

cultural dissent

Important screenings of hard-to-see films by dissident filmmakers took place in Venice this November; discussions and debates followed. Vaclav Taborsky was at the Biennale and gives us his report.

by Vaclav Taborsky

The most interesting part of Biennale 77 was the conference of the film section with some contributions on state subsidies to feature film makers. However, first I have to describe the event itself and its main topic: cultural dissent.

Unnoticed and – with the exception of one article in *Variety* – unreported by most of the film magazines, an unprecedented event took place in Venice between November 15 and December 15, 1977.

Cultural Dissent

La Biennale Di Venezia is organized every second year with a different topic. Last year it was dedicated to cultural dissent. Dozens of artists, scientists and communicators who at one time or other had experienced censorship, ostracism or persecution because of their innovative or critical work, were invited to the beautiful city which was an inspiration for many creative people in the past centuries.

Vaclav Taborsky, Czech filmmaker now living in Canada and teaching film at Algonquin College in Ottawa, won the Golden Lion San Marco Award in 1963 for the Best Documentary.

Energetic president Carlo Ripa di Meana almost succumbed to the same force which was the infamous instigator of dissident creation. Pressure from the Soviet embassy, East European press, and various communist organizations in Rome and Venice forced the organizers to change schedules and locations and to replace three section heads who yielded to the attacks of the radicals. In spite of this "crude exportation of Soviet censorship", as described by the stubborn president Carlo Ripa di Meana, Biennale took place and was extremely successful.

Two events went on for almost the entire month: an exhibition of modern Soviet and Czech artists, and screenings of films which had been critical or criticized or banned altogether. Dozens of features and documentaries from the USSR, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and other countries became an impressive selection of the most talented directors: Wajda, Janczo, Tarkovskij, Forman, Chytilova, and many others.

All topical seminars were held in the old, marble-refrigerated Ala Na-

poleonica in Museo Correr which is just opposite the famous church on Piazza San Marco. Discussions – and sometimes arguments – in each section lasted three to four days. Problems of freedom – or the lack of it – were presented in the history section (André Glucksman, one of the French new philosophers, was perhaps the most exciting participant), visual arts, film, religion, theatre, science and literature. The last section had an impressive list of guests, from Vercors, Alberto Moravia, Stephen Spender, and Andrej Siniavskij, to Josef Skvorecky from the University of Toronto.

From all scrutinized areas of human activities, motion pictures were probably the most interesting. It is comparatively easier to smuggle a book or a study or a painting out of a tightly controlled state than to acquire a print of a film which was never released in the country of its origin. Yet, the selection for the screenings was almost complete.

Film Seminars

Among participants of the film section were Jan Kadar, Lionel Rogosin,

Italian director Nelo Risi, Russian director Mikhail Kalik, Herbert Marshall from USA, Finnish-Swedish director Jörn Donner, Jiri Tirl from Sweden, Kurt Goldberger from Germany, writer Ugo Piro and Ernesto Laura and Lino Miccicché from Italy, Brian Winston from the National Film School in London, Vladimir Valenta from the National Film Board and many others.

The rich and diversified screening program started with two films of the imprisoned Armenian director Sergej Paradzhanov. Filmmakers and critics at Biennale sent a letter to the Soviet government, pleading for his release from prison. Those presentations were followed by pictures of filmmakers who had been criticized, censored or unemployed, but not jailed: Andrej Tarkovskij, Marlen Khutsiev (his film *I Am Twenty Years Old* was banned by Khrushchev), Karoly Makk, Krzysztof Zanussi, Pavel Juracek (recently exiled, now living in Germany), Dusan Hanak, Jura Jakubisko, etc.

The greatest discovery of those screenings was probably the films of the young Slovak directors who – if there were no interference with their creative efforts under normal circumstances – would astonish the film connoisseurs by the richness and originality of their cinematic language in the years to come. Unfortunately, Dusan Hanak was not allowed to make films for several years, while the greatest and most surprising talent Jura Jakubisko (*Deserters, Deserters and Nomads, Birds, Orphans and Fools*) had all his films banned and was not even permitted to finish the editing of a film made for the Italian producer M. Ergas in Rome. Jakubisko would remotely remind us of Lelouch, as he is usually his own scriptwriter, director and cinematographer. Like the mentioned French director, he delivers powerful and poetic images, full of action and logical movement. Unlike Lelouch, he has the unusual ability to masterfully combine poetry, humor and surrealistic vision. If his films were available on our continent, Jakubisko would undoubtedly become a cult figure for thousands of film enthusiasts.

