

SIMON FRASER

At the Simon Fraser University Film Workshop near Vancouver in British Columbia, one learns filmmaking by making films.

The Film Workshop is non-academic. There are no lectures, no grades, no side-tracking of creative energy to the task of pleasing a professor.

"What the Workshop does," says Workshop graduate Peter Bryant, whose documentary film *Noohalk* was chosen best film at the Canadian Student Film Festival in 1970, "is get people involved who are really interested in making films. No courses, nothing. That's all they want to do."

Shelah Reljic, now a producer at the Vancouver National Film Board office, conducted the first Simon Fraser Film Workshop from 1967 to 1969. Instead of film lectures, Reljic scheduled regular campus screenings of new Workshop productions. "The kids had to face their own audience," says Reljic. "And the audience cheered, booted, and whatever. And from the idea of having made the most beautiful film in the world they finally realised reality and time and space and distance—and that there were an awful lot of things to be improved."

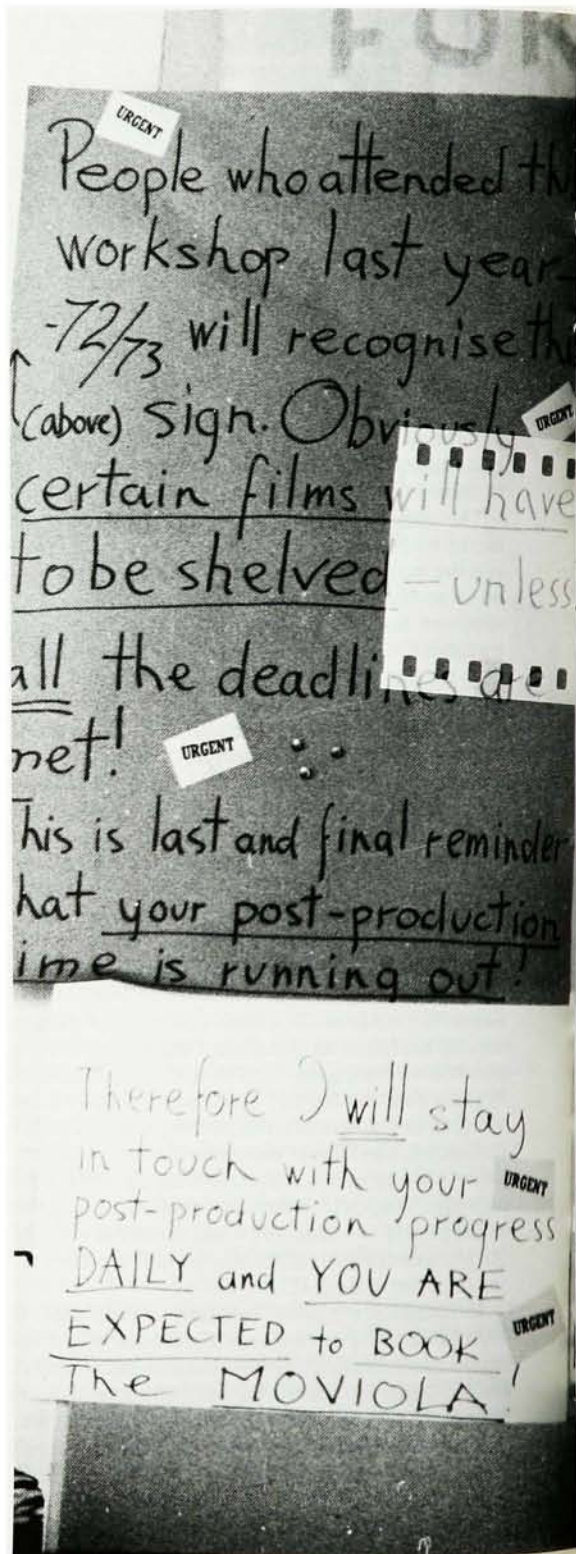
Graduates of the Workshops have worked on CBC, NFB, CFDC and Canada Council films, as well as on commercials and independent productions.

Along with Bryant, Reljic's Workshop included, among others, Tony Westman, George Johnson, Bryan Small, Doug White, Sandy Wilson, Pat Corbett, Zale Dalen, Linda Johnson, Mark Dolgoy, Manuel Busquets, and J. Andrew De Lilio Rymysza.

