

ON (EXPERIMENTAL) FILM

by Barbara N. Sternberg

I don't want to whine, nor flog a dead horse, nor bite the hand that feeds, nor covet what neighbouring filmmakers have, but what's an independent or experimental filmmaker to do to get films 'out there'? Enter festivals, you suggest. Good idea. Festivals give exposure, and help make contacts. Prizes from festivals bring recognition. Festivals also tie up one's print for awhile – international festivals, for quite awhile. This is no problem if one has the many release prints one should have for effective distribution. However, multiple release prints (read, 'expensive') are not allowed on Ontario Arts nor Canada Council production grant budgets. And now, I am given to understand, the National Film Board will no longer make release prints for independents. So, what's a filmmaker to do to effectively distribute with one print?

Distributors like Canadian Filmmakers' Distribution Centre, Atlantic and West (arts-council-supported cooperatives) do not have budgets for purchasing prints or making additional prints as needed for distribution purposes (the filmmaker deposits a print with these centres). Nor do they have funds for posters, newspaper advertisements or travelling to festivals. The amount Telefilm spends to take a film to Cannes is close to the entire year's budget for CFMDC!! So, we need the arts councils to allow for multiple-release prints, posters and advertising on production grants or to substantially increase distributors' budgets. The relative amounts spent by the department of Communications on the NFB, Telefilm and that given Canada Council to distribute towards independent and experimental filmmaking clearly indicate DOC's priorities. It keeps these film activities in their respective, determined places. We want to change our place; experimental films should be allowed to be seen.

Have you written the National Gallery yet? Do you agree with their allocating funds for video acquisitions but not for film acquisitions? The new building will see a video screening area within the gallery space – certainly a welcome addition – but again, they refuse to make the minor changes to this plan that would allow this space to screen films as well. Silence on your part means it's okay.

Yippee! Plans are in progress for a week-long International Experimental Film Congress to be held in Toronto in the spring of '89, the first since the one held in London, England in 1979 – about time to have another look, survey the international scene, identify directions. The congress will involve lectures, panels, technical workshops, a critics sidebar and lots of screenings: recent work from Canada, U.S.A., Germany, France, England and possibly Japan and Russia plus special historical and retrospective screenings. YIPPEE!

Carl Brown has just completed *Condensation of Sensations* (60 min., colour sound). Throughout the film the image is manipulated by various processes (toning, dyeing, solarization, hand-processing) to create reticulation amongst other effects. The sound track is by the Toronto-based improv new music group CCMC (Michael Snow, Casey Sokol, Nobuo Kubota, Allan Mattes) who played to the film improvisationally. Carl felt that it was a natural marriage between his film and CCMC's sound in that, in both, there is a sense of randomness and spontaneity managed within a control of their respective media. Sometimes the sound and image work together, sometimes they pull apart; they move together or they don't but always, Carl feels, in an interesting way. In the first reel, the struggle between sound and image reinforces the subject's struggle (to see) as he falls and gets up. The second reel flows more easily and evenly as the character sees more clearly or with new vision.

Carl recently premiered *Condensation of Sensations* at the Banff Centre for the Arts where he presented a slide show of his still photography as well. Carl works similarly in still and motion picturing. In both, he starts out with black and white realistic images which are manipulated and colour is added – an emotional content, impact, surface. He wants to work with surface and what's going on in the image – (Carl mentioned the influence of Stan Brakhage's *Dog Star Man*.) He was trying, in *Condensation of Sensations*, to get away from theory and language; to connect to the audience on an emotional or gut level, at least at first. To make a film you don't have to know the theory first in order to see it. A long discussion did follow the Banff screening.

Tax outrage

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ing a commitment from Telefilm in October when the funding announcement was made. His project, a \$350,000 documentary entitled *Return From Death* was to be coproduced with France. Both Television Quatre Saisons and the Global Television Network are waiting for a commitment from Telefilm.

"It has been delay after delay," says Floquet, "and I have been told by Telefilm that I will receive a letter by February. Global needs an answer by April 1."

The cold winter weather is not the only thing that is chilling out the production industry outside of Montreal and Toronto, says Alan Stein, an Alberta-based filmmaker.

Stein, president of the Alberta Motion Picture Industries Association says that although production is slowing down as a result of the Telefilm problem, producers in the west have been active in seeking part of the \$3 million that Telefilm has managed to save and earmark for development.

"There has been a rush on development applications," says Stein, "in order to get some cash flow this fiscal year."

Telefilm has allocated a percentage of this \$3 million for regional film development.

A meeting in Edmonton, in late November, between the Alliance of Canadian Regional Motion Picture Industry Associations (ACRIMPIA) and Telefilm chairman Jean Sirois has left the impression, says Stein, that interim production funding will be made available through the department of Communications.

"They are going after interim funding from DOC but I don't think they know what their financial circumstances are," says Stein. He says he does not think Telefilm will take any bold initiatives to solve their problems until a new executive director is in place. Just when that will be is also uncertain, he says.

Laurence Carota, president of the Atlantic Independent Film and Video Association, says that although projects are moving ahead, producers in the Atlantic provinces are "up

Carl mentioned the need to work in other areas besides experimental film in order to survive – you can't survive only making experimental films unless you teach – and finds it ironic that he sold a still photograph recently for \$2,000 that was composed of footage from his film work!

in the air in terms of any future projects."

"I don't think all the damage has been assessed yet," says Carota, echoing Demers. "The biggest damage is the loss of credibility of the film industry just as we are making headway in getting potential financial partners interested."

Carota argues that the Telefilm funding situation is a

strong case for dedicated funding and that it would serve the Canadian film and television production industry if Telefilm accepted a proposal put forward at the Edmonton meeting that the production budget be dedicated in thirds to the Atlantic provinces, central Canada (Montreal and Toronto) and the western provinces.

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