



D I S T R I B U T I O N I N T H E
M Y S T E R I O U S
E A S T

BY GORDON PARSONS



WHITEWASH

1990

by JAN PEACOCK

Photo by Karen Bondarchuk

REGIONAL REPORT

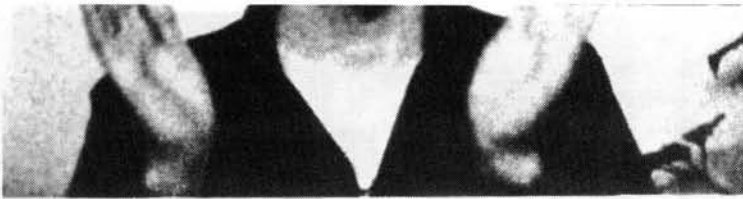
JACKASS JOHNNY
(1988).
Directed by
ALEX BUSBY and
DAVID COOLE.



pursuing the successful distribution of his or her own work. These two very broad "conditions" break down into many subconditions of course, and they subsequently extend outward into all the myriad avenues for distribution. Wise counsel would suggest that it is necessary to work very closely with the chosen distributor or, if distributing independently, with the various exhibitors. That seems obvious. The question is, how? The circumstances of distribution in this country do not favour the producer—or, for that matter, the distributor—both of whom should be allies rather than antagonists. My immediate experience only extends to two "tiers" of the normal distribution pattern, the theatrical release and the home-video market, but I will try to comment on the others.

THEATRICAL EXHIBITION

THE TWO THEATRICAL CHAINS THAT DETERMINE THE DUOPOLY OF THEATRICAL distribution in Canada also exist in Atlantic Canada with a slight variation. There are indeed two chains and one of them is the very familiar and endearing Famous Players, but the other, in lieu of Cineplex Odeon, is Empire Cinemas, which



Linda Busby in
LINDA JOY.



operates throughout the Maritimes and is owned by Maritime concerns, the Sobey family, who also own several food stores (and probably control wealth beyond measure, as the saying goes). Both Famous Players and Empire show the occasional Canadian feature, but they invariably do their bookings through the commercial distributors. Canadian films shown under such conditions tend to do rather poorly. I doubt either Famous Players or Empire would respond to the personal touch by independent filmmakers. They screen only 35 mm and show short films only if they are a part of the feature package, as some NFB films have been in the recent past.

There are very few independent venues for theatrical features or shorts in Atlantic Canada. Be they repertory cine-

mas or film societies, all of them deal most often with commercial distributors such as Cinephile or Alliance and screen the standard rep cinema diet of international art films, but all have a commitment to film outside the mainstream and all will certainly consider showing independent Canadian work. The return to the feature filmmaker can average \$500 for an average one-week run at Wormwood's, but much depends on the promotional effort of the filmmaker in bringing audiences to the film. If a commercial distributor is involved then the return will obviously be much less, if anything. Similarly for short films. Such works can be rented at a fixed rate or a small percentage (5% say) for theatrical screenings or more inventive arrangements can be negotiated. Wormwood's recently screened a short work after the

main feature and charged an additional \$1 for the mini-screening. The process was labour-intensive but interesting. It allowed us to assess the true "draw" of the short film and the interest audiences had in seeing it quite apart from the feature. Interestingly, most of independent outlets retain very close contact with the local independent sector.

HOME VIDEO

AS ELSEWHERE, THERE ARE PRECIOUS few outlets for independent or even Canadian film or video work in Atlantic Canada. The existing video chains or superstores make no exceptional effort to market such items. The usual items come from sources like Norstar Home video or the "Big 3" of video distribution, and they are relegated to obscure corners of the store. Overall, the number of Canadian tapes on display is quite small and limited to feature films. The exceptions are two stores in Nova Scotia, Critic's Choice in Halifax and Light and Shadow in Wolfville, a small university town one hour's drive from Halifax. Both give some prominence to Canadian and independent work, although each has a particular emphasis. It is possible for independent producers to approach each with requests to place rental of purchase items. The return on such an effort is minimal but there are greater rewards than money.

PAY AND SPECIALTY OUTLETS

THERE ARE NO OUTLETS OF THIS nature unique to the Atlantic provinces.

BROADCAST TELEVISION

BROADCAST OFFERS SOME VARIATIONS from the norm, but nothing to get in a lather over.

CBC does exist in Atlantic Canada, but the regional office does very little independent purchasing of one-shot features or shorts. They engage in co-productions and offer licensing agreements but otherwise the Maritime office has very little discretionary air time. Newfoundland has somewhat more time but less money. Major decisions are taken in Toronto through Tom Howe's office. [ed. note: This was written prior to the December CBC cuts. Note the author's

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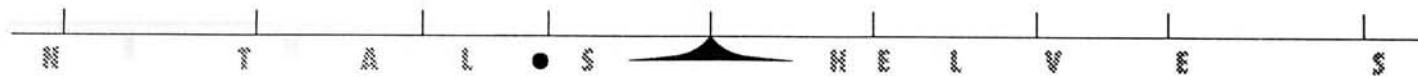
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Top: EIGHT FRAMES PER SECOND (1987). Directed by CHARLES CLARK.
Bottom: THE BOX OF SUN. Photo by Simon Esterez.



timely final comment.]

ATV is the regional outlet for the CTV network. Along with ASN, its educational "sister" network, it has taken a rather unique developmental approach to participation with the independent sector. Beginning with a series of script and playwright workshops in the three Maritime provinces, it has progressed to the point of funding the television production of certain works that seem to be emerging from that program. Otherwise there is an open door to approaches by independents but not an extensive history of licensing agreements or independent sales.

MITV (or Maritime Independent TV) is the new kid on the block and is thus given over to the best of intentions. They have made several independent purchases of both series and single programs, but many of these have been initiated through other broadcasters and are very commercial productions. They do provide licensing agreements, but at this point they are not getting involved in co-productions. My impression is that the bottom line is not what they want it to be and that situation has affected their ability to engage in co-productions and make more adventuresome purchases. Or it may be a red herring.

ASN, a.k.a. the Atlantic Satellite Network, has an educational mandate for roughly 22 hours of each broadcast week. Most of this time is taken up with live university broadcasts and other curriculum-related programs. This time is given over to the Media Services section of the Nova Scotia Department of Education; they both program it and make the necessary purchases. Essentially they have no money for broadcast rights and will pay only for the duplication rights so that programs can be copied off air. One recent innovation in their approach is to allow other groups lined up by the producer to pay for the broadcast. ASN will show the work, sometimes outside the normal educational slot, and by doing so trigger Telefilm money.

EDUCATIONAL OUTLETS, LIBRARIES

PURCHASING FOR THESE ORGANIZATIONS is done through central organizations. For the educational sector in Nova

Scotia that organization is the Media Services section of the Department of Education, mentioned above with reference to the ASN broadcast network. There is very little selling school-to-school. Materials are usually purchased from established distributors with both school and educational broadcast rights on the ASN television network included. A similar situation exists in other provinces; purchasing often is done through a central educational agency. Libraries seem to exercise some autonomy in their purchasing, but I'm told the ones that do (such as the Halifax and Dartmouth libraries) have very limited budgets.

CULTURAL CENTRES, ARTIST-RUN GALLERIES, ART GALLERIES AND OTHER OUTLETS

THE NATURE OF THE PROGRAMMING and the selection process that takes place in each of these organizations is very individual, as might be expected. Some groups may curate a certain portion of their yearly programming while receiving pre-selected and packaged programs from elsewhere. Depending on the type of program involved, these organizations may be open to an individual approach, but they would also deal with existing commercial and non-profit distributors.

The only independent film and video distributor operating in Atlantic Canada is Atlantic Independent Media (902 - 422-5929). Bonnie Baker, AIM's director, is probably the best person in the region to consult about distributing in the Atlantic provinces, preferably before going into production. The Atlantic market is a very small part of the Canadian market—apparently only 4% in the educational sector, for instance—and as a result most efforts directed towards Atlantic Canada will be seen as secondary to the primary markets of Ontario and the West. Nevertheless, there is a market and it does pre-license, co-produce and buy outright. But hurry, this offer may expire at any minute.

Gordon Parsons is an exhibitor and film programmer in Halifax.

ATLANTIC REP CINEMAS AND FILM SOCIETIES

THE CAPITOL THEATRE

General Delivery
Shelburne, Nova Scotia, B0T 1W0
Contact: Wolfgang Schricker

THE SACKVILLE FILM SOCIETY

Box 368
Sackville, New Brunswick, E0A 3C0
Contact: Thaddeus Holowinia

THE VOGUE CINEMA

Main Street
Sackville, New Brunswick, E0A 3C0
Contact: L.R. Babineau

THE ACADIA CINEMA

Main Street
Wolfville, Nova Scotia, B0P 1X0
Contact: Al Whittle

WORMWOOD'S DOG & MONKEY CINEMA

2015 Gottingen St.
Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3K 3B1
Contact: Peter Gaskin

EMPIRE CINEMAS

7205 Quinpool Road
Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3L 1C7
Contact: Morris Landry

FREDERICTON FILM SOCIETY

537 Albert St.
Fredericton, New Brunswick, E3B 2C1
Contact: Barry Cameron

SUNDAY CINEMA

Island Media Arts Co-op
Box 2726
Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, C1A 8C3
Contact: Peter Richards

MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY FILM SOCIETY

58 Cochrane St.
St. John's, Newfoundland, A1C 3L6
Contact: Noreen Gulfman

POUR UN CINÉMA LIBRE

REGIONAL REPORT

PAR CLAUDE FORGET

La parole donnée ici naît d'un inquiétude et d'un certain enthousiasme. Inquiétude de voir se rétrécir une marge de manoeuvre pour un autre cinéma, qui se cantonne trop souvent lors d'événements spéciaux ou de festivals; une fortification involontaire de la part des artistes, mais presque assumée par les instances gouvernementales, puisque les fenêtres d'exploitation indépendantes relèvent d'une rareté significative. Mais aussi enthousiasme surprenant à regarder de près le cheminement de certaines oeuvres se proliférer dans des espaces qui semblent contradictoires: une toute petite salle d'expérimentation et une télévision d'Etat (LE FILM DE JUSTINE), un mini-réseau de salles indépendantes et une télévision payante (HORSES IN WINTER), l'achat-groupé d'un film, sous-estimé dans le circuit fermé canadien et québécois, par un réseau de bibliothèques publiques en France (PORTRAITS DE NOTRE TEMPS: SUE COE ET SON OEUVRE).

Comment faut-il alors parler de distribution d'un cinéma indépendant? C'est d'abord et avant tout en tant que praticien au sein d'organismes culturels que je réagis: c'est-à-dire subjectivement, à la première personne, et, conséquemment, par une parole forcément ambiguë et d'interrogations en suspens. C'est aussi par mon expérience à Cinéma Libre, qui est justement né d'une volonté de cinéastes à rejoindre le plus large public, par l'intermédiaire des réseaux existants.

Tout film a le droit d'être vu par son public. Au Québec, en province, le réseau des salles parallèles a joué un rôle important pour faire connaître le cinéma québécois dans les années '70. Maintenant, leur programmation copie celle des deux grandes réseaux canadiens qui sont aussi omniprésents au Québec: Famous Players et Cinéplex Odéon. Il en est de même auprès des autres propriétaires indépendants qui attendent patiemment une offre venue d'en haut de la pyramide. À Montréal, l'effritement du mini-réseau S.M.C. a jeté une ombre sur les salles de répertoire, qui exigent maintenant un minimum garanti pour présenter des films québécois, alors que plusieurs documentaires et premiers longs métrages de fiction avaient connu une carrière appréciable. Une nouvelle salle, le Quartier Latin, a la ferme intention de jouer un rôle plus dynamique, mais elle doit répondre à des critères de rentabilité intrinsèques au lieu (près de 600 sièges). Il reste le Cinéma Parallèle, programmé par un comité de distributeurs voués à la promotion du cinéma indépendant, mais son accès reste limité à plusieurs contingences: petite salle de moins de 90 places, programmation sur 4 jours comblée d'événements spéciaux (festivals et autres manifestations). Ma déclaration de principe comme quoi tout film doit être vu par son public ne semble pas si évidente dans ce paysage.

La majeure partie des films distribués par Cinéma Libre sont lancés au Cinéma Parallèle. La promotion est adaptée pour chacun des films afin de les faire valoir en tant qu'oeuvre originale: relations de presse et moyens de promotion différent pour chacun des films. Plus de la moitié des films indépendants que nous distribuons

BY CLAUDE FORGET

TRANSLATED BY JEANLUC SVOBODA

This discourse is an expression of concern leavened with enthusiasm. Concern for the increasingly limited possibilities available to "other" cinema, which is too often confined to special events or festivals—a defence mechanism involuntarily adopted by artists and almost taken for granted by governments, because the venues for independent distribution are so restricted. On the other hand, one cannot but be enthused by successful efforts to penetrate seemingly contradictory markets: small experimental theatres and national television (*Le Film de Justine*); a mini-network of independent

cinemas and pay TV (*Horses in Winter*); and an association of Public Libraries in France, which purchased a film that had little success in the closed Canadian and Quebec markets (*Portraits de notre temps: Sue Coe et son oeuvre*).

I wonder, then, how to address the question of independent film distribution. First and foremost, I speak as an active cultural worker—that is, subjectively, in the first person singular—and therefore, what I have to say is often ambiguous and tentative. I also speak from my experience at Cinéma Libre, whose aims reflect the desire of filmmakers to impact on the largest possible public through existing networks.

Every film has the right to be seen by its public. Throughout Quebec, the network of parallel cinemas played an important role during the '70s in presenting Quebec productions. However, their current programming is no different from that of the two major Canadian distribution networks also operating in Quebec; i.e. Famous Players and Cineplex. The same can be said of independent theatre owners, who patiently wait for offerings from the top of the pyramid. In Montreal, the disintegration of the S.M.C. mini-network has cast a long shadow over repertory cinemas, who now require a guaranteed minimum box-office before presenting Quebec films, even though a number of documentaries and original feature films had considerable commercial success. The newest venue, Le Quartier Latin, apparently has every intention of revitalizing this sector, but nevertheless must bow to financial imperatives; i.e. profit (and filling almost 600 seats). The only other venue is Cinéma



PORTRAIT DE
NOTRE TEMPS:
THE ART OF SUE
COE.
Un film de
HELENE
KLOWDAWSKY.

PAINTED
LANDSCAPES
OF THE TIMES:
THE ART OF
SUE COE.
A film by
HELEN
KLOWDAWSKY.



Top:
Ben (Jacob Turney)
and Mrs. Waxman
(Vicki Barkoff) in
**HORSES IN
WINTER.**

Bottom:
Maintenant
CINÉMA LIBRE
distribue **À TOUT
PRENDRE**
(1963).



anuellement souffrent de manque de moyens appropriés, puisqu'il n'existe aucune forme d'aide directement liée à la diffusion de ce genre de films.

Ainsi, les distributeurs ne peuvent prétendre à des fonds directement liés à la promotion de films financés par le Conseil des arts du Canada et par Approvisionnement et Services Canada. Au Québec, les films produits sans l'aide de la Société générale des industries culturelles (Sogic) n'ont pas accès prioritaire à des programmes d'aide. Seul Téléfilm Canada est plus souple, à la condition de répondre à certains critères des rentabilité qui sont d'ordre plus économique que culturel. Il faut souligner que les nouvelles règles du jeu du fonds de mise en marché de Téléfilm sont discriminatoires envers les oeuvres produites sans l'aide de Téléfilm: le tiers non-remboursable (c'est-à-dire subventionné) ne s'applique pas, confirmant ainsi la dérision du système qui privilégie les films mieux nantis. Il faut enfin préciser que le ministère des Communications créa deux fonds importants de production (plus de 7 millions par année dont 2

millions pour la production non-définie aux salles de cinéma, sans se soucier de la distribution des films comme si cela allait de soi) et concentra ses efforts en distribution par le fonds d'aide à la distribution de longs métrages, privilégiant exclusivement les distributeurs commerciaux pour acheter autant des films étrangers que canadiens.

Pourtant la distribution de films indépendants a aussi sa rentabilité, autant économique que culturelle. L'acquisition de droits d'utilisation de nos films en circuit fermé par les institutions représente une audience qui ne reste pas innocente à la forme et au contenu des films. Une audience aussi large que la télévision et les salles commerciales, puisque nos films sont vus dans un contexte d'éducation et d'animation; ils sont enseignés à des générations différentes pour rester longtemps dans l'imaginaire collectif. Ils ne sont pas simplement des biens de consommation jetables après usage. À titre d'exemple, un film tel que *QUEL NUMERO? WHAT NUMBER?* a généré plus tiers de ses coûts de production après quatre années d'exploitation, grâce à une alliance de distributeurs indépendants (Cinéma Libre au Canada français, DEC Films au Canada anglais et Films Transit pour l'exploration). A sa sortie, le film était surtout utilisé par les adultes, alors que maintenant, des écoles secondaires s'intéressent à la pertinence du propos. Le succès du dernier film de Forcier n'est-il pas un peu redevable à notre obstination à faire connaître ses premiers longs métrages, qui continuent d'être demandés après 15 ans.

En 1964 des jeunes cinéastes québécois (Claude Jutra, Gilles Carle et Michel Brault), maintenant de renommée internationale, se mettaient en scène dans une fantasia sur l'industrie du cinéma: *CINÉBOOM*. Ils affichaient fièrement sur les murs de Montréal une phrase qui semble être la source de notre nom; il s'agit de: "POUR UN CINÉMA LIBRE".

Claude Forget est directeur général du Cinéma Libre en Montréal.

Parallèle, whose program is determined by a committee of distributors interested in promoting independent film, but they are subject to a number of constraints—the theatre has only 90 seats, and presentation of independent works is limited to 4-day events crammed with special programs (festivals et al). The principle I stated earlier, that every film should be seen by its public, should obviously be interpreted in this context.

Most of the films distributed by Cinéma Libre are premiered at Cinéma Parallèle. We use different promotional techniques for each film, to emphasize that they are original productions. In other words, press events and promotional activities vary for each film. For more than half of the independent films we distribute every year, our efforts are hampered by restricted budgets since there are no funding programs specifically aimed at defraying distribution costs for these productions.

Distributors do not have direct access to promotional funds for films produced with grants from the Canada Council and Supply and Services Canada. In Quebec, films produced without assistance from Sogic (la Société générale des industries culturelles) are not given priority by other funding programs. Although Telefilm Canada is somewhat more flexible, its funding criteria are still based on profitability—financial rather than cultural. Furthermore, the new criteria adopted by Telefilm's Marketing Program discriminate against productions not financed by Telefilm itself: non-reimbursable funds—i.e. grants from funding sources, which can constitute as much as one third of a production budget—are automatically excluded from total expenses. This is just another example of the shortcomings of a system that favours big-budget productions. Finally, there are the two major production programs set up by the DOC (with an annual budget of more than \$7 million, of which \$2 million go to the production of non-commer-

cial films and nothing for distribution, as if it happened all by itself). The DOC's only concession in this area is for the distribution of feature films, which obviously encourages distributors to make no distinction between the purchase of foreign or Canadian films.

Nevertheless, the distribution of independent film can be profitable, both financially and culturally. The acquisition of our films by various institutions representing closed circuits, as it were, ensures their presentation to a public interested in form and content. This audience is just as important as the TV and commercial cinema audience, because our films are seen in an educational context where they are used as teaching aids and shape the collective imagination of younger generations. They are not simply consumer goods, used and discarded. To mention but one example: the film *Quel Numéro? What Number?* recuperated over a third of its production costs after four years of concerted effort by an ad-hoc alliance of independent film distributors—Cinéma Libre in French Canada, DEC Films in English Canada, and Film Transit in international markets. When it first came out, this film was mainly used by adults, but now secondary schools appreciate its relevance. And the success of Fortier's last feature film is perhaps due to our stubborn efforts to distribute his earlier works, which are still in demand 15 years later.

In 1964, some young Québécois filmmakers (Claude Jutra, Gilles Carle and Michel Brault)—now internationally renowned—acted out their fantasies about the film industry in a production called *Cinéboom*. They went around Montreal defiantly writing graffiti that probably inspired our name—"POUR UN CINÉMA LIBRE."

Claude Forget is the manager of Cinema Libre in Montreal.



HORSES IN WINTER

BY GRANT POIER

(Non) distribution of film

REGIONAL REPORT

The crops wave quietly in the breeze. They are waving

at the planes which cut across the Prairie sky. We see

these planes fly by and in the past they were meta-

phors for opportunities that didn't always touch

down on the Prairies; for attitudes, interests, perceptions

and preconceptions from other places that, way up there, over there, were not easily changed. From that height it is hard to see the context, much less the details, of what



happens below. And it is easily missed or ignored.

Three Prairie provinces, their cities dispersed throughout the territory, satellites of activity autonomous in their isolation, separated by distance and a healthy diversity...

and video on the Prairies

I would like to refrain from perpetuating stereotypes or instigating new fears and suspicions. I hope my discussion can be distanced from imposed limitations and defeatist positions. This is not intended as an attack on current distribution activity; however, we cannot talk about distribution as something separate from the surrounding events, issues and impressions.

The works of Prairie film and video artists have been rarely and less than adequately represented by major centres. Programmers, curators and purchasers do not often see the work, if they are even aware of its existence. Distributors are only part of a broader situation which continues to put the region's artists at a disadvantage. Centrally located writers, critics, curators and juries form certain canons of what is and is not independent film and video art in Canada, based on the artists and the works they are familiar with—usually the ones just down the street. Sure, at times a thimbleful of work from the regions is sprinkled in, but the work, with its undeniable differences and difficulties, is not easily slotted into categories defined by someone else's sensibilities/politics/practices. Publications and reviews are also more likely if the subject or artist is local. Contributing to this has been a critical shortage of communication and exchange between regions. Perceptions change slowly and this region, it seems, has more often been considered importers than producers and exporters of film and video. We haven't often seen ourselves reflected in the activity or the subsequent documentation or spin-offs of it.

The region's discontent regarding distribution is not about to fade away while there remains a continuing shortage of distribution opportunities, a lack of visibility for the region's producers and product, and minimal attempts by out-of-region distributors to understand and accommodate the work. There is a depressing lack of local producer interest and involvement based on feelings of helplessness given the existing situation. For instance, we have been told, at some

times more bluntly than others, not to even bother sending work to be considered for distribution. Or only if it fits a particular theme. While it's great that local work can participate in a dialogue current in the major centres, such themes or discussions can also originate in the regions, and this is not happening. The 1980s have seen the development of strong production centres and activity on the Prairies. Despite the quantity and quality of work, it is still difficult to develop or sustain productive relationships with existing independent distributors.

This is not a call for token representation, or the ranking of work according to a "Prairie" canon—simplistic if not impossible to impose. Grouping Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba as the "Prairies" doesn't make sense outside of historical and geographical considerations. It is a convenient and imposed designation which ignores the diversity which actually exists.

In spite of the non-welcome from existing distributors, it seems somewhat merciless to criticize them further. Given their current structures and funding, it appears they are (understandably) unable to handle much more work; they do not have the time or the resources to adequately contextualize or represent it. Works from the region that have been accepted by distributors gain exposure mainly because of the efforts of the artist or regional curators—the work's location on some distributor's shelf doesn't necessarily improve the situation.

