

# Convergence confab a "critical success" for film/video makers

MONTREAL — With over 1000 registered participants (87% from Quebec, 12% from the rest of Canada, and 1% from the U.S.), Convergence, the five-day forum on the new film/video technology held Nov. 27-Dec. 2, was, according to its organizing committee president Larry Lynn "a first, not just in Canada, not just in North America — but a first of its kind."

"It's only a slight exaggeration to say it succeeded beyond our wildest dreams," commented co-director Barbara Samuels. "We'd prepared ourselves to take a bath. We'd been told we were the last people who could organize such an international conference and what happened was that we had some pretty heavyweight people come in from Los Angeles and London and who discovered Montreal. Canadians have never been terribly given over to international conferences and the international community was happily surprised by the level of discussion and interest. For that alone, it was worth it."

The \$600,000-budgetted forum, which Lynn agrees was "a critical success," admitting, however, to "a small (as yet untabulated) deficit: the box-office just about made it, but not quite", was addressed to professionals in film and video and offered 22 workshops/panels (at between \$35-\$85 per session depending on date of registration) examining aspects of the film/video convergence from production techniques in electronic cinematography to interactive video.

Paralleling the workshops was a wide selection of current work in video, thematically organized by programmer Ewa Zebrowski not only to reflect the conference panels,

but as well to illustrate uses of video made by such filmmakers as Wim Wenders (*Room 666*), Jean-Luc Godard (Scenario du film *Passion*) and Michelangelo Antonioni (*Il Mistero d'Oberwald*).

An exhibits room at the Sheraton Centre, where most of Convergence was held — screenings were at the National Film Board's Guy Favreau Complex theatre — featured state-of-the-art technology like the much-discussed Sony High-Definition Television System (HDVS) with its 1125 scanning lines, the Synclavier 32-track digital recording system, as well as displays of Lucasfilm's Editdroid electronic editing system, the Sky-cam suspended movable camera, and other electronic marvels. Conspicuous by their absence, however, were manufacturers from the film side of the image-production industry.

Of the 87 invited panellists, five cancelled, while four came from as far away as Japan and Australia. By national origin, panellists were predominantly American (38, mainly from Los Angeles and New York), with 31 Canadians, four Europeans and one Nicaraguan.

The intensive electronic cinematography course, given by Harry Mathias, asc, lasted three days, while the remaining panels were held in three-hour sessions, except for the final global overview which consisted of an all-day session in two three-hour chunks. Other panel topics focussed on computer editing, a primer in electronic imaging, production design in the light of video aesthetics, music videos, new horizons in sound reproduction and post-production, the video avant-garde, computer animation, electronic field produc-

tion, cost effectiveness in video/film production, studio lighting in video production, the video and film documentary, advertising and the new technology, distribution and exhibition in the new age, and interactive video. Many of the panels are available on videocassettes through the NFB.

If overall, Convergence often seemed like a hard-sell attempt by the video industry to seduce filmmakers into converting to tape — indeed, as one participant put it, "This isn't so much a convergence as it is a submergence" — reaction to the conference was extremely varied.

"I thought it was absolutely fantastic," commented Glen Ferrier of Toronto IATSE Local 667. "There was interest right across the board. There should be more conferences like this one, across the country, not just confined to Quebec."

For CBC-TV drama producer Mark Blandford (*Duplessis, Balconville, Empire Inc.*), "As a first taste, I think it was useful. Basically the whole thing appeared geared to people with little knowledge of video, and a lot of my Film Board friends with no knowledge of video said they found it useful."

Though trained as a filmmaker, Blandford doesn't "share the industry bias against video." His own television work, he says, has been "pretty much 50-50 film and tape; I really have no preference," adding that he was "really fascinated by the High Definition TV, because what it means is that we are not very far from shooting in video that won't be any different from film."

