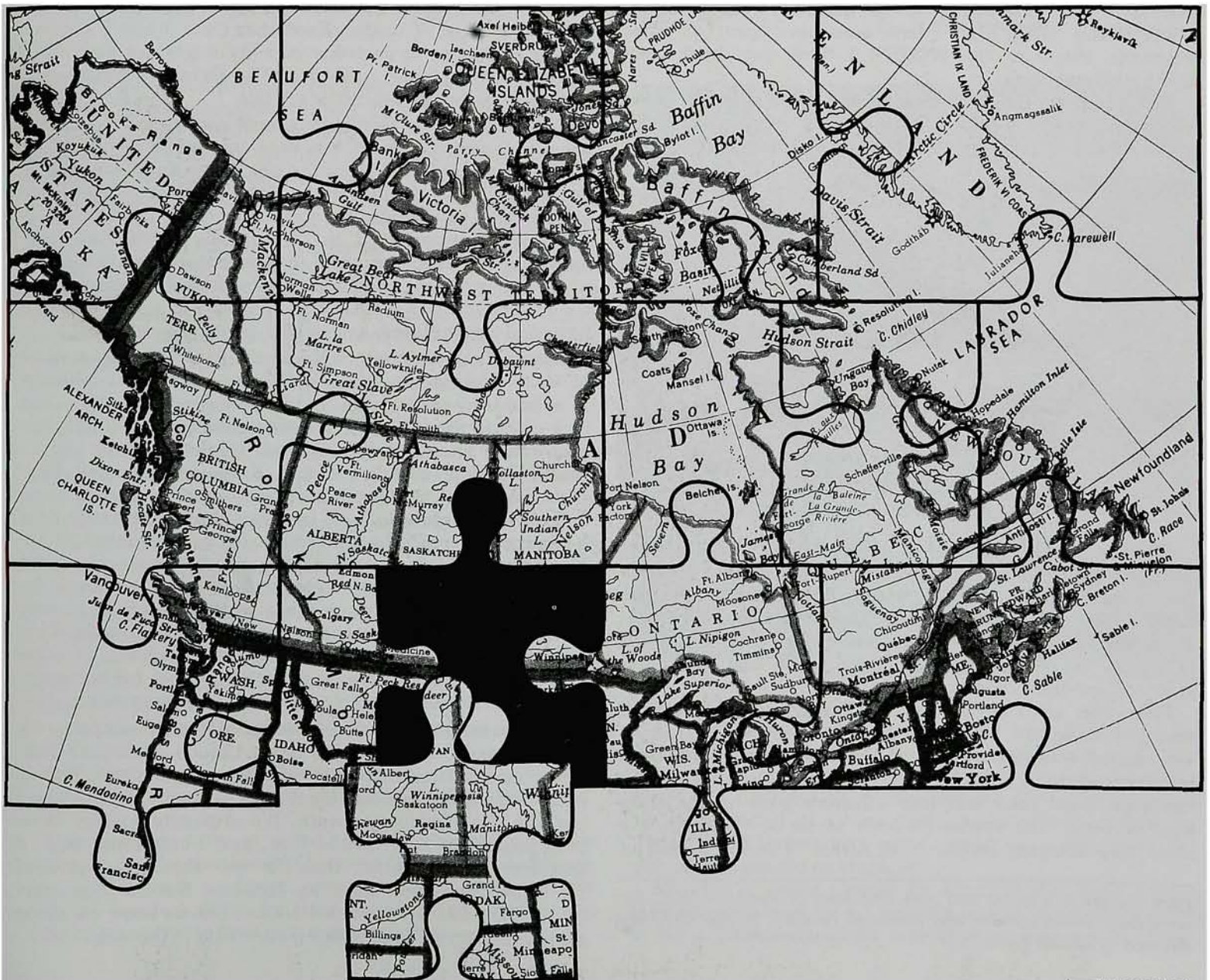


To hear the producers, a few good Canadian scripts could turn this industry around. We asked Cam Hubert about some of the ideas and scripts she's been stockpiling. Perhaps they, and others like them, could help us piece together a Canadian identity.

scenarios for canadian films

by Cam Hubert



When I was asked if I would be willing to write an article about "Scenarios for a Canadian Film", my first reactions were mixed. My most immediate reaction was that I was miffed the letter came addressed to MR Cam Hubert. I ought to be getting used to that, by now. It seems to be presupposed that if a person is a writer, particularly a writer dedicated to film and film form, then the person is a man. Has to be a man. Couldn't be anything other than a man.

I am not a man. My three children and my ex-husband could all testify to that.

Having cleared the air of that, I may be able to move on to Scenarios for a Canadian Film. It ought to be easy. Off-hand I would say there are probably 25 million good stories, any of which would make a good film. Do I start alphabetically or in order of historic happening, do I subclassify and cross-index according to ethnic or costume, modern or...?

