

# Marc Paradis, un désir d'ogre

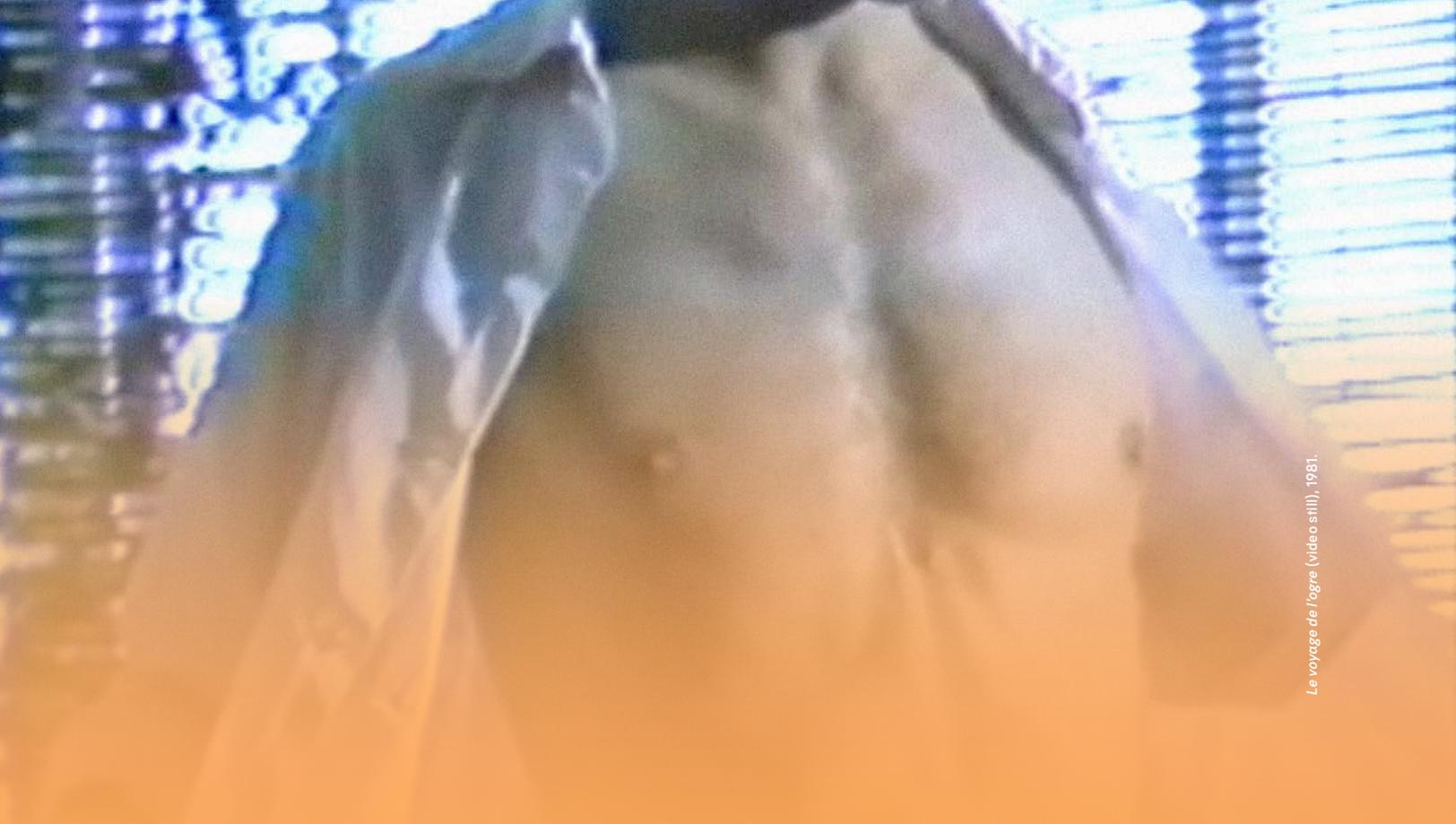
## Introduction: Requiem

KARINE BOULANGER

Marc Paradis is a pioneer of queer video in Quebec and Canada, like Paul Wong and John Greyson. Since his first work, *Le voyage de l'ogre* (1981), he has interrogated notions of sexuality, the body and homosexual identity. His aesthetic, which is deeply corporeal, oscillates between raw and explicit realism (*La cage*, *Lettre à un amant* [*Letter to a Lover*]) and a certain classicism, particularly in his representations of the body and in his pictorial references (*Harems*, *Délivre-nous du mal* [*Deliver us from Evil*]). The texts, their literary qualities and their declamation play a central role (*Réminiscences carnivores* [*Carnivorous Reminiscences*], *L'incident « Jones »*) and lend a tragic resonance to these stories of love, sex, rupture and death. *L'incident « Jones »*, *Letter to a Lover* and *Deliver us from Evil* form a triptych that condenses these intimate and artistic questionings. Paradis has also made a number of videos about the art scene of the 1980s (*Say Cheese for a Trans-Canadian Look*, with Luc Bourdon; *Video Portrait of John Mingolla*; *Album: a performance by Denis Lessard*).

In the 1980s and early 1990s, Paradis' work was widely distributed. But while *Le voyage de l'ogre* (1981), his most well-known work, is still occasionally screened, his other works have faded into obscurity. Why is this? Perhaps it is because his activities as a videomaker stopped after just 10 years. Or because the apolitical darkness of his work puts him in a complicated position in the context of LGBTQ2S+ communities' efforts to achieve affirmation and recognition. Whatever the reason, we think it is about time to revisit this obsessive and transgressive body of work, in which everything is taken to the extreme, ogre-like: desire, emotions, anger and a thirst for creation.

This publication is marked by tragic happenstance: on the same day, we learned of the death of Marc Paradis at 64 years of age and of the financial support by the Canada Council for the Arts. Paradis knew that Vidéographe wanted to dedicate a publication to him but, sadly, he wasn't to see any of it. His passing led us to rethink the project to give it a more personal dimension and a more open form. In 'A Decade of Videomaking', doctoral researcher Alexis Lemieux considers the typology, aesthetic and reception of Paradis' work. In 'Opaque Transparencies', Denis Vaillancourt, Distribution Coordinator at



Le voyage de Joffre (video still), 1981.

Vidéographe, considers a fundamental issue in Paradis' videos: the insoluble relationship between love and sex. In 'My friend, Paradis', filmmaker Luc Bourdon tells of his memorable and tumultuous friendship with the artist as a young man and conveys a complex personality. This project has also given us an opportunity to revisit the Vidéographe of the 1980s, in which the friends were very involved.

The publication comprises 16 of the videos Paradis made, including two previously unseen works, *Ecce Omo* and *Marrakech*<sup>1</sup>. Based on urbane observation and travel, they reveal a new aspect of his work. Six of the videos have been newly digitalized from master tapes found in Paradis' home and three have been sub-titled in English<sup>2</sup>. Two short portraits by French filmmaker Gérard Courant, *Marc Paradis* (1985) and *Nous irons tous avec Paradis* (1986), offer a glimpse of Paradis' humorous and self-deprecating side.

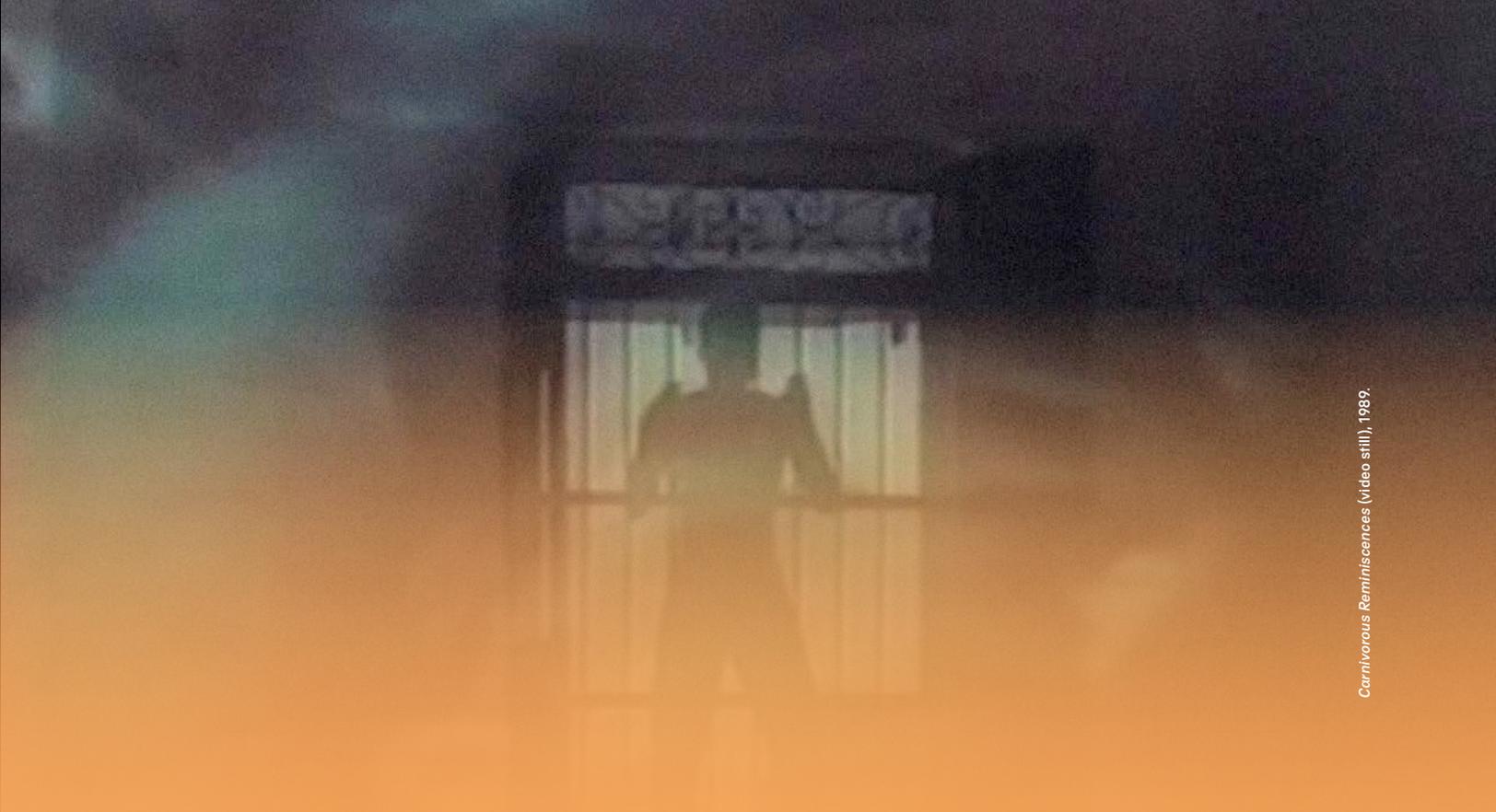
Thanks to the impeccably organized personal archives that Paradis left behind and to his family, who have trusted us and to whom we are very grateful, we have been able to publish a vast selection of previously unseen documents that shed light on his process: notebooks, scripts, cuttings, research files, casting photos, and more. Paradis' private life – his loves and friendships – seem inseparable from his creations, and some material seems to exist as an intimate journal and creative project at the same time. He said:

*'The reflections that I bring to my work are not meant to move the masses, but the individual. My work is transformative for the people that participate in it first and then for all who are involved with it. In the first place, it is a tool for personal change, in the second, a tool of appropriation from reality. The outcome is that the individual moves towards an increasingly constant reality. This individual becomes more alive, closer to who he is, aware of society, he becomes more convincing, more real.'*<sup>3</sup>

1 Another, *La vie est ronde*, seems lost.

2 *La cage*, *Réminiscences carnivores* and *Harems*.

3 Carrière, Daniel. « Marc Paradis : entrevue. » *ETC* 12 (1990) : 24.



*Carnivorous Reminiscences* (video still), 1989.

A biography and an exhaustive bibliography complete the publication. We wish to thank Katherine Nash and the Paradis family, Luc Bourdon, Simon Morel, Christophe Flambard, and Yves Lalonde for their help and support.

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Deliver us from Evil (video still), 1987.

## A Decade of Videomaking

ALEXIS LEMIEUX

Marc Paradis' videographic works of the 1980s are among the most important of that decade to address themes of masculine homosexuality in Quebec and Canada. Paradis was driven by an interest in the individual<sup>1</sup> and the individual experience detached from any politics, having ended his political engagement<sup>2</sup> to devote himself to video and to remove any obstacles to its accessibility.<sup>3</sup> His work is characterized by a great sense of freedom and a will for independence. It is influenced as much by theatre and literature as by the visual arts and filmmaking. Today, his artistic work is not as well-known as it should be, outside of the fields of video and cinema. It was often limited to its own circle of supporters. At the time, gay cinema and film festival<sup>4</sup> were financially neglected by governmental institutions, and this had an adverse effect on the dissemination of his works during the 1980s and the early 1990s.

Paradis' work has nevertheless withstood this period of precariousness and the lack of investment in culture. It has become pioneering in the treatment of the theme of masculine homosexuality. But what does it consist of? What are the themes that guide it? What do the images and soundtracks reveal? Masculine homosexuality has been explored by Quebecer videomakers and filmmakers Jean-Claude Lord (*Deliver us from Evil*, 1969), Mario Leparé, Alain Mongeau, Claude Robert (*Rat Club*, c. 1970), Michel Audy (*Luc ou la part des choses*, 1982, and *Crever à 20 ans*, 1984), Fernand Bélanger (*Passiflora*, 1985), and many other English Canadian videomakers such as John Greyson and Colin Campbell.<sup>5</sup>

1 'What interests me is an in-depth exploration of the individual'. See « Marc Paradis : en vidéo, il peut y avoir une exploitation du sexe... » [Interview with Marc Paradis]. *RG Rencontres Gaies*, no 38 (1985): 23.

2 'I was very politically engaged during the rise of the PQ. Leaflets, anarchy, arrests, etc. » *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*, 24.

4 In the past, this was the case for the International festival of gay and lesbian cinema, Image et Nation. See « Censure au musée du Québec » [Collective letter by the Conseil d'administration de diffusions gaies et lesbiennes du Québec]. *RG Rencontres Gaies*, no 107 (1991): 13. See also: « Festival de cinéma gai : une excellente programmation! » *Fugues*, vol. 8, no 8 (1991): 66.

5 Waugh, Thomas. « Les formes du discours [homo et hétéro-] sexuel dans la nouvelle vidéo masculine. » *Communication. Information Médias Théories*, no 9 (summer 1987): 46.

This article gives an overview of Paradis' works,<sup>6</sup> including 16 videos that are accessible at Vidéographe. Most of these are short films whose duration range between seven and 28 minutes, with the exception of a medium-length film (*Harems*). They are at once both experimental and documentary. The following essay is made up of three parts: 1) a succinct overview of the works; 2) a formal analysis, including the main aesthetic characteristics and a reflection on the works' themes; 3) a discussion of the videomaker's prolific period, which will briefly address the context in which his audiovisual work was disseminated.

## 1) The works

*Le voyage de l'ogre*<sup>7</sup> (1981) and *La cage* (1983) build a relationship with the theme of masculine homosexuality. In the former, this happens through the eyes of a murderer, John Wayne Gacy, via those of a young director and videomaker, Marc Paradis, who invites young men<sup>8</sup> to share their stories and confide to (and be confined within) the camera. In *La cage*, a writer's fantasies get in the way of his work. An erotic story of two young men unfolds and unexpectedly ends in an orgy scene. *Scheme vidéo [Video Scheme]* (1984) and *Say Cheese for a Trans-Canadian Look* (1985), co-created with Luc Bourdon, are linked by a similar subject. *Video Scheme* is about the Festival du nouveau cinéma and Cinéma Parallèle, in Montreal. *Say Cheese* follows three protagonists (Luc Bourdon, Marc Paradis and Simon B. Robert) as they travel across Canada to select Canadian video works for the 13th Festival international du nouveau cinéma et de la vidéo de Montréal.

The videos, in which Paradis captured artistic performances, were conceived in such a way as to develop a rhythm and a language in line with the elements that were filmed, whether inert or animated. They present dance scenes (*La stupéfiante Alex*<sup>9</sup>, 1984), experimental dance-theatre (*L'instruction*<sup>10</sup>, 1984), and art actions in which dance plays a role in the movement of the actors' bodies (*Performance « Album » de Denis Lessard*, 1986, and *Performances de Yves Lalonde*, 1987). They capture the important and impressive moments of these live art performances.

<sup>6</sup> Marc Paradis' works are part of the collection of the Cinémathèque québécoise

<sup>7</sup> The second title of the screenplay for this video is *La nuit fluide*, considered for the production of a feature-length film.

<sup>8</sup> The search for young actors for the screen-test for *Voyage de l'ogre / The Path of the Ogre* appeared in *Le Berdache*, specifically in the 'Classified section' in no. 20, May 1981, 9.

<sup>9</sup> This video is also entitled *Ginette Laurin, danseuse*.

<sup>10</sup> A recording of a play by Peter Weiss.



Le voyage de l'ogre (video still), 1981.

The triptych comprising *L'incident « Jones »* (1986); *Délivre-nous du mal [Deliver us from Evil]* (1987), and *Lettre à un amant [Letter to a Lover]* (1988) address the complex nature of human relationships. In *L'incident « Jones »*, the characters search for an impossible romantic relationship after an impromptu encounter that connects Stephen (Jones), Benjamin (Baltimore) and Simon B. (Robert). The short video takes place on a Laurentian lakeside initially and then continues elliptically at an airport, following Simon's departure. At the heart of *Deliver us from Evil*, explicit sexual scenes are ambiguously connected to the theme of love, which raises questions about sex and sexuality. A young man's monologue expresses the difficulties and the pain associated with his romantic break-ups. In *Letter to a Lover*, the final video in the triptych, a text is recited by one of the young lovers. He announces the end of their union. However, the letter will never reach its intended recipient.

*Portrait de John Mingolla* centres around the visual arts and the artist John Mingolla in particular. We discover the *expressionnisme sauvage (wild expressionism)*<sup>11</sup> of his works through panoramic and zoom lenses, against a very rich soundtrack. *Réminiscences carnivores [Carnivorous Reminiscences]* (1989) presents the incestuous memories of a narrator and his apprehension about a meeting with his brother. At the beginning of the video we see a young man anticipating this imagined encounter. *Harems* (1991) is the only video from the early 1990s. It is the second work, after *Carnivorous Reminiscences*, to be filmed abroad (partly in Jamaica<sup>12</sup>), and is undeniably dreamlike, even mythical, with the role of the gogo-boy played by Simon B. Robert.