When Shelah Reljic came to Simon Fraser it was her first exposure to university life. Says Reljic of her initial reaction, "I couldn't believe these kids were going out in the world not knowing how to share, not understanding people, and not having something to do." It has often been remarked that film-making is a group activity: a particular feature of the Film Workshop from the start was the sharing of skills and knowledge when students made their films. Years after they leave the Workshop, graduates continue to "work together." Professional Tony Westman, a graduate of Reljic's Workshop who now has extensive experience on NFB documentaries and on CFDC theatricals (including Bryant's first feature attempt, *The Supreme Kid*) remarks that working together is particularly important in his professional work. In contrast to the academic atmosphere of "every man for himself", the Workshop promoted an attitude of working together toward common goals.

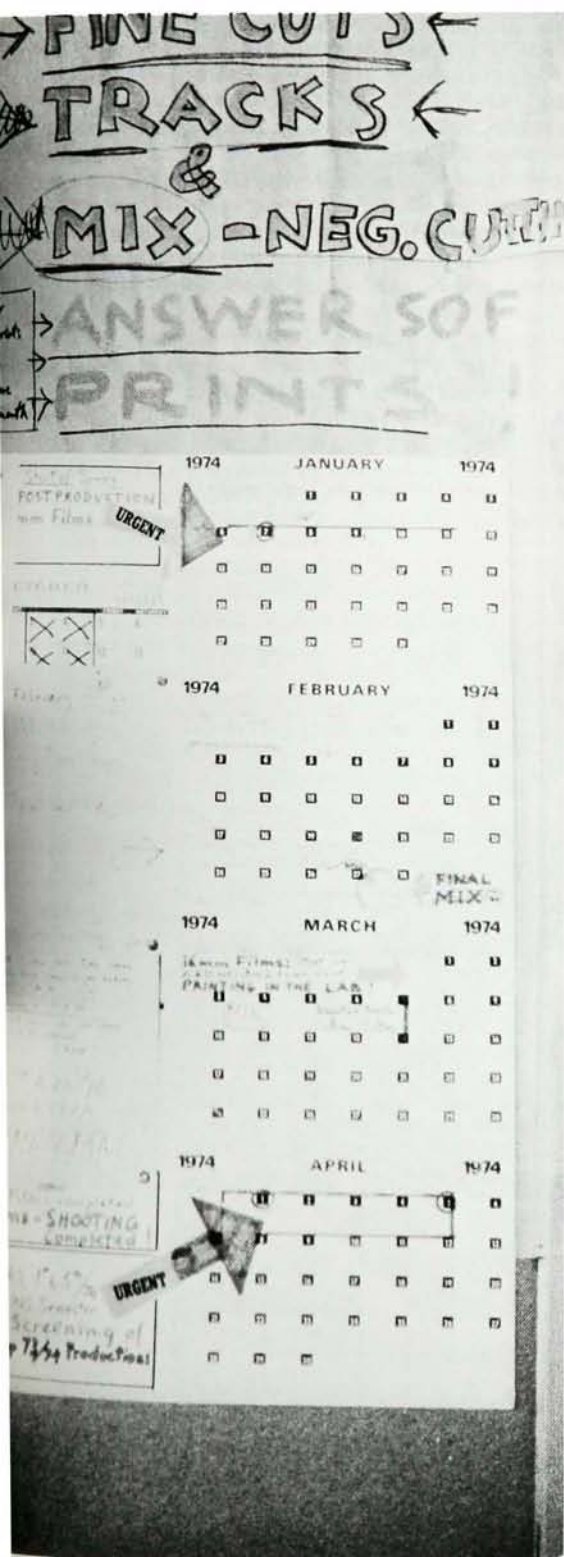
"The crew that has any sense of ego ... if there's any one person on the crew who thinks he's better or sharper than anybody else on the crew, he's in trouble," says Westman, "because in a situation like that you're in this mess together, and you have to open yourself to asking the other person for help. I've worked in enough tense situations and very easy situations to know the kind of critical sensitive points that break down a film. And I realize that if everybody is willing to communicate, and not afraid of their poor little aesthetic, that's the way you get films made."