Do we have to be self-consciously Canadian? Isn't there the slight possibility that within our borders things have happened that might be universal in scope and international in theme? Do we have to have Mounties, maple syrup, hockey sticks and a pulp mill to qualify as Canadian?

I mean, to raise an old ghost, What Is Canadian Identity?

I started listing themes and stories I thought would be good box-office draws and still be material from which good films could be made and then I was face to face with what seems to be another presupposition. That there is an inherent contradiction between "good film" and "commercial film"; do they have to be mutually self-exclusive? Some of the BEST films I have seen have been box-office successes. Some of the WORST I have seen have been quite good endquote.

Film is an art form but that doesn't mean it has to be an esoteric mystery. Film is entertainment, but that doesn't mean it has to cater to the lowest common denominator.

British Columbia Archives



Carving out Richfield, a miners' town in B.C.

Then I thought well, why not show what the Canadian film industry has so far NOT done. Show some of the Canadian stories and themes which I, myself, have incorporated into scripts which have been ignored completely by every possible arm of the Canadian film community. For in this list of rejects lies something that ought to be said about the state of Canadian filmmaking.

Five years ago I began work on **The Drinking Gourd**. A friend of mine, the first black baby born in North Vancouver, shared with me some of the stories passed down from mother to child in a totally oral tradition. None of these stories ever found their way into a history book or any other kind of book. The stories go back as far as the hold of a slave ship bringing people from Africa. The stories tell of

the horror of the auction block, the sexual exploitation of the black woman, the agony of having your children taken away and sold like cattle, the gutsy refusal to take the easy way out and die. Some generations after the first black woman in the family was brought to North America one of her grandsons was body-servant to a cavalry officer who was assigned to the Cherokee who were being sent on the Trail of Tears. The Cherokee had the first university in North America, the teacher of a class of children on the trek was a graduate of that university, a woman who spoke both Cherokee and English. The black man made a deal with the woman; he would get her away from the white man if she would keep him safe from the Indians. They left, with about a dozen others, under cover of a blizzard. They headed north, their trail obscured by snow and wind. Years later some of the Metis defenders of Batoche had black skins. Another branch of the family came north with Harriet Tubman herself. Another branch were political refugees from Ethiopia, people who were against Haile Selassie when it wasn't popular to dispute him at all. The family moved west with the historic migration; worked the CPR and the mines, the harvests and the homesteads. The first black sheriff in Alberta... people heading for the Cariboo gold fields... all in one family. A genealogical study, a human study, a statement on the human condition set amongst some of the most filmically beautiful scenery in the world. The history of a family through the eyes and hearts of its women.