Distribution is obviously not as well established or sup-

*The region's discontent regarding distribution
is not about to fade away.*

ported as production in this country. Production, firmly entrenched, nevertheless demands greater distribution support. New players are involved and new liaisons are made; audiences have been located or developed, and skills, expertise and interest in distribution have been sharpened. Existing distributors, with their limited resources, have made valuable

and commendable efforts to establish a presence in an expanding marketplace. However, it appears that a certain threshold looms where, without additional models, strategies, activities, and adequate funding support, the independent film and video community will not be able to significantly advance its present position.

Local and regional voices are important; this issue supposedly isn't being disputed any longer. We have the (production) tools for giving form to that voice, but it doesn't help much to sing or yell when it doesn't echo beyond your local community. We're fed up with federal policies that cut (or disallow creation of) our own links to each other and to the rest of the country, or impose structures and systems in which we have little or no input.

We can no longer "just sit around and wait for someone to call us."

Why, to date, have there been no willing or intelligent attempts to address the obviously unsuccessful relationship between the Prairie region's producers and existing distributors? There didn't appear to be a problem? One might say the Prairie region itself was guilty for not forcing the issue before now. Lack of confidence, time and resources, a not-yet-sufficient production base, apathy: it was all of these—and in addition, it was felt that such a gesture, even if moderately effective, would nevertheless be a temporary solution. Other options were not evident, the premise was wrong and the timing was not right.

Well, from way up and over there, try to imagine a large

message (in upper case) plowed rather pragmatically into those standing crops. P.D.I. The Prairie region has developed an initiative for the distribution of its artists' work. The founding members of PRAIRIE DISTRIBUTION INITIATIVES (PDI) are the Calgary Society of Independent Filmmakers (CSIF), EM/Media, Film and Video Artists Alberta (FAVA), Saskatchewan Filmpool Co-op, Video Pool, and the Winnipeg Film Group. Given the historical, geographical and cultural designation as "the Prairies" and the realities of limited funding support, the centres of the region are drawing on individual and collective strengths, sensibilities, practices and positions to create this cooperative working relationship..

Let me highlight several developments which have encouraged this current stance/strategy, or at least its particular shape.

As the director of EM/Media in the early '80s, I was more often than not preoccupied with putting out, or starting, local fires—those seeming to be closest and most urgent. My awareness of activity within and outside the region was not expansive. There was always an interest or curiosity in what other centres and artists were doing, but time and distance discouraged regular contact. As a developing community, our local isolation was reinforced as much by our own inexperience as by economic, political and cultural attitudes in the country, which were historically centralist.

In 1985 EM/Media hosted the first PLAINS CANADA Independent Film and Video Conference in Calgary. We wanted to see if there were common concerns, needs, perhaps characteristics, within the region's film and video communities.

Many of us had never met and it was not known whether film-video biases and competitiveness would threaten our interaction. Now held bi-annually, the PLAINS conference is a crucial forum where invited guests, members and delegates from the

Centrally located writers, critics, curators and juries form certain canons of what is and is not independent film and video art in Canada, based on the artists and works they are familiar with—usually the ones just down the street.

seven Prairie film/video centres screen and discuss recent work, and investigate current issues. It is an event where producers and centres can celebrate their diversity and their independence, as well as their incidental codification as the "Prairies".

At the first conference Lorne Falk, then curator at Walter Phillips Gallery, suggested the Prairie region was "the quiet room in the house," where artists and communities had a chance to develop and produce according to their own needs and interests, away from the distractions and pressures of the major centres. Rather than painting some idyllic and isolationist regional scenario, it was meant and taken as a call for maintaining an environment where there would not be pressure to deny indigenous values and approaches or a rush to be integrated into outside models and systems.

It was also in 1985 that EM/Media first sent a delegate to an IFVA/ACVI AGM in St. John's. As a national organization, the Alliance has gone a long way towards acknowledging and addressing common issues between centres, regions and media. The Prairie access/production centres are now all members of the Alliance, where, through the Prairie Caucus, they have developed a particular relationship and presence. (Falk's "quiet room in the house" analogy might be a little hard to accept by anyone seeing/hearing the loud and late-night "discussions" carrying on in the hotel rooms of Prairie delegates at these national meetings.)

The next important event was the National Video Caucus, facilitated in 1989 by the Alliance in Halifax. The majority of delegates to this meeting were primarily from production organizations, yet a good portion of the discussion revolved around distribution issues. It was clear that these centres, while not all wanting to get into active distribution, nevertheless had valid concerns and options. They and the producers they represented could be important partners in the distribu-

tion of work. I expect similar sentiments also exist within the independent film community. This strengthened our contention that access/production centres, at least in the Prairie region, must be more involved in shaping strategies appropriate to the needs of producing members.

In September 1990 the region held a distribution meeting in Calgary. This followed several years of dealings with the Canada Council Media Arts section in which it admitted to being unable to respond to the region's concerns. It had been suggested that a distribution proposal from the region would be welcomed. Media Arts financially supported the gathering of Prairie delegates in Calgary, initiated by the Winnipeg groups. During discussions with David Poole [Distribution Officer for the Canada Council Media Arts section], the participating centres resolved to establish a different relationship with the Canada Council, and a new model to arrive at solutions for the distribution of film and video from the region.

We were at an important junction where, by retreating for a moment from the rigours of production and administration, we were able to see both the successes and the frustrations of our local and regional communities. This distance also enabled us to put into perspective distribution in the national community, of which we were an unclearly defined part.

As a result of the increasing interaction within the region, it was apparent that despite differences, we shared concerns and frustrations which were difficult if not impossible to address by individual centres alone. The creation of PDI is more than a distribution stance. It is an expression of regional solidarity and self-determination. It is a reflection of the region's past development as well as its future potential. It is also a rejection of existing distribution models. We feel these models are not easily transferred to—and are not necessarily appropriate or even possible for—this region. We cannot see ourselves as a CFMD-P.

The presentation of the Canada Council's updated distribution policy and the resulting discussion in Montreal in November 1990 did little to dissuade the region from the necessity of the direction we were taking.

A document from the region has recently been drafted and submitted to the Canada Council, outlining the mandate and policies of PRAIRIE DISTRIBUTION INITIATIVES. We are working with the Council toward equitable funding support, both Operations and Special Projects, for distribution activities on the



Prairies. We are calling for collective negotiations with the Council regarding the future direction of film and video distribution in the region. We are insisting that distribution strategies within the region be coordinated, and additionally, that local artist-producers have greater input and involvement in directing this activity.

PDI is composed of six media arts centres (with another to come on line soon), each interacting with its own extended community; together representing over 800 artist-producer members. Each member centre is supported as an access/production centre by the Canada Council. PDI is an inter-city and inter-provincial network which, at its centre, is an advisory council with representation from all active centres in the region, each having one vote. It is an association of Prairie producers, in the film and video medium. It is a vehicle for independent and collective actions/strategies.

The region's past distribution efforts have had no Operations support and a minimum of Special Projects funding from the Canada Council. Winnipeg Film Group and Video Pool have received some distribution support through CIDO-Manitoba programs as well as from provincial arts agencies. In any case, these efforts in the region have developed audiences and clients, have gotten the work out to be seen, and have resulted in a number of projects and strategies, at times innovative. Distribution has always been a combination of approaches and related activities.

Active? Whenever the opportunity arises. Some of these activities have included: one-sheets and catalogues; informal distribution of workshop productions; programming or packaging of local and regional work; assistance and consultation to members whenever possible; targeted distribution of audio compilation cassettes; facilitating curators and programmers as well as developing our own; submissions to and attendance at festivals and western showcases; home video packages; broadcast and cablecast series; and in the case of Video Pool, dedicated distribution which has become increasingly regional in practice. It is from this base that PDI intends to extend and expand its distribution efforts. These efforts and activities cannot continue in relative isolation, and as a region we can have a stronger presence and a more productive role in distribution.

Increasingly, centres on the Prairies have become "touch down" points for visitors from outside the region. Exposed to the milieu and the activity, they have been interested and supportive, as have local audiences and colleagues. There is, however—and this is an important point—no dominant city/centre/community in the region which can focus incoming interest or claim to represent Prairie work. It makes sense then to have each of these centres connected within a regional network, taking advantage of the individual location, resources and opportunities of each centre as well as the collective strength of the region's initiatives.

PDI is perhaps more a strategy than a structure—the process of involvement and collaboration being an essential element. Major decisions are made through consensus which, though less expedient perhaps, encourages more thorough research and discussion. Given the limited resources available now and in the foreseeable future, it is even more crucial that a consid-

ered, coordinated approach to distribution be taken, where the resultant strategies and activity reflect a mandate rather than some administrative structure which quickly demands its own attention and maintenance.

Through the active participation of production centres we expect a much stronger understanding of and commitment to distribution on their part. These centres are a direct link to/from their producing memberships, among which we intend to generate renewed interest. The collective nature of PDI will also strengthen regional awareness and inter-activity.

This is not a duplication of services within or outside of the region. Instead, it is a combination of complementary services and strategies which are compatible with the collectively determined vision and strategies of PDI. One possible undertaking would be a flexible system of component catalogues and archives. The structure does not deny the differences between film and video; between works by different producers or from different centres/cities. Each centre/community is encouraged to maintain its local autonomy, its own directions and differentiations. PDI is designed to be responsive to local considerations while also coordinating broader interests and activities. Future expansion is possible by the addition of new member groups to the advisory council. Having member centres in three provinces will broaden the potential funding base by taking advantage of support from municipal, provincial and federal sources. We cannot depend on the Canada Council, constantly threatened by Brian and his blue axe, to adequately support distribution in the region.

PDI hopes to play a cooperative role within a broader national strategy. It seems inevitable that individual distributors will focus on particular work, and on particular distribution approaches. Therefore, the centralization of distribution is not preferable, not equitable nor even practically possible. It is a very limited option and vision. There must be alternatives which can better acknowledge and more effectively represent the diversity of work in this country. There must be greater collaboration among distributors, an informal but supportive network with closer links to the centres of production and to other networks, particularly artist-run galleries, museums, and educational institutions.

The Prairie region is not jumping into more formalized distribution without considerable thought and some past experience. This has been in development for a while, waiting for a proper shape before emerging. We are not embracing this strategy with blind faith and we do not expect to have all the answers. This is a pilot project, an exploration and a great challenge. We are somewhat cautious, but we are equally determined and optimistic.

Grant Poier, a founding member and administrative manager of EM/Media, lives and works in Calgary as an intermedia artist.

C

REGIONAL REPORT

D

Canadian Filmmakers Distribution West began as a Vancouver branch of the CFMDC in 1979. It soon became apparent that the needs of filmmakers out west could not be adequately met by an organization run from Toronto. In 1982, a mutual agreement was reached and Canadian Filmmakers Distribution West (CFDW) became a distinct society (registered, non-profit, that is).

Part of the agreement for separation was that our organization keep a regional version of the name of the founding organization. A nice sentiment at the time, it has created endless confusion for clients of both organizations. There are still some who have not sorted it

W

out nine years after the fact.

Another part of the agreement was that we maintain a working sub-distribution agreement. This has been quite successful over the years, primarily in the education market. We have also developed a similar agreement with Atlantic Independent Media for the same market. In the areas of broadcast and exhibition or programming with other arts groups, we primarily represent our members' work and refer programmers to other co-ops for titles CFDW does not carry. Sub-distribution does not require an additional membership fee; producers only need to be members of the primary distributor.

Our contracts are non-exclusive and can be terminated by a member with thirty days' written notice. Most work will be taken into distribution, but not all. We frequently refer producers to other distribution co-ops that could better serve the needs of the work in question, such as Video Out or Women in Focus. We distribute both film and video productions. With video, we primarily take work that has potential for the educational sector or the non-theatrical market and refer work that has potential for the video art sector to Video Out. In some cases, we share the same titles and work in different sectors of the market. Since we do not

A BRIEF HISTORY BY SYLVIA JONESCU LISITZA

have a working sub-distribution agreement with Video Out, this is done through separate contracts.

We also have referred producers to commercial distributors or home video distributors if their work seemed most appropriate for those forms of distribution. We have on occasion refused work on the basis of extreme copyright violations.

Our main function is distribution, though we have done programming in the past. Our last major effort, National Film Week (1986), incurred a sizeable deficit that took three years to eliminate. As a result, our programming is now done collaboratively and considerably more cautiously. We work more as instigators of programming, connecting with other groups who have established programs and venues such as the Pacific Cinematheque, Vancouver Art Gallery and Vancouver Children's Festival.

We have two and one-half staff positions, hiring extra staff for projects or seasonally, as required. We have been trying to increase funding over the past three years to allow for three full-time staff positions. While we have had some success regionally, costs have continued to rise. Our small funding-to-total-budget ratio has been and continues to be a major challenge for the organization.

Sylvia Jonescu Lisitza is the director of CFDW in Vancouver.

R E C L A I M I N G

A N O T H E R

INTERNATIONAL REPORT

D E S E R T :

D I S T R I B U T I O N

O F F I L M A R T

BY DIRK DE BRUYN

I N A U S T R A L I A

Issues of distribution of avant-garde films in Australia are probably not so different from those in Canada. Yet Australian cultural conditions are more extreme, with only two population centres around 3 million—Melbourne and Sydney—able to sustain film and video production. With a total population of only 16 million, the bipolar nature of the Melbourne-Sydney axis and Australia's isolation from other film cultures in terms of time, distance and money make an avant-garde scene difficult to sustain.

Because distribution is enmeshed with the politics of independent filmmaking and closely linked to problems of production and exhibition, it is useful to begin with a brief history of independent filmmaking in Australia.

By the mid '70s, filmmakers' coops had emerged in Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and Brisbane, providing a focus for independent filmmakers through programs of local work in their theatres and (in Melbourne and Sydney in particular) growing numbers of films in distribution. Innovative independent fiction and documentary work with mainstream inclinations (early work by the likes of Peter Wier, Paul Cox and George Miller) was sharing venues with highly experimental explorations by Thoms, Read, Lee, Martin, and C&A Cantrell, as well as a significant stream of avant-garde packages from overseas. Australia was definitely plugged in. There was also the Australian Film Institute (AFI), which had theatres in Melbourne, Sydney and Hobart as well as a significant distribution arm. These organizations were largely dependent on government funding for their exhibition and distribution work through the federal Australian Film Commission (AFC).

Around 1976 the Melbourne Film Makers' Co-op folded when the AFC was no longer willing to support the co-op during a time of financial difficulties. This was part of a rationalisation process. Films in distribution were returned to filmmakers or put into distribution with the Sydney Co-op (which soon found it necessary to move out of exhibition and work purely in distribution) or the AFI. By 1986 the same fate befell



the Sydney Co-op, with all works going into the AFI collection. Today only the AFI survives in a reduced form with a theatre in Sydney. Weir and Miller work through Hollywood and only the Cantrills regularly reach an audience outside Australia through their own inventiveness.

What happened in between?

The answer is a lot—Super 8, for example, and a new generation.

But where is avant-garde film? It was lost in the rush to erect a “national film industry,” and there is no significant distribution of avant-garde work. Film artists have failed to find a cultural niche nationally and internationally. Even though the AFC provides funding for such work, this is secondary to its main role of servicing and developing more accessible work.¹

Film art is tolerated because it is there, not because it is considered relevant.

The art world does not see avant-garde film as part of its landscape, so such work does not figure in its politics. There is no shared funding between film and art. Only painters or sculptors who venture into film are seen as having something to say to the art scene; their film work is legitimized by their work in other art forms.

Having sketched out this backdrop, it is not all gloom and doom. Various strategies have been developed to find a wider audience for avant-garde film.

By the mid-'80s Fringe Network Film and Video group held intermittent screenings of a mixture of student, animation, fiction, documentary and experimental work. The same is true of the Sydney and Melbourne Super 8 groups. All three eventually held festivals of innovative film and video, although no group specifically looked after experimental avant-garde work.

In Melbourne, MIMA (Modern Image Makers' Association) entered this environment in 1986 when a group of film and video artists, including myself, came together to galvanize a single voice in the film and video art area with a primary goal of increasing exhibition and distribution. Despite this area's low profile, we were able to obtain funding for a full-time administrator and part-time publicist. The main line with funding bodies was that this was a neglected area, and with the quality of work being done an

WATERFALL.
By ARTHUR
and CORINNE
CANTRILL.

audience could be found.

The Fringe and Super 8 emergence was a return of a cycle similar to the time of the co-ops. There was the same co-existence of various film forms, but this time it was the avant-garde filmmakers who were organized well enough to obtain funding and try to take things further.

One of the early strategies was a monthly curated series of screenings along such lines as "landscape" and a "performance night." These were packages sold to the newspapers by a publicist who worked very hard to get short and punchy interviews and reviews into the papers and on the radio. This did not bring a rush of viewers to the screenings, however. It was the friends of the exhibiting film and video makers who brought the numbers toward a respectable 60 average. Programs with many short films by different artists did better than programs with work by only a few.

The publicity needed to be angled at people who would show a sustained interest in the work after coming to a screening. The best way to do that was to have regular screenings around which a scene and an audience could develop. Flash forays into mainstream media could not catch the right fish. Such publicity focused on superficial aspects of works which often challenged basic assumptions of the status quo. Yet such screenings can be seen as an essential and preliminary step to any hope of distribution of avant-garde work.

Another early MIMA activity was a three-volume video compilation of film and video art to be sold to the educational market as an introduction to this area, with the hope of stimulating further interest and sales of complete works by individual artists. It was to function as a kind of sampler and sell at about \$60 per tape with written support material. Volume 1 covered pre-1980; volume 2, 1980 - '83; and volume 3, 1983 - '86. Some film artists had misgivings about having their work included in a medium other than the one in which the work was conceived. In these cases the medium of film itself was central to the nature of the work. With hand-drawn films, for example, their texture is altered, changed to something else on video.

Another problem was the video compilation undercutting possible sales of film prints to the National Library's film collection and to the film centres in the various states. The Film Study Collection had been buying prints of avant-garde work for at least fifteen years, and some filmmakers were already able to sell prints for educational use at two or three times print cost. That easily beats a small percentage of a sampler that sells for \$60. The danger is that instead of developing new markets the tapes shrink existing markets. I don't believe this problem has ever been resolved completely, but the tapes were made available to the Study Collection at a much higher price and only excerpts of works were used in the compilation tapes. In a sense the problem has been transformed by the fact that now the Film Study Collection and the film centres very rarely buy films at all, only video.

The tapes have sold well to public libraries and brought in a couple of hundred dollars a year to each of the participants (for some the first and only return for their work, especially those working in Super 8). They also have functioned to introduce international institutions to work

being done in Australia, so they have become a useful networking tool for MIMA. I cannot recall it having led to further sales of work by individual artists, nor have I met anyone who started coming to screenings after borrowing the tapes from their local library, although people who know the work have borrowed the tapes to revisit it.

Compilation tapes have since been made by the Melbourne and Sydney Super 8 film groups as a way of getting the groups' work, which includes avant-garde work, to a wider audience.

MIMA also interested art galleries in hosting a national tour of avant-garde work and obtained funding to buy prints of the films and videos selected while the galleries paid a fee to show the work. The work went to over a dozen galleries around Australia, touring for about a year. The tour increased the profile of film and video in the art scene and a few extra copies of the video compilations were sold. Looking back, it's a pity the contracts signed with the artists did not include international rights, because here was a selection of important work chosen by artists themselves.

Has the problem of diminishing print sales become insurmountable? In Australia it is very hard to get anyone to take on distribution of avant-garde film work at all. MIMA has been trying to set up its own distribution of film packages. The idea is to put together 80-minute programs with notes about the work under such topics as experimental animation. Packages would be available to film societies and schools for a rental fee as well as for sale. So far MIMA has been unable to obtain funding for this innovation.

One factor acting against the project is the fact that distribution funding of independent work has been scaled down to a single operator—the AFI. Funding bodies are understandably loathe to reverse their thinking and support a new player. The AFI has little time for experimental work. Experimental work is part of a hazy category with slick animations, political and feminist work dominating. Their only truly avant-garde film is early work by long-term practitioners that has somehow managed to stay on the books. There is no attention paid to this work in selling strategies, which are developed to move more accessible films. There is no time within such organizations to set up developmental distribution strategies for "fringe" films. It is more about immediate returns now than ever before.

Sales to television are even more problematic, although the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) has bought short avant-garde work for series on Australian independent filmmaking. It is difficult for the ABC to find out about filmmakers' work when it is not being distributed by the AFI. With its continually emerging profile, MIMA now gets contacted by people putting together such packages and can put them in touch with artists who have relevant work. It's not perfect, because the process for deciding which artists are contacted can lead to problems, but it's better than nothing.

During 1988-89 as president of MIMA I pushed for the organization to function on three different levels in order for it to meet the needs of its members. At the grass roots

level the organization needs to help build and sustain a community by facilitating contact between artists. Events like open screenings need to be held regularly to allow artists to compare notes and open dialogue and see a way to participate in the organization. A newsletter can also meet some of these needs. On a more organized level, regular screenings need to be set up with an on-going public profile so that a hard-core following and interest in this work can evolve. On the third level are high-profile public festivals like Experimenta which can be publicized and packaged for a more general public audience and allow national and international networking. Such a structure underlines the interdependence of activities and my belief that all three levels of activity eventually feed into distribution success. The three levels are a prescription for a healthy film and video art culture—a necessity for developing public interest. Gone are the days when artists could sit back and wait to be discovered. We must take on these hurdles ourselves.

With the right, specifically tailored strategies, work can be distributed successfully. The key is to work for the long term. This was brought home to me just before I left Australia when MIMA was starting to put together one-person shows as part of its regular program. These were more poorly attended than group screenings, underlining just how much work needs to be done to build up interest. Part of the problem had been that for one whole year there

had been no regular screenings and attendance had to be rebuilt from scratch.