Paradis makes furtive appearances in several of his videos: *Le voyage de l'ogre*, *L'incident « Jones »* and *Harems*. He appears in a work by Polish videomaker Jozef Robakowski entitled *Joseph's Touch [Effleurements]* (1989), which looks like an homage to Paradis' works and a celebration of their aesthetics. In *Say Cheese for a Trans-Canadian Look* (1985), he is seen alongside his friends, Luc Bourdon and Simon B. Robert. The same year, and in 1986, he was captured on camera in two short films by Gérard Courant, one being a portrait of the videomaker (*Marc Paradis*, 1985), and the other a group portrait (*Nous irons tous avec Paradis*, 1986). At the end of the 1990s, Luc Bourdon made *Question de bande* (1998), a portrait of 11 videomakers, among them Paradis, who revisits *Le voyage de l'ogre*. This would be one of his final appearances in front of the camera.<sup>13</sup>

11 An inscription in a painting by John Mingolla is revealed in front of the camera.

12 Part of this was also shot in Montreal and in the metropolitan area.

13 He appeared in a film by Laurent Gagliardi, entitled *Quand l'amour est gai* (NFB, 1994).



La cage (video still), 1983.

## 2) Aesthetics

Paradis' videos are linked by common themes that we will consider below. They also share similar aesthetic characteristics. Chromakeying has been used in many works including *La cage* and *Letter to a Lover*. The saturating effect of the process has rendered certain shots highly abstracted. Paradis has superimposed images in many of his videos, such as *Deliver us from Evil*, *Letter to a Lover* and *Carnivorous Reminiscences*. In *Carnivorous Reminiscences*, the rhythm of the sequences is punctuated with dissolves that introduce the fantasy images of a personal and intimate past shared by two brothers, one of whom, the narrator, professes a fraternal love. Dissolves are used throughout the videomaker's last two audiovisual creations; these also use a number of ellipses that punctuate their storylines.

In *La cage*, the young men are filmed individually: 'The protagonists of the 'orgy' are as isolated as the fragmented portrait-shots that we are shown.'<sup>14</sup> The metaphor of the cage, keeping each person a prisoner of his desires, is revealing of this fragmentation. Furthermore, the video seems connected to a 'narrative impulse towards physical and structural pleasure. This impulse has contrapuntal components of sound and image that occasionally come together. It is fragmented, interrupted, and drifting, and its conclusion remains open and ambiguous, perhaps in the manner of Antonioni!'<sup>15</sup> In *Letter to a Lover*, the sexual intensity of the shots can be seen in their formal treatment: naked bodies that caress each other, scenes of fellatio and multiple male orgasms. Throughout the second half of *Voyage de l'ogre*, an invasive, even scrutinizing camera, a metaphor for the ogre's eye, reveals scenes of masturbation.

Music is often used (vocal or experimental<sup>16</sup>); the compositions by Richard Angers in *Letter to a Lover* and *Deliver us from Evil* are an example. A relational tension is denoted through the narration sung by Yves Dionne and scripted by Paradis in *L'incident « Jones »*. This narration is notable for its 'purism'<sup>17</sup>. The piano composition in *Le voyage de l'ogre* is a leitmotif that suggests the desire and fantasy of the encounter. A voice-over is frequently used for the narration and dialogues.

<sup>14</sup> Waugh, Thomas. « Les formes du discours [homo et hétéro-] sexuel dans la nouvelle vidéo masculine », *op. cit.*, 54.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>16</sup> 'If we established a grammar relative to contemporary art, it is very likely that electroacoustic would be the most akin to experimental video.' See Montal, Fabrice. « L'électron frénétique : Petit survol historique de la vidéo expérimentale au Québec (1971-2011) », in *XPQ : Traversée du cinéma expérimental québécois*, Montreal, Cinémathèque québécoise and Les Éditions Somme Toute, 2020, p.195.

<sup>17</sup> Waugh, Thomas, « Les formes du discours [homo et hétéro-] sexuel dans la nouvelle vidéo masculine », *op. cit.*, 58.



Harems (video still), 1991.

In *Deliver us from Evil*, actor Simon B. Robert delivers the voice-over over images of naked young men, frozen like statues in a fine art exhibition. Sexuality is banalized: numerous scenes of masturbation and ejaculation using superimposed imagery follow one after the other. The appearance of Simon B. Robert, towards the final quarter of the video, endorses this banalizing of the orgasm: 'A good line of coke is better! Or a packet of cigarettes...'. The murmurings in *Carnivorous Reminiscences* meld with Richard Angers' sound mixing, the music chosen by Josette Bélanger, and Clemencia Aguirre' sound work. The romantic rupture evoked in *Letter to a Lover* is reflected in the tone of the letter-reader's voice,<sup>18</sup> which is also that of the narrator.

These various techniques (chromakeying, superimpositions, dissolves) serve to portray a dreamlike world. The paroxysmal point of the dream culminates in Paradis' final video: *Harems*. This film is spellbinding; it transports us to an idyllic world that contrasts with the nocturnal world of the dance club. The dichotomies of 'day/night' and 'city/countryside' that we see in *Harems* call to mind similar ones in his second<sup>19</sup> video *Le voyage de l'ogre* (day/night, suburb/city). In this second tape: 'The relationship to the city, the urban metropole, is of extreme importance, because the city is conceived as a complimentary character: it influences the different characters' acts and, further, it is where the trap lies.'<sup>20</sup> Moreover, *Say Cheese for a Trans-Canadian Look*, a work of self-representation, gives a certain perspective of different Canadian cities, including Montreal.

The relationship to water or fluid<sup>21</sup> is also a recurring element in Paradis' videographic work. Water becomes a metaphor for 'the social status of homosexuality: the necessary fluidity'.<sup>22</sup> The fluidity in *Le voyage de l'ogre* is represented by the Saint Lawrence River or by the urine that runs from the young witness's underwear. Then there is the Jamaican sea and the Saint Louis lake in *Harems*, the ejaculations in *Deliver us from Evil*, and the shower scene in *Joseph's Touch*, where fine particles of water are dripping on the face of actor Simon B. Robert.

18 The reader's voice is that of François Lamotte.

19 Or his third video? There is believed to be a first work produced at UQAM in the early 1980s, when Paradis was studying theatre, called *Strip-tease*.

20 A passage taken from the screenplay for *La nuit fluide/Le voyage de l'ogre* which was written for the production of a feature-length film, but which was never realized.

21 This Bachelardian theme originated in the feature-length project *La nuit fluide*.

22 Part of a line taken from *La nuit fluide/Le voyage de l'ogre*.



*Carnivorous Reminiscences* (video still), 1989.

Human relationships, and particularly gay male relationships, are among the most prevalent themes in Paradis' videographic work. Female figures are rarely foregrounded, except in the dance and dance-theatre performances (*La stupéfiante Alex* and *L'instruction*) and a dreamlike fiction in *Harems*. Similarly, members of so-called 'racialized' groups do not feature highly and do not play a key role. Generally speaking, we see masculine intimacy unveiled and exposed by actors and observers. *Harems* does this with a rather flamboyant and convoluted storyline. The context is a dichotomous love-possession and love-seduction relationship between a scriptwriter and a gogo-boy, invented and put to death by the former: 'the myth commands death, because without death, there is no tragedy'<sup>23</sup>. The intervention of the narrator between the scriptwriter and the gogo-boy is inherent to their interaction.

Themes of childhood, memory and homosexuality are at the heart of *Carnivorous Reminiscences*. This video is set in an exotic country; against this backdrop, a meeting is supposed to take place with a brother whose presence is pure fantasy. There is a recurring motif of a barred window or a closed room: a metaphorical cage. The narrator's memories evoke multiple sensations: the smell of skin, the sight of delicate feet, the texture of soap on the body... 'This meditative essay, shot in Colombia (on a Vidéographe exchange program), continues Paradis's perennial themes of love, rupture, and memory, showing various male social or erotic interactions, solo and duo, in exteriors and around windows and exotic courtyards.'<sup>24</sup>

The scenes are characteristic of a shared tenderness. The word *volupté* (sensual pleasure), articulated and desired by the narrator, describes the young men's mutual and passionate pleasure before the definitive rupture of their past close relationship. The final scene describes the imagined and sublimated meeting by a fountain, where the protagonist who dreamed this touching reunion is abandoned by his brother. In superimposed images, a naked body succumbs to a masturbatory act: 'There are nocturnal expectations of what love we don't yet know' the narrator concludes. This lyrical video comprises intertwining literary texts by Verlaine, Gide and Augustin Gomez-Arcoz and was largely inspired by Gomez-Arcoz's novel, *The Carnivorous Lamb* (1975), in which the author considers themes of childhood in great depth.

<sup>23</sup> Extract taken from the dialogue at the end of *Harems*.

<sup>24</sup> Waugh, Thomas, 'Sex, Money, and Sobriety', in *The Romance of Transgression in Canada. Queering Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas*, Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006, p.237.

In *Joseph's Touch*, the images of a man's hand brushing a screen through which the actor's chest can be seen, are comparable to images in *Carnivorous Reminiscences* of the hand of a young man who touches a courtyard wall onto which the expected brother's face slowly appears. In both works,<sup>25</sup> this evocation of the 'sensitive' hand, perceived in this slow and delicate gesture, is intrinsically linked to memory.

Paradis' shots are magnificent. They are tinged with symbolism, eroticism and metaphor. They are rich in texture and sound, with an overlapping use of different techniques (chromakeying, superimposition of images, etc) that bring to mind the visual arts. There is an element of play in his work: in *Logre*, the witnesses indulge in a fictitious game of seduction-confession, in *La cage* the lovers engage in a playful exchange<sup>26</sup> about sexuality, in *L'incident « Jones »*, the triad of young men have a complex and seductive relational dynamic, and in *Harems*, there is an amorous, even alarming, game being played between the gogo-boy and the scriptwriter. *Homo ludens* is at the heart of the interpersonal dynamics between the young actors and is perceivable through their bold performances.

