

# EXPERIMENTAL

GRIERSON'S ORPHAN

Film

It is paradoxical and strangely typical that Canada's internationally renowned avant garde cinema can trace its origins to, of all places, the Canadian government. As with most things cinematic in Canada, even experimental film began at the NFB. It was unwittingly nurtured by the very man whose approach to filmmaking would later fuel the experimentalists' rebellion—John Grierson. When Grierson hired Norman McLaren, he had no idea that this quiet animator would help to inspire a movement which radically opposes the empirical principles of the documentary. Working with the cinematic medium in entirely new ways, playfully and profoundly foregrounding the artifices of his own image-making, McLaren detonated the very perceptual frameworks of the institution which employed him and, in the process, opened up the possibilities of Canadian cinematic expression. That pursuit of possibilities remains the chief characteristic of this other essential Canadian filmmaking tradition—the experimental film.

WAVELENGTH



most significant avant garde filmmaking took place beyond the Board. Concentrated primarily, but not exclusively in Toronto and Vancouver, experimental filmmaking flourished within the independent film scenes, on university campuses, and in the burgeoning visual arts community.

Rooted in early European avant garde movements and influenced by the American avant garde cinema of the 1940s and 1950s, experimental filmmaking in Canada began to emerge fully in the 1960s. Although some experimental work continued to be produced inside the NFB by McLaren, Arthur Lipsett and others, the

CANADIAN PACIFIC



In the 1960s, Canadian experimental film rose to international prominence and critical acclaim in groundbreaking works of Michael Snow (*Wavelength*), Joyce Wieland (*Rat Life and Diet in North America*) and Jack Chambers (*Hart of London*).

The tradition gathered formal and philosophical momentum in the 1970s and 1980s with Bruce Elder, David Rimmer, Ellie Epp, Al Razutis, Chris Gallagher, Vincent Grenier, Peter Mettler, Barbara Sternberg and others. In addition to the continuing work of these directors, Sheridan College in Oakville gave rise to the "Niagara Escarpment" school. Rick Hancox, Richard Kerr, Philip Hoffman, Mike Hoolboom, Gary Popovich and Steve Sanguedolce produced highly personal, autobiographical work while maintaining the structuralist, experimental tradition. Into the 1990s, experimental filmmaking, always restless and incorporating new image-making media into its open-ended forms, continues to offer startling, influential work. Just as the documentary tradition once dominated the structures of fiction in Canadian cinema, now the formal and philosophical investigations, once the exclusive preserve of the experimental film, are increasingly evident in recent Canadian narrative feature filmmaking.

RAT LIFE AND DIET IN NORTH AMERICA



HART OF LONDON

In under four decades, the elusive, protean experimental film tradition has yielded a vast, complex and vital body of work essential to our understanding of Canadian cinema. Then and now, experimental film contests the assumptions of narrative cinema, the empirical claims of the documentary, and the validity of its own complex processes of image-making.

The experimental accusation, boldly and often breathtakingly rendered, contends that audiences must challenge their very ways of seeing. Evolving in a creative dialectic with the documentary (in spite of Grierson or because of him), the rich and vibrant Canadian experimental film tradition continues both to construct and detonate images in order to investigate what is present and, perhaps, illuminate what is absent.

■ Tom McSorley

# TimeLines

## DISTINCTLY CANADIAN 100

Canada at the Toronto festival, which becomes the premier showcase for new Canadian cinema.

- Atom Egoyan shoots his first feature, *Next of Kin*, marking the beginning of Ontario's New Wave.
- *La guerre des tuques/The Dog Who Stopped the War*, Demers's first *Tales for All* for Les Productions la Fête, is released.
- *The Terry Fox Story* wins the Best Film and *Strange Brew* the Golden Reel Award at the Genies.
- Cynthia Scott's *Flamenco at 5:15* wins for Best Documentary Short, and Atlantis Films of Toronto wins Best Live Action Short for Don McBreaty's *Boys and Girls*.