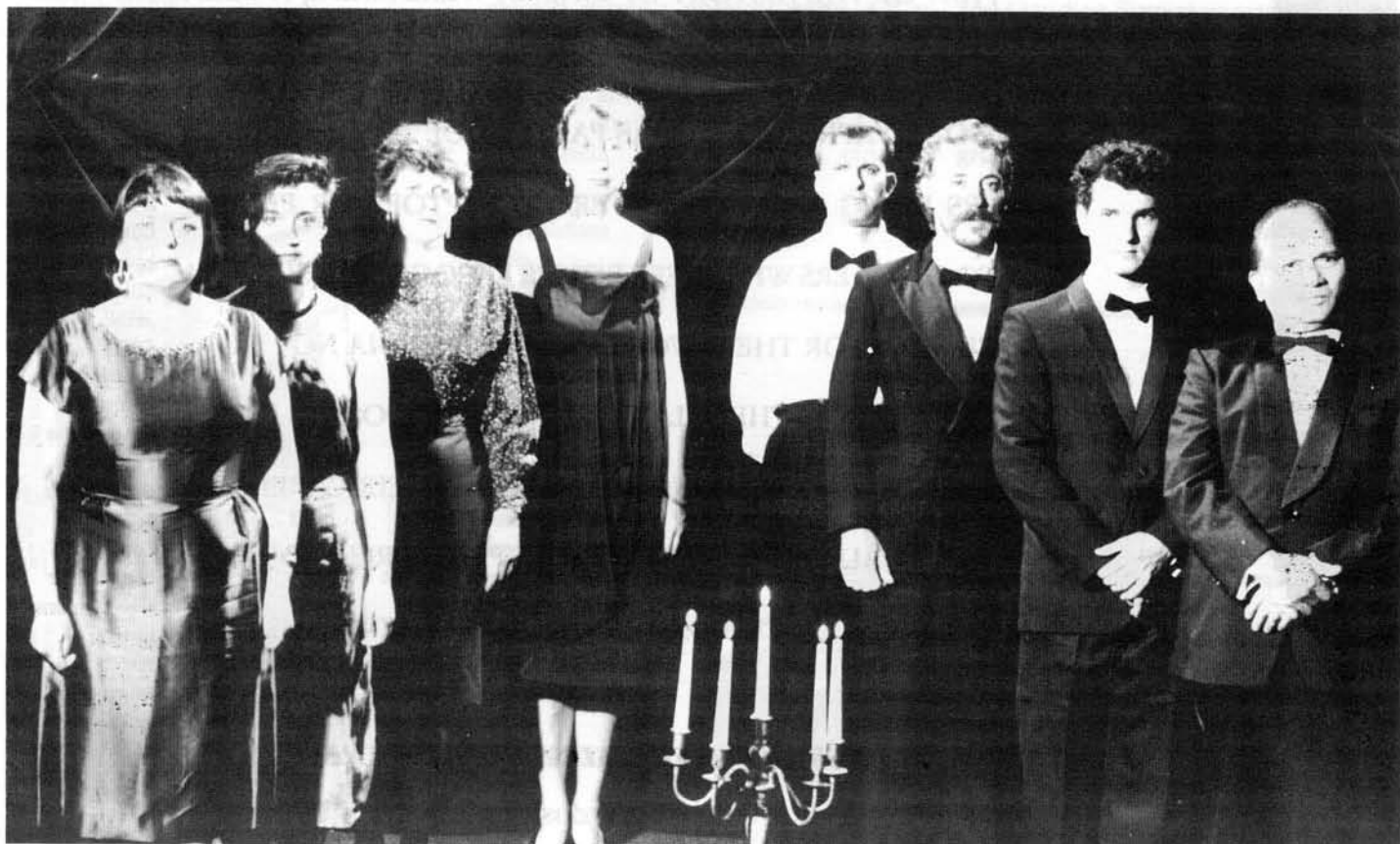
Just how successful this strategy can be was shown by the Melbourne Cinematheque, which has shown classic films to a largely film-buff audience on a weekly basis for six years. They have started to slip in a few one-person avant-garde screenings which have had full houses. There is interest, but it will take a while to harness it into meaningful sales.

Whether MIMA (or anyone else) can gain continual public acceptance for avant-garde work is problematic. Times change and people change. But if any strategy to increase the distribution of avant-garde work is going to succeed, it must be a holistic one which takes into account not only distribution but also an understanding and ability to act within all facets of the community out of which such work comes. Such an organization must be in a position to help build the community.

¹ This is even more true in these days of economic cutbacks. It is rumoured that if the more conservative forces had won the 1989 federal election, it would have meant the demise of the AFC itself. Even now the AFC only appears to be able to function in second gear and for the umpteenth time is reassessing its role within the film industry. Devolution.

Dirk de Bruyn is an Australian experimental filmmaker and one of the founders of MIMA. He is currently living and filming in Canada.

From the
RATIONAL LIFE
FILMS,
by DEBBIE LEE.



DISTRIBUTION IN FRANCE: An account and some considerations concerning experimental film

BY ROSE LOWDER

INTERNATIONAL REPORT

DISTRIBUTION ORGANIZATIONS OFTEN DEVELOP TO MEET NEW REQUIREMENTS OF A GROWING COMMUNITY OF FILMMAKERS. IF, IN FRANCE IN THE 1920S, WHEN A NUMBER OF ARTISTS' FILMS, NOW PART OF THE HISTORY OF CINEMA WERE MADE, IT SEEMS NO NEED FOR ALTERNATIVE DISTRIBUTION ORGANIZATIONS WAS FELT, IT WOULD APPEAR THIS WAS PARTLY DUE TO THE MAKERS BEING MAINLY PAINTERS, SCULPTORS OR PHOTOGRAPHERS WHO WERE EITHER RECOGNIZED SUFFICIENTLY FOR THEIR WORK IN OTHER MEDIA NOT TO SUFFER FROM THE RELATIVE LACK OF EXPOSURE FOR THEIR FILMS OR LIVING A STAGE OF THEIR CAREERS WHICH ALLOWED THEM TO ACCEPT THE RELATIVELY INFORMAL CINEMA DISTRIBUTION OF THEIR TIME.

MUCH LESS COMMERCIALLY STREAMLINED than Hollywood, the French film industry sporadically allowed

A visit to **LIGHT CONE**, also the home of **COLLECTIF JEUNE CINEMA**, two experimental filmmakers' cooperatives in Paris, on October 10th, 1990. September brought four times the usual number of rentals and everyone is exhausted.



films to be made through the 1930s and 1940s which did not correspond to the norms. Most of these films, such as Mitry's *Pacific 231* (1949) strayed only gently from what was considered acceptable film

poetry. The first radical break—i.e. films which could not possibly be received by the usual distribution outlets—would appear to have been made by the Letterists, in particular Maurice Lemaître with his work *Le film est déjà commencé? / Has the Film Already Started?* (1951). However, if the Letterists did not join forces with the foreign artist-filmmakers who were working in Paris in the 1950s, such as Hy Hirsh, Robert Breer and Kenneth Anger, it would seem this was due to the different origins and interests of the artists: the Letterists were a post-dadaist literary movement, Breer was a part of the modernist art world and Anger had a Hollywood background.

Although Lemaître continued to make films through the 1960s, Mekas' and Sidney's New American Cinema European touring program, shown in Paris in 1964, would appear to have had no immediate influence and French independent filmmaking remained unadventurous until the 1970s.

In spite of this, there were some distribution attempts. The *Collectif Jeune Cinéma* (CJC) was an informal group of filmmakers making both art house films for Art and Essai cinemas and more

amateur or personal work.

Some generous but utopian efforts were made by other individuals such as Rosine Grange and Vivian Ostrovsky, who travelled from Copenhagen to Sorrento screening a truck-load of women's films ranging from Agnes Varda to Gunvor Nelson under the name of Cine Femmes International from 1972 to 1975. The energy required outweighed the support Ostrovsky felt she could give to some of the women's films, resulting in her devoting her time to becoming an active experimental filmmaker herself.

The CJC, vaguely taking the New York Film-Makers' Cooperative as a model, became a legal entity in 1972, organized by a group of filmmakers gathered around Marcel Mazé, who also ran an independent section of the Festival of Hyères or Toulon. The two towns are closely situated and the festival changed place periodically depending on the elected mayor's political party. CJC's collection grew as foreign and French filmmakers left behind prints they had screened at the festival. However, this was an unsatisfactory situation for all concerned. The mainstream cinema

festival organizers—pushed further in this direction by the town hall which financed the festival and had in mind a commercial competitive event where journalists and starlets would sell the town and its beaches—made many filmmakers compromise, others uncomfortable and a handful avoid ever showing a film there. The Festival of Hyères was, nevertheless one of the few places in the 1970s where one could see international independent work in France, albeit in the most unsuitable circumstances.

IN THE MID-1970S, it seems

Kubelka's "*Une histoire du cinéma*," a selection of films closely following the New York Anthology Film Archive's Essential Cinema collection, organized and shown by the newly opened *Musée national d'art moderne* at the G. Pompidou Centre, had an effect on a large group of young filmmakers ready for formal experiments in film. Gathering some of these filmmakers and in fierce opposition to CJC, Guy Fihman and Claudine Eizykman established the Paris Film Coop (PFC) in 1975, this time proclaiming the New York Film-Makers' principles as gospel.

There were also a half dozen small groups from the mid-1970s to 1980, now



Miles McKane looks dauntingly at the prospect of window cleaning. The begonia outside has been watered, the hibiscus is doing well, the yucca is behind Miles.



Inside Yann Beauvais assembles the bookshelf he has carried from the shop to replace the one that had collapsed under the weight of a particularly large book.

no longer in existence, usually catering for filmmakers of diverse and incompatible aims such as trying to enter the film industry, making politically radical films or developing an individual artist's practice. All these groups ran screenings in all sorts of places: some paid rent, some distributed the funds collected at the door. On the whole, they were a financial disaster. But although many then involved have now left the scene, the activity of that period allowed some of the most active filmmakers today to see a wide variety of work.

PFC still exists as a distributor and is effective in obtaining grants, but around 1980 it became evident to some filmmakers who had also started screening films that some self interest and irregularities were prevailing. These filmmakers left PFC and hardly a film has been deposited since then.

LIGHT CONE STARTED in 1982

in Yann Beauvais' tiny one-room apartment with 20 films the first year, 50 the second, around 700 experimental films today ranging from the 1920s to 1990. Although Light Cone was able to learn from the experience gained by the other groups, developing this co-op was a most arduous task, one which Beauvais, soon joined by Miles McKane and helped by a few filmmakers, tackled unerringly in the midst of much intimidation and injustice. Beauvais was especially useful in maintaining a balance between the need to advise organizers of screenings while at the same time not promoting one filmmaker more than another, acting as a service to people who, not being familiar with experimental work, need some initial help in selecting programs according to their chosen theme, public or space. Helping organizers to stand on their own feet, Light Cone often led them on to more difficult territory than they would have gone on their own. This is extremely difficult to do but necessary, since otherwise organizers fail to obtain an audience and abandon screenings. Beauvais also toured French films at his own expense and gained support from well-known foreign filmmakers who placed their films in distribution in Light Cone.

Thus established filmmakers hold a

responsibility in the filmmaking community: supporting unethical or inefficient organizations leads other less experienced filmmakers to follow suit and hinders alternative organizations from becoming established enough to change the situation.

The circumstances in France were, and still are, absurdly difficult. Concerning filmmaking as an independent artist's practice, there are hardly any subsidies one can possibly hope to obtain. In the case of distribution, only one authority, the *Centre national de la cinématographie* (CNC), a national cinema institution dependant on the Ministry of Culture with more or less additional attributes according to the government in power, is involved. The single grant Light Cone receives, which is for both distribution and weekly October to June screenings in Paris by Scratch Projection, also run by Yann Beauvais and Miles McKane, does not even cover one minimum part-time salary. And this is after some progress: originally the CNC gave the same sum to the three or four different groups who applied regardless of what each did. Now this authority takes some account of what is accomplished during the year, though there is still room for some improvement.

Funding institutions in France still demand public relations value for their money: the inordinate sums spent on the Festival of Avignon, preventing the town from having any cultural policy or funding any other cultural activity correctly, is exemplary of this situation. The problem is that most funding body officials lack the background to appreciate any advanced art for what it is—a forerunner in opening up new directions for thinking and feeling in relationship to a society ever developing in complexity.

This situation led Light Cone to join forces with the *Collectif Jeune Cinéma*. Light Cone's films

would no longer fit into Beauvais' bedroom, whereas CJC used their grant to rent a premises but had nobody willing to distribute their films. Light Cone now distributes both Light Cone's and CJC's films from CJC's premises, thus enabling both organizations to keep their respective grants.

Although these two co-ops have what they most urgently lacked—Light Cone an office and CJC a distribution service—the situation is far from ideal. The office is tiny, consisting of two very small rooms without even a toilet. The amount of rentals rises considerably each year, and the work load precedes it. A number of large programs, coming mainly from museums and festivals from all over Europe, recently especially from Spain, Switzerland, Germany, but also Holland, Australia, Canada, Paris and Grenoble or Marseille, involve an enormous amount of work.

THE MOST RENTED FILMS are

still mainly the classics of the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s (Fischinger, Lye, Moholy-Nagy, Deren), followed by older generation American filmmakers with the Letterists gaining favour as they become assimilated into the classics, thus allowing some younger filmmakers working in a similar way to be included

Just behind, through the glass window reflecting Mile's presequence, rewinds appear in the second room where the films are checked. Visiting filmmaker Carlo Schiano is there making a splice on his last film.



from time to time. Very few other contemporary filmmakers who are not either painters or sculptors are widely screened, although they are included more and more often in programs accompanying contemporary art shows in large museums. In spite of this, nearly all the films in Light Cone have been rented at one time or another and, with very few exceptions, at least one film on each filmmaker has been shown within the last year. If the number of films continues to increase, however, this will probably be less the case in the future.

The distribution feedback is that Light Cone has a reputation for sending prints in good condition, as all poor-quality prints are systematically withdrawn from circulation. It is a fact, however, that the situation is extremely fragile as it relies almost entirely on voluntary work by a minority of filmmakers, often foreign filmmakers passing by who offer to help. This is likely to become a major problem in the future.

This brings us to the point concerning artist-organizers: the effort demanded in the competitive cultural scene of France—and it seems similar in other extremely developed countries as the degree of development appears to bring a corresponding measure of competition and stress on the cultural level—is such that one has to think and worry continuously from morning to evening about strategies to succeed in even

keeping the activity stationary. Although the quality of the organizational work that is done draws other people to work and enlarges the interest for a practice which can only exist if a certain amount of activity exists, there are limits to what one can do. Even if one opposes a wasteful society, it is almost impossible to work for any length of time without even modest payment. An additional consideration is that producing art work of a high level requires a similar investment of energy, so the two activities are mutually incompatible time-wise. Yet if filmmakers in some countries such as France withdrew from organizing, experimental film viewing possibilities would cease to exist, which would obviously be undesirable for filmmaking. So if filmmakers in this country are organizers as well, it is not because they wish to be so involved, but rather because they have to be organizers for the activity to exist even on a low level.

Recent French films are rarely shown abroad in spite of their being appreciated, as there is no funding body to cover the travelling costs for such screenings in the way that the Goethe Institut, the Austrian authorities or the British Arts Council often do for their independent filmmakers. French filmmakers either hold employment which prevents them from travelling, or they have time but cannot afford to

travel to screen films without covering their costs.

It would seem to me, as a filmmaker and organizer facing today's market economy, there are three possibilities: one withdraws, "drops out"; one fights the system with the dilemma of militant work which takes all one's energy and one does nothing else but that; or one works within the circumstances, trying to use every occasion to rethink and readjust things so that the process gradually changes—mentalities do change—as well as the "content" of what one is trying to accomplish, *i.e.* allowing a means of expression capable of proposing something on other levels to exist.

Although artists often choose to assert the autonomy of art from commercial, ethical, political or social considerations in the making of work, this is much less the case when it comes to the circulation of work. Such an attitude would be unfeasible for an independent film organizer or distribution service. The pitfalls are so numerous that if alternative cultural policies are lacking, those of mass culture prevail. Complete autonomy would suppose that art had no influence on people's lives, but fortunately, this does not seem to be the case.

Rose Lowder is an experimental filmmaker, curator and organizer in France.



The office desk has a phone, the FAX is due to arrive any moment, and there is a small computer, due to be replaced by a Mac.



Discovering the distribution catalogue, which he had not seen, Carlo is sitting in the cozy corner by the now assembled bookshelf. The rest of the furniture was found in the street and the board displays current screenings.

INTERNATIONAL REPORT



BY ROSE LOWDER

S W I T Z

SIGNS OF ACTIVITY AND AN

A series of circumstances indicate that Switzerland, a country where experimental film activities were rare, is becoming more active. An effective role was played by an art school in Geneva, the *École Supérieure d'art visuel* (ESAV), which was equipped for students to specialize in filmmaking and where

experimentation was actively encouraged by one of the teachers, François Albera, who invited filmmakers such as Dwoskin, Morder, Nekes, Straub and Huillet or van der Keuken as well as technicians from Godard's crews to present their work in the classes. Although Albera has now left the ESAV to



VIPER 1990
Luzern,
Switzerland.
KULTUR
PANORAMA
building where
most of the
screenings take
place.

Photo by
Rose Lowder.

ERLAND

IMPORTANT YEARLY EVENT IN LUCERNE

take charge of a new cinema course at the University of Lausanne, half a dozen multimedia artist-run organizations, operating from squats, apartments or modest store fronts, were set up in the late 1980s by ex-students from this art school. One of these groups, *Cinéma Spoutnik*, runs regular screenings of

experimental films among programs of other types of marginal or conventional cinema. *Spoutnik*, part of a larger organization called *Etat d'Urgences*, has a cinema built within a sizeable abandoned factory occupying five storeys of around 1100 square yards each, the *Usine genevoise de dégrossissage d'or*

(UGDO), given to *Etat d'Urgences* by the town of Geneva. Audiences for *Spoutnik* screenings seem to vary from very large to poor depending on who takes charge of the organizational work.

This situation is echoed by other groups in Switzerland in that there are few organizations sufficiently estab-



V FIPER (Video, Films and Performance)

"Women's Experimental Film 1960-1989"—plus "information programs" composed by diverse organizations from different

countries, installations and multimedia performances.

lished to be able to operate on a regular basis—potential organizers and public being equally young. Most of the groups appear to be limited to local artists' needs, and in many cases their programming is not radical enough to call them alternative spaces. Organizations such as *Fonction Cinéma*, designed to promote young Swiss filmmakers, provide editing equipment and screening space for experimental work as well as being flexible enough to program independent filmmakers such as Robert Frank from time to time. Funding appears to be much more easily obtained by independent groups in Geneva than it would be from a town of the same size in France, although the lack of a strong cultural policy on the part of the authorities is an impediment¹.

Experimental films are also screened in other towns. In Lausanne, a rock concert space, called *La Dolce Vita*, programs all sorts of experimental film and video pieces which, for various reasons, could not be shown within other existing Swiss institutions. The organization of this space is fragile, however, depending on the work of a single person.

In Bern, the town's old stables have been converted into a cinema called *La Reithalle*, in a style I am told is "très factory". Besides programming politically militant films, this place screened the quite ambitious *Cinéma américain indépendant* program put together by the Ma Dai Geneva group, which included nearly all of the New American Cinema generation of filmmakers from Anger to Warhol who became known in the USA in the 1960s and 1970s. Another place to see experimental film in Bern is the cinema in the Art Museum—*Kunstmuseum*—run efficiently by Thomas Pfister with experimental film and video screened weekly along with documentaries on art and artists or art house features. Although funds are readily available and screenings are increasing, the relatively small size of the country and its towns (Geneva's population is 350,000; Lausanne, a little smaller; Bern, a little larger; Zurich, where Christine Noll Brinkmann is setting up a film de-

partment at the University, is twice the size of Geneva) hinders the evolution of artistic practices.

Given this general situation, the VIPER International Film and Video Days that takes place each year in Luzern stand out as a serious attempt to exhibit and examine new developments in experimental work. At a time when many festivals start with fine intentions but tend to compromise when faced with financial difficulties, it is good to see an event, now in its 11th year, which is gradually becoming more radical, searching for quality and succeeding in finding an audience while in the process of being recognized by serious artists and organizers as a meeting place for seeing recent work and exchanging information.

Looking over past catalogues, one notes VIPER started in 1980 as a short independent film festival in Krien, a suburb of Luzern. By 1985, its reputation extended to the USA and other countries, and the festival took the name of VFIPER (Video, Films and Performance), moving to the Kulturpanorama building in the centre of Luzern. The event still takes place there, with a few satellite venues at other alternative spaces such as BOA, a warehouse-like premises a half-hour walk away which hosts the opening night performances and films, one all-night screening and music video events. Gradually over the years the catalogues indicate a larger number of filmmakers from different countries, many of whom one recognizes as being well-established. The catalogues also become more elaborate, this year's being entirely bilingual (German-English).

VIPER (the "F" seems to have been dropped) now has several sections: an international film and video program of recent work from the last two years, an extensive Swiss video program of the last year's productions which is extremely well attended, various retrospectives—this year, "Russian Parallel Cinema" as well as three programs of Swiss-born American-resident filmmaker Rudy Burckhardt toured by Alf Bold from Berlin; last year,

ent countries, installations and multimedia performances.

Although the quality of the work varies, great care is taken to present each piece under good conditions: the light goes on in between films and their titles are announced; many of the filmmakers are guests for the length of the event; and a discussion takes place in German or in English with translations when necessary after each screening. Adjoining the screening room is a refreshment area with a monitor indicating the piece being screened, thus allowing one to take a break during films or videos one knows without missing others.

In relying on non-competitive principles and thematic screenings, the organizers of VIPER have succeeded, in a country where there is virtually no film industry and very little experimental film being made, to render accessible to their audience over the years a good selection of some of the better work from quite a few countries.

It is not important in fact that there is no experimental film distribution organization in Switzerland. In Europe, where distances from one country to another are relatively short, and where one hopes transport and customs across boundaries will soon be no problem even when the countries do not belong to the Common Market (as is the case with Switzerland), there is absolutely no need for filmmakers' cooperatives in every country. What is required are regular screenings and well-run specialized events.

¹ A series of articles on the financial aspect of Geneva artist-run groups was published in the magazine *Drole de vie* no. 1, June 1989 (UGDO, 4 Places des Volontaires, 1204 Geneva, Switzerland).

I am grateful to Catia Riccaboni and Aude Vermeil of Geneva as well as Cecilia Hausbeer of Zurich for answering my questions and filling in information.

Rose Lowder is an experimental filmmakers, curator and organizer in France.

SETTING THE FOCUS:

POINT OF VIEW

DISTRIBUTING WOMEN'S WORK IN CANADA

By MARGOT LACROIX



1974: VIDÉO FEMMES. 1974: WOMEN IN FOCUS. 1975: GROUPE INTERVENTION VIDÉO. These three

feminist groups, along with several other artist-run arts and media centres, have by now celebrated 15 years of existence, and all of them have been involved in the activity of distribution for at least 10. They emerged at a time when a significant portion of the population was awakening to the fact that crucial voices were missing among the several histories being written and incorporated into the official record. The uncharted territory opened up by the new technology of video¹ and the immediacy of the medium offered opportunities to redress that situation, explaining in part its appeal for women. In a process that was to some extent indissociable from the feminist ideas of the '70s, production collectives and cooperatives were formed by women who were training themselves, teaching each other, and committing themselves to this form of expression.

Browsing through the documents produced at Women in Focus during those formative years, one is amazed by the number of videos created in a relatively short period, and at the range of subjects. A sense of urgency emanates, and an insatiable will to document

and explore as many aspects of women's experiences as possible in order to fill a gap.

The problem of making these productions available and accessible to a larger audience eventually posed itself, and with it the necessity of





creating distribution networks. The development of women's studies courses and programs in colleges and universities, the emergence of festivals devoted to exhibiting film and video by women directors, and the formation of women's resource groups around a wide variety of issues are all factors that have contributed greatly to the expansion and strengthening of distribution channels. As issues were being defined, public institutions of all kinds were being confronted with problems and questions they could no longer ignore, so they begin to pay attention to the educational resources being offered by feminist distributors. We gradually expanded our collections beyond in-house productions, acquiring rights to productions by women from Canada and around the world. In 1981, Women in Focus started to distribute 16mm film as well. The early part of the 1980s also witnessed the integration into our collections

of productions of a more personal and/or experimental character, with a concomitant expansion of our market to include galleries, museums and other art centres.

The agenda that a feminist distribution centre such as Women in Focus tries to fulfil is of no small proportion or outlook. Behind the commitment to the works in the collection and the artists they represent lies the unshakable conviction that values and attitudes must be changed in order for women to gain their rightful place in society as individuals and creators. Promoting and marketing alone are not enough in this context. As with many other independent distributors, these activities must be reinforced by continual education of our audiences, providing a context for the works and the artists—i.e. creating a critical discourse with a view to challenging and expanding habits and expectations. On a more practical level, we also have been deeply involved in defending the economic rights of female cultural producers and in debating issues such as censorship.