Westman also remarks that the Workshop or any film study program is a good start, but that the training never stops. "To have spent a year or four years or twenty years



FILM WORKSHOP

Jaan Pill



in the school playing games with movies is one thing," says Westman. "But to get out there in the field, with very rapid-action situations where you don't make mistakes, is a different ball game, and it takes years to understand exactly what that ballgame is, and to get one's reflexes refined to the point of knowing that when you're half a stop out, you know it. You don't measure it, you just know it."

George Johnson, a professional free-lance editor whose initial experience came with cutting Peter Bryant's two half hour films in Reljic's Workshop adopts a characteristically non-analytical approach to his work. If you ask him if he does a lot of parallel cutting and cross cutting, he'll tell you he doesn't know what the terms mean in words: he just does them. This goes back to the attitude Reljic had in teaching film at the Workshop. Reljic herself had apprenticed for many years with Hollywood editor Homer Powell, who now lives in Vancouver. "Shelah really depended a lot on people learning for themselves," says Johnson. "The whole editing approach was sort of make it up as you go along and see what works and what doesn't work. Because you can't tell anybody what works and doesn't work, especially an editor. I guess in everything else too. You have to do it a few times and see under what occasions something will work and when it just doesn't work at all. You just do it on your own and find out. It was that kind of experience."

Bryant, who now teaches a production course at UBC, notes that his students are as capable as students everywhere, but for them production is one of four or five other courses. At the Workshop, as he notes, film production was all that one did. Similarly Diane Edmondson, who worked with Stan Fox both at SFU and York, remarks that she was struck by the fact that at York, students had to take many kinds of "background" subjects; once again, the energy that comes to production is in this way inevitably diluted.

SFU Workshop schedule 1973-74

Ron Orioux and Tony Westman



Stan Fox of the CBC in Vancouver was the next film professional to conduct the Workshop. Fox, whose students when he taught film at UBC included Richard Leiterman and David Rimmer, describes the Workshop approach as "one of the results of the educational experimentation which was going on in the mid-Sixties, where it was felt that universities should change their whole approach radically, and have centers and places that don't involve the usual academic ritual of having courses and credits and grades and diplomas."

"Unfortunately it is not possible," says Fox, "for the model to be accepted within the university structure as readily as the academic model."

Sandy Wilson's remarkable career with the National Film Board began in Fox's Workshop when she made **Penticton Profile** with the backing of the NFB Challenge for Change program. Her first short had been made in Reljic's Workshop. Mike Collier, another Workshop member of that time, is now customer service manager at Alpha Cine in Vancouver. Another Workshop regular was Brent Straughan, whose multi-screen **Enfilony** premieres this summer in Hamilton Place, Ontario, with the backing of a live symphony orchestra.

A unique aspect of Fox's Workshop was the parallel emphasis on video and film. Judith Eglington was active in both areas, as was Diane Edmondson.

The next film resident after Fox (who is now associate chairman of the Film Program at York) was the late Luke Bennett, a film editor from New York. A major Workshop project during his residency was a successful film on architecture for the B.C. Association of Architects. Participants included Ron Orioux, Zale Dalen, Rick Patton, Joanna

Moss, and Lee Dombrowski.

Essentially the same group subsequently made the NFB documentary **Seven Steps to Freedom** on a prison self-help group, produced independently of the Workshop in 1972, as well as the NFB's **Bye Bye Blues**, in 1973. Both films were directed by Joanna Moss.

Eugene Boyko of the NFB remarks that an outstanding characteristic of the Workshop is the opportunity to go out and make mistakes.

"In an academic course," remarks Boyko, "you're getting marks, rather than doing and experimenting. When you're going for marks you're playing it safe a lot of times but when you're getting both your feet into it as you do at SFU, you make a lot of mistakes but hopefully you won't repeat them."

Ron Orioux, another Vancouver professional cameraman, with extensive experience with NFB and industrial documentary films, who studied with Luke Bennett in the Film Workshop and who recently set up Edgewater Productions in Vancouver with Workshop alumnus Doug White, remarks in the same context on what he learned at the workshop conducted some time back by Richard Leiterman at the Banff School of Fine arts.

"There was an advantage to the conference," says Orioux, "just to get a sense of Richard Leiterman. It was a delightful experience of the intuitive nature of that man, you know, which cuts through all the intellectual bullshit about film-making, which makes for a point that a person can't become a film-maker just by taking a good four-year course in film-making. That's not a prerequisite; it's not a *Production still from "After the Dance" directed by George Johnson*



guarantee: it's nothing except a strong input to a person who has the potential to work in the medium."

