

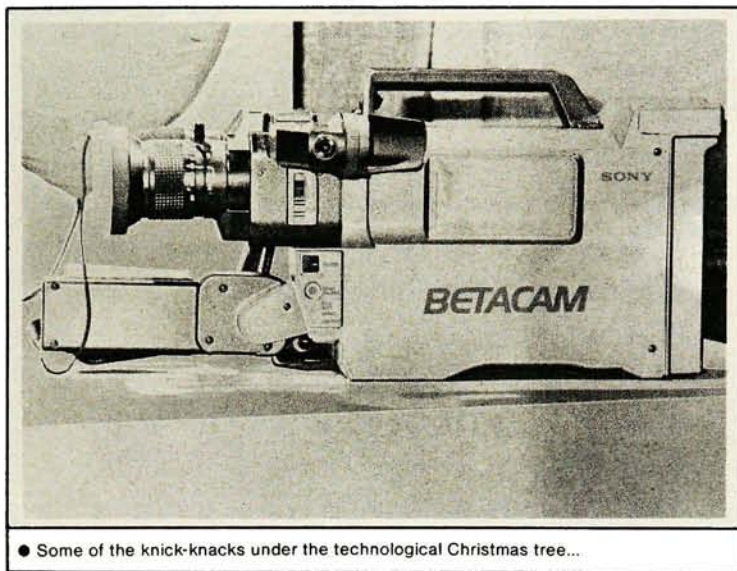
Tools of the new technology

The recent Convergence Forum on the new film/video technologies afforded the novice videomaker/filmmaker a universe of possibilities to slip across that phosphorous barrier heretofore considered the exclusive realm of technocrats, scientists and hardware hustlers. Like most of these fora, this meeting of film and video technicians, salesmen, researchers, and the odd artist lived up to its name in both senses of the word. In ancient times the forum was both a marketplace where popular assemblies met and a place where political and legal business was transacted; late in 1984, the Convergence Forum was all things to all people.

Most people that I talked to after the experience "profited" from the time spent there. Richard Burman, a video wizard from Montreal, honed his skills in an intensive three-day seminar led by Harry Mathias which covered everything that you ever wanted to know about electronic cinematography but were afraid to ask. In an entertaining and forthright fashion, Mathias led us down the golden cathode path to enlightenment and on the way we learned about Gamma, Waveform generators, video lighting, enhancement and 2010 other things that I wrote down. His attempt to define film in terms of video injured the electric egos of a few engineers, but I found the sessions gave a human face to some pretty dry subject-matter. Burman got a lot out of the seminar as did Magnus Isaacson a producer at Radio-Canada's *Le Point*, who felt that the knowledge he gained would at least enable him to speak the same techno-language as those he was working with. John Sleeman, a Montreal photographer, and Tony Lhotsky, an Ottawa cinematographer, both said that the sessions were worthwhile, so who am I to argue?

Let me say that I got a great deal out of Convergence. I learned. I experienced. I met three new people. The whole enterprise contributed greatly to my evolving understanding of video and new technology in both a technical and analytical sense. So I do salute the effort of all involved, Larry Lynn, Barbara Samuels, Suzanne Hénaud and Ewa Zebrowski, among many others, who brought to Canada, for the first time, the possibility of thinking about what we, as media people, are doing and what we're doing it with.

So what's new? And what should you be investigating? There was a whole roomful of video toys. From Sony we get High Definition Television - the next new wave. Wide-screen. High resolution. The ironic thing is that it's almost like film. We also get single-frame animation on a BVH 2500, Betacams, Skycams, Panacams, Aniputer A-100's, Video Laser-



● Some of the knick-knacks under the technological Christmas tree...

discs, Synclavier sound and music systems and a whole range of other knickknacks that belong under the technological Christmas tree.

And then there were panels. And more panels.