At Women in Focus, our current double vocation as gallery and distributor is steering us in interesting directions. The gallery component of the organization has consistently been engaged in the reflection of feminist strategies in the presentation of visual art; this has led us to the elaboration of our current approach to exhibiting. The philosophy of our program rests on the acknowledgement of the necessity for more research and documentation of the work of individual women artists. It proposes a collaborative model whereby the artist participates as actively as she wants or can in the process of research and decision-making leading to the show. A document, the Exhibition Companion, is published, and it contains an in-depth chronology of the

artist's life and work, compiled by a researcher with the artist's assistance, as well as an essay by a writer on the work exhibited. Women in Focus aims at producing such documents and distributing them as widely as possible in an attempt to stimulate more research and discussion about the cultural practices of Canadian women artists. This strategy will also apply to video and eventually film: information about Canadian video and filmmakers rarely seems to go beyond press kits and c.v.s, and is not often enough the object of more elaborate documentation.

Fifteen years later, the convictions which have sustained feminist arts and media centres involved in distribution have not abated, but it is becoming more apparent every year that the changes hoped for will take much longer than anticipated. The idealism which nourished our origins has been gradually tempered in the face of challenges, not the least of which is our survival in the arid conservative climate to which we are currently subjected. Last year, federal funding to feminist publications through women's programs was unilaterally cut, a move that has put into great jeopardy our ability to communicate and exchange information. This reaffirms the necessity to keep documenting what we do, so that in the end our histories remain. Where will the axe fall next? How will it affect the production and dissemination of independent visual media?

Previously, our government expressed a political will to support us in our role as advocates for women's equal rights, but that is no longer the case. Cuts

to the core funding of already overwhelmed women's centres, and cuts in the sectors of the arts, education and social services are ultimately felt in a reduction of spending on media learning resources, a situation we are already facing. What impact will the trivializing of the discourse about feminism, and its concurrently negative effect on women's issues, have on those who establish purchasing priorities for increasingly leaner budgets?

Fifty-four Canadian distributors of "films on women's concerns" are listed in *Images in Action: A Guide to Using Women's Film and Video*,² attesting to a demand for this material and the efforts of private and public sector distributors to respond. Of these, three have led the way, devoting their efforts exclusively to productions in which women possess all or the major part of the creative control. Resilience is one of the traits that could be ascribed to them; determination, is what they feel, to reach age 20 standing firm and strong. Still kickin', after all these years.³

¹ See Lisa Steele, "Committed to Memory: Women's Video Art Production in Canada and Quebec," in Rhea Tregobov, ed. *Work in Progress: Building a Feminist Culture* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1987), p. 40.

² Ferne Cristall and Barbara Emanuel, eds. *Images in Action: A Guide to Using Women's Film and Video* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1986).

³ I apologize to GIV and Vidéo Femmes for any assumptions I have made here which they may not share.

Margot Lacroix is the Distribution Manager of Women in Focus in Vancouver.



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CONNECTING VOICES: AN INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD FUNG **BY**

JAMES MACSWAIN

POINT OF VIEW

MACSWAIN You are well-known both as a video artist dealing with issues of race and sexuality from a personal perspective and through your role at DEC Film and Video, where you worked until recently. DEC distributes films that deal with racism and Third World issues. I want to talk about your experience there in the context of Canadian distribution.

FUNG DEC Film and Video works as a collective, so everyone shares the day-to-day running of the organization. When I was there I did actual physical distribution work—print traffic, shipping and receiving, sales and that kind of thing. We all shared in the major decision-making concerning what we carried. I did a lot of work around colour-positive issues, the catalogue and the collection of work that dealt with recent immigrant experience.

MACSWAIN How long were you there?

FUNG From 1985 to 1990.

MACSWAIN And as a part of the decision-making collective, what criteria did you use to choose work? Did you base it on how well the work was done or were you looking more at content?

FUNG We had a number of loose criteria, which shifted around. One was how the content fit into both our collection and needs we perceived in the city or the country. There were also works we didn't even realize there was a need for but which were wonderful as individual pieces. Increasingly over the years there was a bottom line for technical quality, because many young people are used to watching slick TV—music videos for instance—and if you are doing work for schools that aren't well produced they won't be used. The work had to be marketable on some level, because it wouldn't do the producer or the organization any good if it wasn't going to go anywhere.

OFTEN YOU DON'T KNOW THE AGENDAS INHERENT IN THE WORK, so it is useful to have people you can trust and with whom you share a common vocabulary to explain that a certain person is allied to a particular person or group which does certain things. It can be either good or bad.

MACSWAIN What is DEC's market?

FUNG Educational institutions at all levels, libraries and community groups, and depending on the tape, art galleries and festivals.

MACSWAIN The same is true for the educational end of CFMDC, and probably for all the distribution outlets in this country. Does that mean your library is mainly a documentary collection, since documentary is more dialectic and didactic in its presentation?

FUNG Generally the work is documentary rather than fiction. Of course there are major differences within the documentary form itself. I think DEC is stereotyped as a documentary distribution centre, but that began to change while I was there. We didn't just choose straight-ahead documentaries. We began to take on more experimental work and fiction work like the black British filmmaker Isaac Julian, who doesn't really fall into a neat category. We also have some animation work.

MACSWAIN It seems to me all the divisions we work with—documentary, animation, drama, experimental—are breaking down, so we have hybrids. The docu-drama is already an established genre. We have experimental animations, experimental dramas; we're starting to use those definitions as specific forms. But with DEC's documentary tradition, what exactly are you looking for in content?

FUNG The focus of the collection at DEC

changes with the people who work there. DEC started out doing Third World material exclusively. By the time I came on a major portion of the collection was women's issues produced by women. Very early it began taking on Canadian video, where the range was pretty wide—lesbian and gay work, for instance, and more and more work on race.

MACSWAIN You market here in Ontario and the rest of the country. Did you ever market in the US?

FUNG No, and more specifically, only English Canada. We have an informal relationship with Francophone distributors. We don't distribute French language versions of films and tapes, only English versions of French language media.

MACSWAIN How did you persuade a conservative education system that your films were viable and worthy subjects for their consideration?

FUNG That's difficult to answer, because each institution and buyer is different. Some people like some parts of the collection and others like other parts. Each tape or film has a different kind of strategy to sell it. A tape dealing with women's issues in India, for instance, might be picked up by feminist communities programming women's issues in an international context. The same tape will also be picked up by community

groups dealing with South Asian issues.

MACSWAIN I can see it would be less difficult selling to the converted. But since you're dealing with progressive film and video, what strategies do you use in trying to get the material to a public that might not be so open to it?

FUNG One of the most important strategies is to try and contextualize the work. Take the subject matter of race. We held the first anti-racist film festival in English Canada in 1984, called Colour Positive, out of which we produced a catalogue of the work in the festival and what we have collected since. The introduction starts with a guide to using anti-racist film and video. Within Toronto schools the ethnic composition of the teaching staff and the ethnic composition of the classroom don't really match up. Many teachers are not taught how to introduce issues of race, and they are frightened of the subject. We tried to create a way they could use the material by taking them through it with the guide. Many individual works also have teachers' or users' guides which offer background information and suggest how to lead a discussion by giving questions to ask.

MACSWAIN In the last ten years in Canada we've lived in a conservative climate, which is a climate of intolerance and economic disparity. How important are the Third World films and tapes at

I DON'T THINK THERE IS A CLOSING-DOWN OF THE MIND OF THE CANADIAN PUBLIC, but there is a closing-down in terms of the money available. Markets are changing quickly. Over the time I was at DEC I witnessed the destruction of 16mm in the market. Most places now buy only on VHS and not even on 3/4" video. There is a kind of crisis in the marketplace and many difficulties arise from that.

DEC in changing public opinion in Canada? In other words, DEC films and videos try to present a global idea of economic and political structure versus a nationalistic structure, showing how they influence each other. Did you discuss these kinds of issues at DEC?

FUNG Yes, they would come up when we were looking at new tapes and films. One of the good things about DEC's collection but also one of the difficulties is that it is not the kind of work you normally would see on television, which makes it difficult to get out to a broad public. We used church groups and other community organizations to do this; often this is the only way Canadians find out what is really going on in Central America or the Horn of Africa or in Southern Africa. It is also one of the only ways people from those regions hear about what is happening in their own countries. Often our discussions would revolve around the question of whether a film was useful to the group it is about. One thing we did to get feedback if we weren't sure about the work, or just as a courtesy, was to show the work to people from those particular communities. If the film was about Chile, we would bring in people from Chile to review it. Often you don't know the agendas inherent in the work, so it is useful to have people you can trust and with whom you share a common vo-

cabulary to explain that a certain person is allied to a particular person or group which does certain things. It can be either good or bad. The other kind of strategy was not to raise issues just in ghettos. In our Colour Positive Guide, which has anti-racist material, there are also films about sexism and women's issues and a gay and lesbian section. We always looked for crossover material in our education material.

MACSWAIN Then the idea is that the world is one and the problems of the world belong to all of us and not to one particular economic area. DEC films try to show the global structure behind issues.

FUNG I guess there are three things involved here. The first idea was for the people involved in those particular struggles to have material to help them develop what they were doing. The second idea was to show people who were "ordinary Canadians" who had no issues of their own and wanted to do solidarity work. The third one was to do cross fertilization. I remember when I was at DEC there was a teacher in one of the reserves in Newfoundland who was showing Micmac children films like *When The Mountains Tremble* about the struggle in Guatemala. It was really gratifying to make those kinds of world connections.

MACSWAIN It has often been said Newfoundland is Canada's Third World. I suspect there are pockets of the Third World in all the provinces of Canada.

FUNG They say native reserves are a part of apartheid, too.

MACSWAIN Exactly. What do you think are the chances for survival of DEC and the work with which you are associated? Will this work be supported by funding agencies in the future? Do you feel there is a closing-down of the mind of the Canadian public for this work?

FUNG I don't think there is a closing-down of the mind of the Canadian public, but there is a closing-down in terms of the money available. Markets are changing quickly. Over the time I was at DEC I witnessed the destruction of 16mm in the market. Most places now buy only on VHS and not even on 3/4" video. There is a kind of crisis in the marketplace and many difficulties arise from that. Also, DEC has not been able to get operational funding from arts councils.

MACSWAIN Because of the question of the number of films with Canadian content.

FUNG Yes.

MACSWAIN Where did your funding come from?

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C O N T I N E

MY PERSONAL INTERESTS WERE WORK ON SEXUALITY AND WORK THAT PUSHES THE FORM—as in documentaries that are aware of the ideological language contained within documentary language and try to work against it somehow. I don't like work that has a very narrow politic or is manipulative in getting across political points.

FUNG In the past the Development Education Centre received a small portion of its funding from CIDA. The vast majority of the money was raised through selling and renting work and grants that would cover a salary from time to time. Now the Development Education Centre has divided up into different areas, so DEC Film and Video is on its own now with its own board.

MACSWAIN Was this positive?

FUNG Oh yes.

MACSWAIN Because people can now focus on what they do best?

FUNG That's part of it. The Development Education Centre has a particular history, and my own analysis is that the organization grew faster than it was able to change its infrastructure, so it wasn't working managerially.

MACSWAIN So is there now a manager responsible for each particular area?

FUNG There isn't a hierarchy, but now each division makes decisions for itself. This offers more of a chance to focus on what each does best without a bureaucracy hindering the development of those decisions. DEC also has a board of directors which reflects the different interests of the collection and grounds the organization in the community.

MACSWAIN DEC is one small distributor in a complex city, but it is trying to bring global concerns to a public that is very

closed-minded in a certain sense. What else did you do that other distributors aren't doing?

FUNG Perhaps where we differ from other distributors is that we have a very strong educational component. Last year we did a really successful series entitled *Consuming Hunger*, a three-part tape on media literacy and the consumption of the Third World. We had speakers from Africa who talked about the imaging of Africa and issues in journalism, including a critique of the tape itself. Now there is a series which includes international issues dealing with Women and Labour. We all need to develop audiences for this work. One sad thing is that people would call up and want work that wouldn't be affordable for individuals, since our prices are set for community groups.

MACSWAIN If you had a wish list, what would you ask for?

FUNG More money for more staff and to go to festivals and to travel to find new work. I would also like to see more of this work on Canadian television, which is very conservative. Cable stations are more adventurous, but they don't pay.

MACSWAIN How do the filmmakers know to contact you?

FUNG People recommend us. We are one of the few distributors focusing on Third World work and we have ongoing relationships with distributors of like mind all over the world, so they often

recommend work to us.

MACSWAIN So your collection includes work done by Canadians in Third World countries and also work shot by Third World filmmakers.

FUNG We prioritize Third World filmmakers who have made work in their own countries. Unfortunately, often the work doesn't have enough of a context to make it accessible to a larger Canadian public. We try to find a balance in which the tape speaks genuinely from that country and yet contains enough background to communicate what is going on.

MACSWAIN Do you find that when Canadian filmmakers go to other countries they can miss the point?

FUNG Oh yes. We call them "grasshopper filmmakers," First World producers who hop from one country to the next. That's why it's very important to get people from the Third World to critique these films. If you can't get work produced by a Third World director then you look for collaboration and whether the First World producer has had an ongoing relationship with that country.

MACSWAIN What are the most important problems Canadians should know about the Third World via films and videos?

FUNG Problems vary from country to country, but there are pressing issues affecting all Third World countries, like the World Monetary Fund and the envi-

WE CALL THEM "GRASSHOPPER FILMMAKERS,"

First World producers who hop from one country to the next. That's why it's very important to get people from the Third World to critique these films.

ronment and its relationship to this fund. Peace and war of course. And issues for women. Other problems are more specific.

MACSWAIN Do you concentrate on particular countries?

FUNG Yes, two areas of the world: Africa—particularly Southern Africa—and Latin America, particularly Central America and Chile. There is a growing section on the Caribbean. This has to do with countries where production is taking place and whether a film will spark a new understanding of an issue. The films reflect the issues taken up in Canada: Central America, Chile, South Africa.

MACSWAIN What about the Middle East?

FUNG We have few films on the Middle East or Asia. I've noticed that different communities have different levels of using film as a cultural alternative, or they already have developed a network for showing films.

MACSWAIN You're of Chinese descent through the Caribbean. We have a very strong Chinese presence in Toronto as well as on the west coast, not to mention the Japanese community. Most of the work I've seen on these communities are by artists who have come from these communities in Canada and not from those countries themselves.

FUNG You've named two communities which are very different. The Japanese community is mainly a Canadian community and most people of my age are third generation and have English as a first language. Their interest as a community is not Japan. The Chinese com-

munity is mostly an immigrant community that doesn't have English as a first language. In a situation like that—as with people from India, for instance—their national cinema traditions are so strong that when people want to see a film they go to Chinatown or rent a Chinese video rather than something produced here about an issue like the head tax. A film like *Displaced View* by Midi Onodera, however, was received quite well in the Japanese community. We haven't had equivalent work in the Chinese community. This can also be seen within the gay and lesbian community. Alternative lesbian work is seen by both straight women and lesbians as part of their culture, while gay men tend to go to Hollywood films and haven't used alternative work. This is changing somewhat because of the many gay and lesbian festivals occurring now.

MACSWAIN Do you have gay and lesbian work from other countries in the DEC collection?

FUNG Not from Third World countries. We are negotiating for a film on Simon Ngoli in South Africa, but it's being distributed through England. We do have some work from England, like Isaac Julian's work.

MACSWAIN It would be interesting to see a video from Brazil on gay life and how it relates to the Mardi Gras and the white men who go to that festival.

FUNG There are films being done in those countries, but often it is so difficult to raise the money for a film they tend to do commercial work. I know Brazil does have a commercial gay cinema which is pornographic and which

also makes feature films with gay plots.

MACSWAIN What was your particular influence on DEC films.

FUNG My personal interests were work on sexuality and work that pushes the form—as in documentaries that are aware of the ideological language contained within documentary language and try to work against it somehow. I don't like work that has a very narrow politic or is manipulative in getting across political points. I influenced the work from the Caribbean simply because I had the contacts. There is one other area of the collection which is also growing, which is that of Aboriginal people, the Native people of Canada and the US. There is a large market for this work.

MACSWAIN Toronto has a large and growing immigrant population. Is DEC growing with Toronto?

FUNG School boards feel pressure to reflect the immigrant situation in their individual schools. With community groups, it depends on how well that community is organized. Things have happened in the last year that wouldn't have happened before. We have a film on Eritrea, for example, and that community is using this film to organize around.

MACSWAIN Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule for this interview. Good luck in your new life as a "non-distributor."

James MacSwain is an independent filmmaker and the Education Film Officer at the CFMDC.



Finding the audience:

POINT OF VIEW

A REVIEW OF THE IMMEDIATE IMPACT CONFERENCE

BY HELEN LEE AND MICHAEL ZRYD

MEDIA NETWORK, A NYC-BASED INFORMATION GROUP dedicated to promoting independent social issue film and video, recently sponsored Immediate Impact: A Conference on Broadening the Use of Social Issue Films and Videos. Among the close to 200 participants were producers, distributors, funders, programmers, exhibitors, cable television workers, teachers, and writers, all mainly New York-based but with national constituencies.

Nine different sessions organized around three themes covered a wide range of issues concerning the use, form and effectiveness of media produced for the specific aim of social awareness and political change. The atmosphere was positive and lively, generating much discussion and debate among those who live and breathe media every day but who rarely have a chance to regroup and reflect in such an intensive, comprehensive way. Hopes were pinned on the '90s for foregrounding censorship, reproductive freedom, racism, AIDS and other urgent issues in the public consciousness through independent media.

Video maker Marlon Riggs (*Tongues Untied*) set the pace with a compelling keynote address centred on the nature and status of independent work. Speaking about the danger of cultural pluralism, he suggested, "Polite multiculturalism has as little value as directly mimicking the dominant." Consider carefully the ideological positioning of producer, subject and audience, he noted, in trying to get to that elusive place of truth, which is a multi-layered truth anyway.



Showing clips from his tape *Affirmations*, he urged formal innovation, but not at the cost of alienating viewers or ghettoizing the project. Blending autobiography and allegory with academic discourse, he covered a great deal of territory but never lost sight of the ultimate goal: activating the viewer. As a "black, gay, signifyin' butch queen", however, Riggs's vision of a new radical/political aesthetic is grounded in a forthright, uncompromising subjectivity.

COLOUR SCHEMES.
A video by SHU LEA
CHEANG.

THE QUESTION OF AUDIENCE

"Building the Audience: Is Bigger Better?"

Moderator Lillian Jiminez of the Paul Robeson Fund for Film and Video and director of the National Latino Film and Video Festival posed the question, "Is Bigger Better?" in terms of quantity vs. quality. Does one aim at a mass audience or serve specific communities? Social issue film and video is meant to empower the disempowered viewer; the quality of empowerment is thus crucial. Kate Horsefield of Video Data Bank described the benefit of "narrow-cast" strategies in reaching "a community where the tape really means something." As Horsefield acknowledged, however, on its own this strategy offers little potential for mass impact. Media must also reach into larger audiences to find viewers not served by the industrial media complex. Multiple distribution networks and approaches are required.

An implicit assumption behind many distribution strategies is that there must be viewers who are looking for independent, alternative voices, if only we could find them. Should we throw alternative images into the airwaves and hope alternative viewers catch them? This passive, arbitrary approach,

while it attempts to combat corporate interests' massive domination of media channels, lacks the focus and transformative potential of more viewer-specific strategies.

Patricia Benoit (producer, *Se Met Ko*) eloquently focused the issue by insisting we begin by asking why we are making media. Her answer—social activism—demands that makers and distributors work toward goals which make quality and quantity relative to specific contexts. Benoit, who addresses issues facing the Haitian community in the United States, has a limited audience

because the work must speak directly to viewers who speak Creole. For her, smaller is better within the context of a mass American audience, but in terms of the Haitian community, bigger is better. Benoit noted the temptations of trying to reach a larger audience: debilitating stereotypes of Haitians and AIDS and voodoo demand correction, and funding agencies are impressed by demographics. Nonetheless, the burden of providing not only a text but a context for a mass American audience would diffuse the impact of her primary target of intervention, the Haitian community. As she says, "Right now, speaking to America is icing on the cake."

Money was another issue that divided distribution approaches. Gretchen Dykstra of National Video Resources (NVR), funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, spoke from the perspective of a funder of projects that investigate the marketplace with venture capital support. Her hard-headed, pragmatic approach insisted that, given the realities of the marketplace, the business of communication requires audience numbers and producers need to make money to continue to make work. Dykstra looked in particular to cassette sales and rentals as a controllable distribution route. For Steve Pierce of Deep Dish Television, a self-distribution network organized by artists and producers which utilizes satellite technology to access a "home dish" market of some 3 million largely rural American homes, the priority is to get information out to as wide an audience as possible, and to ensure the information is used. Deep Dish encourages home taping and pirating as a viable form of grassroots distribution.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS **On the Issue of Form Vs. Content**

Continuing the form vs. content debate, several video and filmmakers, (including Riggs, Shu Lea Cheang and Annie Goldson) tried to broach that well-worn ground through their own work.

In Goldson's considered critique of avant-gardism, she risked caricaturing both the avant-garde and popular audiences, but her main points, if commonplace, were well-taken: the rapidity with which experimental, self-reflective techniques are reappropriated and absorbed into the mainstream, and the realization that television viewers do read

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against the grain.

Cheang's ironic delivery displayed the ambivalence at work in being identified as an "artist of colour"—form and content in one body. In the conversion of her video, *Color Schemes*, into an installation for the Whitney Museum, she evoked the distinctions between art space and community-oriented art and their subsequent collapse with the multicultural mandate. Riggs was the most hopeful about the crossover potential of community-specific

work to transcend its original intended audience. Basic conflicts of identity, sexuality, individuality and self, while located in one particular person or story, can appeal to a broader group. In his own project of reintegrating black gay men into the black community—or, for that matter, translating any one story to an audience at large—all the panelists agreed that one cannot forsake entertainment values.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS **What Makes a Community Media Active?**

The answer to this question was unequivocally clear: communities make community media active. Frances Negron-Muntaner spoke with impassioned clarity of her experience confronting several of the bugaboos of independent production while making *AIDS In the Barrio: Eso No Me Pasa A Mi*. She noted that communities can be neither romanticized as freely incorporating all difference nor understood as single-identity groups. Negron-Muntaner and her co-producer began making *AIDS In the Barrio* to fill what they assumed was a gap in the community's exposure to AIDS education. After researching local AIDS resources, however, they discovered the information was there but the practice of AIDS prevention was not. The tape, then, needed to activate its viewers, not passively inform them. Strategies of entertainment, identification and humour were reclaimed as both appropriate and effective. Negron-Muntaner also wrestled with the question of the relation between the identities of the makers and the tape. Would a production staff including herself (a university-educated lesbian feminist) and white non-community-based technical staff be compromised by definition? Her fears of misrepresentation vanished in the face of how the tape was used; conditions of reception (the make-up of the community and routes of engagement) overrule conditions of production.

Panelists' accounts of the variety and openness of audience readings challenged the absolute imperative of a work's integrity. Audiences can find value in the loosest and least professional of works—as *America's Funniest Home Videos* suggests. Humour, low-tech authenticity and recognition are powerful and popular techniques. Louis Massiah of Scribe Video Center noted television's advantage over theatrical exhibition is that its space of viewing allows us to talk back.

The self-conscious integrity of makers was also questioned: good intentions do not guarantee social effectiveness. Interestingly, this humbling realization allowed many participants to speak of relaxing the anxieties of co-option and compromise. Activists who wish to intervene in culture can no longer ignore or remain aloof from the fact that contemporary culture is media. There is no position, theoretical or practical, outside mass media—or if there is, it is so removed as to be inadequate as a base of intervention.