Government and Film

The sub-topic for discussion on motion pictures was "The Nationalized Cinema, Its Successes and Its Problems". Apart from East European struggles with state control, there were several contributions re-

levant to our situation, as in Germany, Great Britain and Sweden the governments subsidize either part or the entire feature film production.

Germany

Hanns Meier, director of the Mannheim Film Festival, reported about film subsidies in the German Federal Republic. Seven cents are collected from the price of every ticket sold in over 3,000 German theatres. This amount is complemented by the governments. Feature film producers receive approximately one million dollars from the federal government and 5 millions from the state governments.

The Federal Ministry of the Interior subsidizes some producers if they wish to develop a good quality screenplay into film. The amount allocated for this purpose goes up to \$300,000. Almost 40% of this subsidy is given to the first projects of young directors. The prizes are distributed on the first day of the Berlin Film Festival.

Apart from those and other grants (from the Ministry of Economy and from Curatorium of Young German Film), \$5,000,000 comes from co-production with the two major TV networks. Since 1974 there were 46 feature films produced on the basis of this agreement with ARD and ZDF.

Nevertheless, the money seems to be inadequate if compared with other annual subsidies in Germany: theatres – \$300,000,000, museums – \$80,000,000, libraries – \$50,000,000.

German filmmakers request that the film investment be increased proportionally. If their demands for 10% of the theatre monies were met, it would increase the purse for German features five times, to \$30,000,000 every year.

Great Britain

Richard Craven, member of the British Association of Independent Producers and secretary to the Film Industry Committee, started with a humorous comparison. Referring to some fruitless arguments about repressed culture from both left and right, he pronounced the British Film Industry Committee to be a dissident group in the United Kingdom. His report on the British film industry conference which was chaired by Robert Bolt (screenwriter of many films by David Lean) in mid-1977, reminded us of many Canadian problems.

Film historians – what happened in 1927? First sound film, of course. But it was also the year of the first bill establishing the British quota of

films to be shown on British screens. It seems that we are hobbling almost 50 years behind.

The levy we all (not you, Famous) would like to see collected from film theatres, started in Great Britain with the Eady Plan in 1950. Seven percent of all box office receipts are redistributed to the makers of British films. It amounts to over \$5,000,000 every year. Well...

Swedish 10%

The most interesting contribution was delivered by Harry Schein, director of the Swedish Film Institute. Since 1963 there has been an agreement between the Swedish government and the representatives of the Swedish film industry (producers, distributors, exhibitors). The percent of box office receipts are transferred to the Svenska Filminstitutet.

One third of the subsidy is used for non-commercial activities, mainly the cinemathèque. The rest is supposed to finance the production of domestic feature films. With 8-10 films made every year, the Swedish Film Institute is one of the largest production units in Western Europe. For each film approved for production, there are one or two projects rejected (Canadian ratio of applications to the subsidized projects is 4.5 : 1 at the CFDC).

Five members of the Board of Directors are eligible for three years. Presently, the Board consists of: president of the largest film company, head of the Actors Union, a representative of the government, a representative of the Swedish Trade Unions, and the director of the Svenska Filminstitutet.

Since 1975, the Institute reached an additional agreement with the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation to establish a fund for production of films which would be shown on television 18 months after their theatrical release.

Canadian Question Mark

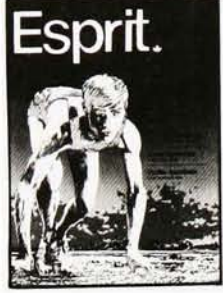
There are several interesting points in those three contributions from Venice. Levy on the box office receipts, partial subsidy of the film institute, funds from television, grants to young filmmakers, the role of the actors union, and many others. It will take us some time to accomplish some of those goals. The Swedish ten percent may not be realistic here, but what about a mere 9% of the theatrical receipts to be redistributed for the production of Canadian feature films – just for starters?

With this joke I end my report from Biennale 77. □

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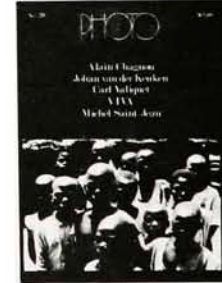
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