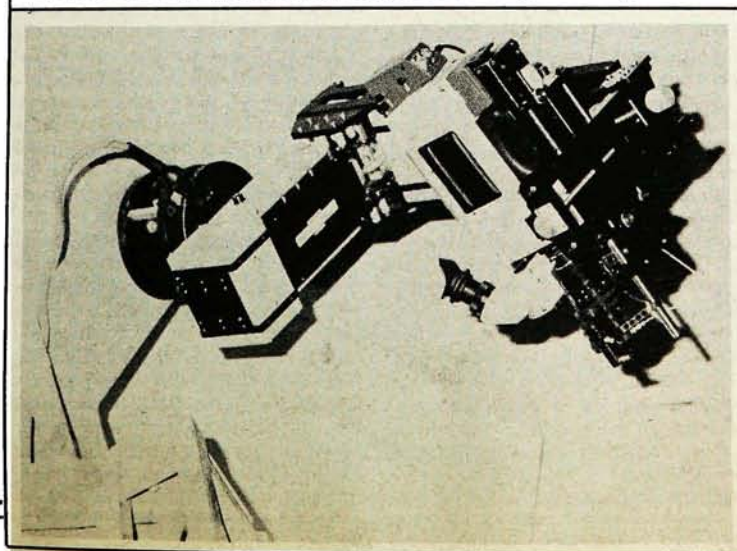
One panel was dedicated to Computer-Assisted editing. The idea is to de-mystify and make palpable various video-editing systems which are now being used to aid and abet film editing. The most interesting systems were explained to us by a panel which included Québécois editor Yves Langlois, an editing consultant Diana Weynand and Lucasfilm's Greg Sexton. What we have to look forward to are expensive but incredible editing systems which bring all possibilities to our fingertips. Editing will truly become the cerebral process that it is and we, as editors, will never again have to worry about losing trims. Look out for Montage, Editdroid and other similar systems by all manner of similar manufacturers.

Another seminar dealt with the

tools now available to the production designer, another with New Horizons in Sound Reproduction. Sound, ahhhhhhh: finally somebody is listening. The most interesting developments come from Nagra who have developed a recorder which enables videographers to cut the umbilical of bad sound, and from Tomlinson Holman, the technical director of Lucasfilm Ltd., who presented a comprehensive analysis of sound from innovative recording techniques to THX sound systems, to a wonderfully responsible program of theatre sound alignment that they are putting into the field.

The "hottest" things in new media are computer graphic systems. A whole day at Convergence was spent with some of the most brilliant minds in the business. The images that they recreate brings magic back to the screen. I tried not to like it. But there is something so attractive about the clean and perfect illusions that these people create that you must put out of our head for a mo-

● New wave: the Skycam has already revolutionized football-game coverage



ment the fact they are still selling beer, television and thrills to a video illiterate audience. Yet these people give new meaning to the word artist. Their technological perfection will some day find creativity.

Other valuable seminars were given on the practicalities of shooting in the field, studio lighting techniques, distribution, and the most exciting movement in video/computer technology - the interactive video-disc. A theoretical production process by explained Jennifer Scanlin, revealed the video-disc's amazing potential.

There were other seminars documentary, advertising, and the cost effectiveness of the tape/film option. But the most valuable was the token seminar on video art which concerned new ways of expanding the visual language, which, in the end, is the only important thing. After you've acquired all the toys and the skills, what are you going to do? The members of the avant-garde panel showed us how you can communicate thought, feeling and message in an individual form.

I could argue with a few things though, just for the record. Where were the women? Everytime I walked into the main ballroom of the Sheraton Centre where the Forum was held, at the front of the room were six or seven men, identically dressed except for different coloured ties, giving their respective spiels/presentations. It looked like a convention of robotics salesmen. Where were the artists? Oh, there was a token panel, and it was very interesting, but why not put artists and philosophers on each panel? Where were the Canadians? The Québécois? I know it was an international forum but still... Why did it cost so much? I wouldn't be able to afford it if I wasn't writing about it. Where were the critics? Where was the dialectic? The public (audience) interaction? If interactive video is the wave of the future, the dynamics of the Forum sure didn't reveal a great debate over the meaning of all this new technology, about where it was taking us, or what it was doing to us.

On the last day there was an attempt to provide a philosophical overview to the whole conference: a global overview. This succeeded in its own way: the actual definition of the film/video/computer Convergence is still to be found. But - if anything is clear - it will involve a new way of seeing, a new way of thinking about seeing. We must not fear the new. We must accept what is good in the next technology. But we must work also to control and democratize the new media, to investigate its true human and liberating potential.

Peter Wintonick ●