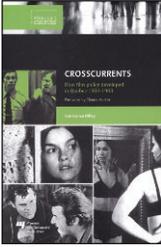


Reviews



Crosscurrents: How Film Policy Developed in Quebec 1960–1983. By Constance Dilley. Foreward by Claude Martin. Quebec City: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2018. 302 pp. ISBN 9782760549388.

This is, in many ways, a book of firsts: to the best of my knowledge, one of the first English language books to be published by the Presses de l'Université du Québec (PUQ), as part of its Culture et publics series; the first detailed study in English of Québec film policy; and the first history of Québec film policy written in full recognition of the role played therein by English speaking Montrealers, many of whom were Jewish.

Surely, one of the reasons for the still-fragmented state of Canadian and Québec film history is that a researcher must, at the very least, know the two official languages. Even so, that creates further problems down the line, for academic publishers, for example. The resulting manuscript will likely contain long quotations in English and French. Should these be translated or not? If so, costs go up and delays ensue. All the more kudos, then, to the PUQ for having taken on Dilley's book.

Knowing the two official languages also allows for some striking findings. As Dilley remarks of her intensive archival research in Québec City, Montréal, and Ottawa: "The cultural archives reveal an almost total absence of any exchanges between the provinces or even between the federal government and the province of Quebec" (p. 137). This ominous note foreshadows many more recounted in her book: how the desire of French-Canadian sovereignists to concentrate only on those within their "society ... brought an end to the potential of a concentrated feature film industry, able to work in both languages in collaboration with ... International film producers" (p. 233). The desire to eliminate "the others" included the obscuring of fundamental facts, notably the fact that "the indigenous film industry in Quebec continued to work and to grow into maturity because of the number of English-language productions made there" (p. 228).

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For reasons never made entirely clear, the ultimate objective of the film workers' struggle in Québec as of the early 1960s was the passing of a *loi-cadre* (framework law) that would “establish, *once and for all*, that production, distribution, exhibition, and classification constitute an indivisible whole” (p. 3, my emphasis). Dilley's book is a very detailed look at this 23-year struggle, and includes the adoption of the first framework law, introduced in 1975, and the 1983 amended law that defined the film industry in Québec as we know it today. Dilley hints here and there at the various reasons for this strange legalism: “the nascent film industry ... wanted policies that would define the government's responsibility to filmmakers and filmmaking rather than to the public” (p. 3); at other times, she just terms the quest for the *loi-cadre* “the holy grail” (p. 97). This, however, attests to a spiritual need that forms the deeper backdrop to Dilley's narrative, namely, the hunger in the soul created in the wrenching away from a deeply traditional and retrograde Catholic society to a secular society in which cinema was nonetheless a sign of the light. In the interim, the reader encounters enlightened bureaucrats (especially André Guérin of the BSC, Guy Frégault of the MAC, Raymond-Marie Léger of the OFQ), acronyms galore (i.e., APC, APFQ, CFDC—two and a half pages of them in Appendix C), most of the gratin of names of modern Québec culture, and—my favourite—the “scholars, lawyers and rascals” (p. 227) who crowded in to become producers of American-style films.

Dilley herself is well positioned to tell the story of the Québec film industry's lobby for a status clearly defined in law. Then known as Connie Tadros, she was the administrator of *Cinéma Québec*—the film journal of record of the time—founded by her then-husband Jean-Pierre Tadros, journalist and later editor-in-chief of *Cinema Canada* (1975–1988).¹

As a reporter close to the scene, she also noted “how forceful and persistent private individuals and organizations were during these crucial formative years in articulating their needs and desires for policy legislation related to filmmaking” (p. 4). Yet, in (academic) study after study, “little attention is paid to this individual effort and much emphasis is put on abstract forces. ... What about the people who made it all happen?” While Dilley's own archival research was crucial to this study, the real work, she writes,

was not so much finding the material as it was organizing it to understand the mysteries of need, conviction and persistence that motivated these individuals in their twenty-three-year-long battle. ... This book follows those individuals, organizations and agencies on the front-lines in an effort to account for the private impact on public policy. (p. 4)

It is up to the reader to evaluate whether Dilley succeeds in this endeavour. Surely, she re-establishes—as it has been effaced—that “filmmakers and producers in Montreal, uniquely positioned to work in French and in English, coalesced into a stable community,” and many who were active in the 1960s remained so into the present century. These included the late Jacques Bensimon, producer and writer Guy Fournier, director Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, film director David Cronenberg, and many others. Also, Dilley re-establishes the primary role of federal film policies as “contributing beyond any measure of fairness to the producers in Montreal and introducing them to world-wide players and markets” (p. 228). This, too, was effaced by the later inward, nation-

alist turn to a more homogenous filmmaking community, but “*not* the one imagined by the earlier filmmakers who set this story in motion” (p. 235, my emphasis).

Note

1. I was Connie’s associate editor from 1980 to 1985.

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