

E A S T E R N W A V E

by Chris Majka

Filmmakers in this region have a tremendous amount of energy when it comes to producing films, often on shoe-string budgets. But when it comes to distributing their products enthusiasm plummets. Perhaps like all artists, once they finish with a production, they are anxious to proceed with the next project. There's a kind of optimism that, once completed, productions would "distribute themselves". Instead, the consequence has been that many fine films never receive the degree of exposure, or even financial return, which they deserved.

In the past couple of years, however, the approach to distribution has become less *laissez faire* and more focused. In this column, I would like to look at some of the ways in which films has been distributed in the Atlantic region as well as well as what the future may hold.

Distribution in this region has always been fragmented. The National Film Board, of course, has its own distribution system for the films which it produces, and with regional offices in Fredericton, Saint John, Moncton, Halifax, Sydney, Charlottetown, Corner Brook, and Saint John's, it has done an excellent job of reaching out into the community. The Atlantic Studio in Halifax was opened in 1973 and over the past 12 years, has produced over 70 films which have been distributed in this way. In addition, the NFB has acquired non-exclusive distribution rights to a number of films produced by independents which they have distributed concurrently through their own distribution network.

The CBC has its own library of productions. However, it has undertaken only rather limited efforts to distribute these beyond its own broadcast system. In Nova Scotia, the provincial film department undertook a number of primarily educational productions and they distributed these films through the school system via their own provincial film library. In Newfoundland, the extension department of Memorial University have undertaken much the same function.

Of the regional film co-ops, the Atlantic Filmmakers Co-Op (AFCOOP) in Halifax and the Newfoundland Independent Filmmakers Co-Op (NIFCO) in Saint John's by virtue of their age and the degree of their production activity, have undertaken the most extensive distribution efforts. For a number of years AFCOOP

maintained an active distribution section with a full-time distribution co-ordinator, a distribution committee, and a library of their 36 productions as well as a few others. In collaboration with NIFCO they organized a couple of cross-country tours of Atlantic region productions and actively sought distribution arrangements here and elsewhere. NIFCO did not have a distribution section; however, distribution was carried out *de facto* by the co-ordinator.

Area production companies

such as Kirzsan Productions, Hollow Reed, Media Co-op Services, Salter Street Films, Red Snapper, Skerrett Communications, Points East, and Carota Films have all, out of necessity, distributed their own productions. Film distribution in this country being what it is, there is no alternative for small companies but to actively hustle their own goods. Doomsday Studios, an animation and live-action production company in Halifax, is an exception to the usual scenario. President Ramuna MacDonald decided to actively develop a distribution wing, in addition to the production activities of the company. During

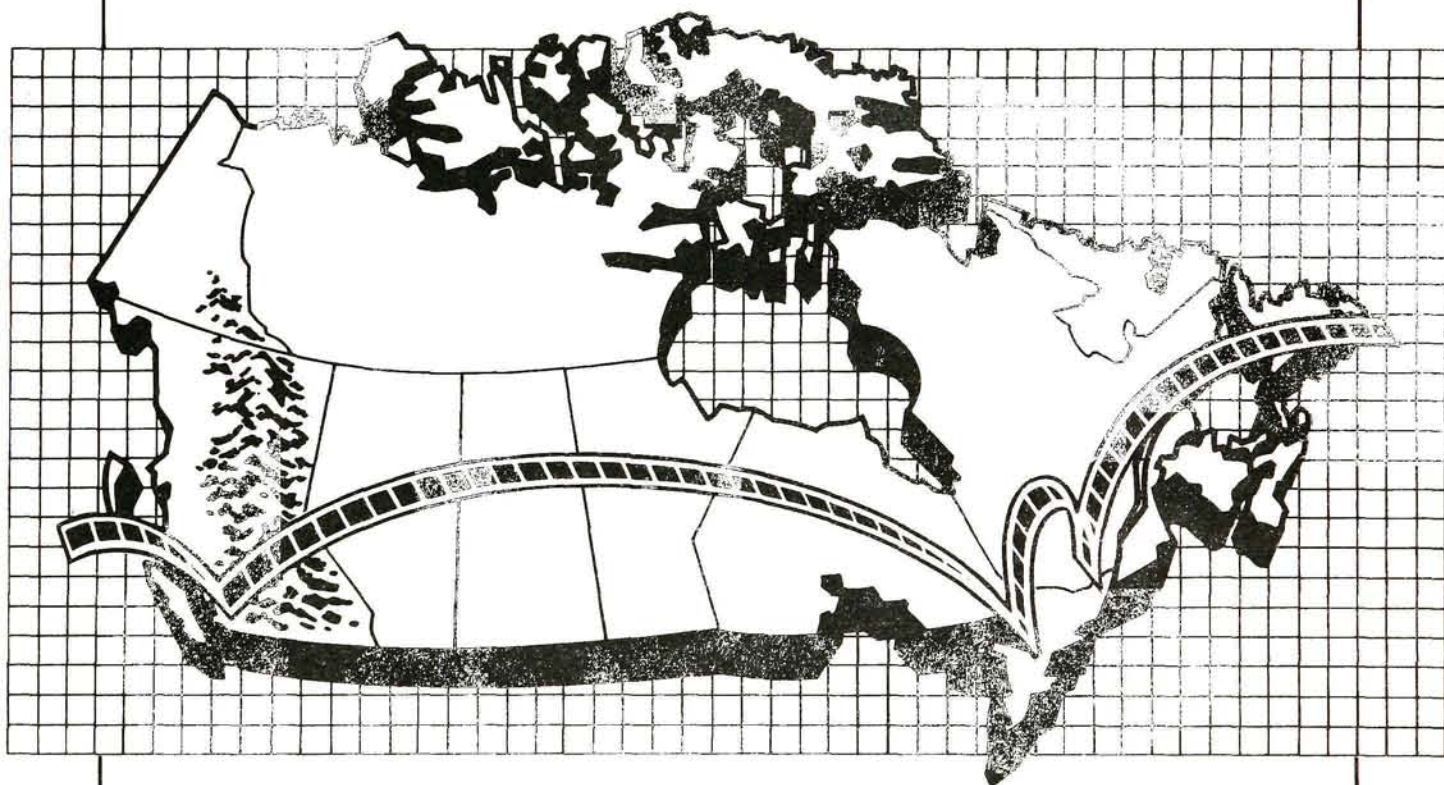
the 1980s Doomsday began to distribute, in Canada and abroad, not only their own productions but those of other production houses and independent filmmakers too. In time it built up a stable of some 38 productions on both film and video which it circulated. At present, however, the distribution side of Doomsday's activities has been somewhat attenuated.