### 3) Dissemination

In this final part, I will consider Paradis' prolific period in light of the context of the dissemination of his audiovisual works. First, we should mention a cultural column in the journal *Le Berdache*, entitled '*L'enclave des damnés*' [*Enclave of the damned*]. The author of this column, Robert De Grosbois, discusses 'the evident nudity' of the actors, in a theatrical production directed by Paradis. It was adapted and translated from a play by John Herbert, entitled *Fortune and Men's Eyes*.<sup>27</sup> This nudity is present in the ensemble of his videos and, like the scenes of sexual activity, has been part of his artistic work since his earliest screenwriting and directing projects. The reactions to these liberties have often been exaggerated, as several of Paradis' videos have been the victim of a form of censorship<sup>28</sup> by the system,<sup>29</sup> represented

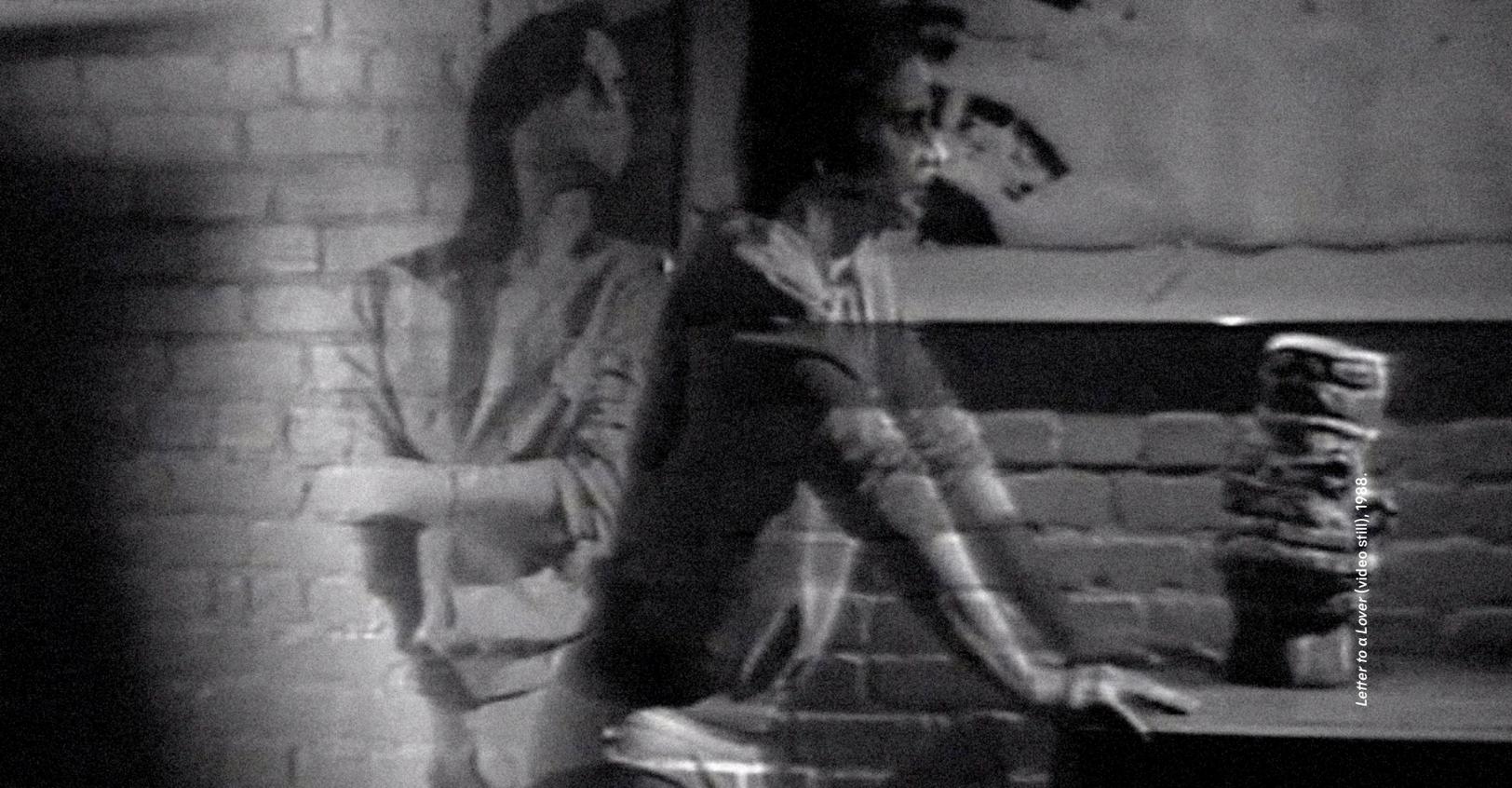
25 They were made in the same year (1989).

26 Sparked off by a meeting of the 'Tuesday Group' led by Marc Paradis, at the beginning of the 1980s.

27 *Fortune and Men's Eyes* by John Herbert-Brundage; translation by R. Dionne; directed by Marc Paradis ; electric keyboard: Jean-François Garsi; music by Gabriel Beauregard; with Gabriel Beauregard, Éric Duchesne, Marc Paradis and Jacques L.G. Tremblay; Les productions Vermine at Café Nelligan (previously situated on Dorchester St). See De Grosbois, Robert, « L'enclave des damnés » [Section Théâtre], *Le Berdache*, no 18, mars 1981, 60-61.

28 Waugh, Thomas. « Les formes du discours [homo et hétéro-] sexuel dans la nouvelle vidéo masculine », *op. cit.*, 47-48.

29 'Censured? Yes, in fact, I was censured by a system that censured itself. I was censured by a media that responds to a series of social taboos, but it is accepted, straightaway, in the rules of the game. You don't have a choice. Within the structures in which I work, as an artist, I was subject to repression, and I still am. But, at the end of the day, I don't care.' See Carrière, Daniel, « Marc Paradis » [Interview], *ETC*, no 12, Autumn 1990, 25.



Letter to a Lover (video still), 1998.

by the museum institutions of the time, such as the National Gallery of Canada<sup>30</sup> and the Musée du Québec<sup>31</sup>. Despite these obstacles to their dissemination, they have progressed through time and have survived 'their era'. The videomaker underlines the importance of freedom of creation in *Question de bande* (1998)<sup>32</sup>:

*'We are talking about respect for editorial content in this privileged and essential space. You don't have to constrain yourself and bow down to a producer or a distributor who is governed by the standards or a code of ethics of dissemination or anything. I think that, looking back, what is interesting is that mine is a very documentary work that probably represents a snapshot of the life of young gay men in the early 1980s in a very detailed, precise way, which, in the traces that remain, in the bank that is here, is probably of interest to the people who are going to be able to watch this later, even today [...]'*<sup>33</sup>.

Paradis' audiovisual works were screened at several Canadian film festivals<sup>34</sup>, in galleries and art museums in Quebec and Canada<sup>35</sup> and in several international festivals of film and video.<sup>36</sup> They have been shown in a number of Canadian cities: Quebec, Montreal, Ottawa and Gatineau, where a 'Canadian retrospective series' was organized that included several videos by the artist (*Le voyage de l'ogre*, *La cage*, *L'incident « Jones »*, *Letter to a Lover*) in September 1999.<sup>37</sup> At the initiative of the Association pour les droits de la communauté gaie, a program was created and presented at the Cinémathèque québécoise in June 1982 by Thomas Waugh and different collaborators. It was a mixed program (made up of gay and lesbian videos) that included early works by Paradis.<sup>38</sup>

30 Consult the text by Luc Bourdon in our publication on Marc Paradis, specifically the part entitled 'An archipelago of desires and censures'.

31 See « Censure au musée du Québec » [Collective letter from Conseil d'administration de diffusions gaies et lesbiennes du Québec]. *RG Rencontres Gaies*, no 107, 1991, 13; Carrière, Daniel. « Aux frontières de la censure. Le vidéaste Marc Paradis retire ses œuvres du Musée du Québec », *Le Devoir*, Wednesday 12 June 1991, B-3; and, Delagrave, Marie, « Un archipel de désirs : [les artistes québécois et la scène internationale]. » *Vie des Arts*, no 36 (Winter 1991-1992): 68-70.

32 A Vidéographe documentary by Luc Bourdon and Francis Laporte. This was a portrait of 10 videomakers who consider issues around video.

33 Marc Paradis appears in the video between 18 min 26 s and 20 min 58 s.

34 International festival of gay and lesbian cinema in Montreal. Many titles were listed in programmes by Image et Nation: *Harems* (Nov. 1991), *Réminiscences carnivores* (Nov. 1989) and *L'incident « Jones »* (Sept.-Oct. 1998).

35 National Gallery of Canada and the Musée du Québec (Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec).

36 Among others, the International Gay Festival of Super 8 Films, 19-21 October 1984 (Brussels) and the San Francisco Experimental Film and Video Festival (1986).

37 « Vue panoramique. Toute la programmation. » *Être en Outaouais*, vol. 4, no 8 (septembre 1999): p.M12

38 Waugh, Thomas. « Sex, Money, and Sobriety », in *The Romance of Transgression in Canada. Queering Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas*, op. cit., pp.474-475.



*Portrait de John Mingolla (video still), 1985.*

It is important to recall that the videographic work of Marc Paradis was among the first to address the issue of homosexuality in the 1980s head-on. It is a sensitive body of work, uncategorizable, that was internationally recognized and appreciated. Given this enviable reputation, the videomaker should, without doubt, have enjoyed the recognition of his peers and cultural institutions at a more local level. This article therefore pays homage to a non-conformist videomaker and a lover of video, of cinema, of the visual arts, and of men.



Harems (video still), 1991.