### FILMS

*The Bay Boy* (Daniel Petrie)  
*The Blood of Others* (Claude Chabrol)  
*La femme de l'hôtel* (Léa Pool)  
*Flamenco at 5:15* (Cynthia Scott)  
*La guerre des tuques* (André Melançon)  
*Low Visibility* (Patricia Gruben)  
*Next of Kin* (Atom Egoyan)  
*Sonatine* (Micheline Lanctôt)

### 1985

#### Events:

- Robert Lantos and Stephen Roth of RSL Productions join forces with John Kemeny and Denis Héroux of ICC to form Alliance Entertainment Corp.
- After lengthy court appeals, the Ontario Board of Censors is finally disbanded and replaced by the Ontario Film Review Board.
- The Academy of Canadian Cinema becomes the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television.
- Ishu Patel's *Paradise* wins the Silver Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival.
- *The Bay Boy* wins the Best Film and *La guerre des tuques* the Golden Reel Award at the Genies.
- *Charade* by John Minnis of Sheridan College wins an Oscar for Best Animated Short Film.

### FILMS

*Agnes of God* (Norman Jewison)  
*Artie Shaw: Time is All You've Got* (Brigitte Berman)  
*The Big Snit* (Richard Condie)  
*Canada's Sweetheart: The Saga of Hal C. Banks* (Donald Brittain)  
*Crime Wave* (John Paizs)  
*La dame en couleurs* (Claude Jutra)  
*Joshua Then and Now* (Ted Kotcheff)  
*The Masculine Mystique* (John N. Smith)

and Giles Walker)  
*My American Cousin* (Sandy Wilson)  
*One Magic Christmas* (Phillip Borsos)  
*Paradise* (Ishu Patel)

### 1986 Events:

- Drabinsky sells 49 per cent of Cineplex Odeon to MCA Inc., the parent company of Universal Studios, effectively putting Cineplex under American control.
- Telefilm Canada announces a \$165-million Feature Film Fund over five years to assist in the production and distribution of feature films.
- The MPAA signs an agreement with the Province of Quebec (Bill 109) by which only Quebec distributors will be allowed to distribute foreign films in the province. This effectively bars English-Canadian distributors from operating in Quebec.
- The Ontario Film Development Corporation comes into being with Wayne Clarkson as its first director.
- The National Screen Institute, based in Edmonton, is formed and the Local Heroes Film Festival begins.
- With the tragic suicide of Claude Jutra, Canada loses one of its finest film directors.
- Denys Arcand's *Le déclin de l'empire américain* wins the International Film Critics' Award at Cannes.
- *My American Cousin* wins the Best Film and Nelvana's *The Care Bear Movie* wins the Golden Reel Award at the Genies.

### FILMS

*The Adventure of Faustus Bidgood* (Andy Jones)  
*Anne Trister* (Léa Pool)  
*Dancing in the Dark* (Leon Marr)  
*Le déclin de l'empire américain* (Denys Arcand)  
*Loyalties* (Anne Wheeler)  
*Pouvoir intime* (Yves Simoneau)

### 1987 Events:

- The Canada-Manitoba Cultural Industries Development Office (CIDO) and B.C. Film are established.
- Patricia Rozema's *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing* wins the Prix de la jeunesse at Cannes.
- Brigitte Berman's *Artie Shaw: Time is All You've Got* wins an Oscar for Best Feature Documentary, Arcand's *Le déclin*

### Gordon Sparling

Director and producer. Born, Toronto, 1900. Starting with the Ontario Motion Picture Bureau in 1924, Sparling had a 40 year career at the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau and the Associated Screen News. During the 1930s, he was virtually the only creative filmmaker in the Canadian commercial film industry and was the editor on

*Carry on Sergeant!* He launched the *Canadian Cameo* series of theatrical shorts at ASN in 1935 and continued to direct and produce the series until 1954. During the war, he was the head of the Canadian Army Film and Photo Unit making propaganda films for the war effort. He returned to ASN and remained with the studios until the production department was closed down in 1957.

### Donald and Kiefer Sutherland

Donald: Actor. Born, St. John, N.B., 1934. Kiefer: Actor. Born, London, U.K., 1967. Donald is indisputably one of the world's most versatile actors. From bit parts to leading roles, from American potboilers to European art house cinema, from *Klute* to *M\*A\*S\*H* to *Fellini's Casanova* to *Ordinary People* to *Bethune: The Making of a Hero*, Sutherland's career spans a vast and open cinematic terrain. Since making his screen debut in 1964, Sutherland's unique screen presence has made him much in demand. He has produced a body of work which is as beguilingly diverse as it is lengthy. Son Kiefer appears to have taken the same approach, assuming a broad range of roles in an equally eclectic number of films. Making an impressive debut opposite Liv Ullmann in Daniel Petrie's coming-of-age story, *The Bay Boy*, Sutherland the younger has become one of his generation's most consistent performers.