Primarily, for Blandford, the value of Convergence "was that it brought a lot of people from

different aspects of the industry together. Usually conferences like these are very narrow: either all techies, or film people or videotape editors. So the organizers should be congratulated in bringing people from all areas of the industry together."

National Film Board filmmaker Mort Ransen found Convergence "a little disappointing. It was mainly an establishment affair, and the average age was too high. At \$350 for the conference, kids couldn't get in, and this was a crippling omission. If Convergence was organized to bring people in film and the established television industry together with what is new in technology, it's the kids who are the most playful with this stuff and they weren't there. So there was nothing threatening to our complacency."

For Ransen, "a lot of filmmakers came in order to be disappointed, so that afterwards they could go back to working in the same old way, without having to nervously look over their shoulders."

"Convergence looked at video as a cheaper way to make films, but there isn't really that much difference. And that's very relieving if you want to dismiss it."

Still, Ransen felt "the conference was useful, though my expectations weren't realized. But it's the sort of thing that should happen again. The more action there is going on, the better."

For experimental filmmaker Richard Hancox, who teaches media arts at Sheridan College in Toronto, Convergence simply glossed over the fact that film and video "are really two different, very different art forms.

I feel that for the organizers new technology is simply videotape — that's the new film. They tried to organize the panels as though they were selling a product. To me the truth still emerged: they are ignoring the new film technology."

"There are so many new things happening in film: Fuji for instance has just announced an ASA 800 professional production film-stock that'll be absolutely revolutionary."

"The difference is that the new technology in film is more software and less hardware. You can use the new film technologies in the old hardware, but if your only definition of new stops with hardware, that just doesn't count. After all, even tape itself is now 30 years old."

Mentioning some "really new technology in film," such as the Swedish developed EFC (electronic film conforming) system that allows electronic editing on film, or Kodak's data code film that makes film frame-addressable by computer, Hancox felt that "what our film industry needs is not videotape, but conferences on scriptwriting, on distribution and exhibition. What it needs is money and ideas, not just tape technology."

"So I would have liked to see some of these issues dealt with; instead what we got was just a lot of hype."

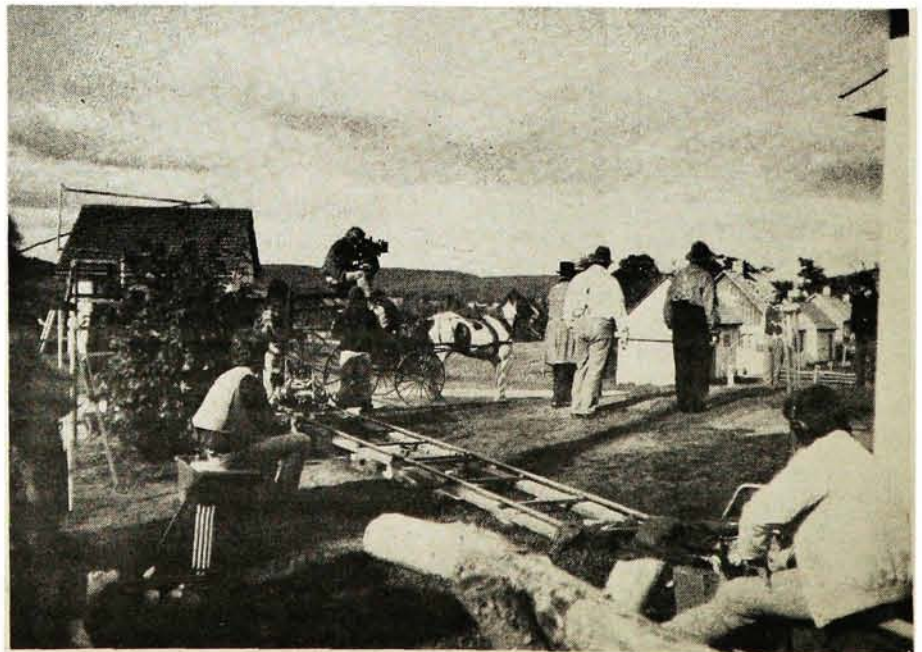
For filmmaker Jacques Bensimon who heads international distribution at the National Film Board, Convergence "was a spectacular display of marvellous toys utterly removed from our own reality, whether you're talking public-sector or private-sector. I feel something