## Opaque Transparencies

DENIS VAILLANCOURT

A major figure in the 1980s, Marc Paradis has left behind him a body of work of iconic power. His daring, disturbing and uncompromising videos reflect upon romantic and sexual relationships between men and address the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of uniting one with the other.

At first glance, some images in the works that this publication covers could be considered pornographic. Yet pornography has no content other than the graphic aspect that speaks to our sexual urges.

Physical relationships are one thing, relationships of the heart are another. Is it conceivable to find an equilibrium between the two? In the works presented, the discourse suggests that love and sex are not good bedfellows. The body's need to exult overrides love and pushes it away when the time comes to satisfy its urges. The heart is expelled by a body otherwise preoccupied.

This duality manifests itself in Paradis' work through the confrontation of words and images that rub up against each other without ever working in harmony. The question we must therefore ask is this: is harmony necessary? Can love and sex flirt with each other in parallel without ever committing to each other, without fusing together? Does one need to unite with the other? Does one need to destroy the other? In *Lettre à un amant* [*Letter to a Lover*, 1988], the dialogue is obscured by sexually explicit imagery, the words are eclipsed by the images' opacity. Be they inscrutable, unmissable, oscillating or superimposed, the images take over, monolithic. They are impossible to ignore. *Letter to a Lover* is a perfect example. The ponderous visual is cut abruptly with language. Superimposition isn't a possibility: it has to be one or the other. Naked bodies collide with feelings that they neither want nor know how to incorporate; they want to take control, to enjoy the



Le voyage de l'ogre (video still), 1981.

moment. The narrator reveals the contents of a painful and troubling missive, but viewers have to close their eyes to grasp them, so parasitic is the image.

While the protagonists see their actions lucidly and accept their choices as well as the consequences of them, sex boldly usurps and conquers feelings. In *Le voyage de l'ogre* (1981), the artist's debut and an allegory of (his?) 'coming out', the story is boldly told with sincerity and neither prudishness nor taboo. For someone who has existed in the corners of their identity, this constitutes an essential step, a first step towards self-affirmation. Emerging from the shadows into the light can happen smoothly for some and through an expression of unbridled sexuality for others. The heart is paused, it is put on ice, or deeply anesthetized by the carnal command. *Le voyage de l'ogre* might represent the stage of self-affirmation. It is saying 'It's my body, I'll do with it what I wish', at risk of then saying 'It's my body. It does what it wants'. Must we satisfy the beast? Control it, kill it, or accept it? It is all a question of making choices and standing by them. But is it really? The parameters are defined by excess. The masturbation scenes, omnipresent and invasive in the majority of the videos, shape the limits of the process. What began as spontaneous and liberating becomes mechanical, automatic, pre-configured. The notion of pleasure becomes programmed. What appeared to be a choice soon reveals itself to be a need that, with a craving to satisfy, transforms surreptitiously into an addiction. To find pleasure in addiction is one thing, to become a slave to it is another. The notion of pleasure becomes distorted, it has deviated from its original path. Is this to compensate for the difficulty, the impossibility, indeed the refusal, to love?

The gogo-boy must be killed, it is said in *Harems* (1991). As an indisputable symbol of programmed carnal pleasure, what does the go-go boy have to offer besides his body for pleasure? Should sexuality be sacrificed to allow love to manifest itself? But can love exist amputated from the former? And is the inverse possible? Connected vessels that don't communicate; therein lies the dilemma.

Because real communication between the men in Paradis' videos does not exist, except through caresses and the friction of flesh. For example, *La cage* (1983) and *Délivre-nous du mal* [*Deliver us from Evil*, 1987] demonstrate a certain aimlessness of bodies that could be said to be drifting. The naked men, using few gestures, risk a smile, a caress, with no more precise goal than living in the 'here and now'. They let themselves live in the moment without any resistance. The bodies bare and



Letter to a Lover (video still), 1988.

mutually excite themselves, conditioned to follow certain steps or the semblance of an orgiastic ritual. Their movements are mechanical, they lack passion. They are just gestures for their own sake. Love has no place here, nor even words, and the sex is without affects or lures. Does Simon not say, 'one thing I have learned... is the banality of the orgasm... someone who jerks themselves off... who comes, who orgasms, is a poor schmuck... a nice line of coke is much better...' (*Deliver Us from Evil*). The judgement seems severe but is also revealing. It is the impasse. In this suspended, frozen time, in which the bodies pose, motionless, like statues, a paper airplane thrown by the protagonist could signify that everything is up in the air, or futile perhaps, or both. Or is it a missive thrown to the water? A bottle in the sea? A hope of reconciliation? Or simply a statement of facts?

As deep as the discourse in Paradis' body of work is, we can ask ourselves, why does it collide with images that act as barricades and claim the supremacy of the body?

Simon's reflexions come from a tormented, lucid and *blasé* being, for whom sexuality seems to no longer have importance, and who even feels it to be futile. He will be the eternal gogo-boy condemned to die in *Harems*, Paradis' final work. He must be delivered from this pain, for he cannot be tamed...?



Marc Paradis, ?

## My Friend, Paradis

LUC BOURDON

It was while watching a report about a class action against an institution that he had attended, to do with a case of historic assaults against children, that everything rose to the surface and a series of horrors began to emerge, that evening, from the depths of his memory.

This marked the end of a long black-out that his brain had induced as a survival mechanism. He had been one of the victims. He joined the group of plaintiffs. They went on to win their case and justice was served.

This event took place over recent years and it troubles me.

I retraced my steps to John Wayne Gacy, to Marc, to le Paradis... Words, gestures, and questions came back to me from every direction. The bad patches too.

In my archives, I found the logbook that I had written and compiled in large part with Marc's help in the early 1980s for the production of the *Le voyage de l'ogre* screen test. 100 pages of text, photos, reflections and notes; the day-to-day details of the development of a short film, a feature, and numerous other ideas.

I watched *Le voyage de l'ogre*, which I hadn't seen since the early 1990s. What I mainly remembered was the filming of scandalous images that were deemed pornographic at the time.



Deliver us from Evil (video still), 1987.

I found myself faced with an amorous gaze – Marc’s – upon some young men who had come to experience the adventure of filmmaking with him. It was a meticulous and respectful gaze that dared to expose the men’s sex close up.

Marc knew how to frame and direct scenes, how to guide a team with an aesthetic that was all his own. We can see all of this in his videographic art. We see his music, his canvases, his apartments, and his sensibility. *The frame is framed...*

We also see men who, for the most part, were not actors but lived out their intimate lives before our eyes.

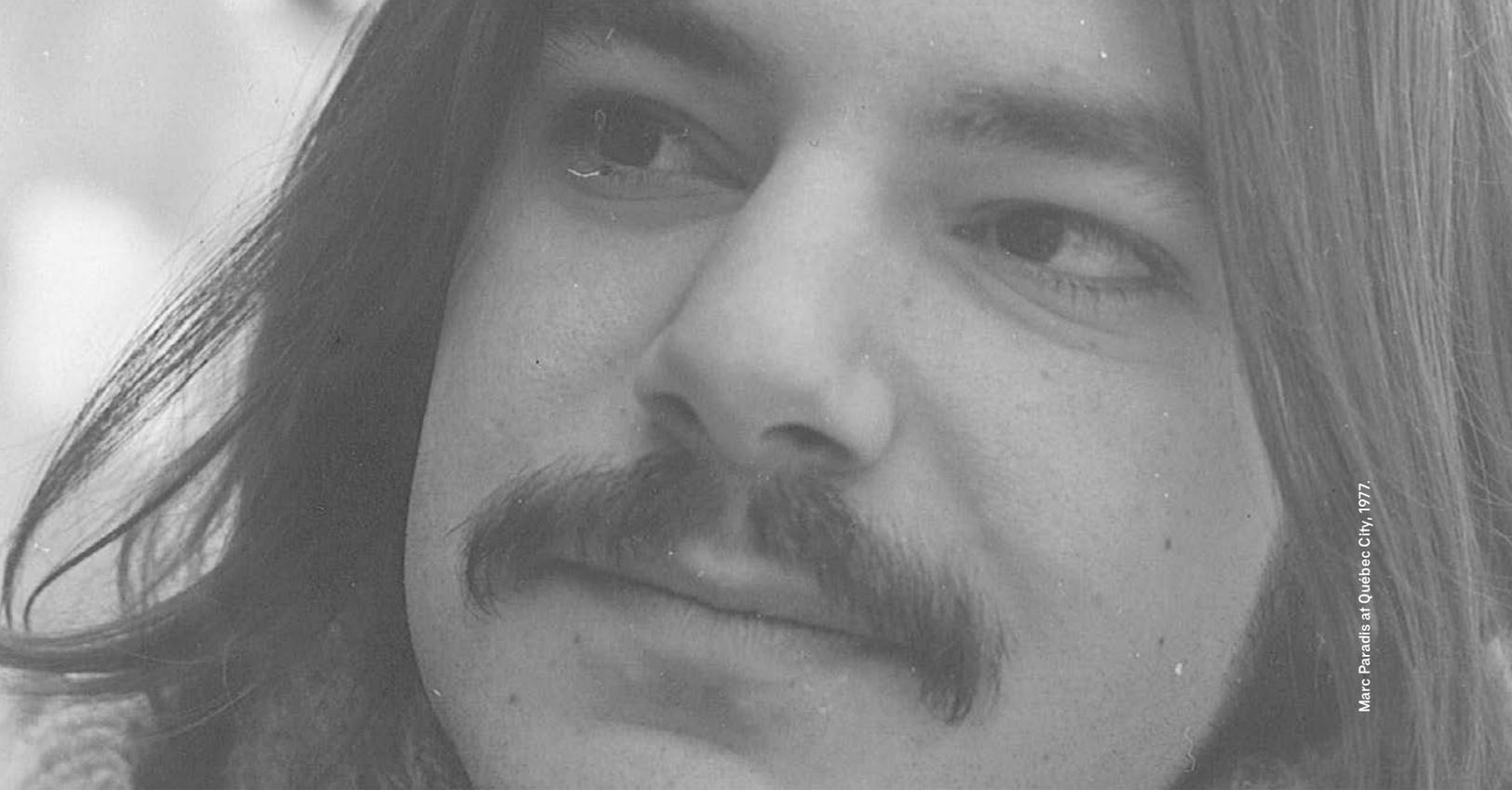
When I re-watched all of this, I couldn’t help but think of the incredible revolution of values and genres that has since taken place. Could Marc’s legacy be that he forced open the closet doors in order to legitimately free a homosexual discourse on its own terms?