Rick Patton, who had studied film in a work-study program at Antioch College in Ohio, found in Bennett's workshop his first ever opportunity to work with a "teacher who was a professional." Like Ron Orioux, a part of his experience is with NFB documentaries, as an assistant cameraman.

Patton remarks, as does Orioux, that the opportunity to work on documentary films is an educational experience which cannot be imagined if one attempts, as occurs in most cases in university education, to approach the same subject through reading about it.

"That's something I would certainly recommend film students to think about," says Patton. "Because it's probably easy to get discouraged as a film student. There are so many obstacles, it's so expensive to get experience. But the fact is that there is this definite spiritual payoff, in terms of expanding your horizons. In terms of human experiencing. You know, it has its cynical aspects. You can get cynical about it, but you don't necessarily have to. You can just be there and enjoy meeting people and relate however you have to."

Luke Bennett was followed, in 1972, by Vincent Vaitiekunas, a Lithuanian-born Canadian director and editor who has made over 200 films.

Among the students in Vaitiekunas' Workshop who have continued as filmmakers are, among others, Michael Chechik, Chris Windsor, C.R. Wrench, Georges Payrastra, Tim Sale, Lawrence Keane, Harlan Dorfman, Fred Easton, Rick Amaro, Danice MacLeod, Ron Precious, Bob Kearney, Mario Barendregt, Bob Ellis, Mary Anne McEwen, Marilyn Kansky, Richard Barazuol, and Peg Campbell.

Eugene Boyko, a veteran Film Board cameraman, recalls the films of Vaitiekunas' first Workshop: "It was a revelation," says Boyko. "It was the best I'd seen in college produced films. I had a reluctance against college films for a long time because I always found that the kind of people that were attracted to it were generally those who couldn't communicate. But here was a school that was here in Vancouver and it seemed to work."

It might be interesting to consider the two Film Workshop group films which, during Vaitiekunas' two-year residency, brought to SFU the McLaren Award for best film at the Canadian Student Film Festival for two years running.

Chris Aikenhead, director of the 1973 Festival award winner **Ivory Founts**, came to the Workshop with the experience of having worked in a variety of capacities on several 16mm films during two years at the first high school in Ontario to have an accredited course in film-making. (The high school was in London, Ontario, and the course started by Frank Boas, who had taken a summer course in film at UCLA.) In addition, Aikenhead had participated for two summers in a high school film program instituted by the Ontario Arts Council.

During the first half of Vaitiekunas' first eight month program at SFU, Aikenhead tried unsuccessfully to come up with a script for a film. Finally, the viewing of a film made in a previous Workshop triggered the idea of a satire on student films and student film-makers.

During the Christmas break in December 1972, Aikenhead returned to Ontario, and while there, put together the basic script for **Ivory Founts**. It was, says Aikenhead, "kind of a parody of that previous Workshop film I'd seen, and of this guy making the film, which I guess just evolved out of my own incapacity to come up with a *real* script. I'd tried for three years in high school to come up with something original and I never had, so I knew pretty well what it was like not to be able to make a film."

The film was made quickly, being shot in January of 1973 and edited by March of 1973 in time for the annual April showings of the Vaitiekunas Workshop.

From the beginning Aikenhead felt the film did not deserve the acclaim it had achieved. He did not return to the Workshop the next year but travelled instead to Europe, and then returned to SFU to continue his study of English literature. "I wanted to drop out of that whole scene," remarks Aikenhead, "and retreat and get my bearings again, or I'd start actually being like the director in the film."

Since then, Aikenhead prefers not to be classified as a film-maker. In the meantime, his pursuit of English literature may be just the thing to enable him to be an excellent film-maker, if he ever decides to return. That is so, at any rate, if one takes the perspective of Mark Slade, of the Vancouver NFB office, who observes that, "What would good for film-makers would be to find some area of interest, and really explore it in depth. It might be some aspect of technology. It might be some area of anthropology. It might be poetry or music. It could be wine-making. Some area in which they would be very exciting and would find a complete kind of structure operating."

Chris Windsor, director of the 1974 McLaren Award winner **Trapper Dan**, another Workshop group project, got the idea for the film while working as a projectionist at a "sleazy downtown theatre" in Vancouver. He wrote down the ideas for the film on backs of envelopes and stuck them on his door and then one day wrote a rough draft.

