

ATLANTIC ECHOES

by Mike Riggio

Since its creation in 1959, the Extension Service of Memorial University has played an important role in Newfoundland's film history. Originally the idea was to have the instructors speak to their classes, which might extend across the island. This enabled people in isolated communities to have access to a store of technical and practical knowledge. Out of this, the television program *Decks Awash* was developed. Fishermen were provided with information on the fishing industry to enable them to keep up with technological advances and the general happenings within the industry.

By 1964 the Extension Service had begun to experiment with film for community development. During the summer of 1967, a group of National Film Board filmmakers set out to shoot a one-hour documentary on community development on Fogo Island. Extension field worker Fred Earle had been sent out earlier to create an atmosphere for organization within the community which the filmmakers hoped to capture on film.

As the shooting progressed, the idea of the one-hour documentary was scrapped. The film became the product of those filmed, and film viewing sessions allowed community members to view their roles within the community. The idea of the community introspec-

tively viewing itself through the film and the film becoming a catalyst for social change became known as the "Fogo Process."

By 1968, the use of film by Memorial University's Extension Service had spread to the point where a separate Film Unit was created with fairly extensive facilities. During the 1970s, video replaced film for most community development projects, while film focused on the historical and cultural facets of Newfoundland.

At present, the role of the entire Extension Service is under review, with reports and recommendations expected by early 1982. And whatever the future role and direction of the Film Unit, it remains to date the most complete and professionally equipped film production centre in Atlantic Canada.

Kirk Smith is employed by Memorial University as a producer/director in film and video. Smith, a native of Regina, studied journalism at Indiana University and at the same time also began working with film. Back in Canada, he worked as a feature reporter for the Ottawa Citizen, and after three years of reporting joined Crawley Films.

After some years with Crawley, Smith worked as an independent directing a number of educational films for federal and provincial government departments. Then he found himself with the Post Office where

he became involved in the use of film and video as a mechanism to create dialogue between union and management.

Towards the end of this period, Smith came in close contact with Colin Low of the National Film Board and eventually this contact with Low brought him to Memorial University.

At Memorial, Smith worked on a training film for sealers. *A-1*, sponsored by Fisheries and Oceans, was designed to improve pelt quality and raise fishermen's incomes.

From his earliest involvements in film it was obvious to Smith that "You don't just go out and shoot it and package it and do exactly what the people who are in power say because often these people are too distant from the audience they are trying to reach."

To counteract the packaging attitude, Kirk tried in his productions to involve the film's prospective audience in evaluating and examining the effectiveness of the product/process at every stage of its development. And it is in this context that Memorial University offers some exciting opportunities - the Program Evaluation Analysis Computer, or PEAC System.

The PEAC system allows the production team to test and evaluate, on a moment by moment basis, audience response to the product. This way the producers have better chances of producing more effectively. The differences can be compared to the architect versus the "auteur" theories. In the latter the product is one indivi-

dual's view, while with the former the filmmaker acts simply as an architect. Like the architect, the filmmaker designs the film, takes it back to the audience/client for evaluation and makes appropriate changes as the process continues.

Presently Smith is completing *Have You Seen My Bar?*. The film is not so much about alcoholism as about drinking habits, its primary purpose being to get people to talk about their drinking habits, what is socially acceptable, and at what point does alcohol become a problem in one's life. "Again the onus is not put solely on the individual but on government and industry to change the system."

At a very early stage, the alcohol film was plugged back into the principle groups the film is to affect - the user, the audience, and the expert. For Smith, filmmaking becomes a circular thing. "At each stage you plug back into the centre, check it, and change it to fit people's needs and to make sure your product is on target. You have to completely eliminate the ownership thing."

Kirk Smith's filmmaking process strives to achieve two overall objectives - to work for social change from within the system, and to find ways to put the audience ahead of the producers and filmmakers.

Videonics Limited is a specialty production house. Where as some people produce spe-

cialized programs for sports enthusiasts, Videonics produces "how-to" material for the magic industry - the professional, semi-professional, amateur, and all the magic hobbyists around the world.

What Videonics does is take people of an international stature - well-known professionals, leading entertainers, thinkers and inventors in the field of magic - people that have proven themselves before the general public. The magicians are brought into St. John's and perform before a live audience. Throughout the day each magic trick is taped and every little detail explained - some of the psychological points, like why you do a certain thing at a certain time, and the 'how-to' is taped from every conceivable angle to speed the teaching process.

The final tapes, each 60-minutes long, are marketed world wide. "We are in the capacity of selling our product to 75% of the countries in the world. All our programming has been certified as educational by both Canada and the United States," says Hans Zahn, himself a manufacturer of illusion.

"We've got thirty-one programs available. We're the leaders in the industry. There's no one that can come close to the amount and quality of programming that we have." According to Zahn, head of the company, other groups have brought out similar material but these others have received poor reviews from a technical standpoint.

For Hans Zahn, the technical quality of the programs has got to be as high in quality as the content. "When you're looking at the world market and you're trying to build a good reputation you've got to do the best you can with whatever you can. If it means spending a thousand dollars to get a good camera, it's money well spent. You have fewer problems when you're going from one television standard to the next. And the customer notices the quality!"

Hans himself is a professional magician, having worked as a professional in the field for some 20 years. In his early days he realized he could use something like this, but there was nothing of the type on the market. "The books on the market can't show you how to do magic tricks - not like you can on film."

From an educational point of view, Hans estimates that one hour of programming is equivalent to three hours of live instruction, and a lot cheaper.

"Magic is an international business," concludes Hans Zahn, "and we are the only company that can sell to all four corners of the world. Nobody else has gone to the trouble and expense to make sure they can supply the product!"

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