There were failed attempts and numerous tantrums, there was jealousy, bad-mouthing, competition, manipulation, and offensive words and gestures on both sides, and there was love and respect as well... At the end of the day, it was all worth it.

## OUR FIRST MEETING

I first met Marc Paradis in 1974 when I was working at the Cinéma Élysée. I was 16 years old, he was 19. Marc had just been hired as an usher and, it has to be said, he was not loved by all of the employees at this institution, which has now disappeared from Milton Street. He was openly gay at a time when this was still seen and perceived by the majority of people as an affliction or an illness.

Our friendship was quickly built around a mutual passion for the theatre.



Marc Paradis at Québec City, 1977.

He had me watch a play that I would never have discovered without his help. I remember being backstage at the famous night club U-du-Q, behind the Gesù amphitheatre, watching a performance free of charge of *Wouf Wouf* by Yves Sauvageau, a truly remarkable happening that has its place in the history of Quebec theatre.

Marc went on to study at the National Theatre School of Canada. There, he waged an open war with the director of the production design department, the celebrated François Barbeau, but this did not prevent him from becoming a 'set designer' of houses, for the rest of his life.

His originality, sharp mind and intelligence were immediately apparent to all who met him and bothered a lot of people. He didn't hold back with those who didn't like him. He had a big mouth, he was outrageous and, when he felt disparaged, he laid it on even more thickly to get a reaction.

Back in the day, we would say he was fantasque (bizarre, outrageous, unpredictable).

The icing on the cake was that he had an aversion to any sort of authority and identified as an anarchist, which was appreciated by those who strayed from the beaten path or who didn't care about appearances.

Marc always surrounded himself with such people, often young artists who lived on the margins of society, searching for an ideal, a mission, a group, or simply a friendship.

## THE JOURNEY TO GACY

*How can a person such as John Wayne Gacy exist here and now? In his own way, he represents our society in what Bataille calls his lower regions. (Extract from voice over, *Le voyage de l'ogre* (1981))*



Le voyage de l'ogre (video still), 1981.

Marc met the French filmmaker Jean-François Garsi at the Festival de cinéma gai de Montréal in 1980 at a screening of his short film *Milan Bleu*. They immediately hit it off. They discovered a shared fascination for the American serial killer John Wayne Gacy and decided to collaborate.

Garsi invited Marc to France to assist in the making of his next film, *La chambre blanche*, which they shot together in the spring of 1981.

In the summer, on his return to Montreal, Marc organized and shot *Le voyage de l'ogre*, which he co-edited with Garsi.

In the interview conducted by Gilles Castonguay for the magazine *Le Berdache*<sup>1</sup>, Marc explained the initial idea for *Le voyage de l'ogre*:

*First and foremost, it's a screen test. As it was made, it became a work of fiction in its own right, independent of what a screen test might usually be, namely the simple and ordinary representation of different actors that you select for a role in a film. Le voyage de l'ogre is a screen test for a feature-length film that is in the process of being made; we are still in pre-production, not even the production stage of the feature. For our screen test, we have gathered, we have selected five people for five roles, having received 35 applications. And then with these actors, we tried to structure the screen test in its usual form: with each person giving their name, age, what they do, where they come from; the second part is an interview about different issues related to the making of the film, but where they respond directly to precise questions without any prior discussion. In the third part, we show the evolution of a character in an onanistic relationship, since the film we are making demands scenes of complete nudity, in action. As we are making a film about John Wayne Gacy, the murderer from Des Plaines, Ohio, and as we are asking a lot of questions about him, it is clear that this character occupies our minds a lot, Jean-François Garsi and me, since we are working together.*

(...)

<sup>1</sup> Castonguay, Gilles. « Marc Paradis : le voyage vers Gacy. » *Le Berdache* 28, (mars 1982) : 18-19.



Marc Paradis and Jean-François Gacy, 1986.

*It was quite fascinating to me to identify myself with Gacy in the video (Le voyage de l'ogre). In what form? In the form of a director who hunts down an actor who is going to become the fictitious victim of a real Gacy, fictitious in a film. The actors were more or less aware of this game. They knew that they were going to act in a film about Gacy, that they were going to be victims, they knew my resemblance, the amount of thought that I had given to Gacy. During the video, a form of basic listening developed vis-à-vis the eight young people, some of whom were my age, at a certain point, they became, not really victims, but almost...*

(...)

*Some major themes emerged, thanks also to input from the actors, that is to say prostitution, love, fear, obviously homosexuality, the whole film is just a step in my thinking about homosexuality, a very personal, individual reflection; I used different creative tools, theatre, visual art, cinema, gradually, as new data came out of my thinking.*

(...)

*As the Gacy project simmered between Jean-François and me, we structured all of our work on Gacy to make Polaroid Killer, in its first iteration, which is a short 20-minute fiction film, retracing five different murders carried out by Gacy, just the five murders, without taking a side for or against the murderer or for or against the victims. In an attempt to analyse the process that made Gacy a murderer.*

(...)

*Gacy killed his victim, he took him and added him to the ensemble of the 'Great Victim', so that each of the young victims came to reinforce the Great Victim. Like a process of mumification, he buried them in the cellar in lime.*

(...)

*He went to prison for sodomy with an 18-year-old. He was condemned to 10 years, he was a model prisoner, was released after 18 months, moved to a new city, remarried, told his second wife of his bisexuality and she left him as she could no longer be around him. Some of Gacy's victims got out alive...*

It was 10 years before the release, in 1991, of the famous American film *The Silence of the Lambs*, which, in a manner of speaking, popularized the genre. Faced with this work inspired by the life of a serial killer, Quebecers did not yet seem able to approach such a subject. It was the early 1980s, but Marc's ideas were shocking to the video and filmmaking milieu when he talked about his projects based around a serial killer.

As evidence of this, all of his funding applications were rejected, not always elegantly, by our institutions, while in France, Garsi succeeded in obtaining 100,000 francs to collaborate on *Polaroid Killer* with Marc.

To be able to count on a contribution from France of 100,000 francs, the equivalent of CAD \$50,000 at the time, to make a short film was a rare occurrence, and would be even today. Unfortunately, the Canada Council for the Arts, the SOGIQ and the Ministère des affaires culturelles du Québec didn't want to help Marc with this project.

I also remember the public premiere of *Le voyage de l'ogre* in Daniel Dion's loft in the Cooper Building. It was shown along with *L'homme de Pékin*, a video by Dion and Philippe Poloni dedicated to the composer Claude Vivier. This was a true clash of styles, as the videos presented two very different aesthetics (performance vs documentary). Obviously, no one could have predicted that they would both become significant works in Quebec's short history of video art.



Le voyage de l'ogre (video still), 1981.

The undisputed star of the evening was Vivier, who monopolized the group's attention with his extroverted personality, in the space in which Dion, Sue Schnee and a number of other contemporary artists co-founded Galerie Oboro.

When Vivier was murdered in Paris in March 1983, Marc said that Quebec's avant-garde had been killed along with him. An important figure in the artistic community (a true connoisseur of music and cinema) had left us. Despite his tragic passing, his distinctive laugh, which had resonated everywhere he went, stayed with us for a long time to come (I can still hear it very clearly).

The idea of *Le voyage de l'ogre* was to reveal the mechanisms and construction of the torturer's fantasy world. The troubling reality that Marc and Garsi discovered during their serious and exhaustive research, was that Gacy was an upstanding suburban citizen. An everyday guy who played the clown for children on Sundays. An entrepreneur in the construction industry respected by the mayor and polite society.

## THE TUESDAY GROUP

Following the production of the video *Le voyage de l'ogre*, Marc brought together a group of people who had worked on the film and organised regular meetings to discuss homosexuality. He named them the Tuesday Group, in reference to the day the meetings were held.

Led by Marc, the Tuesday Group shared their personal experiences with the aim of writing a play that would reflect their collective lived reality as gay men. These long discussions led to the structuring and development of a play. The group wrote the *Tuesday Group Manifesto*, which was published in the magazine *Trafic* (2 March 1982).

The basic argument of this text was the following: 'the role of the homosexual is to reinvest humanity in its coitus, that is to say to raise awareness among men and women through the fight against patriarchal fascism'.



La cage (video still), 1983.

*La Cage*, which Marc made in 1983, also grew out of the Tuesday Group. It was his first video to espouse the codes and techniques of video art. A collage of texts gathered from actors and the intimate diary of Bruno Duclou (an anagramme that my poet friend Luc Caron concocted for me). A creative work allowing the viewer to see and hear the romantic discourse of men who were gay, and proud.

## ENCOUNTERING A NEW TYPE OF CINEMA

In 1981, the short film *La chambre blanche*, shot in France and directed by Garsi, with Marc as assistant director, was selected for the Festival international du nouveau cinéma de Montréal. *Le voyage de l'ogre* was also included in the 'Présence Vidéo' section, which marked the first presentation of video art in a film festival in Canada.