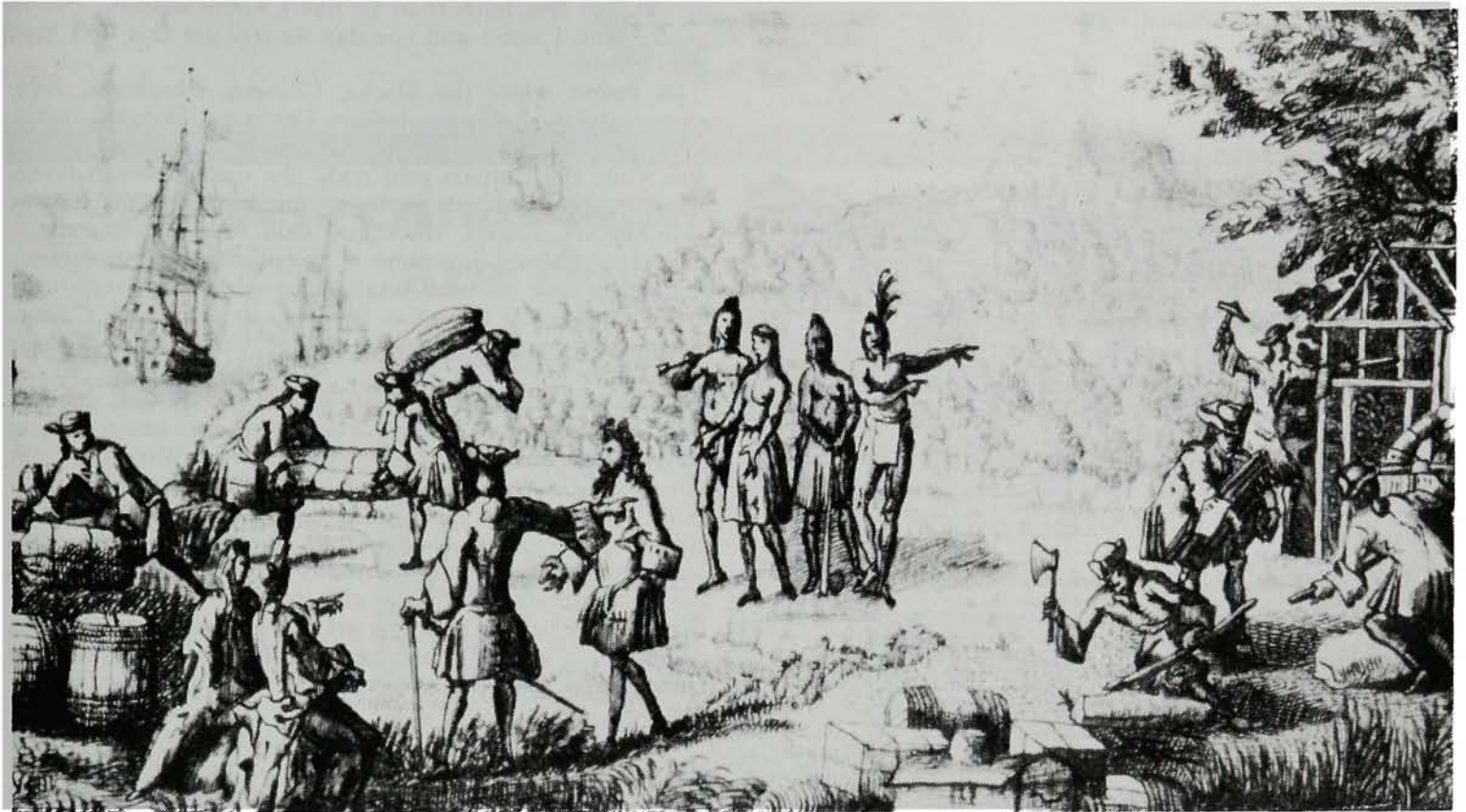
The NFB, CBC, and CFDC were not the least little bit interested. Now, of course, **Roots** has done it and I suppose that in a year or so someone possibly might see something more and better could come from **The Drinking Gourd**, but it will still be a case of too little too late.

I don't think **The Drinking Gourd** got rejected because I am a bad writer; nobody was even interested in seeing the script. Comment was basically the same from everyone... do you really think the blacks have made any significant contribution to Canada, do you really think it is relevant? Well, yes, gentlemen, I *do*. I certainly think there was more merit in this story than in **Shadow of the Hawk**, but while our industry reacted with total bland indifference to a story about a Canadian family, money was made available for what I can only term a piece of tripe.

Simon Kunnanoot was a Kispiox Indian who was accused of back-shooting two white men. Not trusting his chances at a fair trial, Kunnanoot and his brother-in-law Himadan took off into the bush. They were chased by the RCMP, the Pinkertons, and endless posses of people out after the rewards. Himadan died in the bush. Kunnanoot survived. Supported his family. Moved easily wherever he wanted to go and eventually gave himself up when assured he would have a change of venue and a fair trial. He was acquitted. If audiences will watch a chase epic, particularly one where the poor guy is eventually exonerated, that is set in barren desert, they'll sit forever to watch a good story set in country where the very environment becomes an unpaid actor. That is part of our identity, incidentally, the fact our lives are structured to our weather and our geography. I don't notice a stampede to try to tell the story of Simon Kunnanoot.

Dreamspeaker has been done as a 90-minute special by the CBC and I was fortunate to get Claude Jutra for my director and fortunate that the casting suggestions I had to make were given consideration by the people with whom I had the good fortune to work. We originally wanted to do **Dreamspeaker** as a feature film, and I still think that, if shot for theatres rather than for the obviously restricted TV screen, it would make an excellent feature film. I am not saying CBC was a second choice, but we knew we would get *nowhere* trying to do it as a feature film in Canada.

Cam Hubert is a writer and poet who lives in Nanaimo, B.C. Her screenplay Dreamspeaker was produced recently by the CBC and directed by Claude Jutra.



The Indians look on as the French arrive

We make our own public enemies; I was doing research into the Mary Steinhauser tragedy at the BC Pen and I became fascinated with the personal histories of the inmates involved. With all the facilities at our society's fingertips, young boys were shunted from pillar to post until their problems became such that the only answer we could come up with was to stuff them into tiger cages and hope there wouldn't be an explosion. We are still doing this and **Way To Go Davey Boy** is my exploration of how this can happen in a civilized country. There are some kids who do just a bit more than other kids; properly channeled this energy makes them winners, they're the kids who make the heroic slide into home or score a winning goal with a chipped elbow or... send a brick flying into a Mountie's face. The ones who could be winners wind up losers; and another script is met with nods and "interesting, but..."