## Nat Taylor

Exhibitor, distributor, producer and journalist. Born, Toronto, 1906. An enigmatic, yet important figure in the development of a film culture in Canada, Taylor owned and operated the Twentieth Century theatre circuit, the largest of the independents, and opened the world's first "twin" theatre in Ottawa in 1948. With publisher Hye Bosin, he launched the *Canadian Film Weekly* in 1942 and used the paper as a platform to lobby for greater federal government involvement in feature film production. He produced Julian Roffman's *The Mask*, which is the first Canadian feature to be marketed extensively in the U.S.; however, his lasting achievement is the introduction of multiplex cinemas, a concept which he developed for 30 years until launching the Cineplex chain with producer Garth Drabinsky in 1979.

## John Vernon

Actor. Born Adolphus Vernon Agopsowicz, Regina, 1932. In addition to his many films, both American and Canadian (remember his growling dispensation of worldly wisdom to Peter in *Nobody Waved Good-bye?*), Vernon starred in the legendary Canadian TV series, *Wojeck*, about a crusading coroner. This distinguished stage and screen performer is often cast as the self-assured heavy or crafty villain. An underrated character actor, Vernon is undoubtedly the only human in history to have appeared both in an episode of *The Forest Rangers* and in a film by Alfred Hitchcock (*Topaz*). He is perhaps best remembered as

## Kiefer Sutherland in *The Bay Boy*.



"The Mayor" opposite Clint Eastwood in Don Siegal's *Dirty Harry* and the thief who is viciously betrayed by Angie Dickinson in John Boorman's *Point Blank*.

## Richard Williams

Animator. Born, Toronto, 1933. The animator who created the popular *Pink Panther* cartoon character, Williams also designed the introductory credits to the hugely popular films starring Peter Sellers. He left school in Toronto at 15 to make a failed bid to join the Disney studios; eventually he arrived with George Dunning in swinging London in the early 1960s. Williams worked as a graphic artist, winning countless prizes for his animated TV commercials. He designed title sequences for *What's New Pussycat?* and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. In 1973, he earned an Oscar for his animated version of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, and in 1988 was responsible for the groundbreaking live action-animation in Robert Zemeckis's *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*.

# TimeLines

*de l'empire américain* is nominated for Best Foreign Film, and Norman Jewison receives his third nomination, for *Moonstruck*.

■ *Le déclin de l'empire américain* wins both the Best Film and Golden Reel Award at the Genies.

## FILMS

*Candy Mountain* (Robert Frank and Rudy Wurlitzer)

*Family Viewing* (Atom Egoyan)

*The Gate* (Tibor Takacs)

*La guerre oubliée* (Richard Boutet)

*L'homme qui plantait des arbres* (Frédéric Back)

*I've Heard the Mermaids Singing* (Patricia Rozema)

*Life Classes* (William MacGillivray)

*Train of Dreams* (John N. Smith)

*Undivided Attention* (Chris Gallagher)

*Un zoo, la nuit* (Jean-Claude Lauzon)

## 1988 Events:

■ Federal Communications Minister Flora MacDonald tables her Film Products Importation Bill which would give Canadian distributors some measure of access to films not produced by the Hollywood majors by introducing a licensing system for all film distributors operating in Canada. The Bill would eventually die on the order paper. It would be the last serious attempt by the feds to curtail the activities of the major American distributors. Subsequent federal policy has been to increase distribution and marketing funds within the context of Telefilm Canada.

■ La société générale du cinéma du Québec becomes the film division of La société générale des industries culturelles du Québec (SOGIC).

■ The Canadian Centre for Advanced Film Studies, founded by Norman Jewison, opens in North York.

■ *Un zoo, la nuit* wins the Best Film and *The Gate* the Golden Reel Award at the Genies.

■ Frédéric Back wins his second Oscar for the Radio-Canada animated short, *L'homme qui plantait des arbres*.