Like Aikenhead's script, the reading of the script to the Workshop was enthusiastically received. Once again, the film was shot and edited in time for the April 1974 showings of the Vaitiekunas Workshop. In both cases, it was a first 16mm film for each. Windsor had worked on previous Workshop films, including **Ivory Founts**, where he acted the part of the student editor. He'd concluded that the important thing in every previous Workshop film he'd seen was the quality of the script.

Of his own script, Windsor remarks, "It was basically a solid script. I read it to people in the Workshop and they all liked it. So it meant you could throw in all these other things on top of it, as you got new ideas. You could put them in, because you had something to fall back on. And if you don't have that, then it's very hard."

Danice MacLeod's script for **Rawstock**, her first 16mm film grew out of the experience of an academic course in production at UBC which consisted of lectures on how a film turns from "rawstock" into the finished film.

"I was taking this terribly serious academic course at UBC" says MacLeod. "'Introduction to Film and Television Production.' And it was *so* terrible. It was all

academic terminology. And we'd have exams every once in a while where we'd get questions where you'd have to have taken notes in class. All this stuff which was completely irrelevant because you didn't know what you were talking about. It was all memorization of all these terms, you know. You don't learn by looking in a book. You learn by doing it."

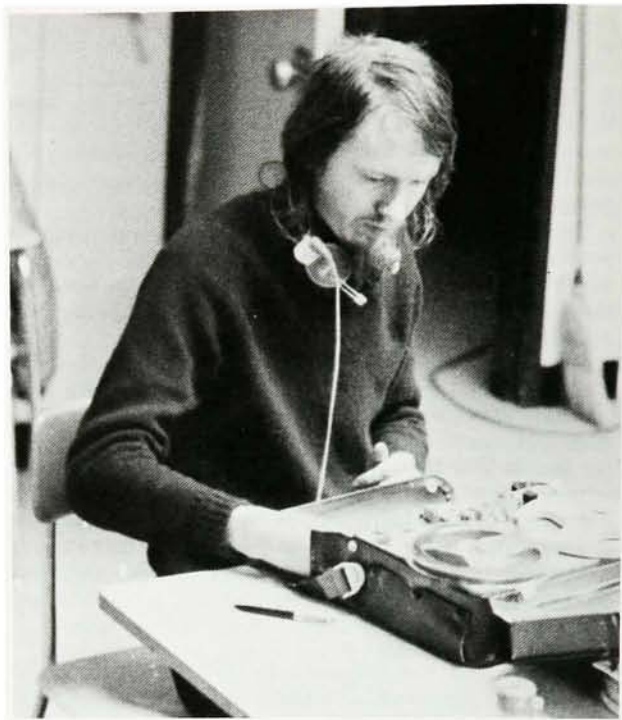
One advantage of academic lectures is that it allows the mind to wander very freely. On one particular daydream in class three years ago, MacLeod imagined filming a live-action metaphor of all human and physical processes involved in the journey of "rawstock" to the finished film. Three years later, with the help of many film Workshops and two film residents, but mainly thanks to her own determination, "Mr. Rawstock"'s epic march across "The Playing Field of Life" is finally ready for screening. MacLeod is now working on a multi-media "Canadiana" spectacular introducing "Aurora Laughter," "Moose Jaw Mouth Wash," and "Husky Thermal Heating Units" as a unique addition to the development of Canadian culture.

In the same vein but through different means, C.R. Wrench has pursued an original concept to satisfying filmic conclusions in his first Workshop film, *Sequences*, which involved the transfer of a beam-starved, feedback-transformed series of exquisite movements of dancer Zella Wolowsky from a series of Video monitors to 16mm film with a 30 frames per second Arriflex (to avoid the roll bar), which he then proceeded to extend in time using an optical printer he had built in the Workshop from a bench moviola and a Bolex.

dropped out of York because his visits over previous summers to production companies convinced him that a degree would make no difference in finding work as a filmmaker. He arrived in time at SFU for Vaitiekunas' Workshop, which he found to be an ideal culmination for his training at York, where production as a concentrated activity does not begin until the fourth year.