That same year, Marc became the first Director of Hospitality at the festival. This role, entirely invented by Marc himself, allowed him an opportunity to have direct contact with the masters of an arthouse cinema that, today, no longer really exists.

Marguerite Duras, among others, made friends with this *Marco de Montréal*, whom she adored. Marc had a natural affinity with women, and many of those he met were intellectuals and artists who loved his company, his free spirit and his repartee. He and Duras complemented each other wonderfully. Marc graciously accommodated all of the writer's whims and demands on her first trip to Quebec, during which she was accompanied by her lover Yann Andréa and her son Jean Mascolo.

Such encounters at the Nouveau Cinéma continued for four years and brought with them the discovery of many avant-garde works and personalities.



La cage (video still), 1983.

Marc knew Montreal's best restaurants and night life. He welcomed guests who, in his capable hands, received a grand tour of Montreal nightlife at a time when AIDS had not yet hit a dynamic and exploding gay community. Marc delighted the vast majority of his guests, who were happy to discover a city that didn't sleep, the village and its scenes.

## VIDEO

Marc's friendship with Jean Tourangeau began in the capital, at a time when the art critic was very active in Quebec City's contemporary art scene. At the beginning of the 1980s, the two friends met up in Montreal, where Tourangeau became Director at PRIM Vidéo while continuing to work as an art critic and curator.

Tourangeau advised, guided and disseminated Marc's first works in a circuit that was as yet unknown to him, belonging as he did to a nascent video community that was emerging from one ocean to the other. Tourangeau became a mentor of sorts to Marc, introducing him to this world, writing about his works and selecting them for exhibitions that defined this new art form.

The creative freedom of the video medium, which defied traditional models of filmmaking, opened up a world of possibility to a new generation of artists such as Marc.

Over time, from one ocean to the other, artist-run centres, galleries, festivals and centres offering access to video became privileged sites to see and hear, among other things, openly gay and lesbian video production using video technology as a means of expression.

Marc benefitted from this non-traditional circuit and was able to exhibit his main videographic work produced in the 1980s, which, despite the opening of minds, always brought with it a good amount of risk due to the negative reactions that it generated.



Deliver us from Evil (video still), 1987.

One of the things the video community had to fight for was inclusion in contemporary art exhibitions in Canadian museums. The new art form had made its way into the great European and American museums, but Canada did not seem set to follow the trend.

The same was true of television. American and European artists had studios that dared to welcome a new generation that played and experimented with image and sound. Here, video artists had access to community television and were now meeting artisans of the small screen who did not want to broadcast them. Canadian contemporary art was changing but television and museum institutions were too risk averse.

## AN ARCHIPELAGO OF DESIRES AND CENSORSHIP

On 21 May 1988, the new building of the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa opened its doors, finally offering a selection of video works to audiences, which included, among others, *Deliver us from Evil* [*Délivre-nous du mal*], which Marc had made that year.

Shortly after its opening, visitors to the new museum began to complain about the inclusion of videos deemed to be indecent, made by artists Richard Fung of Toronto, Joe Sarahan of Vancouver and, no surprise, Marc Paradis. The affair garnered a lot of attention and the video community mobilized. The museum held consultations, equivocated, and ended up supporting the contested videomakers' practice following a public consultation.

A similar thing happened in 1991, with the inauguration of another new building, this time, the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, who decided to mark the occasion with a contemporary art exhibition, *Un archipel de désirs : les artistes québécois et la scène internationale* [*An archipelago of desires: Quebecer artists and the international scene*]. This exhibition included a number of video works, including three works by Marc.



## What makes someone a whore?

Letter to a Lover (video still), 1988.

Shortly before the inauguration, Louise Déry, the curator of the exhibition, took the precaution of inviting Marc to meet with the influential Board members of the museum. Déry had done her homework and prepared an exhaustive file intended to defend Marc's work. He had come back from Quebec City with assurances that all three of his videos (*Deliver us from Evil*, *Letter to a Lover* [*Lettre à un amant*] and *l'incident « Jones »*) would be shown.

But – surprise – shortly after the opening reception of the exhibition on 22 May, the date of the first screening of Marc's works, only *l'incident « Jones »* was shown. Claiming it was due to administrative problems, the directors said that all would be in order within a few weeks. The exhibition had simply opened before it was ready, as certain curatorial tasks had not been completed in time.

And yet, Marc's two videos were the only ones put on hold for this reason. They were also the only two works containing scenes of nudity.

The video community did not wait to react. Vidéographe, Galerie Obscura, Le Lieu [Centre en art actuel], Galerie René Blouin and the Regroupement des centres d'artistes autogérés du Québec (RCAAQ) sent communications to the museum, denouncing this act of censorship.

Marc demanded his works be removed from the exhibition while the public debate between the museum and the artists continued (notably via print media).

At the end of June 1991, in solidarity with Marc, Robert Morin, Lorraine Dufour, Daniel Dion, François Girard, Jeanne Crépeau and I demanded the removal of our works from the exhibition.

***Censorship is inherent to this type of institution. It is to be expected. But when we censor something, we must be coherent and take responsibility for it. Where is the real respect here?***<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Carrière, Daniel. « Six vidéastes retirent leurs oeuvres du Musée du Québec. » *Le Devoir*, samedi 29 juin 1991, A4.



Deliver us from Evil (video still), 1987.

These words of Marc's, reported by the journalist Daniel Carrière in the newspaper *Le Devoir*, express his fundamental feelings; despite the solidarity expressed by his peers, he was hurt by the turn of events.

Injured and often criticized, Marc wasn't impervious to the perpetual questionings that surrounded the dissemination of his works. Tired of the perpetual attacks on them, Marc retrieved his works from Vidéographe in the early 2000s. He surrendered and put his video art production to one side.

## THE HIDDEN SIDE OF PARADIS

To understand Marc Paradis' oeuvre, you need to look at the catalogue of projects that he masterfully led. This will allow you to understand the extent of his accomplishments over the years and the influence that he has had on our lives.

From 1976 to 1979, Marc played an important role, with the help of his partner Éric Duchesne, in the resurrection of the Saint-Jean Baptiste quarter in Quebec City, when they founded the café-theatre Le Hobbit. This site for theatrical creation was central to the regeneration of an area that had to fight for survival at a time when it was under threat of demolition. With this restored building, he instituted a hub that helped to restore the street to the shopping destination it had once been. He fought to present theatrical works including the first plays of Marie Tifo, Léo Munger and Germain Houde.

Returning to Montreal in 1980, he undertook the Herculean task of transforming a rundown spot into a stylish studio on Amherst Street (the name dating from a bygone era) where he rehearsed John Herbert's *Fortune and Men's Eyes* with a troupe that he had formed. They performed the piece at the café-theatre Nelligan in Montreal in the autumn of 1980.

His creative laboratories were his apartments on Drolet St, Sherbrooke St, Rachel St, St Laurence Boulevard and Mount Royal Avenue. They were unique places, sumptuously furnished, equipped with state-of-the-art sound systems, and decorated with canvases by Riopelle, Ferron and young contemporary painters. Luxury, colors, accessories and works married with the places he occupied with his lovers. These places were inhabited at all hours of day and night with a bevy of people sharing ideas, projects, time and joints with Marc.



Marc Paradis at Café-Théâtre Le Hobbit, 1977.

As the 1980s came to an end, Marc helped his sister Pascale to set up a fashion boutique on St Denis Street, at a time when this commercial road was lively and bustling. We owe the renovation of Café Méliès and of Vidéographe to him, both of which were in need of a lick of paint and a touch of his inspiration.

In the 1990s, despite several administrative issues, the façade of his renovated apartment building on Mount Royal Avenue became the model used by civil servants at the City of Montreal for the drawing up of the master plan for the avenue.

Marc's obvious flair and taste for renovation wasn't limited to modest projects but extended to those that involved the moving of mountains. In the early 1990s, he met the rich and famous Guy Laliberté of Cirque du Soleil. This was the beginning of an adventure that would take over Marc's life for the next two decades.

Notably, Marc would manage the colossal renovation project of Laliberté's principal residence on Mont-Saint-Bruno. This construction project would last for several years. To carry out this challenging work, he again brought together a team of young workers, often dropouts, that he affectionately called *Les pic-pics*, a reference to the sound of their work and a French play on words relating to their social status.

Marc stayed permanently on site and supervised everything from the first pouring of concrete to the buying of furniture, works of art and everyday objects.

A turnkey operation delivered by the video artist who was now recognized as an expert in interior decor, construction and the renovation of villas in the Bahamas, Las Vegas, Los Angeles and other amazing places around the world.

From the beginning of the 21st century, as our lives took different paths, our relationship slowly became episodic and, after a time, I lost track of his story. We never discussed it.

When I heard of his passing, it was like a bomb had exploded in my brain. The days following the announcement of his death were blighted by a growing sadness as I passed by streets, houses and places that had played a significant role in his life, in our lives. I found my memory playing tricks on me as I remembered only vague fragments of these rich and intensely lived decades.

How can I recover the numerous meals shared with, and thanks to, Marc? How can I recall our fabulous travels throughout Canada and in California, the Bahamas, and Europe? How can I describe his family, his father, his mother, his brothers and sister, and his nieces whom I know and who were the privileged witnesses of his highs as well as his lows? How can I write about a person whose existence remains indescribable, even unknown, in many respects? How can I talk about his intimate life and his loves when I know nothing about them? How has chance, fate or destiny allowed you and Jean Tourangeau to leave us in the same week? So many questions have been left unanswered.