Finally, independent filmmakers have pursued a wide variety of tactics in terms of distribution. In addition to distributing films themselves, independents place films with co-ops such as AFCOOP, with distributors like Doomsday

and other distributors in Canada, the U.S. and Great Britain and lobbied to have the NFB carry their films as well. To reach wider audiences some filmmakers in this area, such as Barbara Sternberg and Neal Livingston, placed their films with the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre (CFMDC) and the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution West (CFDW). Both of these are cooperative, artist-run ventures which address themselves particularly to the needs of independent filmmakers in the country.

In recent years filmmakers have increasingly looked

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abroad for markets. Your columnist was involved in an effort to bring Atlantic area films to Britain, travelling there several times to push local productions. The effort was surprisingly successful with films from this area being shown at festivals, included in film society programs and special sc-

reenings, and a number of film distribution and broadcast deals with both the BBC, and Channel 4 being signed. It sometimes seems that people in other countries are more interested in seeing regional and local-issue films than other Canadians are.

The most recent chapter in the chaotic history of distribu-

tion is the recent formation of the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Atlantic (CFDA), a sister organization to the CFMDC and the CFDW. In 1983 the Canada Council cut funding for the distribution section of AFSCOOP. Other co-ops were clamouring for distribution monies citing the AFSCOOP precedent. Finding him-

self without a job, Distribution Co-ordinator Jim MacSwain, approached the Canada Council to sound out their interest in a regional distribution centre and found there was support. The ball started rolling and the result, three years later, is the CFDA.

On its board of directors are representatives of AFSCOOP,

NIFCO, the New Brunswick Filmmakers Co-Op and the Island Media Arts Co-Op from P.E.I. (Ciné Marévie, the Edmundston-based Acadian Co-Op has chosen to stay out of the organization preferring to find distribution arrangements in Quebec) and a search for a full time staff person is currently underway. There are already some 76 titles which will be distributed and the list is growing daily. While primarily created to distribute the more "non-commercial" works of co-ops and independents, the CFDA will undertake to distribute any work produced in the area which is submitted to it and thus it hopes to become a truly regional distribution house. Both Doomsday Studios, and the Centre For Art Tapes have agreed to let the CFDA distribute their productions.

Although film and video here will undoubtedly continue to be distributed in a variety of ways, the presence of the CFDA may be able to smooth some of the confusion out of the process.