Moe Foner (Bread and Roses Cultural Project) underlined the importance of positive audience address, recalling a lesson of his decades of documentary and labour organization experience: "It's very easy to divide workers—the bosses do it all the time—what's hard is to unite workers." Foner also stressed that media is only one tool among many for political organization. Though media is inextricable from culture, media's demands should not overwhelm the broader goals of activists.

Meanwhile, Karen Hirsch of Greenpeace, a relative newcomer to community media, spoke of the remarkable ingenuity of local organizers undertaking what she called "tupperware" videotape distribution. Hirsch celebrated the "pirating potential" of VHS. Groups that have successfully used educational Greenpeace videos to rally community resistance to waste dumps have, on their own initiative, sent copies of the tape to the next town targeted by waste disposal companies. This grassroots distribution is so community-directed that Greenpeace is often the last to know their tape was used.

EXPANDING HORIZONS

Makers as Users

Low-tech video formats like VHS, 8mm and Hi-8, with their accessibility, low cost and ease of shooting and post production, have narrowed the traditional division between producers and communities; community members can now make images for political, educational and expressive purposes with a minimum of expertise and capital.

Hank Linhart of RENEW, a video collective in North Brooklyn working on community development and environmental issues, pointed to the utility of portable video formats for investigative work. Linhart's community, Greenpoint, has recently become a popular site for garbage transfer stations. Rats, seagulls, smell and dumping have disfigured the neighbourhood while other environmental abuses like pushing garbage into waterways threatens larger communities. RENEW's video documentation of these abuses, used to lobby the State assembly and city Hall, has helped close 12 sites.

The purely utilitarian nature of the tapes dictates some interesting formal qualities. An 8mm shooting format, bumped to 3/4" for editing, is released on VHS, but the loss in image quality accentuates the image's power-as-evidence. In addition, much of the tape is left silent. The tape is not self-explanatory and so requires a member of RENEW to accompany the tape as a lecturer. The strategy guarantees that the lobby target gets the message, since the presence of the accompanying collective member verifies

that the tape gets seen and does not sit on a shelf.

Chris Bratton helped found Youth Television, a collective of independent producers and educators developing critical media studies curriculum for high schools. Their package, *Teaching TV*, features student-made work. Though he praised the accessibility of low-tech, Bratton warned against notions that any technology is inherently progressive: putting a video camera in the hands of a student does not automatically teach critical thinking. Bratton sees his project as part of a larger movement in American education to expand the importance of the school as a site for community action.

Alex Juhasz spoke about her experience as project director of Women's AIDS Video Enterprise (WAVE). Her earlier AIDS education projects alerted her to a lack of attention to the group most recently affected by AIDS: low-income women. Wrestling with many of the same issues of identity and class as Negrón-Muntaner, Juhasz directed more energy to the process of production. One-third of the project's budget was allocated to distribution, however, and group members continue to work as resource persons accompanying their tapes.

Robert Mignott of House of Color ("a collective founded to combat dominant media representations through the production and distribution of media by and about gays and lesbians of colour") gave a presentation which unintentionally exposed some of the contradictions of representation in identity politics. Mignott screened *I Object*, what he described as a "not low-cost but no-cost" production which was nevertheless the most technically sophisticated and theoretically ambitious work on the panel. Ironically, the aestheticized formal surface of the tape coincided with a failure to communicate the makers' message. The tape's opening collage of media images (from Mapplethorpe to Madonna), driven by a back-beat of Grace Jones, is followed by a series of lyrical and erotic portraits of collective members, as strikingly composed as the iconography of the collage. The effect, a celebration of pleasure and difference, did not articulate a critique of dominant media—if anything, the aestheticization of the body in the opening montage seemed to be appropriated for the closing images.

House of Color's motivation for making the tape privileged their own identity as makers ("images about and by gays and lesbians of colour"), but had targeted no specific audience, which diffused the tape's effectiveness. When Mignott screened *I Object* for high school audiences, discussion was limited to some students' homophobic reactions, provoking other students' defence of the House of Colour's freedom of speech. In the age of Helms, this debate is important but begs other questions. These ironies suggest the limitations of production strategies in social-issue media which depend more on authorship and identity than on a consideration of reception and audience.

Helen Lee is an independent filmmaker who works at Women Make Movies in New York.

Michael Zryd is a cinema studies student at New York University.

**US INDEPENDENT
DISTRIBUTORS**
Compiled by Helen Lee

This is a selected list of major national distributors in the US, many of them New-York based. Contact them for more information about their collections and distribution services or to obtain current catalogue information.

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS

Curated travelling programs with a focus on avant-garde and art documentaries. Kari Olson, Circulation Coordinator, Media Arts Department, 41 E. 65th Street, New York, NY 10021, (212) 988-7700

APPALSHOP

A media arts and distribution centre promoting the cultural work of the Appalachian region. Robert Gipe, Box 743, 306 Madison Street, Whitesburg, KY 41858, (606) 633-0108

CALIFORNIA NEWSREEL

Emphasis on social and political documentary; strong African-American collection. Lawrence Daressa, 149 Ninth Street, #420, San Francisco, CA 94103, (415) 621-6196

CANYON CINEMA

A filmmakers' co-operative much like CFMDC, with focus on experimental West Coast artists. Dominic Angerame, 2325 Third Street, Suite 338, San Francisco, CA 94107, (415) 626-2255

CINEMA GUILD

Strong commitment to films and tapes on progressive issues for community/solidarity groups and educational markets. Gary Crowds, 1697 Broadway, New York, NY 10019, (212) 246-5522

DEEP DISH TV

National public access satellite television network distributing activist media of all genres via satellite to public access stations. Some Canadian downlink sites. Steve Pierce, 339 Lafayette, New York, NY 10012, (212) 473-8933

DIRECT CINEMA

Educational films and videos on a wide range of social issues, including children's and institutional videos. Mail order catalogue available. Betsy McLean, 291 S. La Cienega, Los Angeles, CA 90069, (213) 652-8000

DRAFT DISTRIBUTION

Avant-garde films and videos primarily by American artists. Brian Goldberg, 83 Warren St., New York, NY 10007, (212) 766-3713

ELECTRONIC ARTS INTERMIX

Video art by established media artists from the U.S. and abroad. Stephen Vitiello, 536 Broadway, New York, NY 10012, (212) 966-4605.

FANLIGHT PRODUCTIONS

Independent media on health care and mental health issues. Ben Achtenberg, 47 Halifax Drive, Boston, MA 02130, (617) 524-0980

FILMMAKERS LIBRARY

Primarily independent documentary on social issues from U.S. and abroad. Linda Gottesman, 124 East 40th Street, New York, NY 10016, (212) 808-4980

FIRST RUN/ICARUS

Educational shorts of Icarus merged with independent, mainly American features from First Run. Jonathan Miller, 153 Waverly Place, New York, NY 10004, (212) 243-0600

FRAMELINE

Films and videotapes by and about lesbians and gays; also regularly exhibits gay and lesbian work, including annual festival. Michael Lumpkin, P.O. Box 14792, San Francisco, CA 94114, (415) 861-5245

INTERMEDIA ARTS

Dealing with media by midwestern artists, especially works by Native Americans. Tom Borup, 425 Ontario St. SE, Minneapolis, MN 55414, (612) 627-4444

MEDIAMIX

Serving New Jersey-based artists; small distribution component called Fiat Lux for Super 8 work to festivals, cable tv and galleries. Albert Gabriel Nigrin, P.O. Box 1623, New Brunswick, NJ 08903, (201) 249-9623/1375

NAATA/CROSS CURRENTS

Asian and Asian American films and videos; educational emphasis, especially public television. Janice Sakamoto, 346 Ninth Street, 2nd Floor, San Francisco, CA 94103, (415) 863-0814

NEW DAY FILMS

Cooperatively-based distribution for established American independents. Loma Rasmussen, 121 West 27th Street, New York, NY 10001, (212) 675-7722/645-8210

**NEW YORK FILMMAKERS'
COOPERATIVE**

More than 2,500 experimental, avant-garde and documentary films (and recently videos). Catalogue available. Reginald Wollery, 175 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10016, (212) 889-3820

PAPERTIGERTV

Distribution of tapes produced by own production collective; over 180 programs on alternative culture and critiques of media and mass culture. Linda Iannacone/Mary Ying Welsh, 339 Lafayette, New York, NY 10012, (212) 420-8196/9045

THIRD WORLD NEWSREEL

Political documentaries on international and social issues in the U.S. and Third World; strong archival collection and growing emphasis on African-Americans. Ada Griffin, 335 West 38th Street, New York, NY 10018, (212) 947-9277

VIDEO DATA BANK

Largest collection of work by video artists and documentarians. Mindy Faber, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 280 South Columbus Dr., Chicago, IL 60603, (312) 443-3793

VISUAL COMMUNICATIONS

Primarily a media arts centre but also distributes work by and about Asian Pacific peoples. Linda Mabalot, 263 South Los Angeles St. #307, Los Angeles, CA 90012, (213) 680-4462

WOMEN MAKE MOVIES

Largest collection of film and video by and about women; strong multicultural emphasis. Debra Zimmerman, 225 Lafayette #207, New York, NY 10012, (212) 925-0606

ZEITGEIST FILMS

Features and programs of shorts for theatrical market. Nancy Gerstman, 200 Waverly Place #1, New York, NY 10014, (212) 727-1989

OTHER GROUPS OF NOTE:

**INDEPENDENT MEDIA DISTRIBUTOR'S
ALLIANCE**

A U.S. network of independent film and video distributors, both commercial and non-profit. Bob Gale, c/o ArtBase, P.O. Box 2154 St. Paul, MN 55102, (612) 298-0117

MEDIA NETWORK

Information group dedicated to promoting independent social-issue film and video. Kevin Dugan, 121 Fulton St. 5th Floor, New York, NY 10038, (212) 619-3455

**NATIONAL ALLIANCE OF MEDIA ARTS
CENTRES (NAMAC)**

An umbrella organization of U.S. media arts centres. c/o Mimi Pickering, Appalshop, P.O. Box 7431, 306 Madison Street, Whitesburg, KY 41858, (606) 633-0108



N F B

F R I E N D O R F O E

O F T H E I N D E P E N D E N T F I L M M A K E R ?

POINT OF VIEW

BY BONNIE BAKER

In an era of diminishing popularity within the federal government for a strengthening of cultural agendas, the cultural/artistic community may rightly fear that open criticism of any public cultural institution will invite further dismantling of established cultural and artistic programs. Yet when the policies of those institutions are contributing to the economic erosion of an artistic community—in this case, independent film and video makers—criticism cannot be strong enough.

The National Film Board, the largest publicly funded producer and distributor of Canadian films and videos, makes NFB films as accessible and visible as any Hollywood film available from your local video store with its extensive library network throughout Canada. As innocuous as this system appears, one would think there is little to criticize. Visibility of Canadian films and videos is something to be desired; accessibility is what film and video distribution should provide. But visibility and accessibility at what costs artistically and financially to independent production and distribution?

Let it be emphasized that as a public agency, the NFB continues to provide critical financial production assistance to the independents



through the PAFPS program, support to film production co-operatives, and in the last two and half years, through the Independent Co-production Fund¹. Where the NFB fails the independent film and video maker is in the area of distribution, going so far astray in its own distribution policies as to undermine the ability of Canadian independent distributors to perform in our own markets.

Producers receiving support through PAFPS or the co-op programs do so with relatively little interference from the NFB either creatively or in their production structure. However, for producers applying for ICF funds, it is a different story. In their own words, the goals of the ICF program are "to enable the NFB to enter into co-production arrangements with private sector producers to assist in the development and production of culturally relevant Canadian films, [and] to assist the Canadian private sector to improve its financial capacity to develop and produce such films." The flaw of the ICF program is not in its goals but in the rather sizeable contract demands the NFB makes upon the independent producer in both production and distribution conditions. Since the inception of ICF, many of the problems regarding production conditions have been resolved, but the distribution dilemma remains the same.

Regardless of the type or length of production and the level of financial involvement, the NFB routinely insists on the acquisition of "non-exclusive, non-commercial, non-theatrical rights." The reasoning behind their claim of distribution rights as a condition for a co-production contract is that it is in keeping with the NFB's mandate as a public film distributor.

In making non-theatrical distribution a production condition, however, the NFB ignores two very important principles practised by the independent production and distribution community. First, the terms and price tag for production and distribution rights are negoti-

ated in separate contracts even if both rights are to be assigned to the same party. Second, while the NFB uses the term non-commercial to describe its distribution activities, it also defines its traditional market as "the public through its own library system and affiliated organizations," which in practice does not exclude educational institutions, broadcasters, public libraries, the general public, community groups, or just about anyone else from using its libraries. In fact, the NFB actively competes with private sector distributors in these markets with a pricing structure that undercuts any distributors who are not 100% government subsidized. Unlike an independent distributor, the NFB is not economically accountable to the independent producer for its performance in the marketplace. And here lies the rub. The economic rights of the independent producer have been severed from her/his work in the pre-production stage.

The practice of retaining certain rights begins to separate the economic rights of the independent when the production is aimed not at the theatrical market (from which non-theatrical revenues are inconsequential) but at broadcast and non-theatrical markets. (How the loss of potential revenue from the home video market will affect the independent producer's ability to exploit home video distribution rights for Canadian independent features in the future remains to be seen when home video becomes a less marginal market for Canadian films.) Potential distribution revenues are a key part of the total financial package of film or video. Potential distribution revenues attract investors and distributors, are mandatory for participation by other federal or provincial agencies such as DSS, OFDC and BC Film, and ensure that producers/directors who routinely defer salaries earn a living from their work. When one of any number of financial partners necessary to put together production financing exercises disproportionately large demands upon the production as a condition for involvement, the playing field tips against all other partners—including the independent producer.

The consequences of such policies by

THE INDEPENDENT EYE 45

POINT OF VIEW



MARTIN RUMSBY
of the
INVISIBLE CINEMA

**T H O U G H T S
O N
I N V I S I B L E
C I N E M A**

BY MARTIN RUMSBY

ORIGINALLY SOMETHING OF A UTOPIAN PROJECT WHOSE GOAL WAS TO

TRANSFORM FIRST INDIVIDUAL VIEWERS THEN SOCIETY AS A WHOLE, AVANT-GARDE CINEMA HAS SHIFTED COURSE OVER THE PAST DECADE TO FUNCTION MORE AS A CRITIQUE OF THE FORMS AND MEANINGS OF INDUSTRIAL CINEMA. THE COMBATIVE,



defiant nature of avant-garde films challenges the alienating viewing experience offered by mass media entertainment. Avant-garde films offer an adventure in perception, requiring the heightened sensitivity of a totally engaged self, directly perceiving the "thing in itself". Techniques of avant-garde film include intense modes of perception offered by rapid, often hand-held camera movement; fast cutting, sound-image juxtapositions; the realization of interior psychological landscapes; open non-linear narrative structures; and direct working on the film's surface. These strategies are intended to challenge viewers to resee and rethink their preconceptions rather than passively absorbing the formulaic stream of processed images offered by mainstream film and television.

Over the past two decades both industrial cinema and television have increasingly served the production of manipulated information. Political power has infiltrated the apparatus of popular ideology, and mass media events have become the activity of a conservative political process. Today the control of the production and distribution of moving images defines both the expressive and interpretive parameters such images serve. The media, then, delivers a pre-determined message, only addressing subjects which reinforce those corporate and state agendas which profit from dominant industrial cinema. Think of the abundance of popular cinemas devoted to law and order, militarism and the moneyed status quo, refusing to acknowledge uncomfortable social and personal realities. Such a situation adds particular urgency to the project of critiquing mass media image making.

A RECENT STUDY OF AMERICAN MEDIA, TITLED "THE MEDIA MONOPOLY", REVEALS that the opportunity for accurate and equitable representation of divergent viewpoints in the cinema will undoubtedly continue to decline over the next few years.

"In 1981, 46 corporations controlled most of the business in daily newspapers, magazines, television, books and motion pictures in the United States. By 1986 that number had shrunk to 29. It is estimated that by the year 2000 ownership of the United States media industry may be in the hands of only 6 conglomerates, and global communication will be dominated by only twelve major corporations."¹

This is very depressing news for anyone interested in independent cinema, more so for those of us committed to presenting independently made moving images. Personal cinemas will become more marginalized and will seem excessively eccentric and aberrant within the increasingly homogeneous media culture of the future.

The strength and dominance of the Hollywood feature film, television and even the art world results from the realization that both art and industry must be based upon an efficient distribution and exhibition system—be it the local cineplex, cable television, artist-run centre or municipal art gallery. Numerous aesthetic, political and personal decisions made in relation to avant-garde film have, however, created an inadequate patronage and presentation system for this cinema. These decisions include the separation of the explicitly political and aesthetic in the North American vanguard; a conservative Euro-American centrism; the anti-commodity stance of many film artists; and the petty factionalism in what should ideally be an independent filmmaking scene united by certain common causes. These factors have alienated critics, curators and potential patrons. Where once there was a support system for avant-garde cinema, many critics, programmers and pa-

trons now prefer to apply their critical theory, appreciation and programming skills to the productions of, say, David Lynch, Peter Greenaway and Wim Wenders rather than focus on the critical challenges offered by artists such as Trinh T Minh-ha, Brent Haywood or Leslie Thornton.

THIS SITUATION IS FURTHER AGGRAVATED in countries like Canada by federal, provincial and municipal funding policies which have markedly prioritized production over the presentation of independent cinema. (When it is not uncommon for the distribution budget of recent Hollywood films to match or even exceed their production costs, present arts council policies appear misguided.) The tragedy of the Canadian system is that there is an already existing nationwide system of film co-operatives which could easily form the basis of an independent film exhibition network. Virtually all of these co-operatives, however, are primarily concerned with producing new films which, when completed, will have few exhibition opportunities. They may be shown in a couple of independent festivals, included in a provincial co-op-organized trav-

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keeping independent and "foreign" (i.e. non-American) films off their screens.

There is a saying in Canada that "local films are not released, but one occasionally escapes." In such a situation, the creation of subsidized cinema industries to make films that look like Hollywood spin-offs for a market that does not want them is absurd. An arts council policy of funding films that cannot be exhibited is equally absurd.²

What the industry does or does not do is their concern. Even if the local industry were to create a viable exhibition system, it would no doubt exclude the work of independent and vanguard film artists from its screens. Let us hope that independent filmmakers will soon realize the future of their cinema depends upon the creation of an independent exhibition network tied into similar networks overseas. Let us hope, further, that these filmmakers will look beyond the funding of their next project and spend some time lobbying funding agencies to prioritize the establishment of screening networks for independent films. These networks would allow taxpayers nationwide, as the actual funders of the work, an opportunity to choose whether or not they want to see national and international independent cinemas.³

TODAY IN NORTH AMERICA, MOST EXPERIMENTAL FILMS are distributed by centralized, federally funded, non-profit centres who require that filmmakers donate copies of their films and pay a membership fee to the centre. The filmmaker is then left to hope s/he will get enough rentals to cover the replacement costs of worn-out, scratched and often bootlegged prints after they have made their way backwards and forwards across North America.

As filmmaker Mike Hoolboom has pointed out, "Over 90%

elling film program, or end up gathering dust in an artist-run distribution centre. The present funding strategy amounts to a benevolent form of censorship which ensures the production of critical cinema while simultaneously preventing the widespread dissemination of the work, thereby creating an invisible cinema.

This is not to lay the blame entirely at the feet of the funding bodies. Although they make policy decisions on funding priorities, granting agencies are subject to the influence of specific interest groups and power-brokers within cinema. The prevailing philosophy at this time encourages filmmakers to get just enough screenings in a few validated venues to ensure their next, usually larger grant.

Virtually all the cinema screens are controlled by monolithic, colonial affiliates of American film studios. These affiliates have implemented protectionist policies aimed at feeding consumers a steady stream of American entertainment films and

of all the rentals of [the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre, New York Filmmakers' Co-op and Canyon Cinema] are derived from income issued by universities, art colleges and the like.... A distribution system based on 'educational values' necessarily favours a small canon of films and filmmakers, choosing to replay a select handful of anointed films over and over again.... North America's distribution co-ops have put into place a powerful conservative agenda that has established terms of reference, lines of heritage, career opportunities and schools of thought which mitigate against the present-day achievements of new filmmakers."⁴

While such centres and their educational market fulfil an important historic and symbolic function, both are based on "passive" distribution models of the 1960s and early 1970s. These models were appropriate for their time but are inadequate in fully serving the needs of filmmakers, buyers and audiences in the 1990s.⁵

During the 1980s several new entrepreneurial distribution projects including the Parabola Arts Foundation (in New York), Film Trek (Ontario) and Invisible Cinema (Canada/New Zealand/ USA) were initiated. These projects seek to alter the present conditions of patronage, presentation and reception of independent cinemas. All three are based, in varying degrees, on the idea of buying and selling avant-garde films and creating independent film collections. As such they take on a role akin to that of an art dealer. By purchasing film prints, packaging them into programs, then touring them through a wide variety of screening situations, entrepreneurial distributors hope to encourage private patronage of independent cinema. The critical question these initiatives pose is this: if artists buy painting, writers buy books and musicians buy recordings, why is it that avant-garde filmmakers generally don't support their art form by buying prints of avant-garde films?

¹ Marvin Heiferman, "Everywhere, All the Time, For Everybody," in *Image World: Art and Media Culture* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1989).

² Of the \$166.5 million of public money Telefilm Canada invested in the Canadian film, television and video industry during the 1989-90 fiscal year, Telefilm generated a total of \$16.4 million in revenue. Reported in the *Leader Post* (Regina, September 1, 1990).

³ As an example of what can be done we could look to French West Africa. In 1963 the French Ministry of Co-operation instigated a program to aid black West African filmmakers. The first feature film shot by an African south of the Sahara was Ouseman Sembene's *Black Girl* made in 1966. At that time West African screens were monopolized by two French exhibition companies which excluded African films from African screens. Despite the difficulties of inter-state co-operation, within twenty years of the production of *Black Girl* an African consortium had replaced the French distribution duopolies, allowing the screening of African films on African screens.

