Tomorrow’s technology

"Only video can save the rock recording industry," announced The Journal as it led into the main topic of the subject. "Pay-TV is the last hope for Canadian program production," said just about everyone at the CRTC hearings last year. The entire communications industry is in the throes of momentous change as it adapts to the possibilities of new technology.

Once, television sales of films were called "ancillary" sales; something one would expect to do with the theatrical release of a film. Today, sales to network cable and pay-TV - not to mention the video-cassette market - are making rich men out of producers who would never recoup from theatrical exhibition alone.

Even the producers of costly features are turning out mini-series as insurance against the changing viewing habits of North Americans. For Those I Loved, Les Plouffe and its sequel, Louisiana and Le Matau - if you miss them at the neighborhood theatre, you can catch the series on TV. Distribution arrangements with HBO and foreign television channels are hailed today as the deals with the Majors were hailed yesterday.

For the makers of non-feature films, television is a primary market, and the dearth of outlets in Canada is of major concern.

Yet the hi-tech revolution means more to filmmakers than simply a diversification of distribution outlets. It should mean an in-house revolution in the way films are shot. This introduction of video in pre-production and production tends well under way among those who work with commercials and television production.

To date, Canadians have not made much use of the innovations when making theatrical features, though experiments are advanced in the States.

These issues are the subject of several articles in this issue. Carol Rutter remarks on Francis Coppola's use of hi-tech innovations in production and looks ahead to the day when film and video will be interchangeable. Joyce Nelson looks at television broadcasting of the news, and studies the context and context, and the illusions which video makes possible. Mary Jane Miller comments on the changes in viewing habits which video-cassette makes possible, and suggests that film/television aesthetics will undergo a revolution as well. Toronto's Trade Forum dealt with the practical questions before the Canadian film community.

Meanwhile, this community awaits the results of federal inquiries into film policy. It is relieved to see that the Cabinet has judged wise to reverse the CRTC's 'correction of error' which seemed to let the Canadian pay operators off the hook in terms of Canadian production. But there is skepticism that the government is imaginative enough to adapt its policies to this world-wide electronic revolution.

As we wait, the federal government is losing authority over those who make theatrical features. The capital cost allowance regulations have become narrow to the point that few producers are using the tax shelter to finance their films. Their productions, made with Canadian directors and crew, will qualify as "Canadian content" according to the CRTC definition of a Canadian program, and this meets their needs. Until the CRTC and the Department of Communications can agree upon the definition of a Canadian film, the problem will persist.

With such elementary problems to solve, the monumental challenge of coping with the electronic revolution looms large and, perhaps, insurmountable.

The editors

Opinion

TV - no longer the ephemeral art

Sixty-eight percent of our television diet is in drama. This increase in the popularity of drama shows is due partly to the increasing number of well-cast and well-written programs, but it is also due to the techniques of television drama that are now being used to create a new form of entertainment. Television drama is no longer just a series of episodes, but is now a complete work of art. The episodes are connected by themes and characters, and the overall effect is more satisfying than the individual episodes. The characters are more fully developed and the plots are more complex. The use of music, lighting, and special effects have also been increased, and the overall production values have been raised. As a result, television drama is now a more satisfying experience for the viewer.