I do not write "tits'n'ass" and I don't go out of the house to buy a ticket to sit in a theatre to watch it; but it sure gets financed in this country. Blood, gore, sex and sadism, put them in your script and call it... Canadian content?

The Nootka nation defeated three ships of the Spanish fleet long before Captain Cook ever claimed Vancouver Island for England. There is a lost gold mine legend, and a forest fire that wiped out one third of the island, all of that incorporated into a modern story about a young man who can't hack the city and so goes back to his grandfather's farm on the west coast of the island. He sees "ghosts" and thinks he's going out of his skull, and anybody who likes fantasy, ghosts, supernatural or fright films would love **Restless Coast** but...

Old Woman examines the position of women in Canada today while taking a look at pre-Indian myths and it is visual, filmic, funny and...

Homecoming looks at something we ought to pay more attention to; the relationship between fathers and daughters. I'm sorry there is no incest, orgy, murder or rape, just the story of people looking for their roots, their identities and their own answers to their own questions. But...

Public Archives



Baking bread wasn't always easy for the women

File on Helen Morgan is a book by John F. Gibson that has sold out in hardcover here and abroad and is about to come out in paperback. I have adapted the book to a film-script but neither CBC Vancouver nor CBC Toronto seems at all interested in a book about a Canadian social reality. This film, if it ever gets made, could do in film what *Ecstasy of Rita Joe* did on stage, but...

Revenge of Annie Charlie by Alan Fry has been a popular Canadian book by a Canadian writer. We've been trying to get a film produced for several years now and if Al Sim-



And how about flying a kite across the Niagara gorge to build a suspension bridge?

Saskatchewan Archives



English colonists stop at Saskatoon

Public Archives



Ellis Island didn't corner the market on immigrants

monds had less faith than he has I would despair, but he doesn't and I won't and one day we *will* get this very good story filmed.

Of course while the blacks, Chinese, Ukrainian, Estonian, Latvian, Icelandic, Indian, Pakistani, Bengali, Punjabi and Doukhobour waves of immigration have been ignored and while the Cariboo gold rush, the Saskatchewan homesteaders, the Cariboo cowboys, the coal miners, loggers, mill workers, singers, track and field stars, boxers, mountain climbers and inventors of telephones and discoverers of insulin have all been totally ignored by the ivory-tower decisionmakers in Canadian film we can point with... something... to the million-dollar pile of bird-poop shoved on us last year.

Union history on this island was so bloody that Joe Hill wouldn't even come here! There was no real union for coal miners here until after the Second World War. Then the mines went belly up but the out-of-work miners were finally in the UMWofA. My kids have seen **Boxcar Bertha** and learned about labor union martyrs in the US but they only know from my own stories (usually at election time or when the Sacred boffins come up with another back-to-work rule I find fascist) that their own great-grandfather was a union organizer. It would be a wonderful film, the sequel to **How Green Was My Valley** written on Vancouver Island, but...

But while we may have come a long way, baby, we've still got a long way to go. I don't think the CFDC should be doing things the way they have been doing them. I doubt if anybody in his or her right mind would suggest they continue doing whatever it is they have been doing. I think if they were to become an introduction service to put the writers in touch with the producers and directors and then, if they want to invest money and get involvement from major studios they can say "Hey, we've got a script" and... introduce everybody to everybody else.

Scenarios for a Canadian film? They are all around us; they are in the memories of our grandfathers and in the futures of our children. They're your story and my story, his story and her story. The writers are writing them. But...

All we need (all!) for a viable Canadian film industry is to start making *good* films and the results will prove our points. We don't have to be self-consciously Canadian nor do we have to be apologetic. I personally think we've got off the track in the past three years and a lot of crap has been filmed that ought never to have been filmed, a lot of insincere people have had some funded fun and we have been right royally screwed without so much as a kiss by people who have sold us out for a pocket full or bird droppings, but I have a lot of confidence in the professional people in the industry.

What I don't have much faith in is the kind of mentality that couldn't see what was in **Drinking Gourd** until **Roots** got there first. Until we have the kind of vision that went into making **Roots**, we won't even begin to scratch the surface. Nobody can ever begin to know where he/she is going if he/she doesn't know where he/she is coming from, and we have to take a good look at where we started before we have any chance of getting where it is we want to get.

We have drama, comedy, suspense, mythology, adventure, action, westerns, farces, and probably even Biblical allegories waiting to be done. (And if anybody steals any of the script ideas I have just outlined, we'll have a mass murder story to chronicle, too!)

Hang in there, we'll make it yet!

HI AL! Maybe we should move Gyp and Annie from the interior of BC to a bar in Greenwich Village. Make her a Puerto Rican blues singer and him a piano player and instead of a comic/drama we try for vampires with two sets of tits each and.....

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