## FILMS

*Alias Will James* (Jacques Godbout)

*The Cat Came Back* (Cordell Barker)

*Comic Book Confidential* (Ron Mann)

*Dead Ringers* (David Cronenberg)

*La grenouille et la baleine* (Jean-Claude Lord)

*Les portes tournantes* (Francis Mankiewicz)

*Tales From the Gimli Hospital* (Guy Maddin)

*A Winter Tan* (Jackie Burroughs, Louise Clark, John Frizzell, John Walker and Aerlyn Weissman)

## 1989 Events:

■ Drabinsky attempts to buy back Cineplex Odeon from his American partners, but loses out in the much publicized corporate struggle. He resigns from Cineplex and leaves the world of Canadian film for more successful ventures producing mega-musicals.

■ The Ontario Film Institute folds into the Toronto Film Festival and becomes the Cinematheque Ontario and The Film Reference Library.

■ The NFB wins an Honorary Oscar in recognition of its 50th anniversary.

■ *Cinema Canada* ceases publication after 18 years.

■ Arcand's *Jésus de Montréal* wins a Jury Prize at Cannes.

■ *Dead Ringers* wins the Best Film and *La grenouille et la baleine* the Golden Reel Award at the Genies.

## FILMS

*Bye Bye Blues* (Anne Wheeler)

*Cold Comfort* (Vic Sarin)

*Jésus de Montréal* (Denys Arcand)

*Speaking Parts* (Atom Egoyan)

*The Top of His Head* (Peter Mettler)

*Welcome to Canada* (John N. Smith)

## 1990 Events:

■ After many months of delay, Phillip Borsos's *Bethune: The Making of a Hero* is finally released to almost universal condemnation. The ill-fated production, at \$20-million the most expensive Canadian film to be produced at the time, is the realization of a 50-year-old dream by author Ted Allan.

■ Francis Mankiewicz's *Love and Hate*, made for CBC-TV, is the first Canadian production to be aired in U.S. Network primetime.

■ The Nova Scotia Film Development Corporation is formed.

■ Arcand's masterpiece, *Jésus de Montréal*, sweeps 12 Genies (the most ever by any film in the history of awards) plus the Golden Reel Award.

## FILMS

*Archangel* (Guy Maddin)

*Bethune: The Making of a Hero* (Phillip Borsos)

*The Company of Strangers* (Cynthia Scott)

*Une histoire inventée* (André Forcier)

*Le party* (Pierre Falardeau)

*Perfectly Normal* (Yves Simoneau)

*Roadkill* (Bruce McDonald)



# TimeLines

## 1991

### Events:

- First Nations Filmmakers Alliance is founded in Edmonton.
- Rock Demers is one of the founders of L'institute nationale de l'image et du son, a Montreal film school based on Jewison's Canadian Film Centre.
- *Jésus de Montréal* is nominated for Best Foreign Film at the Academy Awards.
- The Genies move from March to November. *Black Robe* wins the Best Film and *Ding et Dong, le film* the Golden Reel Award.

### FILMS

*The Adjuster* (Atom Egoyan)  
*Black Robe* (Bruce Beresford)  
*Blackfly* (Christopher Hinton)  
*Clearcut* (Richard Bugajski)  
*The Falls* (Kevin McMahon)  
*The Grocer's Wife* (John Pozer)  
*The Making of "Monsters"* (John Greyson)

## 1992

### Events:

- *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media* is released and becomes the most successful theatrically released Canadian documentary of all time.
- Le Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris organizes the largest retrospective of Canadian films ever held anywhere.
- The first issue of the new *Take One* appears.
- *Naked Lunch* wins the Best Film and

*Black Robe* the Golden Reel Award at the Genies.

### FILMS

*Les aventuriers de timbre perdu* (Michael Rubbo)  
*The Boys of St. Vincent* (John N. Smith)  
*Careful* (Guy Maddin)  
*Highway 61* (Bruce McDonald)  
*Léolo* (Jean-Claude Lauzon)  
*Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media* (Peter Wintonick and Mark Achbar)  
*Masala* (Srinivas Krishna)  
*Naked Lunch* (David Cronenberg)  
*Requiem pour un beau sans coeur* (Robert Morin)  
*La sarrasine* (Paul Tana)

## 1993

### Events:

- Robert Lantos takes Alliance public and creates Alliance Communications Inc. In production and distribution in both television and feature films, Alliance has become the largest in Canada and a major player in the North American marketplace.
- *Shadow of the Wolf/Agaguk* is released. At a reported cost of \$31-million, this Canada/France co-production is the most expensive Canadian film ever made.
- The Feature Film Project is launched at the Canadian Film Centre. Its first production is Holly Dale's *Blood & Donuts*.
- Telefilm Canada celebrates its 25th anniversary.