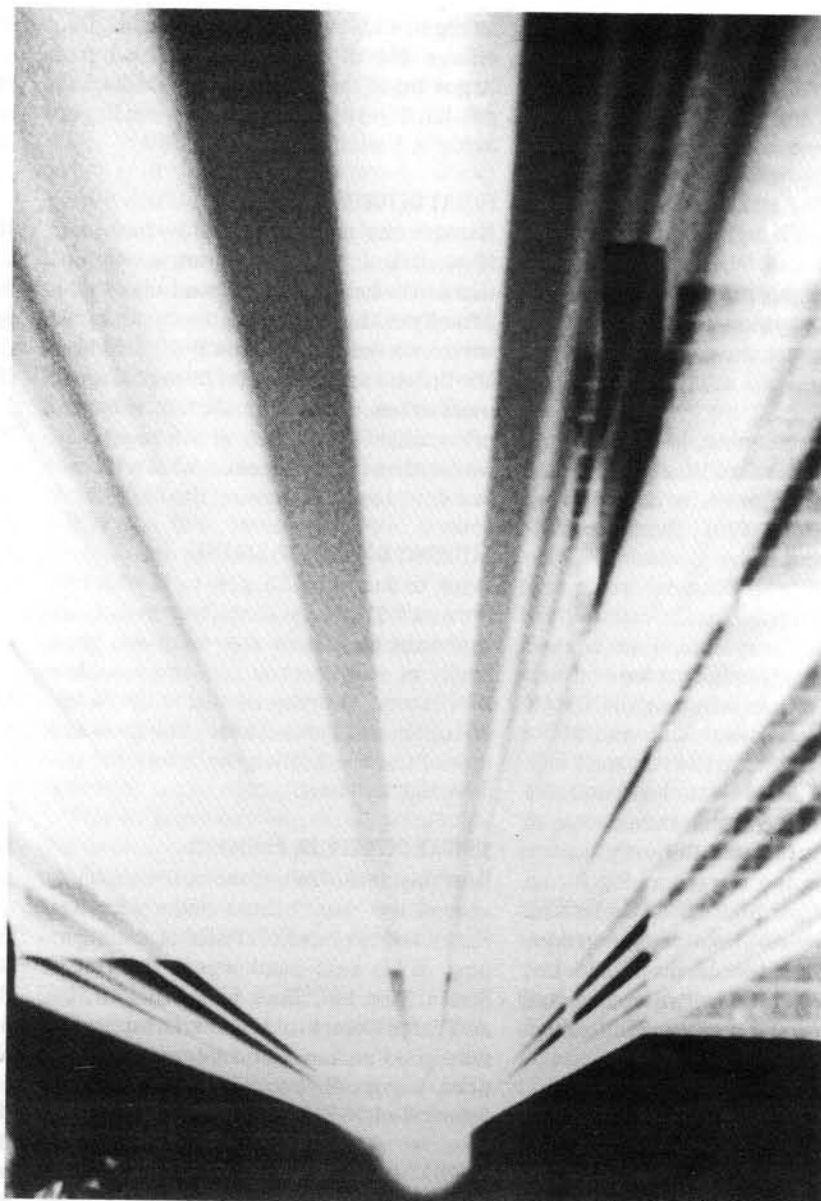
From a lecture by Dr. Sheila Petty at the University of Regina (November, 1988).

⁴ Mike Hoolboom, "How German Is It?" in the *Independent Eye* (Toronto: Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre, Spring 1990), p. 1.

⁵ New York Filmmakers' Co-op, for example, does not even have film projection facilities for interested programmers or buyers to see work listed in the co-op catalogue, and although Canyon Cinema can show films to a potential booker, its procedure for previewing films is far from straightforward.

Martin Rumsby is an independent filmmaker and curator from New Zealand currently living in Regina.

POINT OF VIEW



Lincoln Park,
Chicago
July 1989.

Photo:
Iwona
Biedermann.

**FROM THE DIARY OF A TRAVELLING
FILM SHOW
BY MARTIN RUMSBY**

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 23, REGINA

Anxious day waiting for a print of Jean Gagné's new film, which never arrives. Catch 3 pm flight to Vancouver over a parched brown prairie, semi-frozen lakes, bush-clad and cleared Rockies, a short sweep over the Georgian Strait then back on solid ground.

Richard Lomas meets me at the airport then takes me to our lodgings: Vincent's Backpackers' Hostel, located along a strip of cheap hotels, girlie shows, freeway exits and the Greyhound service depot. Inside the place reeks of hippie hangover—crawling with cockroaches and young travellers. We dump our gear then wander through a damp, drizzly early evening in Chinatown looking for a razor, toothbrush, vitamin pills, scotch and dinner....

WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 24, VANCOUVER

Call the Pacific Cinematheque to let them know I'm here. They give me messages from Ingrid Lae and Mike Hoolboom....

Skytrain to town, walk to Cinematheque, pick up cheque, miss Mike, then back to Scienceworld. See an OMNIMAX history of aviation after which Ingrid gives us a tour of the projection booth. Watch her thread the 4pm show then agree to meet her later at the Cinematheque. Skytrain back to town, find information on boat travel to Seattle then back to Cinematheque to present my Invisible Cinema program.

A wonderful screening, great audience and excellent discussion. Mike bubbles that it's the best show he's seen me do and, along with Richard, Ingrid, Chris and Susan Gallagher, Peter Lipskis, Ian Cochrane, Janice Bowley and Oliver Kellhammer we go to a nearby Spanish restaurant and bar...

Ingrid tells the story of how she worked her way from selling popcorn at Vancouver's Ridge Cinema to becoming an OMNIMAX projectionist. Maria Insell and Ann Marie Fleming join us later then Richard and I walk back through Chinatown to the hostel. We finish the last of the scotch then decide to stay up all night to catch the early boat to Victoria. Out on the street looking for an early breakfast we find all the tables and chairs from Mom's 24-hour diner next door piled up along the sidewalk, the door locked and the cook making out with a woman over the hotplate. Go to Vincent's and fall asleep.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 25 VANCOUVER

Virtually thrown out of hostel after missing our bus and boat connections and walk out into a tumultuous West Coast downpour. Breakfast at Mom's, cab to Greyhound, bus to boat, boat to Victoria then buy tickets on the Victoria Clipper—300-seat jet-boat service to Seattle. Great trip at 35 mph through Puget Sound under the stars, leaning off the back of the boat churning up a massive mile-long wake. Seattle looks great

at night. Cab to Pacific Hotel where they charge \$50 above their advertised rate. Argue for 20 minutes with the desk clerk, call Jim Bond in Chicago and Nora in Regina at about 5 am then sleep.

FRIDAY OCTOBER 26, SEATTLE

Explore city on foot, find 911—both Alan Howard and Robin Reidy are great, and extremely helpful. I feel good about 911. After 5 pm Alan takes us to the Cyclops Café where we wait for Kristina Bozic and Noni Martin who are driving out from Chicago to meet us but who didn't make it to 911 at the prearranged time. They arrive eventually, we eat, then find an excellent bed and breakfast downtown overlooking the harbour.

SATURDAY OCTOBER 27, SEATTLE

Drive to Portland, Oregon to see Charles Burnett's *To Sleep With Anger*—a black American film about a crisis-ridden black family in south-central Los Angeles. Meet Nils Benson, the projectionist at the Northwest Film and Video Centre, who gives us a tour of the booth, then check into the elegant Mallory Hotel.

SUNDAY OCTOBER 28, PORTLAND

Breakfast at the Mallory then drive aimlessly around the city.... Cross paths with Ken Kesey and his bus FURTHER at the beginning of his next jaunt across the United States. Film him. Back to Northwest Film and Video Centre to do show. Great projection, good audience and interesting questions. Say goodbye to Nils then head down Interstate 5 to Eugene, check in to motel.

MONDAY OCTOBER 29, EUGENE

Up early, drive down Highway 126 to 101—which will take us down the coast to San Francisco. Personality differences have begun to surface—four people in one car headed in the same direction for four different reasons.

Every place we pass through is like

something out of *Twin Peaks*....

We speed down the coast, occasionally hitting 110 mph through giant redwoods in northern California and all the way to Petaluma just north of San Francisco. Find motel, check in, sleep.

TUESDAY OCTOBER 30, PETALUMA

Call Obrero Hotel in San Francisco to see if they have room for us. "Yes, if we get there by midday!" Leave at 11 am, over the Golden Gate Bridge into San Francisco and find the Obrero about 3 minutes to 12....

WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 31, SAN FRANCISCO

It's really difficult trying to keep four people together. Beginning to feel drained at having to invest so much energy into keeping things running more or less on time and smoothly. Cancel planned visit to the Canyon Cinema but still manage a long and enjoyable conversation with Albert Kilchesty....

On Market Street I notice an ornate old theatre facade: The Orpheum. We wander in to look at the lobby then into the theatre to look at the interior. An amazing black musical show called "The Gospel at Colonus" begins.... Meet an unmarried mother from Detroit—she looks in bad shape and has a sad story....

THURSDAY NOVEMBER 1 SAN FRANCISCO

We head out of town over the Oakland Bay Bridge, through Berkeley then up Interstate 5 for the long drive to Portland to stay with Nils for the night.

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 2, PORTLAND

Breakfast with Nils, back onto I-5 to Seattle, meet Alan Howard at 911. Do a good show at 911 with a lot of questions from the audience about Stan Brakhage. After the screening we go to a couple of late-night gallery openings then to Rebar. Kristina's car is broken into, she loses her CD player and Richard loses his jacket and sunglasses. Sleep at Alan Howard's apartment.

Anxious day waiting for a print of JEAN GAGNÉ'S new film... RICHARD LOMAS meets me at the airport... They give me messages from INGRID LAE and MIKE HOOLBOOM... MIKE bubbles that it's the best show he's seen me do and, along with RICHARD, INGRID, CHRIS and SUSAN GALLAGHER, PETER LIPSKIS, IAN COCHRANE, JANICE BOWLEY and OLIVER KELLHAMMER we go to a nearby Spanish restaurant and bar... INGRID tells the story of how she worked her way from selling popcorn at Vancouver's Ridge Cinema to becoming an OMNIMAX projectionist. MARIA INSELL and ANN MARIE FLEMING join us later... Argue for 20 minutes with the desk clerk, call JIM BOND in Chicago and NORA in Regina... both ALAN HOWARD and ROBIN REIDY are great, and extremely helpful. I feel good about 911... we wait for KRISTINA BOZIC and NONI MARTIN who

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 3, SEATTLE

Kristina wakes me at 9:30 am. I am sick. We drive all over town looking for breakfast. They eat and I sleep in the back of the car. After breakfast we drive to West Seattle to pick up a new CD player. West Seattle is very strange—the locals seem to be either mutant or armed forces retirees, maybe both.

I-5 to Vancouver, check into the seedy Hotel Niagara then go to Railway Club and talk about things Canadian and American with some of the locals.

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 4, VANCOUVER

Ingrid Lae tells me she has been blacking out, probably as a result of too close a contact with high-powered projection rectifiers.... Kristina, Richard and Noni take me to the airport. Catch the plane and sit next to a cheese salesman from Regina who doesn't want to talk about cheese....

The next week is spent writing, organizing, meeting people and trying to contact Richard and Kristina in Chicago. Finally get hold of them on Friday night and Richard tells me the day after I left the car was totally destroyed in an accident in Montana....

WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 14, REGINA

Help Alan Zweig film Tom Walsh's band NOMA. That night I see NOMA perform at the Club and Geoff Yates tells me some guy has gone crazy with a gun in New Zealand and killed a whole lot of people.

THURSDAY NOVEMBER 15, REGINA

Up at 6 am, cab to airport, Air Canada to Toronto. Sit next to retired farmer and wife who are off to Florida and Disneyworld for the first time in their lives. Bus from airport to Yorkdale, subway to Spadina.... Call in at David Bennell's but he has already left for Australia. Meet Dirk de Bruyn who is staying

at David's. Dirk and I talk about independent cinemas in Australia, Canada and New Zealand and for about 3 hours then visit Pages Bookstore. I am looking for today's *NOW Magazine*—I find it but there is virtually no mention of my upcoming Toronto show. Very disappointing...

Have to dodge a hail of flying lead to get to the Innis screening—some guy has gone crazy with a gun on my block. Get to Innis and see a great program of undistributed films. Most like Bob Cowan's *Night Dreams*, Linda Feese's Super 8 films: *Fuck You*; *Communion One* and *Communion Two*, John Kneeler's *Speck*, Gail Mentlik's *Migraine* and Jane Elford's *Magic Man* and *Sea Drift*.

Run into Josie Massarella, John Porter, Jim Shedden and meet Bob Cowan.

Josie and I go to the Rivoli in search of old friends and a longer night—we end up having to stand through a not very good film program....

Walking Josie to the subway we run into Mike Hoolboom and Ann Marie Fleming. We talk, I walk with Josie to a streetcar then head back to the Rivoli to talk with Mike.

Walk to Karabanow up Spadina through Chinatown depressed about the lack of publicity for my Euclid show and wishing I had enough money to pull out of the screening. Decide to become a stockbroker.

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 16, TORONTO

Unsuccessfully attempt to call some film reviewers to drum up interest in my Euclid screening. Subway to railway station, GO Train to Oakville, cab to Sheridan College. Meet Phil Hoffman. He is fantastic, incredibly supportive of my work. Show program to Phil's Contemporary Image Making class and discuss media-related issues.

GO Train to Hamilton, VIA rail to St.

Catharines, walk to the Niagara Artists' Centre.

Meet up with Tobey Anderson, Peter Gibson, Alice Crawley, Bonny Brown, Mike D'Amico, Ruth Bartlett and various others at the opening of Panoramural, Emmanuel Avenel's projection installation. NAC seems to be reverting to the folksy, regional type artist-run centre it was before I arrived there. This causes me to think about change—how it is interesting to work to change something, accomplish a certain amount, implement new procedures then see it overturned virtually overnight. Makes me realize just how fragile my Invisible Cinema project is. Will always remember Tony Fomison saying to me, "If you don't do it, nobody else will."

Still, constant change is part of the mandate of artist-run centres. The heavy workload, small staff and long hours involved in running such centres really limits the staff's ability to become involved with serious research or curatorial and critical projects, with the result that neither the staff nor the centre can ever realize their full potential. Their problems are further exacerbated by the arts councils who fund and attempt to manipulate artist-run centres.

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 17, ST. CATHARINES

Call up virtually everyone I know in town, visit NAC, watch some of the ANNPAC Ontario meeting.... Back to NAC for the Dirk de Bruyn screening. Dirk's aesthetic and practices seem a little old in relation to what I have seen in North America. The screening generates some interesting comments from Clive Robertson and Derek Knight.

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 18, ST. CATHARINES

A high-speed car journey to Windsor. It's a beautiful afternoon, driving along the nar-

are driving out from Chicago to meet us... see CHARLES BURNETT'S *To Sleep With Anger*... Meet NILS BENSON, the projectionist at the Northwest Film and Video Centre... Cross paths with KEN KESEY and his bus Further at the beginning of his next jaunt across the United States... manage a long and enjoyable conversation with ALBERT KILCHESTY... stay with NILS for the night... meet ALAN HOWARD at 911. Do a good show. at 911 with a lot of questions from the audience about STAN BRAKHAGE... KRISTINA'S car is broken into, she loses her CD player and RICHARD loses his jacket and sunglasses. Sleep at ALAN HOWARD'S apartment... INGRID LAE tells me she has been blacking out... KRISTINA, RICHARD and NONI take me to the airport. RICHARD tells me the day after I left the car was totally destroyed... ALAN ZWIG film TOM WALSH'S band Noma... GEOFF YATES tells me some guy has gone crazy with a gun... Call in at DAVID BENNELL'S but he has already left for Australia. Meet DIRK DE BRUYN who is staying at DAVID'S... Most like BOB COWAN'S *Night Dreams*, LINDA FEESEY'S Super 8 films: *Fuck You*; *Communion One* and

row coastal strip between the Niagara Escarpment and Lake Ontario, up Highway 403 past Hamilton, 6 to the 401 to Windsor. See some interesting cloud formations and very strange, almost supernatural light phenomena just east of London....

MONDAY NOVEMBER 19, WINDSOR

Wake up after a night of intermittent sleep, run some errands with Peter before visiting the art school, looking through some studios and talking with students.

TUESDAY NOVEMBER 20, WINDSOR

Driving through the dirty, reddish-brown chemical haze hanging low over both cities, Peter and I cross the Ambassador Bridge from Windsor into Detroit. We can't help but comment on the North American fetish for personal hygiene despite the filth of the cities they live in. It is virtually impossible to walk through any large American city without becoming layered in atmospheric dirt. Visit John King's bookstore. Buy a hardcover edition of Janet Frame's *Intensive Care*. Return to Windsor for my screening at the School of Visual Arts. A superb screening with a lot of discussion around issues of appropriation, culture and difference. Later Peter and I talk for hours about notions of universality and difference. Peter emphasizes the possibility of transcendence through poetics.

WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 21, WINDSOR

Catch the 9:50 am VIA Rail service to Toronto, past southwestern Ontario wetlands through London, which appears quite big as the train rattles in braking through high-rise apartment blocks, close-quartered

urban dwellings and, eventually, the downtown business district.

East of London we pass through some beautiful woodlands laid barren in the late autumn greyness.

The train crawls through the ancient, wooded crags of the Niagara Escarpment as we begin to wind our way down to the shores of Lake Ontario.

In Toronto I subway back to the Karabanow, catch the last half hour of *Vertigo* on television, try to call the Euclid, then walk down there at 6:30 pm.

The projection booth at the Euclid is great, crowded with various projectionists from around town discussing lenses, schedules and other matters.

The audience for the screening is very interesting, virtually a representation of almost every faction of Toronto independent filmmaking. Not much talk after the screening—partly because I don't feel too good—a combination of advancing cold, laryngitis and a bad feeling about the Euclid. Most discussion is about filmmaking in New Zealand, a semi-historical overview of the Invisible Cinema and problems surrounding the distribution of independent films.

After the screening Alice Crawley, Ruth Bartlett, Mike D'Amico, Bonny Brown, Jim Anderson, Bruce and Kathy Elder, Jim Shedden and some of the Innis crowd go to the nearby Monarch Tavern then to the Café Diplomatico where we run into Mike Hoolboom, Phil Hoffman, Kika Thorne and Marc Glassman. We stay there until after 1 am then Mike, Kika and I head down to Mike's temporary abode. We talk for hours—Mike suggests that I tour Europe and go live in Vancouver....

THURSDAY NOVEMBER 22, TORONTO

Wake at midday, pick up cheque and mail from the Euclid, then to CFMDC to look at new films. Most like Mike and Kika's *Two* and K Daymond's *Nice Girls Don't Do It*, a film about female ejaculation....

The east is colder and harder than the west, but there is incredible artistic energy and commitment here. From the work I've seen it looks as if things are moving again in Toronto. The feeling around here after the Experimental Film Congress was so bad I thought that avant-garde filmmaking would die here. Now it seems to be stronger than ever.

Back at the Karabanow I wash, change clothes then go to Innis College for the Pat O'Neill screening. The work is visually interesting but seems to lack substance. Talk briefly with Kathy Elder then walk through Chinatown and along Queen to the "Escarpment studio" on Stafford St. Talk to Mike until 11:30. Mike gives me a copy of Marguerite Duras' *The Malady of Death*....

Observe that each time I come to Toronto it seems more like an American city. Buy a morning newspaper from a vendor on Bloor, get to Karabanow, and fall asleep reading about the demise of Maggie Thatcher.

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 23, TORONTO

Up at 6 am breakfast, then organize mail-out to New Zealand. My whole body aches. Running late I subway to Yorkdale then cab to airport. Nice flight, especially when climbing out of Pearson International over the wooded, lake-splashed farm lands north of Toronto. Finish reading *The Malady of Death* on the plane.

Chicago looks the cleanest I've ever seen

Communion Two, JOHN KNEELER'S *Speck*, GAIL MENTLIK'S *Migraine* and JANE ELFORD'S *Magic Man and Sea Drift*... Run into JOSIE MASSARELLA, JOHN PORTER, JIM SHEDDEN and meet BOB COWAN... I walk with JOSIE to a streetcar then head back to the Rivoli to talk with MIKE... Meet PHIL HOFFMAN. He is fantastic, incredibly supportive of my work... Meet up with TOBEY ANDERSON, PETER GIBSON, ALICE CRAWLEY, BONNY BROWN, MIKE D'AMICO, RUTH BARTLETT and various others at the opening of Panoramural, EMMANUEL AVENEL'S projection installation... Will always remember TONY FOMISON saying to me, "If you don't do it, nobody else will"... Call up VIRTUALLY EVERYONE I know in town... Back to NAC for the DIRK DE BRUYN screening... The screening generates some interesting comments from CLIVE ROBERTSON and DEREK KNIGHT... PETER and I cross the Ambassador Bridge from Windsor into Detroit... Visit JOHN KING'S bookstore. Buy a hardcover edition of JANET FRAME'S *Intensive Care*... PETER emphasizes the possibility of transcendence through poetics... After the screening ALICE CRAWLEY, RUTH BARTLETT, MIKE D'AMICO, BONNY BROWN, JIM ANDERSON, BRUCE and KATHY ELDER, JIM SHEDDEN and some of the INNIS CROWD go to the nearby Monarch Tavern then to the Café Diplomatico where we run into MIKE HOOLBOOM, PHIL



it—a crisp, clear smogless day. Catch El to Damen Ave. The sidewalks around Milwaukee and Damen are cleaner too. Strange—as Toronto gets dirtier and more American, Chicago cleans up and is beginning to look almost Canadian. Is this part of the New World Order?

See Jim Bond for a couple of minutes, he is just about to leave for a job in Los Angeles. Jim sets up the equipment I need then disappears. I am disappointed. Had been looking forward to spending time with Jim and filming him for the opening sequence of my North American film....

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 24, CHICAGO

Wake up in agony so sleep, rest and read until 2 pm. Get up, go back to Milwaukee Ave with Richard and dub off some film soundtracks. Call Terry Killips and Chicago Filmmakers but neither at home. Stay in and watch Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*.... Fall asleep into a night full of dreams.

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 25, CHICAGO

Wake up feeling well rested. Walking around a slightly more gentrified Wicker Park that old Chicago charm seems to ooze out from under every doorway, along every sidewalk and in almost every window I look into.

Shoot some footage then go to the Art Institute with Richard and Kristina to see the Ed Paschke show. The paintings are much better than the reproductions of this work I have previously seen—a good argument for painting. Wander down a hall of

medieval battle armour which starts me thinking about the human relationship with technology and the drive which seems to derive from these outfits for humans to become machines: Leger, Duchamp, Superman, psychedelics, the Six Million Dollar Man, and Virtual Realities.

El back to Milwaukee Ave and screen a print of *The Day the Earth Stood Still*....

MONDAY NOVEMBER 26, CHICAGO

Phone Chicago Filmmakers, Noni, Richard and Ed Video. Stay in late reading *Intensive Care* then out onto Milwaukee Ave into another great Chicago day. The avenue is wet with drizzle and thronging with the activity of store men unloading trucks, panhandlers, the usual mix of all types and a constant stream of traffic heading in all directions.

Call Fred Camper. We have an interesting talk ranging across North American avant-garde cinemas, Chicago Imagism and the Casper David Freidrich show at the Art Institute....

TUESDAY NOVEMBER 27, CHICAGO

Wake up to pouring rain. Outside there is a creepy feeling everywhere. Visit Chicago Filmmakers, dinner with Richard, Kristina and Noni. Noni tells me that the Centenary of Wounded Knee is coming up this December 29. Bus back to Jim's who calls in at 12:30 am to tell me that the screen is up in LA. We talk for a while, wish each other luck, then goodbye until next time.

WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 28, CHICAGO

Up at 5 am, catch El to O'Hare, Air Canada to Toronto, bus to VIA Rail Station, Subway to bus station, bus to Guelph. Arrive like a straw man about to fall apart at the seams, can barely stand and I am incapable of holding a conversation. Kevin Hogg takes me to my accommodations, London House, an excellent bed and breakfast. Rest and read a little more of *Intensive Care* then back to Ed Video for my show.

Great screening at Ed, wonderful hosts and audience. Talk and drinks with Kevin and Pauline Hogg and Charlie Fox later.