Winnipeg filmmakers

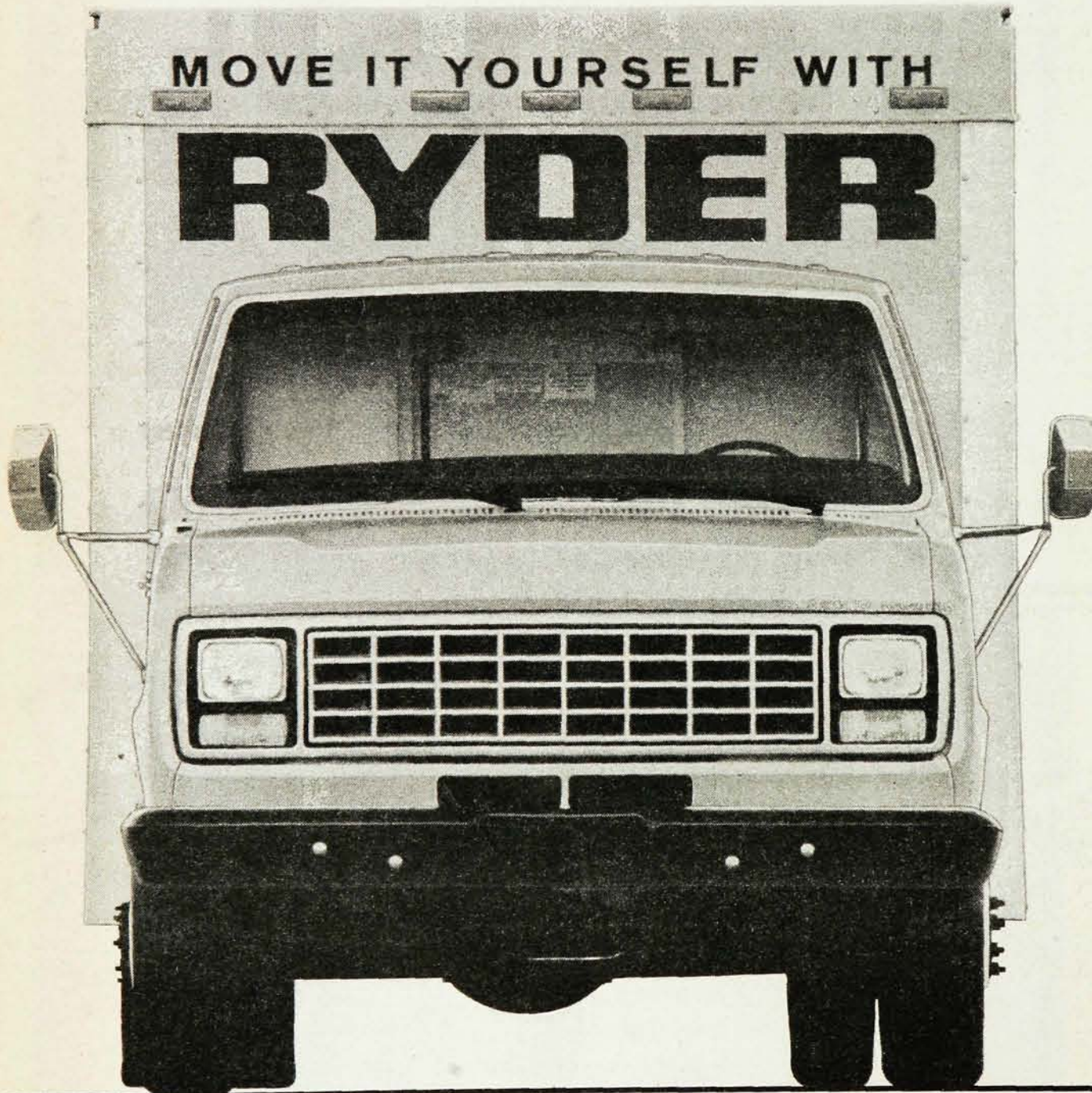
WINNIPEG - The Winnipeg Film Group and the Winnipeg Video Pool are now settling into their new downtown offices at 304 - 100 Arthur Street.

The Film Group was formerly ensconced in an old brick house several blocks away, and used the NFB theatre for their Cinematheque screenings. Now they have a theatre which seats 110, a small screening and meeting room, a large main office space, a library-production office, an 1100 sq. ft. studio/workshop, three editing rooms and an animation room and lounge, spread out over three floors of the Heritage Building.

The Video Pool has office space, a library, an editing room and a small studio for sound recording interspersed on the same floors. Both organizations felt that, as sister arts, it would be convenient to have interlocking office space.

The new building was renovated as part of a Winnipeg Core Area Revitalization Program which is supported by all three levels of government. The building as a whole is called Artspace, and is home for 18 major visual and literary arts groups in the city. The building, an old stone structure with high ceilings and Belgian glass windows, houses production, display and administrative space, as well as four galleries, a cinema, workshop areas and a restaurant.

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