- *Thirty-two Short Films About Glenn Gould* wins Best Film and *La Florida* the Golden Reel Award at the Genies.

### FILMS

*Calendar* (Atom Egoyan)  
*I Love a Man in Uniform* (David Wellington)  
*Map of the Human Heart* (Vincent Ward)

## 1994

### Events:

- The federal government approves the takeover of the Canadian assets of Paramount Communications Inc. (formerly Gulf+Western) by Viacom Inc. of New York. These assets include the Famous Players theatre chain and Blockbuster Video. In turn, Viacom promises to exhibit more Canadian films and spend more money in the marketing of Canadian films in Famous Players theatres.
- Nelvana goes public; IMAX is purchased by American interests and goes public in the U.S.
- John Candy, the most successful of the SCTV graduates and one of the most beloved Canadian actors of all time, dies at age 43.
- Atom Egoyan's *Exotica* wins the International Film Critics' Prize at Cannes, the first English-Canadian feature to win a major international award since *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*.
- *Exotica* wins Best Film and *Louis 19, le roi des ondes* the Golden Reel Award at the Genies.

### FILMS

*Exotica* (Atom Egoyan)  
*Louis 19, le roi des ondes* (Michel Poulette)  
*Love and Human Remains* (Denys Arcand)  
*Mouvements du désir* (Léa Pool)  
*Octobre* (Pierre Falardeau)  
*Thirty-two Short Films About Glenn Gould*

(François Gérard)  
*Zéro Patience* (John Greyson)

## 1995

### Events:

- Edgar Bronfman Jr., through his family's company, Seagrams, of Montreal, buys MCA (owners of Universal Studios) from Matsushita Electric Industrial of Japan for a reported \$8-billion Canadian.
- The newly elected provincial Tories under Mike Harris cut deeply into the OFDC, freezing production funding and slashing the amount of money available for OFIP, the Ontario tax rebate program operated by the OFDC.
- La société générale des entreprises culturelles (SODEC) replaces SOGIC and L'institut québécois du cinéma, Quebec's film advisory board.
- Disney announces the opening of two new animation studios, one in Vancouver and the other in Toronto.
- *Le confessionnal* wins Best Film and *Johnny Mnemonic* the Golden Reel Award at the Genies, in ceremonies that take place in Montreal in January, 1996.
- The NFB receives its 10th Oscar, for *Bob's Birthday*.

### FILMS

*Bob's Birthday* (David Fine and Alison Snowden)  
*Le confessionnal* (Robert Lepage)  
*Double Happiness* (Mina Shum)  
*Eldorado* (Charles Binamé)  
*Rude* (Clement Virgo)  
*When Night is Falling* (Patricia Rozema)

## TAKE ONE

## Steve Williams

Animator. Born, Toronto, 1962. One of the best and brightest of the new wave of computer animators, and a graduate of Sheridan College's famed animation school, Williams first went to work for the Toronto-based software innovators, Alias Research, but quickly moved on to George Lucas's Industrial Light and Magic. There he has been responsible for creating the aliens in *The Abyss* and the shape-shifting villain in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. His realistic dinosaurs convinced Steven Spielberg to use computer animation rather than traditional puppets to create the T-Rex and raptors in *Jurassic Park*. Williams was nominated for an Academy award for his work in transforming Jim Carrey into a cartoon superhero in *The Mask*.

## Fay Wray

Actor. Born, Cardston, Alberta, 1907. This almond-eyed beauty raised on her father's ranch, "Wrayland," achieved world-wide fame in 1933 as the shrieking heroine in *King Kong*. However, Wray started in Hollywood almost a decade earlier during the silent era's golden age and was one of the few actresses from that period still performing in the late 1950s. One of her early successes was opposite Erich von Stroheim in *The Wedding March*. Like Marlene Dietrich, Wray was often paired up with Gary Cooper in a number of his star vehicles from 1928 to 1933. Wray also acted on stage throughout her career and co-authored a play with Sinclair Lewis. She appeared in her last film, *Dragstrip Riot*, in 1958. ■