His words spoken in the last moments of *Le voyage de l'ogre* remain, which, since they were recorded on camera in the summer of 1981, have always made me wonder:

*Why John Gacy?*

*Why a subject like that?*

*Because in a life of extreme limits, such as he lived, the range of fantasies is immense. You can add yours at your leisure. It's the only thing that matters in life.*

*If he hadn't been there?*

*Why ask if?*

*The connection between the real and the imaginary, is an 'if'.*



## FAREWELL MY FRIEND

Returning from the gathering organized in his memory by his niece Catherine in September 2019, I wrote and published this word:

**M**

*Che strano...*

*In a southern setting on Ontario Street, the Abreuvoir today, we met to pay tribute to you, to remember you, to exchange stories, to understand and piece (back) together certain fragments that had been lost and were found again.*

*Our lives are novels.*

*And your final chapter reveals the origin of your whole life.*

*And everything is obvious, everything becomes so clear, so tragic and painful.*

*What is there to say? What more is there to say? Do we let you leave with your secret or talk about the torturer, the victims, the ogre's journey and his cage of words?*

*You did it profusely. We remained blind. Deaf and mute too.*

*An instinct for things, a head in art, a disturbing sex, such extraordinary desires and ideas... White. Black. Little or no gray. Marguerite fell in love with you, no surprise there. A simple understanding between survivors, addicts, tormented souls.*



Simon B. Robert, Marc Paradis and Eric Duchesne, 1987.

*And the idea of rereading the beginning of the story...*

*Rediscovering the loud echoes of your mind Paradis.*

*So that your song, your life cuts across our minds.*

*Eat and dive into the night.*

*Invite grace and her friends.*

*Dream a thousand and one illusions, a thousand and one fictions, a thousand and one houses...*

*RIP my friend*



Marc Paradis, 1982

## Marc Paradis Biography

Marc Paradis was born in Montreal on March 24 1955 and passed away in August 2019. His eclectic journey crossed through theatre, video, and interior design. In a biographical CV from the 1980s, he details his younger years and a complicated academic journey involving moves, conflicts and expulsions, with brutal self-deprecation. He studied visual arts at the Cégep de Sainte-Foy, set and costume design at the National Theatre School of Canada in Montreal and dramatic arts at UQAM. From 1978 to 1990, he also trained with the likes of Józef Robakowski, Bruno Bigoni, Jerzy Grotowski and Michael Kriegman in numerous workshops.

In 1976, he co-founded the theatre café Le Hobbit in Quebec City with his partner Éric Duchesne, rescuing a heritage house from demolition. Until 1979, he worked front and back of house and was the principal host. This small stage welcomed members of the Quebec theatre scene, including Robert Lepage, until 1981. That year, Paradis staged and performed in John Herbert's *Fortune and Men's Eyes* [*Aux yeux des hommes*] at the Nelligan theatre café in Montreal.

In Montreal in June 1980, Paradis met French filmmaker Jean-François Garsi, and worked as his assistant on the film *La chambre blanche*. Fascinated by John Wayne Gacy, an American homosexual serial killer who was arrested in 1978, they developed an idea for a short film on the subject, entitled *Polaroid Killer*, which Garsi made in France in 1984, followed by a feature-length film, *La nuit fluide* (unreleased). In 1981, Paradis shot some screen-tests for *Polaroid Killer*. He would go on to release *Le voyage de l'ogre*, an intimate reflexion on Gacy and homosexuality. Taking a direct and raw approach, Paradis explored desire, homosexual love and sexuality, and the masculine body – themes he would continue to explore in the majority of his subsequent videos. In the wake of *Voyage de l'ogre*, he founded the Groupe du mardi [Tuesday Group], bringing artists and friends together for, in his words, 'theatrical reflexion on the art of representation and sexuality'. In 1982, he published the *Manifeste du Groupe du mardi* [*Tuesday Group Manifesto*] in the magazine *Trafic*. The group also worked on a play entitled, *Sodomi et le gars mort*.



Marc Paradis, 1990.

Throughout the 1980s, Paradis involved his close friends in his video productions: Éric Duchesne, Simon B. Robert, Gabriel Beauregard, Yves Lalonde, Jean Tourangeau, Daniel Carrière, and Luc Bourdon. For him, art and life were indistinguishable. *L'incident « Jones »* (1986), *Délivre-nous du mal [Deliver us from Evil]* (1987) and *Lettre à un amant [Letter to a Lover]* (1988) form a trilogy about romantic rupture. Paradis also documented the Montreal art scene with *Video Portrait of John Mingolla* (1985), *Performances de Yves Lalonde* (1987) and *L'instruction* (1984), after Peter Weiss. More than simple recordings, these videos attempt to bear witness to the experience of the viewer, and even of the artists.

Paradis was also very involved in the Montreal video scene. He sat on the Board of Directors at PRIM in 1983 and 1984 and at Vidéographe in 1985, 1986 and 1990; he was also Interim General Coordinator at Vidéographe in 1988-89. In 1983-84, Paradis was Programmer-Curator of the Canadian selection of the 'Présence Vidéo' of the 13th Festival international du nouveau cinéma et de la vidéo de Montréal with Luc Bourdon. They made *Scheme vidéo [Video Scheme]* (1984) and *Say Cheese for a Trans-Canadian Look* (1985), about their work as festival programmers, their research and their encounters.

In 1990, *Letter to a Lover* was bought by Canal+ (France). In 1991, three of Paradis' videos featured in the exhibition *Un archipel de désir : les artistes québécois et la scène internationale*, which marked the reopening of the Musée du Québec. These were *L'incident « Jones »* (1986), *Deliver us from Evil* (1987) and *Letter to a Lover* (1988). At the opening, only *L'incident « Jones »*, the least explicit of the three, was screened. Was this censure? The museum blamed an administrative delay, an explanation that did not satisfy Paradis. He withdrew his works from the exhibition; the other exhibiting videomakers – Robert Morin, Lorraine Dufour, Luc Bourdon, François Girard, Jeanne Crépeau and Daniel Dion – followed suit. The newspapers followed the conflict with interest.

Although the 1990s looked promising for his career, Paradis abandoned videomaking. *Harems*, an ambitious work heavy with classical and personal mythology, seemed to mark the end of his production. A member of a collective called Farine orpheline cherche ailleurs meilleur, he took part in the organization of the event Utopia in 1999, a research-creation lab based on industrial heritage. He also worked as an interior designer, notably for Guy Laliberté and the Cirque du soleil, as well as for businesses and individuals in Montreal and abroad. In the early 2000s, he made three videos – *Ecce Omo*, *Marrakech* and *La vie est ronde* – which he shot on his travels. *Ecce Omo* was shown at the Festival du nouveau cinéma; the other two films would remain unreleased.



Harems (video still), 1991.

Marc Paradis' video work, widely disseminated, has been screened at numerous festivals and at the Walter Phillips Gallery, LACE/Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (1988), Optica (1987), the Museum of Modern Art (New York), Rochester Contemporary Art Center (RoCo), the MacKenzie Art Gallery, the Long Beach Museum of Art Video, Medellín's Museo de Arte Moderno and the San Francisco Cinematheque. His works belong to the collections of The Kitchen (New York), the National Gallery of Canada, the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec and MoMA.



Harems (video still), 1991.

## Biographies

### KARINE BOULANGER

Karine Boulanger has a Master's degree in Film Studies, from the Université de Montréal; her thesis was on independent Quebec film from the 60s and 70s. She worked for seven years doing research at the Université de Montréal, within the Groupe de recherche sur l'avènement et la formation des institutions cinématographique et scénique (GRAFICS), and the Center for research on Intermediality (CRI). She then worked six years at the Cinémathèque québécoise, first as programming assistant then as programmer-curator, film, video, and international new media. As a curator at Vidéographe since 2015, her role here is to develop and highlight Vidéographe's large and important collection.

### ALEXIS LEMIEUX

Alexis Lemieux is a doctoral student in Museology, Mediation and Heritage at UQAM. Under the guidance of Viva Paci, his research centres on the relationship between ideas around walking and heritage in the city of Montreal and its surrounding areas. While undertaking his Master's degree in Communication, he focused on cinema and moving image practices and wrote a dissertation on the work of filmmaker Fernand Bélanger under the guidance of Pierre Barrette.



Deliver us from Evil (video still), 1987.

## DENIS VAILLANCOURT

Denis Vaillancourt studied cinema, theater and literature. One of his passions has always been writing. His short stories have been published in various literary magazines. As well, he has written a script, a play and two novels.

Employed at Vidéographe since 1999, Denis currently works with the Distribution team. His main tasks consist of selecting work to be distributed, program them, and offer work to festivals and other video related events. He passionately works to promote Vidéographe's content here and abroad and thus has gained the confidence of artists represented by Vidéographe. At the same time, he is currently writing his third novel.

## LUC BOURDON

Luc Bourdon is a major figure in video art in Canada. Over a period of more than 25 years, he has created some 50 works in varying genres, including documentary, fiction, and experimental video. Many of these address art and culture - *De la parole aux actes* (2000), *La grande bibliothèque* (2005), *Classes de maîtres* (2008) - with an emphasis on history and memory. These themes lie at the heart of his first feature-length film, *La mémoire des anges* [*The Memories of Angels*], which he made at the NFB and for which he was awarded the Grand Prix Focus - Cinémathèque Québécoise for best Canadian feature-length film at the Festival du Nouveau Cinéma de Montréal in October 2008. His second feature-length film, *La part du diable* [*The Devil's Share*] (2017), won the Award for Best Feature- or Medium-length Documentary at the Festival international du cinéma francophone en Acadie.

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