Both Aikenhead and Windsor had the good fortune to have as a lead in their films the versatile actor, editor and raconteur Harlan Dorfman. Dorfman, who, like Zale Dalen of Highlight Productions in Vancouver, had at an earlier stage of life planned to be a short story writer, was introduced to the SFU Workshop while sitting one day at the Cecil Hotel Tavern in Vancouver, not long after arriving in Canada from Berkeley. He happened to be complaining about the future of the short story writer in an age of decreasing readership to his friend Dennis Hoffert. Hoffert, who has been in several Workshops over the years, suggested he get into films up at Simon Fraser.

Actress Valerie Ambrose also starred in both McLaren Award films. She was 'discovered' by Mary Anne McEwen, a commercial writer who made *The Garden of Eden* in Vaitiekunas' first Workshop.



Chris Windsor

Vaitiekunas inculcated a sense of professionalism among his students, including MacLeod. He taught them to respect the tools of filmmaking.

"I perhaps usually give a false impression to people," says Vaitiekunas of his attitude toward the machinery of film production. "I hate the machines. I hate moviolas. I hate cameras. They get in the way. I have to bow down to them in order to make a film. But I know also I have to be a prudent and smart guy, and to understand that I cannot wishfully think that the bad machine, malfunctioning camera, will go away or take pity on me. Those bloody machines have no brains; they're totally uncompromising. And I'm at the mercy of them. If I don't handle them properly my most glorious ideas will look like a pile of shit on the screen. Unexposed, badly composed. My sound will be garbled. If my editing machines are wrong, I lose the sync and everything else compounds throughout the production. At the end, that great vision will look pretty lousy. And what will happen? Everyone will laugh at me.

"I learned that through bad experience and bad mistakes. And I remember those mistakes, indelibly. Unforgettable mistakes. I thought that since I've had a lot of problems, because nobody ever told me and I made bloomers, what I could do is short circuit. I could close the gap quicker. But, of course, you know people don't understand that. They think that I'm impossibly technologically oriented. I'm not.

"I believe very strongly," says Vaitiekunas, "that in order to be free in manipulating your medium, you have to be familiar with the tools that you work with. The whole filmmaking is a series of minute little judgements that go on like bullets. And they come from left and right field. You catch them in mid-air, grab them, exercise your judgement, and you proceed further. You have to do it quickly; the quicker you do it the more spontaneous and fresh the effect will be in the long run. But you cannot have that when you're solely occupied with how to make the bloody equipment work."

The film on V.D. (entitled *It Takes Two*) which a group of Film Workshop students made in the summer of 1974, after Vaitiekunas left for York, carried within its structure the lessons which the group had learned in making their own

films in the Workshop. The film, sponsored by the B.C. Department of Health, was shown nationally on CBC in March. It well fulfills its function, which is to reach an audience of high school students. It was directed by Michael Chechik, who this summer is coordinating the filming of the Greenpeace "Save the Whale" project in the Pacific Ocean.

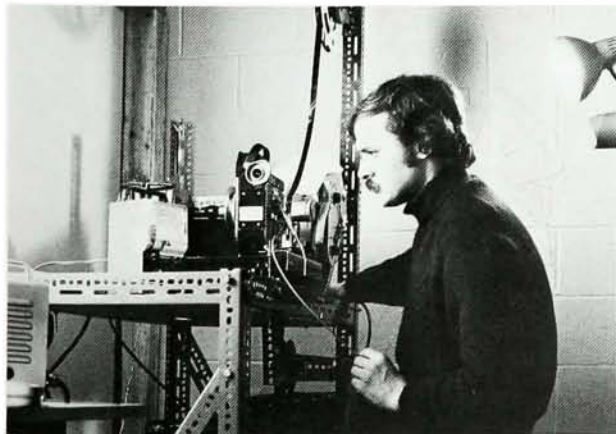
The V.D. film works because the viewer has no chance to be bored. "That's exactly why," says Chris Windsor, winner of the McLaren Award in 1974 for *Trapper Dan*. "It just changes. The image keeps changing. It goes from live action to animation back to live action. A voice-over giving information. It has a historical section which is still photographs. And then there's a montage of editing. You know there's only 15 minutes. You're trying to follow it and you're getting entertained at the same time."

Each of the two award-winning group projects, *Trapper Dan* and *Ivory Founts*, likewise had solid scripts which were filmed and cut in a relatively limited amount of time. Vaitiekunas sees this as a clue to their success. "I think," says Vaitiekunas, "that spontaneity, not a belabored kind of approach, is the one that people want to see."

