



A family portrait

Sheridan

— Lucie Costin

Sheridan College of Applied Arts and Technology is located twenty miles west of Toronto in the suburban community of Oakville. Sheridan is well known for the scope and variety of courses that it offers to those interested in the visual field. There is a well endowed photography department with very professional leanings — it aims at producing extremely adept technical photographers for work in the commercial market. There is also the Animation Film Department which trains the student in this cinematic art on a scale that is unprecedented in North America. It is

Two second year students, Yvonne Taffe and Judit Smits, discuss a TV project



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preparing the students for the professional demands in the communications field where commercial opportunities are beginning to appear. In a later issue of Cinema Canada, an article describing the Animation Department will appear, written by its head, Bill Matthews. There is also a Graphics department which again is highly specialized and concentrates on providing students with the best technical skills so they can compete in the commercial market.

These programs were launched in 1968 and were immediately very popular. But at the same time as these departments were flourishing, a significant demand arose for an alternative program which would offer a generalist approach to media for persons who, for one reason or another, did not want to specialize. Therefore, in 1971, a department with a generalist viewpoint was established to answer this need. It was called the Media Arts Department and its goal was to provide students with a good working knowledge of film, television and sound. Within a year however, the department was expanded in scope and two more options were added — theatre and cartooning. Theatre, in which there are 30 students, and cartooning, in which there are 40 students, co-exist independently of each other and independently of the main program in media in which there are 150 students. The media program is designed to be completed in three years although students with prior experience can complete the course in two years.

Two keynote characteristics with the media department is that all the instructors are young and involved people and that also there is a tremendous

Gord Wyatt on camera, Peter Kelly on sound, working on a dramatic scene from Stone Boy



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diversity of views between them. There doesn't seem to be a consensus among them about what exactly it is they are all trying to do. Some instructors feel that it is a good launching pad for people intent on a career in media. Others feel that the media have done fine in the past without the aid of such schools and that for most of the students it is a unique labour of love that they pursue for a few years while in college but that they are not likely to continue once they graduate. Others feel that it is not the role of the department to supply graduates for the major competitive markets, but rather there exists a growing need with small community groups to produce low cost information packages and that the media arts graduates could fill this need.

Harvey Honsberger, head of the department, is concerned with the idea that the student should go out into the community with a piece of equipment in order to try and understand the community. He hopes the college is not restricted to a precise geographical location but rather that it lives intrinsically within and for the community. The emphasis is to listen to the student and to find out what his/her attitudes are to the community.

The television courses that Harvey and I will be teaching this coming fall at Sheridan, are geared to being mobile and community involved. Portable television facilities will be used predominantly and the college will be used mainly for post production editing, screening and critiquing. The television facilities are both in the 1/2" and 1" format. And when the students wish to use a studio, they have access to the one that is located on the Brampton Campus of Sheridan about ten miles away. Television studio work however, is the exception rather than the rule in the department.

On the film side, the department has invested a good deal of time and money on the newly developed Leacock-M.I.T. sound Super-8 film system. The system incorporates a NIZO-S56 camera and converts it so that the motor is crystal controlled. It has rendered the umbilical cord passé with the cable-less sync. The NAGRA tape recorder is simply equipped with a crystal module which makes it operable with any crystal controlled camera, 16mm or Super-8. The department has bought several of these cameras in addition to a large number of silent Super-8's.

It was decided to invest in Super-8 because of the large number of students that wanted to work with film and yet had to do so with relatively little means. Also, the Leacock-MIT system parallels the technology of 16mm and so the learning that takes place is not inferior to those using the larger format. It was also thought that small groups within

the community might be more willing to approach the college for the production of a film, if the means were more within their financial range.

Most of the work done up until now at Sheridan in film has been silent Super-8. With the recent arrival of the Leacock-MIT system, it is expected to revolutionize the work done in much the same ways that the talkies revolutionized Hollywood. Meanwhile, Rick Hancox, filmmaker, will also be developing the 16mm film production at Sheridan. Rick does not see Super-8 film as a panacea and loyally promotes what he considers to be the workhorse format. Next September, for those who feel like him, he will be offering a full scale 16mm film course concurrent with the sound Super-8 film courses. He believes that while Super-8 filmmaking can be cheaper in many ways, students can make their money back more readily in 16mm because the Super-8 market is not yet developed adequately. Also he believes that good quality release prints are just as expensive in Super-8 as 16mm. And the great debate rages on . . .

Backing the film and television production courses are aesthetics courses given by Ken Dancyger who is a television producer, screenwriter and film historian. He covers such ground as the documentary genre, the theatrical film and screenwriting. His work is complemented by Jeff Paull, another instructor, who is also a member of an intermedia group that tours internationally. Jeff specializes in the simultaneous projection of film and slides. His original work is accompanied by four jazz musicians. As an instructor, Jeff views his role as being very similar to midwifery. He explains, "I help people give birth to their own ideas although I have nothing to do with the conception or gestation of these ideas. I help these ideas come into being through technical pointers and by keeping the person company in the process."

Much will be offered in sound starting this fall. By then, Ted Gzebb, instructor, will have completed installations of a four-track sound studio. In addition the students will have access to a great deal of portable sound equipment. Ted aims at stimulating people's imaginations so that they become innovative, adaptable and unconventional. He wants, above all, to play down technology, although it is very important, and to make people aware of content and what sound can and cannot do. The program being instituted for the fall will have besides the basic sound courses, courses in documentary radio, radio drama, music production, commercials and film sound.

Twice a week there are forums that are open to everyone in the department. Every Monday morning a special guest is

invited to come and speak to the students on their work in the communications industry. Guests vary greatly from week to week so that no one area is emphasized over another. This year's guests have included such people as Richard Leiterman, outstanding Canadian cinematographer, Don Elder, executive producer of Children's Programming at the CBC, Kirwan Cox, outspoken media critic, and Michael Spencer, head of the Canadian Film Development Corporation. These guests talk informally, answer questions, provide tips and also occasionally let the students in on future plans.

Every Friday there is a second student forum. This is a time when the students present the department with their recently completed work, be it in film, multi-screen slide presentations or television. The idea is to let everyone know the latest goings-on and to pass on tips and comments to each other.

And what have been the concrete results of the department since it began in 1971? Several graduates have found jobs at the CBC, one as an assistant cameraman and the other as an assistant editor. Others have gone on to further education, others have found work in school boards as AV assistants, or in governmental agencies producing AV material. One is in the NFB as a gaffer, another is driving a truck for a film house. One lucky graduate recently landed a job with an international Canadian company that wants him to produce films on the operations of all the head offices around the world. His first assignment is in Japan, then Paris. One student who is graduating this year, has received an Ontario Arts Council grant to circulate in a number of schools and help 10-12 year olds express themselves with portapak television. The results have been so positive that he intends to continue with portapaks in old age homes and in a school for the deaf.

Any person who has successfully completed high school may enroll for the media arts course. Or, if the student is over nineteen years of age, he/she is permitted to enroll as a mature student. The tuition is \$285 for the year. In addition to this, students entering the department for the first time are required to buy a media kit for \$30 before they are granted access to equipment. The media kit contains countless indispensable small items such as take-up reels, slide trays, leader, film cement etc. — all at cost. It is also estimated that, in addition to this, the average student pays another \$150-\$200 a year for supplies such as film and video tape.

Additional information may be had by contacting Mr. Peter Mallett, Dean of English and Media Studies, Sheridan College of Applied Arts and Technology, 1430 Trafalgar Road, Oakville, Ontario.