

anomie

by Peter Benison

ANOMIE, produced by Salvatore Gabbamonte (for Uranus Film Organization, Inc. Montreal), directed by Claude Castravelli, D.O.P.: Peter Benison. Synopsis: Set in the student ghetto and the university, this film shows life styles of several students and the relationships between them. When the harsh realities of another world clash with theirs, the viewer is left to decide if the students' life style is adequate or desirable.

When I was first approached last November to work on *Anomie*, I was told the film, a colour feature, was intended primarily for the university circuit. As I had come from a film society background, I knew a film of this type would be lucky to get \$200 a showing (more like \$75-\$150).

The economics didn't seem to fit, so I went over the financial details with the producer, which only took five minutes. By all accounts, this was your average two million dollar feature. After 'Canadianization' the cost had dropped to thirty eight thousand.

"I see," I said, "you think you can make a 90 minute colour feature, even in 16mm for just over thirty eight thousand?"

"No," he replied, "of course not." I breathed a sigh of relief, the whole thing was a joke.

"Where do you think I'm going to get that kind of money?" he continued. I was on my guard again.

"We've had to make revisions and the budget is now \$13,500."

This was rather hard for me to take, but as most of the shooting was to be on weekends (the cast was recruited from the local universities), I decided to go along with the gag.

Although my main interests were photographic, the cameraman had already been lined up, so I agreed to do the sound.

Day one arrives, and there I am on the 'set' (a borrowed house, no expense). To my surprise, the battered Bolex I had expected to see, wasn't there. Instead an Eclair along with batteries, sync cables, filters and tripod was on hand. A Nagra and Sennheiser comprised my sound equipment.

Another shock. I discovered that my payment, along with everyone else's was to be deferred until the film showed a profit. There were no transportation costs, and after the pizza arrived for lunch, I discovered there weren't any meal expenses either. This venture was going to cost me money.

As we were about to begin, I saw with horror, where else they were saving money: no lights! Actually this wasn't quite true, there were a few photofloods in reflectors. Admittedly the areas to light were small but how could there be any control? Simple, I was told, just flood it until you get an exposure. It seemed that lighting wasn't important other than to get an image on the stock.

The following day, I screened a couple of rolls, they had shot the week before as a test, and this lighting philosophy was evident. Sure, there was an exposure most of the time, but there certainly wasn't any character, and all the interiors looked the same regardless of the time of day.

It was at this point I felt I could contribute more than sound recording. I proceeded to hunt up a Colortran Multi-10 (focussing 1000wt), and two 650's. Not much, but a definite improvement. Another shortcut: no generators or electrician. Fortunately there was nothing too large to light, but even still I was surprised at what could be done with so little.



Photo: Gerry Wexler

Peter Benison



Photo: Gerry Wexler

For example, there was one scene in the bedroom where Marie comes in to wake up Jane about an important letter. Although the day was to be sunny, (it had to match with later scenes), they were planning to start the scene in the dark, and then have the room lights go on. Not only would this lead to continuity problems, but it also wouldn't set the scene effectively.

To make matters worse, the bed was by a window. Taking a few extra moments, I put the Multi-10 out on the balcony, and shone it through the drapes. Although it was night and snowing, the light hitting the drapes and the strong beam coming through the slit in the drapes crossed the occupant and made all the difference in the world. It indicates the time for day and suggests the heroine is not an early riser. A minor point, but nonetheless, tells the audience something about her. While it's no Academy Award stuff, that one light made a difference.

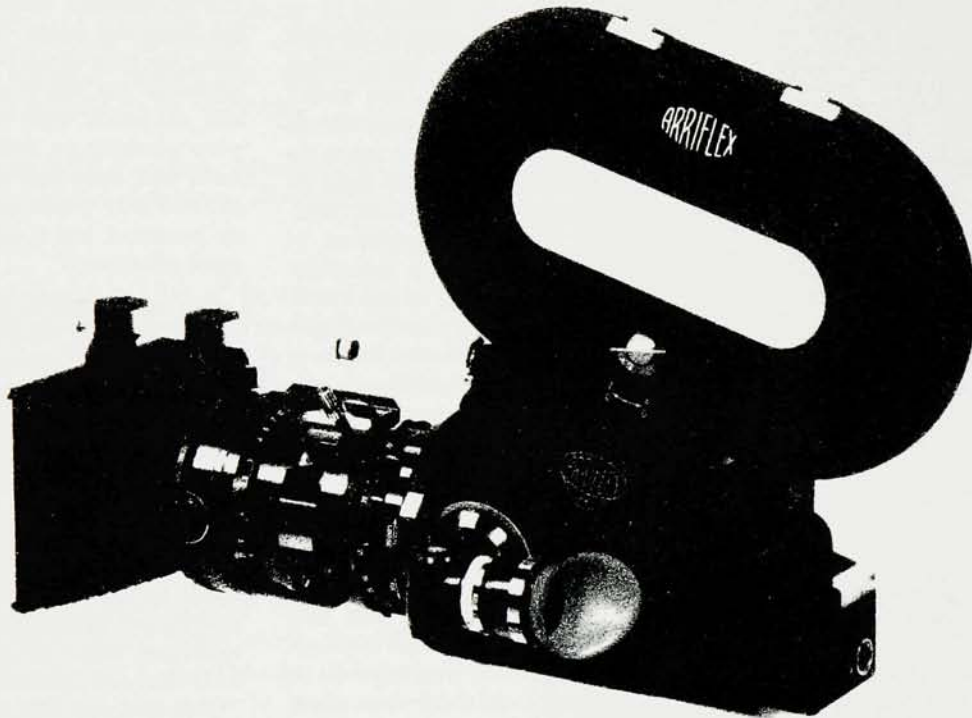
Another one light situation comes to mind. Our three stars walk into their apartment one night to find it ransacked. As the scene opens, the camera is in the messed-up room and is facing the hall. The hall wall is covered with books and an aquarium. Only the aquarium light is on when they enter. They can't be seen yet, but they can be heard coming into the porch, and the light goes on. The porch light nicely sidelights the books and gives an indication of the type of dwelling. In addition when the heroine walks into view and sees the room (face to camera), her surprised expression is heightened by this dramatic lighting. All with one 650!

The filming continued and so far two and a half hours of footage has been synced up with KEM. The 'budget' is being reviewed to determine whether or not we stay with the KEM or go back to the synchronizer and squawk box.

Apparently, to date, the cost has only been \$4500 and it doesn't look like it'll go much higher. It has been a real lesson in co-operation, ingenuity and low budget filmmaking.

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