The high energy and intensity in Vaitiekunas' Workshop derived, among other things from the resident's belief that a film is not finished until it has been shown to an audience.

"It's a long path," says Vaitiekunas, "during the short period of time that the Workshop provides to put through a student. Naturally what has happened in both years was that I had to push quite heavily and a lot of people complained. I don't know how many individual people complained. I don't know how many individual people do admit that they used to get these threatening phone calls. And I would put my foot down, because I knew that unless I did that, unless they take care of that particular stage of production now, that person will never have that film finished, and so it would be kind of a terrible loss because he will never have the opportunity of putting his work to test: Exposing it to the audience."

As an aid to students during post production, Vaitiekunas mounted a huge schedule on a stand under a spotlight in the middle of the darkened Workshop. It was not unusual to see students working sixteen hours a day on their films eight weeks before the screenings.



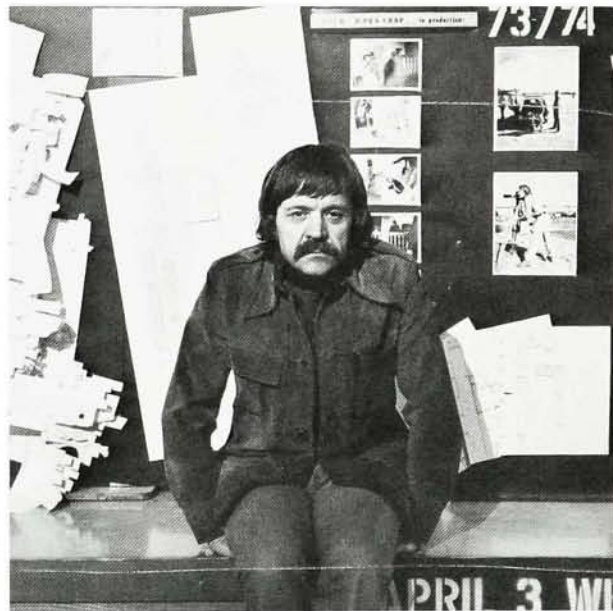
C.R. Wrench with his optical printer

Guy Bergeron, the Montreal producer who is the current Workshop resident has decided, meanwhile, that scripting should be separate from production in the Workshop, and is devoting the summer to a Scriptwriting, rather than a production, Workshop. "Basically it will be a kind of summer-long brainstorming on as many projects as there are people," says Bergeron. "The first couple of meetings will be essentially people coming up with their idea and selling this idea to the other people in the Workshop."

Vaitiekunas, now a visiting associate professor at the York University Film Department, has come to essentially the same conclusion as Bergeron on the subject of screenwriting and production.

"Out of necessity in the Workshop we had to do both things at the same time," says Vaitiekunas. "The demand on the student was incredible, because a student had to be a screenwriter as well as a producer as well as a director and editor. And, as you know, people are not endowed, usually, with all these talents. So that one of the areas would suffer, sooner or later. But the best approach . . . going back to the Workshop structure, is for the year to be split, and part of the people would concentrate on producing scripts. And the other part of the year would be purely production."

"While you're writing a script, you're not loaded with all kinds of paraphernalia and equipment, or logistics. You can work anywhere there is light, a piece of paper and a pen. And I think there should be an entirely different environment, because during the embryonic stages of writing one should not be under the pressure of production as an environment and ambiance. You begin to think too early of camera angles. You begin to think too early of technical tricks and things like that, and tend to forget the structure. Structure is a nebulous thing."



Vincent Vaitiekunas

"And it's good to write the script away from the production area, period. It should be written in the park perhaps, or in a restaurant or in your bedroom. Wherever you feel more inspired and not under any particular pressure."

"Out of necessity I think these two areas are separate. But both are equally important and perhaps I did not emphasize enough, looking in retrospect, that when there is no script, there is no film. You just have to have an idea developed, and worked out and structured. And only then should one go out and start to shoot. I think that the problem that goes with a lot of student filmmaking is that these two areas of operation go too close together."

"In a film academy, I understand scriptwriting classes produce scripts and then the production students take them and they produce them. So that the people that are interested totally in production, direction or camerawork; they've got something already worked out, and a polished script to start with. So you start pretty high up. And that kind of reflects, I think, the whole state of affairs in feature films in Canada." □

THE GREAT BALL IS HERE ...