## TELESCENE WINS AGAIN

Congratulations to Robin Spry  
for *STRESS & EMOTIONS*

Winner of best performance:  
1984 GOLDEN SHEAF AWARDS

Winner of best educational film:  
1984 CANADIAN FILM & TELEVISION  
AWARDS





**Convergence**

like the African must have felt on meeting the white man for the first time with all his trinkets and baubles.

"And yet Convergence did touch upon something fundamental: that as a filmmaker, when I look at a television set, I'm aware that there's something happening there that's completely beyond me. I feel that in my own craft I'm still back in the age of the foot-powered sewing machine.

"Yet what I see on television is a very specific usage of information, either by the state or by large corporations. The question then becomes: can this medium discover a cinematographic vocation for itself? And that's where we as filmmakers come into it, if at all.

"In Canada, where we still talk about developing a film industry, we've become like dinosaurs, totally surpassed by the information media. There is no convergence happening: at best we're taking cinematographic products and redistributing them through broadcasting.

"The virtue of a conference like Convergence is to have addressed some of these issues, which are tremendously complex, whose tools have marvelous potential, but are still very far removed from both our means and our needs."

For Convergence co-director Larry Lynn, "I think the idea of a conference such as this should continue. Perhaps within one to two years, we could probably put together a continuation here in Montreal."

For now, "we have to sit down and figure out what happened. We have to analyze this thing and see where one should go next.

"I think the general idea was

a success. We succeeded in bringing people together to discuss the new technology and its impact on the industry. By bringing these ideas in from around the world, hopefully people walked out with a new perspective on their own work. That at least was our original intention."

Convergence was funded through grants from the federal department of Communications, the National Film Board, Telefilm Canada, the Société générale du cinéma, Montreal's CIDEM Tourisme, the federal department of Regional Economic Expansion, and Tourisme Québec.

For additional aspects of Convergence, see this issue pp. 7-13.

MONTREAL - Runaway kids' hit *La Guerre des tuques* will open in English as *The Dog Who Stopped The War* in Toronto and Vancouver on Jan. 25.

**Film Production Insurance**

Insurance Specialists for

**CANADIAN & INTERNATIONAL FILMS**

Since 1965

**Michael Devine & Assocs. Ltd.**

3901, JEAN-TALON OUEST  
MONTREAL, QUEBEC H3R 2G4

Give us a call - we speak your language!

1-514-735-2579

1-514-739-3161

Telex 05-27317

**DAVID  
RAIN  
WRITER**

research, scripts  
and narration for  
documentary films



PHONE FOR  
SCREENING REEL  
(416) 533-5661

FROM SCRIPT TO SCREEN

Season's  
greetings

**FILM & VIDEO**

FILM/VIDEO SOUND STAGES

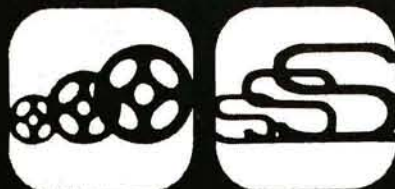
16/35 LAB. SERVICES - WET GATE PRINTING

RECORDING STUDIOS: ADR; FOLEY; MUSIC. MIXING - DOLBY STEREO

COMPLETE LANGUAGE DUBBING SERVICES

FILM/TAPE TRANSFERS; ALL FORMATS DUPLICATION

**all under one roof**



**Sonolab inc**

1500 PAPINEAU STREET, MONTREAL, QUEBEC CANADA H2K 4L9 (514) 527-8671 TELEX: 055-61722