

winnipeg film symposium 1976

by Stephen Chesley

photo: Stephen Chesley



(1 to r) Kirwan Cox, Tom Shandel, producers; Michael Spencer; Linda Beath, distributor; André Lamy; Sandra Gathercole; Len Klady.

**One of the anomalies of the Canadian film-
ing situation is that, once a year, various
funding sources get together to offer some
sixty participants a free three-day trip to
Winnipeg for discussions and films. Stephen
Chesley gives us the essential points of the
debates held during this year's Symposium.**

The Fourth Annual Canadian Film Symposium, held as part of the Festival of Life and Learning at the University of Manitoba from February 2-5 under the guidance and spiritual direction of Len Klady, assumes a role each year of a tribal gathering. From across the land filmmakers make their way through winter's icy blasts to the cold, sunny, clear Winnipeg council chamber. And each year, while the goals and basic issues remain relatively constant, the emphases change. And the East meets the West and finds common ground. This year several of the chiefs didn't make it - trapped in a massive storm in the East - but the rest arrived at some implied, if not articulated conclusions, and conveyed an overall impression of the Canadian Film Industry in early 1976 that is heartening, to say the least.

If there is any one word to describe the outlook of the participants' it's 'positive'. There is a basic assumption that people are making films whether features or shorts - and this year, for the first time, discussion about shorts equalled or surpassed that about features. Less bitching was evident, although a small chorus of "The Government owes us" could be heard from time to time. But on the whole a great deal of knowledge about the film industry has been acquired since the first major Symposium two years ago, and it showed in the discussions, which were much more practically centred, rather than occurring on the simple level of government vilification.

This attitude has resulted, I think, not because of any brilliant moves on the part of Government film agencies. In fact, the opposite is almost true. Government on the highest level is disregarded as impotent, and the preference is to work on the local level with regional representatives of government bodies that can offer direct aid and comfort to accomplish the main task: make films.

In fact, the overwhelming difference revealed by this year's Symposium was the actual strength of regional activity, and, for the first time, some explanation of why it is so strong. There is a definite allegiance to the various parts of the country, most in evidence in the Prairies, where Vancouver usually stands alone in espousing the virtues of recording the life of one's own provincial habitat. Toronto is no longer seen as The Big Apple to all, and conflict is sure to grow between regional outposts of organizations based in central Canada and the filmmakers who feel the Big Guys aren't responsive to local needs. It'll be rough going because neither side now understands or sympathizes with the other's chosen centre of work loyalty.

Of course Mr. Faulkner *et al* did not escape some well-thrown darts. But he himself occupied a new position in discussions: whenever representatives of government film agencies occupied panelist chairs, they were not assaulted as symbols of Ottawa or Montreal incompetence. Instead the CFDC and NFB and Canada Council, while still sitting on the fence, seemed to be falling to the filmmakers' side a slight bit; people seemed to realize that the ultimate problem was not artistic ignorance at the top, but political ineptitude and that both filmmakers and government film agencies were in the same position with the same goals. The enemies are still American domination of all Canadian film markets and Faulkner's endless cowardice and limited vision, but all present realized that both filmmakers and government bodies need to join the battle on the same side, thus rendering obsolete the approach of divide and conquer used so effectively to stifle strength in the past.

Stephen Chesley founded Impact Magazine in 1971 and was editor of The Canadian Film Digest from 1972 to 1974. He is presently a free-lance writer and photographer and is a member of the Board of Editors of Cinema Canada.

Klady again assembled an interesting group of features and shorts for screening. The list includes **Bar Salon, Pour le meilleur et pour le pire, Cold Journey, A Sweeter Song, The Clown Murders, Eliza's Horoscope** in the feature category; **Potlach, Bachman-Turner Overdrive, Buenos Dias Companeras** in the longer short category; and many shorts from NFB and regional co-op productions centres. Most of the filmmakers were there for personal discussion.

The panels themselves were, except for a Policy discussion, very much low key, and took the tone of explanation and description rather than accusation. The storm did prevent certain important elements from reaching Winnipeg on time, such as Colin Low and Tom Radford for the Regionalism and Film panels. And from time to time discussions were overlong on the tangents of co-op survival and the relative merits of the 'hustle' in the grand scheme of things; but during the flow of words a great deal of information was passed, a couple of bits of which were really announced for the first time. Herewith a general summary of the highlights of each.

REGIONALISM AND TELEVISION. The panelists: Terry Marner, a Saskatchewan filmmaker; Ralph Thomas, a CBC Drama producer based in Toronto, Vancouver filmmaker Tom Shandel; ACCESS Alberta head Jim Stanton; Leon Johnson, co-ordinator of the Winnipeg Film Group.