THURSDAY NOVEMBER 29, GUELPH

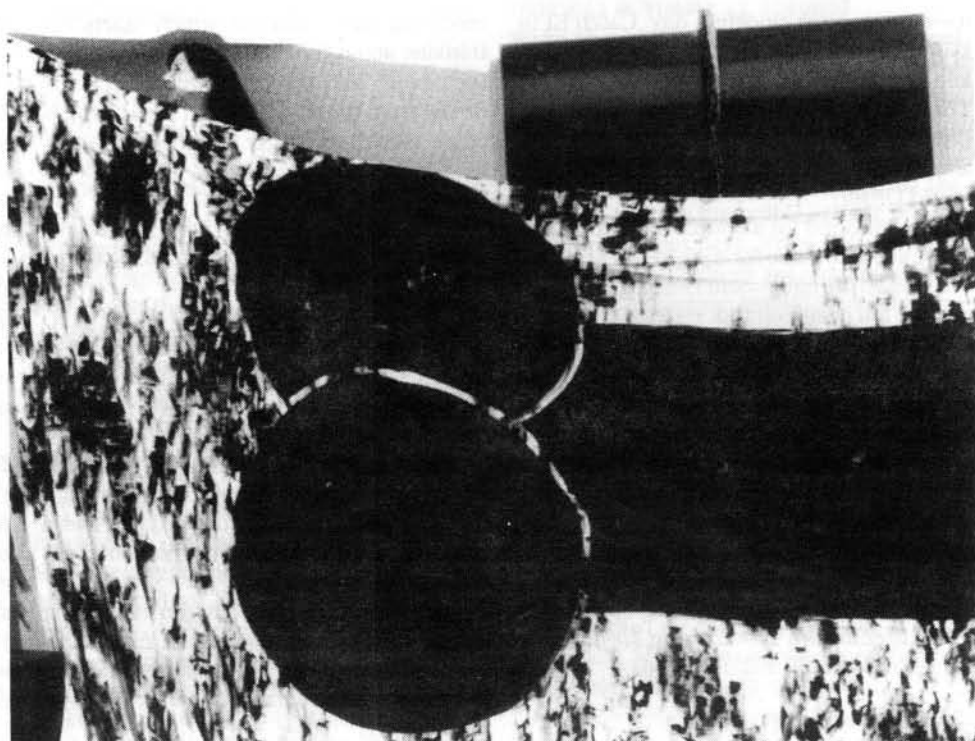
Up early, breakfast then walk through lightly falling powder snow to Ed. Run into Kevin on Wyndham St. with his High 8 video camera—he chases me around downtown shooting footage. Coffee at Ed with Nancy Hallis and Kevin then Kevin videotapes me walking to VIA Rail Station, buying ticket, boarding train then departing.

Arrive Toronto, call CFMDC and AGO then wander around Queen, Dundas and Chinatown. Subway to Yorkdale, bus to airport. Air Canada to Regina, get home about 10 pm, read accumulated letters, Independent Eye and try to figure out a way to get to Wounded Knee next month.

Martin Rumsby is an independent filmmaker and curator from New Zealand and currently living in Regina.

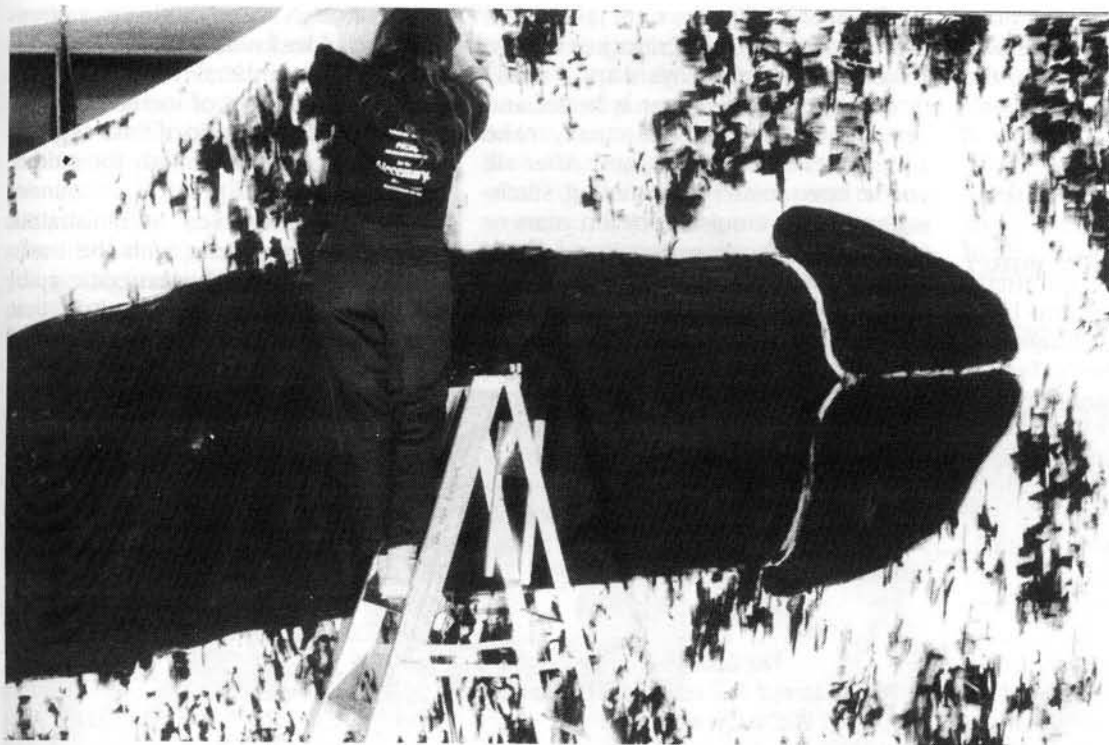
HOFFMAN, KIKA THORNE and MARC GLASSMAN... Most like MIKE and KIKA'S Two and K DAYMOND'S Nice Girls Don't Do It, a film about female ejaculation... I wash, change clothes then go to Innis College for the PAT O'NEILL screening... Talk briefly with KATHY ELDER... MIKE gives me a copy of MARGUERITE DURAS' The Malady of Death... fall asleep reading about the demise of MAGGIE THATCHER... See JIM BOND for a couple of minutes... Get up, go back to Milwaukee Ave with RICHARD and dub off some film soundtracks. Call TERRY KILLIPS and Chicago Filmmakers but neither at home. Stay in and watch a 16mm print of STEINBECK'S *Of Mice and Men*... go to the Art Institute with RICHARD and KRISTINA to see the ED PASCHKE show... LEGER, DUCHAMP, SUPERMAN, psychedelics, the SIX MILLION DOLLAR MAN, and Virtual Realities... Phone Chicago Filmmakers, NONI, RICHARD and Ed Video... Call FRED CAMPER. We have an interesting talk ranging across North American avant-garde cinemas, Chicago Imagism and the CASPER DAVID FREIDRICH show at the Art Institute... Visit Chicago Filmmakers, dinner with RICHARD, KRISTINA and NONI... Bus back to JIM'S... KEVIN HOGG takes me to my accommodations, London House, an excellent bed and breakfast... Great screening at Ed, wonderful hosts and audience. talk and drinks with KEVIN and PAULINE HOGG and CHARLIE FOX... Run into KEVIN on Wyndham St. with his High 8 video camera—he chases me around downtown shooting footage. Coffee at Ed with NANCY HALLIS and KEVIN... KEVIN videotapes me walking to VIA Rail Station, buying ticket, boarding train then departing.

POINT OF VIEW



WHY THE FILM YOU'RE MAKING

YOU'VE READ IT IN THE NEWSPAPERS, SEEN IT ON THE TUBE, WORN THE T-shirt and chowed down the candy bar, so hell, it must be true: the short film is dead. Worm food. Yep, filmmakers from coast to coast are abandoning their Bolexes and have stopped trying to get labs to process all their footage for free under the guise of a long "test." No more hanging around the *Beachcombers* set for short ends, or scratching into your intertitles hermetic death threats against local film programmers who dismissed your latest masterpiece as "adolescence in full flower." As one venerated bard put it, no more Bolex-in-the-park films. It's time to glue that camera back on the sticks where it belongs. And the films themselves? Could we imagine for a moment that the abandoning of the short film is tantamount to the end of independent cinema? Nope, following Tzara's dictum that the head is made round so thought can change direction, they've simply turned to the new look this fall: towards the loneliness of the long distance runner; towards parties where you need invitations or the right kind of hairdresser (hell, any kind of hairdresser) to get in; towards the ever-elusive



WON'T BE SEEN IN CANADA BY MIKE HOOLBOOM

PROMISE OF A MARKET FOR YOUR WORK "OUT THERE" IN
the vast reaches beyond the water where audiences quietly thirst for
a Canadian cinema—yours.

FLASHBACK

or The Future Isn't What It Used To Be

THE MONTH IS JUNE AND I'M HOLED UP IN THE WORST HOTEL in Vancouver, listening as the Tories bring down the next act in the unmaking of Canada. A few months ago they were calling it free trade, and before that the dismantling of VIA Rail. This month it's the Meech Lake accord. Next door Eddie, the retired jockey from Timmins, leaves his room for the last time—feet first. I found him hunched over a bottle of Wild Turkey. But 4,000 years of fermenting science can't do anything to hide the smell of a man rotting from the inside, and as I crawl back to my hovel in a place they used to call Terminal City—end of the line for avant garde sorts and jockeys weaned on booze in the place of winnings—I lie witness to a country surely ripping its guts apart in a public fix they're calling constitutional reform. Every day CBC wires up the country for a call-in, and every day the callers take another ballistic turn: today we hate the French; tomorrow we're sending Valentines; the next day it's Wells; good; bad; indifferent—everyone just wants to be the first to say "fuck you." Regionalism at work? That's not how it reads in the *New York Times*, where congressmen are urging their government to step in before everything gets out of

hand—an option most politicians have been sucking on in this country ever since there were seats to be sat on. On June 22 the inevitable happens—the big fix dies, Mulroney rolls snake eyes and the next day I get a letter from a friend about the marriage of a lost love to a stranger while Canada divorces. So nothing's really changed. Or has it?

BACK ON TRACK

or Where is Here?

AS AN AVANT GARDE FILMMAKER I was raised on division. Name me a filmmaker and I'll name you a dozen folk who would turn the knife for the price of breakfast in the Saigon Star. In more reflexive moments I figure these filmers, being closer to the shape of their medium, are somehow replaying formal cues in their own lives. As film is simply the separate and discrete progression of images that require a mechanical claw to be viewed as continuous motion—a motion most of us are interrupting anyways—it's no wonder we're all hun-

kered down in our respective corners, waiting to chop the heels of anyone who strays close enough for contact. In the middle of all this—Meech, Oka and other long-standing feuds—how is it that we've managed consensus (that's right folks, national consensus)? Having trooped through a dozen film co-ops across the country in the past couple of years the smell of corpses is unmistakable: the short film is dead. And in its place: the narrative feature. Why now, when this country couldn't seem further apart, should an independent cinema gathered around a number of regional centres each hundreds or thousands of miles apart from one another somehow manage to congeal into a collective yeasaying? Narrative—to tell the stories of a country that hasn't become one yet? Narrative—to lend a voice to a minority expression and insert it into a mainstream mode? Feature length because we're tired of getting programmed by some John Ford freak being pressured by Council to show anything Canadian so s/he cobbles together an overly long show of disparate shorts under a moniker the great unwashed may find amusing—you know, "Films by Hairy Men" or "Women with Double-Jointed Thumbs"—and there your pride and joy sits, lost in a swim of emulsion you personally despise, and when it's over it's only the funny film people remember. When was the last time you left the house to go see a ten-minute film play-

ing by itself? You never get taken seriously at parties. All the critics just want to write about Atom [Egoyan] and Patricia [Rozema] because bigger is better and besides, maybe you could actually make a film that could pay the rent. After all, you've been scratching, painting, stitching and dying emulsion for ten years or more with nobody noticing and along comes some upstart with three large reels and all of a sudden s/he's getting flown to Berlin and you're getting your phone cut off. It's obvious, isn't it? Short films are for students and masochists. After paying for those big posters and the craft services and the space and the crew, it's about as much trouble getting a feature together as a half-hour drama. Why not shoot the works? Be a real filmmaker. Live a little.

THE DOCUMENT

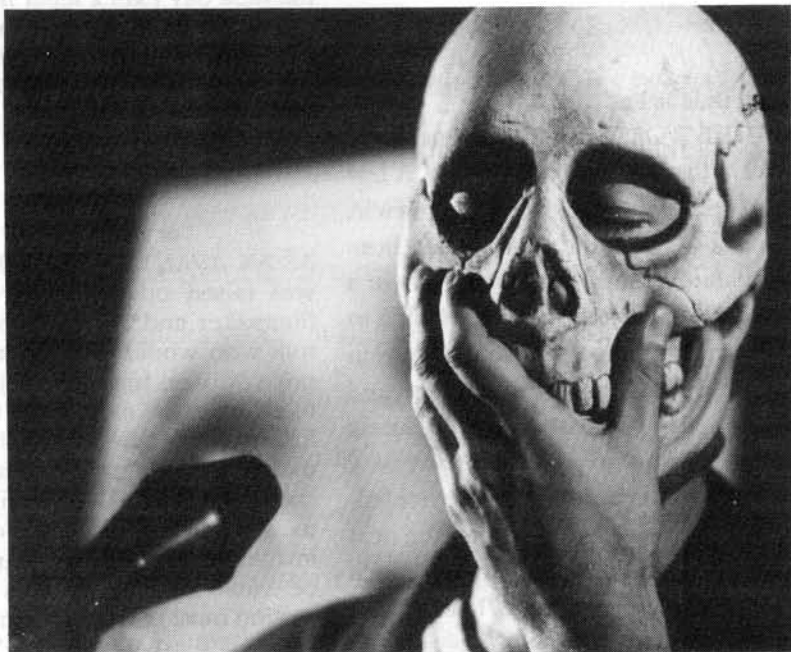
or How I Learned To Succeed In Filmmaking Without Really Trying

AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING occurred in Toronto in the winter of 1989-90. A few of you know about it because you asked to come and were told you couldn't. A few begged off, claiming prior commitments, and about forty stragglers in search of a co-op did finally gather. It was a LIFT meeting, this ascendent acronym short for Toronto's independent film co-op. It boasts a membership that's swollen past 400 members which it serves as an equipment access

centre, though it also publishes a newsletter, provides funding for multicultural types and members' films, puts up monthly screenings of members' work and is staffed by a group of folks as gifted as they are generous with their time. (This is not a paid political announcement, but some co-op administrators should be thrown out with the trash. You listen to their bureaucratic spiel while looking for a delete button, that one clean stroke to send them out of your life forever. Alas, they've been screw-mounted into the furniture. But not here.) So one night the LIFT board gathered and a letter was passed around by Don Booth. A member. The board picked it up, their eyes bulged, the room started to swim, and they realized the document they were looking at represented nothing less than THE FUTURE. Here's a slice of what they read that night:

"OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS, LIFT has matured into a sophisticated organization.... In doing so it has become a conduit for new filmmakers to learn their craft. As these new filmmakers mature, their productions become more sophisticated and their budgets increase. Soon, LIFT's small package of equipment and grants become insignificant components of the production and the filmmakers leave the co-op.... We must make a conscious decision to support the complex financial and production requirements of our increasingly sophisticated membership. This move, if made with care, will improve the quality of films that pass through our organization.... If LIFT does not pursue larger and more complex films it will remain a good place to start and a good place to leave. We should not lose our most successful members. If we choose to accept the challenge of more expensive and more complex filmmaking, then LIFT films will make a more substantial contribution to movie making in Canada, and it will be a contribution that the public will notice."

SUCCESSFUL? Sophisticated? Bigger = Better = Features = Where Do I Sign? He went on to dismiss ALL short films as training wheels for THE BIG FILM, the feature. All this is ridiculous, right? This dude has just dismissed maybe 98% of all the films ever made in this country—



anything less than 90 minutes, meaning almost all the independent films made anywhere any time. Throw out this bum. Give him the hook, the boots, the stirrup and piss on him. But hold on a minute. Nobody's laughing. Everybody's taking this EXTREMELY SERIOUSLY. Everyone's thinking: well, he has a point. He's a...well damn it, he's a philosopher if you get right down to it. So what happens? Hold the presses, hold your noses and call a special meeting to talk about

sucking on their eyes. The proof? Well, when Françoise [Picard] came to visit LIFT a couple of years back, it was with the express purpose of meeting Atom *et. al.* Haven't we heard this tune before? And what happens when the dance is over? The co-op goes on, with some room for a while longer for a difference learned in the necessities of a personal/public history no amount of meetings is about to smooth out. But the lean is clear: shorts are for kids, and as far as the

and film looks like 19th Century literature mostly, morality plays with murderous beginnings and sunset finishes. I always thought it was a question of hammering the same few words into the

I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE

THINKING. DOOMSAYER.

CYNIC. LOW-MINDED CRETIN.



the future of the co-op in terms of THIS letter. By invitation only, natch. The figuring was to bring everyone on board who wanted to do the feature thang, push enough of them into a room and the co-op's fortunes were bound to be going up, up, up. Feature drama *uber alles*.

Not that big changes were proposed. Nah, just simple things like rigging the joint for 35mm, letting feature types make free long distance calls, reshaping the staff. Ask not what you can do for the co-op but...hell, any mention of the evil 'c' word was quickly dismissed as too much time spent between the electrodes. This is Toronto, after all. The only way to survive here is to hitch your straps to the one moving quickest up the stairway to heaven—or Telefilm, whichever comes first. Back in meeting land I was informed the only reason the *avantgarde* was tolerated at LIFT—indeed, existed at all—was due to the efforts of Atom and Patricia and Peter [Mettler] and Bruce [MacDonald] and all the other folks doing the feature jig. The rest of us were little more than vampires

grown-ups go, it's not how long you make it, it's how many times you can make it long. But enough of Toronto already. Let's change the scenery.

TERMINAL CITY: VANCOUVER or The Worms Crawl In and The Worms Crawl Out

SARAH'S ON GRANVILLE HUSTLING up some change. She tells me, "Sex is an emotion in motion. Love is what you make it and who you make it with." Sure 'nuff, but what about the images that glare out at us from every turn? Are they just so much backwater or what? How does an independent film take shape in the midst of so much jetsam and flotsam, not to mention career opportunities? Sarah again: "It's bullshit man. It's all bullshit. Look Mike, you're alright to talk to but your films might as well be playing in the next theatre. I like a good story."

"So did McLuhan," I'm thinking as I see her off to the loop. What else would prompt him to write that each new medium would take as its content the one preceding? So TV is filled with films

mind's soft part, that we live in the reality of our descriptions or the sentimental feeling that comes with the old questions and the old answers. But in the midst of a political dissolution, how is it that a motley group of sociopaths could find themselves heading on the same slim road towards the same slim desire? Perhaps this was just my own over-worked imagination, nourished in the thick soup of paranoia that closed the Toronto Filmmakers' Co-op, CEAC and finally the Funnel. Maybe it was time to gather the evidence, haul some hard facts in the place of conjecture. What were people doing around here anyways?

SIFTED EVIDENCE

ANN MARIE FLEMING IS A YOUNG, extraordinarily talented *avantgarde* filmer from Vancouver. She'd finished three (public) shorts which had gained some notoriety, prizes, success. She took her ten-minute film opus to André Bennett at Cinephile, the patron saint of the Canadian independent feature, asking for



**THIS IS A MOVIE THAT HAS TO
BE SEEN. IT'S EVEN GOT A
PLOT.**

\$\$\$ to make a long film. He did. She did. See it soon in a theatre near you. After finishing her first feature *Low Visibility* on Council grants, Pat Gruben turned Telefilm's head long enough to make *Deep Sleep*, a smooth-looking 35mm 90-minute \$2.2 million family drama. Three years after making his feature length *avantgarde* documentary about the fire-bombing anarchists the Vancouver Five,

Oliver Hockenfull is back working on a feature length dramatic work. After romping naked through the sand dunes in *A Place With Many Rooms*, Fumiko Kiyooka is working on a feature-length film. Mary Daniels has just finished her first film since leaving film school, a feature-length work showing a disparate collection of train travellers as they make their way across America. Marek Cieszewski has just finished his first film in seven years, feature-length of course. Chris Gallagher, once the avatar of the structural short, is working on a feature-length drama about a bloke who loses his memory and returns to Germany to relive World War II.

Am I leaving anybody out? You bet. But we *avantgarde* types have learned to look out from the wrong end of the telescope, narrowly interested eyes finding like-minded emulsion benders. These are the folks making up Pacific *avantgarde*, not exclusively mind, but a fair slice of the action. Everybody's noggin is clattering with the same idea. Just a coincidence? Lists not being my particular obsession, we turn back to Don Booth in Toronto as a co-op, or part of it, gropes towards the future. I can still see him stoking the feature rap, mixing metaphors on his way to some gram-marian's idea of hell, claiming he had a list. A list! I'm flashing McCarthy, one final witch hunt to give the *avantgarde* a last flush, but no, this hermetic, infinitely obscure, invisible cinema is no use even discussing. Don's got a list of independent Toronto folk working on features RIGHT NOW—and he says there's forty names on it. Can you imagine it? Forty features of Protestant fury from Hogtown. Three months later I clamber on board Greyhound 5507 only to find things look just the same in Vancouver. A narrative, feature-length consensus. Made in Canada. Is this the beginning of something? Is there a doctor in the house? This filmmaker needs an enema.

**CASE STUDY #1
The Beast in Hollywood**

CONSENSUS NIPPING AT MY HEELS I head south on a sunny AMTRAK train that'll land me in the heart of the beast. No time for fucking around: if Canadian cinema is headed towards Hollywood the only gig left is to round up the wagon train and push south, hoping a lungful of what L.A. folk euphemistically term oxygen will rack this thing into focus. I'm met there by Al Razutis, who at 6'4" and 200+ lbs with a crazy van filled with guns, booze and boards looks more like a surfer on the lam than an *avantgarde* type, but this is Amerika after all. As we barrel down the freeway of a city Joan Didion termed "the intersection of nothing" I realize anything is not only possible here, it's likely. Think the worst. Then roll down the window and have a look outside.

At night, with the military choppers crossing overhead, Al spins a yarn of origins, of the very beginnings of the Vancouver film co-op. As he continues

to speak I feel the last few bits of the puzzle drop into place.

RAZUTIS "In 1979 Françoise Picard decided to create a network of film production co-ops across Canada. She contacted people in various cities across the country and said, 'I want you guys to organize yourself and send a delegation to this conference I'm setting up.' We had a giant meeting at Video In, wondering if we should go because it wasn't a grassroots situation at all. We weren't a group, we hadn't asked for a meeting, and as far as I can tell neither did anybody else in Canada. There were no groups. This was all Françoise's idea. Peg Campbell, Gordon Kidd and I went to this conference where we met representatives from most of the provinces. Panels were set up to discuss needs, problems and conditions of the independent film sector. She was trying to bring everyone in Canada together in a single network, that was her big idea."

HOOLOOM "And to try to map out some kind of strategy—where are we and then what are we going to do?"

RAZUTIS "Yeah, but it's my feeling that the strategy was already in place before the meeting. She set the agenda for the meeting, what the panels were going to discuss and who was going to sit on them. It was a set-up beneath the liberal motto 'Canada Stand Together, Understand Together.' At the end of the meeting the message was clear: it's time for everyone to form production co-ops. We got back to Vancouver and founded Cineworks, a production co-op that would deal with *avantgarde* film and political documentaries. We didn't have any money, so we incorporated and did some screenings. The idea was to set up an administrative shell and apply to Council for funds, which is what everyone was encouraged to do. It was a blatant example of dictating from the top, creating a network of conference-going independents, and with her grant policy Picard could dictate what people should make and how they were going to make it."

HOOLOOM "But you must have been involved on a local level with filmmakers who decided out of their own interests to come together to make the co-op happen. All of the co-ops I know rely a good deal on volunteer labour and the goodwill of its members."