WESSCAM

THE MOST SOPHISTICATED STABILIZED CAMERA PLATFORM IN THE WORLD. NOW AVAILABLE FOR RENTAL IN 16 mm. OR 35 mm. FORMATS IN CANADA, AND ONLY AT PRODUCTION SERVICES. FOR A DEMONSTRATION OR SHOW REEL, GIVE US A CALL.

Mitchell BNC/SPR
R - 35 Highspeed
Arri 35
Arri 16
Eclair

Worrall
O'Connor
Cartoni
Elemack
Nagra

Mole Richardson
Ianiro
Thorne C. S. I.
Generators
Brute to Inkie

P.S. PRODUCTION SERVICES LTD.

CANADA'S BEST!

That's saying a lot, but to film makers it automatically means... Bellevue Pathé. It just goes to show that good news really does travel fast in an industry where you have to produce — or else.

And that's a cue to quality, because that's the one imperative we demand of ourselves. We set higher standards for ourselves than even the most discriminating client. We have the technical skills in our people and we have the technical facilities in our equipment. Put them both together and the results make friends out of clients.

And that's a cue to quality, too, like: Paramount - 20th Century-Fox - Columbia - Warner Bros. - United Artists - MCA Universal - Cinepix - Potterton - Agincourt - Quadrant.

Our circle of friends and clients continues to grow.

A FEW OF OUR RECENT ORIGINAL PRODUCTIONS ARE:

- THE APPRENTICESHIP OF DUDDY
- WEDDING IN WHITE
- KRAVITZ
- LIES MY FATHER TOLD ME
- CHILD UNDER LEAF
- ALIEN THUNDER
- DAY IN THE COUNTRY
- PAPER BACK HERO
- NEPTUNE FACTOR
- BETWEEN FRIENDS

CANADA'S LARGEST FILM LABORATORY AND SOUND FILM ORGANIZATION



BELLEVUE Pathé

TORONTO
9 Brockhouse Road
Toronto, Ont. M8W 2W8
Tel. (416) 259-7811

MONTREAL
2000 Northcliffe Ave.
Montreal, Que. H4A 3K5
Tel. (514) 484-1186

A DIVISION OF ASTRAL BELLEVUE PATHE LTD./LTEE

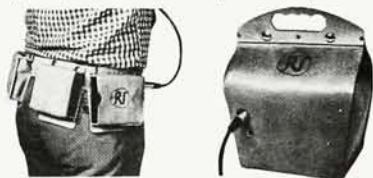
BATTERY POWER BELTS

110V, AC BELT

- Solid state Crystal Controlled Inverter powered by 9 NiCad rechargeable batteries with built-in charger.
- 5 ppm accuracy: this represents a maximum error of 1/4 of a frame on a complete 1200' roll of 16mm film
- uses most advanced CMOS logic
- short circuit and overload proof
- no fuses or circuit breakers
- automatic warning sound when batteries running low
- unit cuts off before any cells can have reverse polarity applied — No switches or buttons to operate
- cannot run at incorrect frequency

COLD WEATHER FILMING

The advantage of the 110V, AC 60 Hz belt system over a DC crystal controlled system in sub-zero temperature filming is that there are no electronic parts on the synchronized motor of the exposed camera. The motor can only run at the speed corresponding to the frequency, or not at all, unlike a DC system where mechanical overloads can lead to cumulative errors which are not corrected. The only electronic parts involved are on the power belt. The belt can be worn comfortably under the cinematographer's clothing for increased battery endurance and highest frequency accuracy at very low temperatures.



8/12V, DC (7 AMP-HR) BELT

Powered by 10 NiCad rechargeable batteries, with built-in charger $\frac{C}{W}$ indication light.

Primary Connection: 230/115 Volt AC, 50/60 Hz.

AC AND DC BELT FEATURES

- Drives continuously approx. 13 - 400 rolls
- Lightweight — 8 lbs.
- Leather housing provides extremely comfortable fit around waist
- No danger of cracking at low temperatures or when folded because of durable leather construction

STORAGE

- belt can be folded into square package for easy storage and transportation
- belt comes complete with leather pouch for tripod use

**RONALD NIECKE
CINEMATIQUE LTD.**
93 ASHBOURNE DRIVE
ISLINGTON, ONTARIO
CANADA



"Battery Power Belts" Patents Pending
Made in Canada