

Some Threshold scenes filmed on York campus

Film not for the weak of heart

MARSHALL GOLDEN

September 1983: An American flag flies on the flagpole in front of the Ross Building at York University. Helicopters buzz the campus as ambulances with California plates zoom past the whirring motion picture cameras.

September 1981: The newly completed feature film, *Threshold*, has its world premiere at Toronto's Festival of Festivals. It is unanimously panned by the critics and nationwide distribution plans are quickly shelved along with the film. Apparently no one cares about the first filmic transplant of an artificial heart.

December 1982: In the United States, Barney Clark becomes the first human being ever to receive an artificial heart. The media is a buzz as the world's first artificially powered man lives on. Meanwhile, all prints and rights to *Threshold* have been seized by the Canada Permanent Trust Company as the film goes into receivership, unable to pay its loans due to lack of distribution.

January 1983: Stimulated by the recent publicity about artificial hearts and sensing a last chance to recoup some of its losses, *Threshold* goes back into distribution, slated to open January 28th at the International Cinema.

It is an all too familiar scenario: a film is killed by nearsighted marketing experts - sometimes never to return, sometimes to reappear when the demand is created. Such is the case with *Threshold*, a Canadian feature completed in 1981 - a film which foreshadowed the first transplant of an artificial heart two years before it happened and two years before anyone cared.

In actuality, and despite its subject matter, *Threshold* is only a mediocre film - it has an interesting story line, but it suffers from some serious misdirection and casting. Donald Sutherland plays Dr. Thomas Vrain, the world famous heart surgeon who performs the pioneer transplant. Sutherland's performance is quite good and will help in solidifying his already substantial

acting reputation. Somebody should, however, warn him about using so much hairspray. The shine on his head is reminiscent of Yul Brynner.

His associate, and the inventor of the heart, is Dr. Aldo Gehring, played by Jeff Goldblum in one of the more serious casting mistakes of the year. Goldblum does not only look wrong for the part (he bears a slight resemblance to a psychiatric escapee) but his interpretation of Gehring, as a philosopher-saviour cum doctor is most distracting and unbelievable. When he describes his invention as if it were the dawn of man and the last hope of the free world, one wonders how the lunatic ever got his medical license.

One of the saving graces of the film is Mare Winningham as Carol Severance, the twenty-year old recipient of the heart. She can simultaneously show a childlike vulnerability and an adult strength, that is riveting to watch. Her largely silent role is central to a remarkable subtext - when the words stop the acting continues.

The harshest criticism is with the director, Richard Pearce whose background may be part of the problem: Pearce is most famous as a documentary filmmaker. He was responsible for two of the greatest films ever to explore the ideals of the Sixties. *Woodstock* (1969), was a masterpiece summation of the hippie movement and subculture. *Hearts and Minds* (1975) was a disturbing look at the Vietnam War and received an Academy Award for the year's best documentary feature. And it is just this documentary training that gives him the most trouble in *Threshold*. He seems uncomfortable with the fiction scene and the direction is frequently wooden; his penchant for documentary is most obvious however, in the scenes showing the film's three heart transplants. These operations occupy about 20 percent of the screen time and are depicted with such reality that squirming is inevitable. Pearce's camera practically leaps into the open chests of the various transplant patients:

This film is not for the squeamish.

Although the issues of conflicting medical ethics make the film interesting, *Threshold* is guilty of committing the great Canadian film sin. What's wrong with making Canadian films that are set in Canada? Doesn't Canada have any medical expertise? Is it true that we all live in igloos? The cast is Canadian, the locations are all Canadian but the film is "set" entirely in California. And our very own York University even becomes The California Heart Institute. It isn't until Canadian feature filmmakers stand up proudly to proclaim their national origins that our film industry will have crossed its final threshold.



Donald Sutherland masquerades as M.D. at York

YUKON JACK ATTACK #3.



The Bear Bite.

Squeeze the juice of a quartered lime over ice. Throw in 1 1/2 ounces of Yukon Jack, top it up with cola and you'll have trapped the Bear Bite. Inspired in the wild, midst the damnably cold, this, the black sheep of Canadian liquors, is Yukon Jack.



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CHEER FOR BEER BASKETBALL DOUBLEHEADER SATURDAY, JANUARY 29, 1983

PURPOSE: To support York Athletics, to have fun.

WHO IS PLAYING: Yeowomen vs. Guelph at 6:00 p.m., at Tait Gym
Yeomen vs. Laurentian at 8 p.m., at Tait Gym.

COST: \$1.00/York students
\$2.00/Non students

At the conclusion of the Men's game 10 CASES OF BEER will be awarded to the group of students deemed to be the loudest, largest, best group at the games.

OTHER CRITERIA: Groups will be judged on the following:

- 1) greatest numbers
- 2) costumes
- 3) banners and slogans
- 4) originality of cheers
- 5) continual enthusiasm displayed during games
- 6) ability to involve other members of the crowd

Note: All groups are asked to register at the door prior to the start of the 8:00 p.m. game. Furthermore, all groups should be prepared to present a 30-second cheer during 1/2 time of the Men's game if called upon.

For further information call Angelo Kioussis at 667-3734 or 667-2289.



January 21 and 22

Student Seminar on New Quebec Film

Join directors, actors and critics from Quebec and Ontario for a two-day seminar on Quebec's film industry.

Friday, January 21

10am: The Director and the Performer in the Quebec and Canadian Industries with Fernand Dansereau, Helene Loiselle and moderator Ken Dancyger of the York University Film Department. 1:30pm: Critics' Panel featuring Jay Scott (Globe and Mail), Ron Base (Toronto Star), Richard Gay (Le Devoir), Maurice Yacowar (Dean of Humanities at Brock University) and moderator Tom Fulton (CJRT). 3:45pm: Martin Duckworth talks about his work. Friday screenings 10am: on l'Appelait Cambodge, Jouer sa vie, Les Adeptes; 2pm: Les Fleurs sauvages.

Saturday, January 22

10am: Independent Filmmakers in Quebec and English-Speaking Canada with Ron Mann, Holly Dale, Rudy Buttignol, Claude and Yuri Yoshimura Gagnon, Brigitte Sauriol and moderator Don Owen. 1:30pm: The Script as Treatment featuring Ken Rosenber (C.F.D.C.), Claire Dion (Institut québécois du cinéma) and moderator Stanley Colbert (CBC-TV). Saturday 3:30pm: Bleue Brume, Le Toasteur, Elvis Gratton, Reveillon.

Seminar tickets are \$4 advance registration advised. Tickets are good for any combination of panels and screenings. Get yours at Harbourfront (869-8412) or BASS.

New Quebec Film is generously sponsored by the Quebec Intergovernmental Affairs Ministry and l'Institut québécois du cinéma.

Harbourfront 235 Queen's Quay West