RAZUTIS "Yes I participated in the beginning, but I got clearer and got out. Cineworks continued like a lot of other co-ops to do nothing. Films were not produced. The co-ops were an attempt to form a 16mm independent craft industry that would service commercial cinema in the end. I felt that all the co-ops would fall into that trap and that's what Françoise wanted. Cineworks had an office which was usually empty adjacent to the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution West. It was a dead zone. It was an equipment access facility with little equipment. And without money or facilities you couldn't do much beyond attending conferences and

writing newsletters. It was pretty dismal. But the Council was setting aside a significant amount of money each year to administer these empty spaces, and I don't know if things have really changed much. To this day the co-op fiasco was the result of poor thinking. You can't create some idealistic network of co-ops without it coming from the community."

THERE IT IS. Co-op? Not if it's stage-managed from Ottawa. Which begs the question of the "independent" in independent film. If the architectures of independent film were cut from the same masterminded cloth, then where exactly are community needs, aspirations, will? But this is Kanada after all, where taking our marching orders from a centralized government centre is simply business as usual. You want culture? Set up a federal department. Feature films? Meet Telefilm Canada. Then establish regional centres which are smaller versions of the honcho machine in Ottawa. And the members of these centres in turn reflect the local bureaucracy that surrounds them. Is it any accident that the best things many of our co-ops produce is their Canada Council applications? When the beast speaks of the purpose of the co-ops being the establishment of 16mm craft shops to service the industry, is this such a far cry from the feature-length narrative consensus we're presently witness to? The way Al tells it, we were heading for features all along, the co-op consensus born with one ear in the ground and the other in Ottawa, or Telefilm, or maybe the Jewison school for upwardly mobile filmmaking. Maybe it's true what they say: the more things change, the more they look American. Why is it the only thing filmmakers really seem interested in talking about in this country is money? Is it only my imagination, or is it really true that filmmakers ten years ago never had accountants or tax numbers or lab accounts? Or is this just the gruesome spew of a mind at the end of its non-narrative tether? Don't get me wrong, I like stories as much as the next metronome. I've been known to twist a few yarns myself, and there's nothing wrong with 90 minutes, either. Or 1 minute. Or 10 minutes. I'm just wondering how we somehow all wound up on the same golf course. The waiting here is ridiculous. But if, as Al suggests, this was the purpose all along, well...

CASE STUDY #2

Wolf Man In The Emerald City

BY NOW IT'S OBVIOUS I have to clear out of these evil metropolises if I'm ever going to catch my bearings on this thing, so I lurch into the Regina bus station at six in the morning, looking a bit like I'd run all the way from Los Angeles. I'm met there by Roy Cross, who drops a coin in my cup before realizing he knows me. It's off for breakfast before setting me down in front of an hombre who is beyond a doubt **THE QUINTESSENTIAL CANADIAN FILMMAKER**. That's right folks, I've scoured the countryside and finally found him lurking beneath the Regina scrub. While I thought I'd caught glimpses of this shape before, it all flowered full in Regina that morning.

His name is Richard Kerr, last seen on these shores hawking his lovely film about the U.S. military. I find him hunkered down beneath the Regina pine, wielding an acetylene torch in one hand and a fistful of photos in the other, all in various states of decomposition. The past isn't what it used to be. Or the future for that matter. We talk, and he begins to turn a tale of such gorgeous dementia, such schizophrenic splendour, that I know I've come home.

There's a few things I ought to explain first. Richard isn't one of those excremental film types—you know, the ones who drop a film between daybreak and lunchtime, tugging it out of a crease in the foreskin. It took him five years to get *Last Days of Contrition* wrestled into an answer print and three years for *On Land Over Water*. So imagine my surprise when he tells me he's finished **TWO NEW FILMS**. Not only has he finished them, but he's decided not to release them—this from one of Kanada's all-time great emulsion movers, someone who has set up shows of seriously obscure work in Canadian locales that don't even show up on the map. Intrigued, I finish off the beer and head south towards the university, the unveiling. We arrive. The lights go down. It starts. Everything changes, and I know why I'm here. And why these films aren't leaving Regina. And what it means to wear the cross of the *avantgarde*, to operate under erasure. In Toronto it would be just another case of anality gone mad, the only obvious response to the politically correct morality hit squad.

I
C O N T I N E
But in Regina this kind of retention means something else entirely. Absolutely.

It would be giving away too much to describe in any detail the tumult of those forty minutes. Suffice to say that these films do not make even a passing gesture at literary traditions. They are formalist from the bootstraps up, turning worlds of colour, light and sound which we term, in a moment of linguistic anaemia, "abstract." Gone is any pretence at social engagement or the exposition of male myths that pervades Richard's earlier work, or even the razor-sharp documentary stillness of his previous incarnations. These new turns are frankly inspired by the lad who took abstract expressionism off the map and turned it into a world of cinema, Stan Brakhage. So why are these two films gathering karma on the shelves of a prairie film department while a portion of the small and sectarian universe of *avantgarde* film hankers after the next Kerr ration? Well, it's only a guess, but little in Richard's past prepares us for these colour fields. If he had to find within himself whatever is required to make this leap of faith, he'd have to be wondering who else was around to share this leap. Especially now. Political agendas don't mix well with modernism of any stripe, and who needs to be busted out of a town you'd left half a dozen years ago because, for a few months at least, it seems you were content to sit while the winds raged behind you, watching the life and times of Colour?

Okay, so formalism aside, you're thinking, "THIS is the quintessential Canadian filmmaker? Learning chops from the godfather down south?" But wait. There's more, because besides tripping on the light fantastic, Richard's also setting into motion a production of a very different sort. You guessed it. A feature-length dramatic film with actors and crew and donuts. A film that will bear NO relation to his short *avantgarde* work. Laughing, he hauls out acting resumes from Hollywood: he's running ads in the trade papers and the names keep rushing in. From Los Angeles to Regina. Two kinds of filmmaking—it's the reason we have two eyes after all. A perfect split. A perfectly Canadian filmmaker. You see, he doesn't want to have his cake and eat it too. It seems that

he's going to make two cakes. And if the first isn't to your tastes, there's always door number two.

Why The Film You're Making Won't Be Seen In Canada

WHAT'S A SCHIZOPHRENIC to do but nod yes twice? Yes to the *avantgarde*, yes to the feature jolt. As the audience for the *avantgarde* slowly lopes its way into the sunset, bored by too many government artists showing in the safe houses and waiting to get stuffed inside someone's essential cinema xmas list to be force-fed to undergrads, it's clear the theatrical option for the *avantgarde* is just about finished. The co-ops aren't interested. Festivals don't care. The cinemathèques figure they're doing you a favour if they show it. The rep houses laugh at the suggestion, and we needn't mention first-run theatres. After the Funnel put a gun to its head there remains just one theatre left in Canada running regular screenings of *avantgarde* work: Innis College. Given that the public face of the *avantgarde* relies largely on university/art college rentals, it's no accident that Innis is housed in the University of Toronto, their theatre provided free of charge. It all sort of fits. Dead filmmakers, academic residues, critical silence, all echoing the social retreat signalled by the return of modernism in film more usually deemed "structural." These self-enclosed works transferred the autonomy of the romantic subject to the thing itself, into objects that were less windows into another world of experience than a world unto themselves. Forget the war. Or gender equalities. Or race relations. Or the host of other foul-mouthed outsiders clawing through the remains of a white man's burden. There is no social intervention in the structural film and few genitals: the point here is not intercourse but autonomy. Its most obvious home is that institution which has quickly filled the landscape over the course of the 20th Century, marking its complicity with the advent of modernism itself: the art museum. The problem is that museums don't feel film is art—if it moves, shoot it, stuff it and give it to the taxidermists—but moving pictures don't belong in these churches. Or haven't much. Film academics cut their chops from American/European features

while art academics/curators take their cue from the Frida Kahlo crowd. Is it any wonder museums don't think film is "art"? Our systems of education have cut them apart, but maybe this is the way it was supposed to be. No chance of a sell out here—nobody's buying. Stay clean, work a day job, live in shit, make small movies which every few years can be collected together to show other people who make small movies. Do not pass go. Do not collect \$200. If the museums won't have it and the theatres won't consider it, then where are we? The underground? Wrong again, Jack. We're not in the underground, we're nowhere.

So you've sold your Bolex to some pimply no-nothing who's wired on enough crack to light up the west end. You've incorporated, got your tax numbers, found an accountant, scammed the arts council for some \$\$\$ and parleyed that into a bit more from the feds—squeezed the last few loons out of 'em before they decided their submarines need a new paint job. You shoot, you chop and there it is, still wet behind the sprocket holes, your first feature. Not for you the hermetic obscurity of artisanal expression. Not for you the strictures of an autonomous formalism. No siree, we're all populists now. We make it for the people, complete with poster, press kit, schmooze parties, festival invites and distributors who do more than send you a form letter once a year informing you about the dues you owe. You shop it around, talk the good talk and you believe in this image, because the bottom line is: THIS IS A MOVIE THAT HAS TO BE SEEN. It's even got a plot. It's got characters and a beginning and middle and end. You are sitting on a commercial MONSTER, a breakthrough success, a film that will rewrite cinematic history. You get a distributor. You open in Toronto, in a real theatre. Okay, it's a Cineplex, but they're playing Rambo next door so it must be legit. With reviews in real papers. And your poster looks great in the lobby. And then?

Then, nothing happens. People don't come, just like they didn't come for all the other features made in this country. It runs for a week, maybe two, and closes. Dismal attendance. They try it in Vancouver, where it flops. Quebec isn't touching Anglo shit after the Meech thing, so you try some festivals, where it's lost amidst the other four billion



change is through political will. Cultural tariffs. Content quotas. We gotta look after our own first, then let the Americans screw the vacuum cleaners back into our banks. Fuck the Tories. Fuck the Liberals. We need a party we can all get invited to, one that is willing to just say no to Amerika. It's never happened before, so what could possibly make anyone feel it's going to happen now after Free Trade and sending troops to uphold feudal aristocracies in Kuwait and opportunists like Bourassa and Bouchard running the show? I pick up the paper in the morning and think, "What could possibly make a difference after this? The personal columns?"

I GOTTA RUN. FACT IS, I am working on a feature length dramatic film with actors and a script and a crew and a set and arts council money. Trying to sell out, but not certain if I really know how. Tired of waiting tables and washing floors, of shoot-outs on the treadmill of

YOU LISTEN TO THEIR BUREAUCRATIC SPIEL WHILE LOOKING FOR A DELETE BUTTON, THAT ONE CLEAN STROKE TO SEND THEM OUT OF YOUR LIFE FOREVER. ALAS, THEY'VE BEEN SCREW-MOUNTED INTO THE FURNITURE.

offerings. So you sell it to pay-TV for \$10,000 and call it a day. Go home to lick your wounds.

I know what you're thinking. Doom-sayer. Cynic. Low-minded cretin. I'm the kind who thinks if shit were gold Canadians wouldn't have assholes. But it's not true, folks. I've done the rounds. I've gone to the theatres and sat with the three other insomniacs while the Canadian film rolled, the walls shaking from all that Rambo energy next door. The sad fact is that we don't have a place to show our work in this country. Look at the Pacific Cinematheque. They're getting operating money from the Canada Council to run a theatre housed in a

building donated by the city and what are they showing? Mostly foreign features. Made available through government subsidy. Another typically Canadian enterprise. It's no secret that our theatre chains are owned by the American majors. And our tax \$\$\$ are paying for a public television that includes a healthy slice of American programming. These be the facts. Widgets you can be making, but if there is no place to put them, well, a nod's as good as a wink to an audience that doesn't exist. Or a blind filmmaker. Or a blind politician. Little has been done to effect distribution/exhibition of Canadian film in our own country, and the ONLY way this could

the ~~avantgarde~~ *avantgarde*. When I think of all the people/groups/events that have tried to make a difference in this process, what comes to mind is the gathering of consensus, of coming to like-minded conclusions and issuing reports. Of committee meetings and delegates. Conferences and networking. All horseshit. What we need is the manufacturing of dissent. ACT-UP for film. Of course that would mean having to talk to other filmmakers. Questions of community. And we all know that ain't going to happen here soon. Not in Canada. Not now.

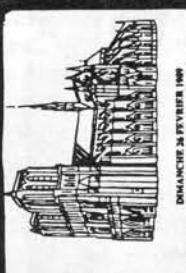
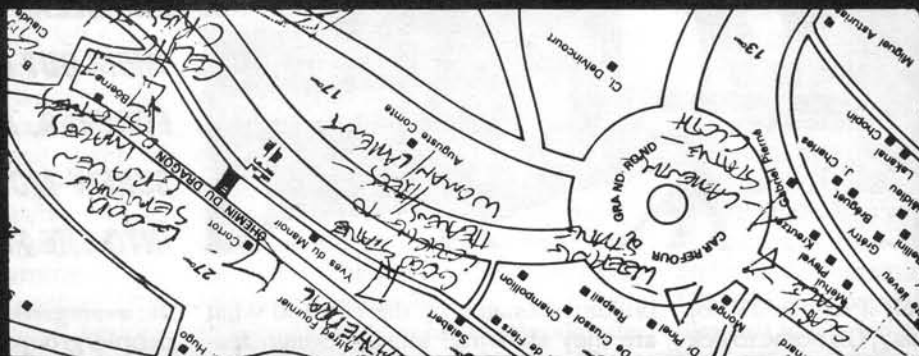
Mike Hoolboom is a Canadian filmmaker.



SHIVA

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Handwritten symbols and letters on a piece of paper. The symbols include a large 'P' with a vertical line through it, a 'Z', and several 'B's and 'R's. There are also some letters that look like 'T' or 'U'. The paper has some text written on it, including '1, 2, 3, 4' and '1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100'. There is also a small note '1, 2, 3, 4' and '1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100'.

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STACCATO



LITTLE PICTURES MAKE ME CRAZY





JOHN
GAGNE

DOMINANTE
GREEN

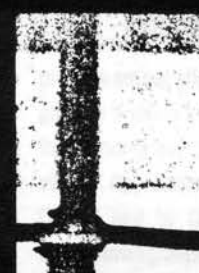
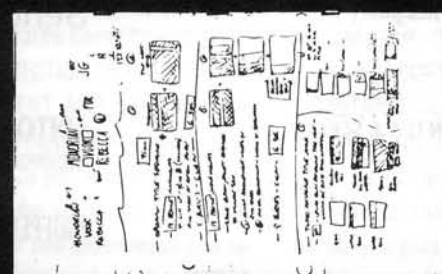
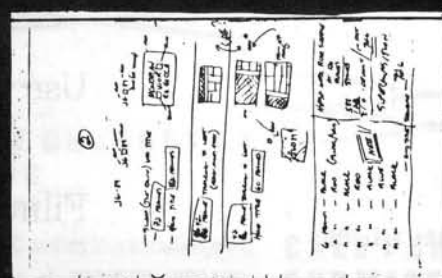
ROSMARIST

SPIJSTRAAT

AN ANGEL
LIVES/WORLS
AT

66 ACHTSBURGWAAL

THE PEOPLE IN
AMSTERDAM ARE
FLAME. IT'S A
SALOON TOWN
PORT TOWN. AND
SEE THE RED CROS
SEE THE RED AN
WHITE STRIKES A
LIGHTS. HEAR TA



Collage by
JOHN
GAGNE



JOHN GAGNÉ BIOGRAPHY

John Gagné is an experimental filmmaker of the lowest order. His interests, both Vulgar and Arcane, have reduced him to luscious and violent investigations of the Kinetic. His films have been screened in a number of festivals and shows, most recently at Canada House in London, England and La Cinémathèque Française in Paris, France.

JOHN GAGNÉ FILMOGRAPHY

All films in 16mm

(A) = Animation

THE GREAT GIG IN THE SKY

1980-81 Col. 4-1/2 min. (A)

SEEKER

1982 Col. 3 min. (A)

ILLUMINATI

1982 Col. 3 min. (A)

RAIN wwRAIN

1983-84 Col. 7 min. (A)

THE MYSTERY OF CARL E. LaFONG

1986-88 B&W 10 min.

RATTLE (Nothing to Slaughter)

Made with Jim Irons

1987 B&W 8 min.

NAME YOUR POISON IT'S A SCREAM

CHANNEL No. 5

1988 B&W 4-1/2 min.

STACCATO

1989 B&W 9 min. Silent

MONDRIAN VOOR REBECCA

1989 Col. 3 min.

THE RED HOTEL

1989 B&W 20 min.

ANTÉDILUVIEN

Made with Anna Proulx

1990 Col. 7-1/2 min.

BLUE VENICE RED HOTEL

Made with Sandra Reid

1991 Col. 6 min. Silent

ELEMENTS

Beginning with this issue, the Independent Eye features a regular "column" entitled Elements.

The column is an open forum for creative work.

Submissions might include interesting visuals or graphics, creative writing, excerpts of film

scripts, notes from productions...

Use your imagination.

Filmmakers are invited to contribute.

Send material to:

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE—ELEMENTS

INDEPENDENT EYE

Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre

67A Portland St.

TORONTO, Ontario

M5V 2M9

CORRECTIONS

EYE RECEIVES GRANT

EYE ON NEWSSTANDS

GST

STAFF CHANGES AT CFMDC

ATLANTIC TOUR OF CFMDC

FILMS

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

U.S. DISTRIBUTION GUIDE

NEW U.S. DISTRIBUTION

COALITION

WE REMEMBER

CORRECTIONS

Readers of the EYE will note an error in the numbering of the previous issue, "The Critical Eye: All Review Issue." The issue should have been numbered Volume 12, #1 (rather than Volume 11, #4). We apologize for any confusion this may have caused.

through the GRANTS TO PERIODICALS PROGRAM OF THE ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL. This grant will permit us to begin paying writers a small honorarium for their contribution. We are currently awaiting word of an application to the WRITING AND PUBLICATIONS SECTION OF THE CANADA COUNCIL.

EYE ON NEWSSTANDS

The Independent Eye has joined the CANADIAN MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION OF CANADA. Among the benefits provided by membership to this organization is a distribution service. Look for the EYE on newsstands across Canada starting with this issue.

EYE RECEIVES GRANT

The Independent Eye is pleased to acknowledge the receipt of its first grant,

GST

Effective January 1, 1991, the CFMDC must charge the Goods and Services Tax on all Canadian film rentals and purchases. Any member filmmaker who is registered should inform the Centre of his/her GST registration number to ensure proper credit and accounting. For further information contact Mary Becker at the Centre.

STAFF CHANGES AT CFMDC

The CFMDC wishes to acknowledge the contribution of JENNIFER HIBBARD, RICK MILLER and RYAN TAKATSU, who worked at the Centre through the fall under the SECTION 25 PROGRAM OF EMPLOYMENT AND IMMIGRATION. Their efforts included the cataloguing of the CFMDC's past records into an archive and the publication of a mini-catalogue of new experimental film releases. We also say farewell to KRISTA GREVSTAD, whose contract to work on media literacy programs has ended. Thanks to all.

The CFMDC welcomes SUSAN OXTOBY on a one-year contract as Special Projects Coordinator. Susan will be working on a number of community outreach projects to increase the Centre's profile both nationally and internationally.

ATLANTIC TOUR OF CFMDC FILMS

DANCING AS FAST..., a program of eight CFMDC films, will tour the Atlantic provinces starting February 14 and continuing through to March 21, 1991. A sampling of recent work, the program will travel to six different venues including FREDERICTON, MONCTON and SACKVILLE (New Brunswick), CHARLOTTETOWN (Prince Edward Island), HALIFAX (Nova Scotia) and ST. JOHN'S (Newfoundland).

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

The LIAISON OF INDEPENDENT FILMMAKERS OF TORONTO (LIFT) and the ONTARIO FILM DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION are pleased to announce the second year of the MULTICULTURAL DRAMATIC FILM FUND. This two-year pilot project is looking for script development and production proposals from new and emerging filmmakers. Documentary and video projects are not eligible. Priority will be given to projects from First Nation, visible minority and Latin American individuals. Applicants must be residents of Ontario and be Canadian citizens or landed immigrants. For more information, contact Lloyd Wong at LIFT, 345 Adelaide Street West #505, Toronto, Ontario, M5V 1R5, (416) 596-6749.

including the popular festival guide to U.S. and international film and video festivals.

1990 on independent media distribution which dealt with the effects of changing media formats, audience development techniques, funding initiatives, new technologies and the evolving face of television. IMDA's main activities are networking, resource sharing, advocacy, and the development of new audiences and distribution strategies for independent work. For membership or more information, contact Bob Gale, IMDA/Art Base, P.O. Box 2154, St. Paul, MN 55102, (612) 298-0117.

WE REMEMBER

U.S. avant-garde filmmaker and long-time CFMDC member ED ESMILLER died in California last July at the age of 65.

He will be remembered for his richly textured films and videos, which have received extensive critical attention.

U.S. DISTRIBUTION GUIDE

The ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT VIDEO AND FILMMAKERS (AIVF), a U.S. trade association for independent producers and individuals involved in independent media, is publishing a comprehensive distribution guide, available for \$19.50 (U.S.) from AIVF Publications, 625 Broadway, 9th floor, New York, NY 10012, (212) 473-3400. They also publish many other titles,

NEW U.S. DISTRIBUTION COALITION

The INDEPENDENT MEDIA DISTRIBUTORS ALLIANCE (IMDA) is a coalition of commercial and non-commercial distributors across the U.S. The coalition was formed out of BUILDING BRIDGES, a four-day session in March,

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The Ontario Arts Council offers grants to professional artists who are residents of Ontario, working in the following media:

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- assistance for new projects or work-in-progress.

Deadlines: February 1, August 15

■ PHOTOGRAPHY

- exhibition assistance towards the cost of an upcoming exhibition.

Deadlines: February 15, April 15, June 15, August 15, October 15, December 15

■ VIDEO

- to assist with the production of original video art.

Deadlines: February 1, August 15

■ ELECTRONIC MEDIA

- to facilitate creation of works of art using electronic media; to facilitate research of potential significant benefit to the arts community into the creative possibilities of electronic media.

Deadlines: May 1, December 1

■ FILM

- to assist with the production of documentary, dramatic, animated or experimental films.

Deadlines: April 1, November 1

For more information and application forms, contact:

Film, Photography and Video Office

ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL

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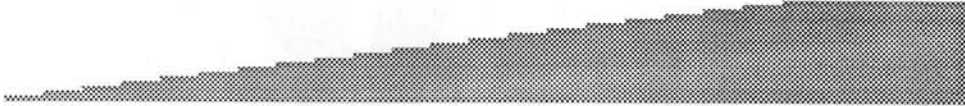


THE INDEPENDENT EYE

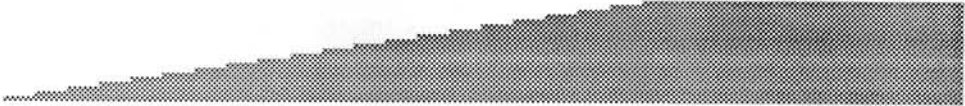
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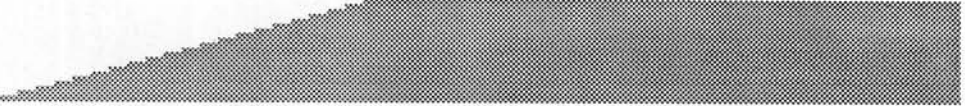
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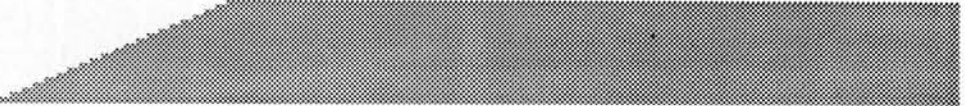
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