

In the course of making all these movies, the NFB has found itself in the vanguard of technical development in cinema. And current projects still in the research and development stage offer much promise: among them is a gadget called "The Brain" — a multi-axis camera and "object motion control system."

Internationalism is a high priority at the NFB. Co-productions with other countries are thus gaining popularity with the board's administrators. Among the most recent projects are a co-operative production with PBS-TV in the United States and more exotically, a co-production with China's enterprising Xian Film Studio that uses the elaborate Imax system of giant screen projection, which is 10 times larger than the conventional 35-mm frame.

"Co-productions allow us to do more expensive projects that we couldn't do otherwise," explains Colin Neale, an NFB executive producer. Now in the planning stage, he adds, is a series of six hour-long films on urbanization in developing countries, to be co-produced with the United Kingdom's Channel 4 television.

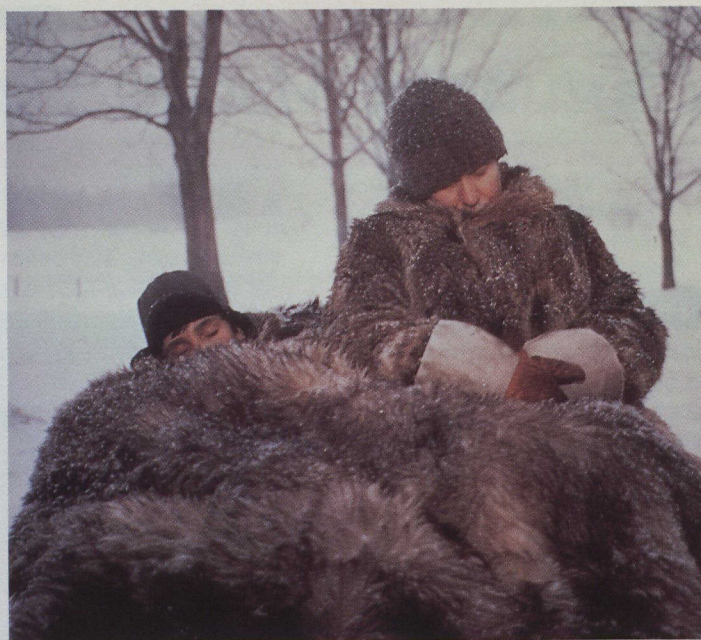
Another NFB priority is using state-of-the-art video technology to disseminate films. Last year, TV viewers accounted for 85 per cent of the film board's worldwide audience. This is in sharp contrast to bygone times, when spectators saw board products largely on 16-mm screens in schools, libraries, church basements and union meeting halls. Today, video is revolutionizing the distribution of NFB films in two ways: by making them more accessible for home viewing and by compelling the board to target its marketing at individuals as well as institutions.

But what matters most to the NFB is making quality products for diverse audiences — both domestic and foreign. "We're creating films for various audiences," says Douglas Macdonald, a veteran NFB producer who works in the English-speaking animation department. "We have one group of films loosely called *Just for Kids*, for instance. They're all directed at children between the ages of 5 and 11 years old."

Then at the other end of the spectrum there is the *65 Plus* series devoted entirely to seniors. "The first film, *George and Rosemary*, deals with romance after 65," explains Macdonald. "And although we designed it for older people, it's winning audiences in all age groups. High school kids, for instance, love it because it deals with a first date!"

Since the NFB operates in a bilingual country, one may wonder if there is a significant difference between its English- and French-language productions. "There's always been a cultural difference," says Barbara Emo, director of the board's English-language programming. "The French production departments are addressing the Quebec market, so the kinds of films they make have a different perspective from the kinds we make." Emo adds, "It's a real and valid cultural separation. But we are under the same roof and we sit at the same table to discuss budget allocations and common policy, so in that sense we work together."

But the future looks promising for all productions — whether French or English, animation or live action — at the NFB. True, recent years have brought budget squeezes; they have also been a time of major government policies



A scene from *Mon Oncle Antoine*, regarded by many as one of Canada's best feature films of all time.

such as the National Film and Video Policy, and of reassessment and reorganization. But in spite of these new adjustments, some of the board's most significant films have emerged during this decade.

A new style of low-budget filmmaking, dubbed "alternate drama," was created with films such as the 1986 comedy hit *90 Days*, or the 1987 dramas *Sitting in Limbo* and *Train of Dreams*. Also produced were such acclaimed dramatic features as 1986's Oscar-nominated *The Decline of the American Empire* and the 1989 Cannes hit *Jesus of Montreal* — both by Montreal director Denys Arcand, a former NFB employee.

In addition, the eighties saw the arrival at the board of computer animation and 3-D Imax filming. The latest Imax spectacular, *Quin Shihuang*, *The First Emperor*, premiered at the new Museum of Civilization last July. Filmed entirely in China, the \$7 million giant-screen production was a co-operative effort of the NFB, the Museum of Civilization and Xian Film Studio of China.

Proud of what the NFB is producing is Robert Forget, head of the French animation department and a visionary who's working on the cutting edge of computer animation. Forget — surrounded by an array of new technical toys, such as a prototype computer sound library for 1 000 digital audio cassettes, complete with a robot arm (co-developed by the NFB and a private firm) — is adamant that the NFB keep up the pace when it comes to research and development.

In a screening room, Forget sits in the dark watching rushes of *L'Anniversaire*, a computerized animation short he crafted to celebrate the NFB's 50th. The clarity is stunning and the shapes of the characters are unlike anything seen before. It looks like a new world.

"Bravo! Bravo!" A small group of onlookers cheer, for they know that Forget is part of the future, and that he's worth celebrating too, as is the NFB. 🍁