

# this & that

**B.C. BIBLE BAN** p. 6 ■ **CRIMINAL CODE** p. 7 ■ **GREEN GARDENS** p. 7 ■ **METHADONE MYTHS** p. 8  
**ROMANOW REPORT REDUX** p. 8 ■ **BORDER CROSSING** p. 9 ■ **LAND CLAIMS** p. 10 ■ **LABOUR** p. 12

## PROFILE

# Smart films

Taking cinema from popcorn to politics by Correy Baldwin

**EVERY MONDAY NIGHT** at Montreal's Concordia University, a large theatre hall buzzes with students, activists, and film enthusiasts. They have come to participate in Cinema Politica—film screenings of some of the world's most progressive documentary work. The Montreal crowd is not alone: over its first 10 years, Cinema Politica has become an international movement, growing into the largest campus- and community-based documentary screening network in the world.

Co-founders Ezra Winton and Svetla Turnin began Cinema Politica at Concordia in winter 2003, during a period of student political action. "It was a really vibrant, politicized campus," says Winton. "It just seemed to make sense that there should be a political documentary screening series there. The campus was ripe for it." The first screenings were packed. Still, they never planned to expand into a network. "We never thought it would grow beyond Concordia," says Turnin. "We've never done outreach. It all happened very organically."

The network is now approaching 100 locals cross Canada, Europe, the U.S., Indonesia, Australia, and Colombia. Each local is semi-autonomous, programming from a bank of over 500 films, with an eye to local relevance. Screenings are free or by donation, in an effort to keep things accessible. One of the more exciting locals to open



■ SVETLA TURNIN AND EZRA WINTON

recently is Toronto's Bloor Cinema, now well into its second year. The monthly series at the central downtown venue consistently draws audiences of 200.

Virtually all Cinema Politica screenings are followed by Q&A sessions and discussions,

often with the filmmaker in attendance.

The approach is changing how films are viewed, especially in the digital age. "Having bodies together in a space is a political aspect of viewing cinema that you don't have when it's online and you can be anonymous," says

Winton. "People want to have an experience that is away from their computer and actually be present in a social space with other people."

The idea is to continue building momentum after the film ends. "Something that has always driven our screenings," says Turnin, "is bringing together activists, audiences, and artists in a common, shared space where they can talk about the issues, and where people can get involved and get connected to direct action."

"[Films] are also a great way to connect with people outside of activist communities," she adds. "We put a lot of effort into extending our outreach in the communities that are most impacted by the issues discussed in the films."

Promoting marginalized voices and issues is at the core of Cinema Politica. The network challenges the status quo, providing exposure for independent documentaries that could otherwise be overlooked. "Filmmakers tell us how happy they are that people are seeing their films," says Turnin. "They really love our work because we extend the life of their films."

"A film never ends if you can stimulate, motivate, and raise questions for viewers," says Canadian filmmaker John Walker, whose latest film *Arctic Defenders* screened to a full house at Concordia on Nov. 18, 2013. "The documentary form is not merely to entertain an audience to distraction but to stimulate action and investigation. Finding and building an audience for this type of filmmaking is essential for the form to survive."

Walker describes the follow-up Q&A as challenging for a filmmaker, but immensely valuable: "For me, it opens new ways of thinking about the film's impact and limitations. I can't think of a more stimulating environment than active minds questioning and searching for knowledge after a screening of a documentary film."

As it moves into its second decade, Cinema Politica will continue engaging and challenging its audiences. "We're dedicated to the sociopolitical aspect of documentary as a change agent, as a tool for social justice campaigns, as a way to inspire people to get involved, to take action," says Winton. "Having physical screenings, and having activists there who are connected to those screenings, really builds on documentaries' potential to contribute to progressive social change."