Moderator Len Klady opened the panel by asking each member to outline the role of his local TV entity. Jim Stanton began with a description of the three-year-old Alberta educational TV and radio corporation, explaining that its \$6.5 million annual budget is used to operate CKVA FM radio, buy open time on CTV for a daily magazine show, prepare school programs, produce a quarterly magazine, and operate a sales arm. One third of production is freelance, said Stanton, and added that Alberta freelancers are



Ralph Thomas

Bob Lower

incensed with the Corporation for insisting on acquisition of all rights for three years.

Terry Marner, though not now a part of the operation himself, outlined the beginnings of Saskatchewan's public broadcasting effort, just now moving into operation. He said that initial attempts to separate it from direct government control were futile, and now the Department of Education is the umbrella for the broadcasting efforts. It's overloaded with bureaucracy, and only in the fall plans to take on production personnel. Marner said that CBC Saskatchewan is under Manitoba budget, so in effect Saskatchewan is a colony of Manitoba, supplying technicians and often creative personnel; as well educational TV on CBC is also financed through Manitoba. He said that he

himself is working on co-productions with CTV, and calculated the amount of potential freelance employment in Saskatchewan at nil.

Manitoba, said Leon Johnson, has a budget now frozen at \$150,000. There is no central authority on the public level, and production must go through each department.

Tom Shandel outlined B.C.'s pioneering effort in public TV: Communications Mandate. There's no educational TV in B.C., but last fall freelance filmmakers and creators were asked to submit plans for CM, and the government would buy time on the CBC for broadcast. It was an attempt to create an alternative TV system. Shandel himself submitted a plan for Pacifica TV, whereby half-inch video would be used to create a muckraking media to fill the void in B.C. of progressive media. It was to be a combination of high grade journalism and low grade technology. "But", said Shandel, "on December 11 we lost a great deal. No contracts had been let so the new government can get out of it. Right now there's no official word, but it looks like it isn't going to happen."

The discussion then turned to the last bastion in the public list to face assault: the CBC. Ralph Thomas outlined the CBC content and structure. He described the Corporation as a reflection of the country: federal, provincial, and city-state levels, and the relationship most volatile on the last level; for example, Cornerbrook is incensed with CBC-St. John's. Regions operate heavily in public affairs, with dramatic production now centred in Toronto, but with Winnipeg and Halifax and then other regions to be strengthened. The coverage of provincial issues depends very much on the region: it reflects how much people in the area want something. The West is weakest, said Thomas, and the Maritimes the most lively and interesting. CBC-St. John's is inextricably tied up with the politics of the province; Joey Smallwood insists he was defeated by a CBC public affairs producer. In the educational area, the

Benson, John Hirsch, Peter Herndorf. "And," he added, "they go Toronto and sit there like caricatures of Toronto." Thomas added that another pressure was constant, and that was the existence and force of American broadcasting. Hirsch, said Thomas, just the week before, ordered that all scripts must now be Canadian if they are to be produced by his department.

The concept of hustle poked its nose up briefly and despite much condemnation of its existence, Thomas commented that even if the term has bad connotations, in any situation you won't be found until people know you're there.

REGIONALISM AND FILM. The panelists: Marilyn Janakis, of the Department of Tourism, Recreation and Cultural Affairs and member of the Interdisciplinary Committee on Film in Manitoba; Chuck Lapp, Co-ordinator of the Halifax Co-op; Bob Lower of the Winnipeg Film Group; Bill Boyle, co-ordinator of the Toronto Filmmakers' Co-op, Gerry Krepakevich, executive producer of the NFB Prairie Regional office.

Beginning the discussion Krepakevich outlined the NFB prairie effort, noting that the office had been kept small, and the first full year of production is now underway. Most of the processing is done locally; productions up to a certain budget do not need Montreal approval; the office's role includes running workshops and supplying services in kind to local efforts if possible; total budget is \$300,000 and looks to be frozen; the region includes the three prairie provinces and part of the Northwest Territories; about 150 applications have been received.

Marilyn Janakis outlined Manitoba film attitudes, saying that her biggest job was trying to get people to accept the premise that film is as much a part of culture as anything else is. Her committee advises departments on film projects; it has no funds itself, but has representatives of the four Departments that do. Production is both in-house and tendered.

The rest of the discussion concerned two areas: co-ops and new sources of financing for short films. Features were absent from all discussions on this first day, and the main thrust was identifying common concerns and problems experienced by co-ops across the country, especially in the context of the level of the local film industry. Methods of selecting scripts and day-to-day administration were described; co-ops seem to number about 25-40 active members; most are just finishing their first batch of films, and all experienced great spending of energy just setting up. Annual budgets are around \$50,000. The exception is the Toronto co-op, which is a service unit, not a producing entity acting as a liaison between filmmakers, a job placement centre, and workshop organiser.

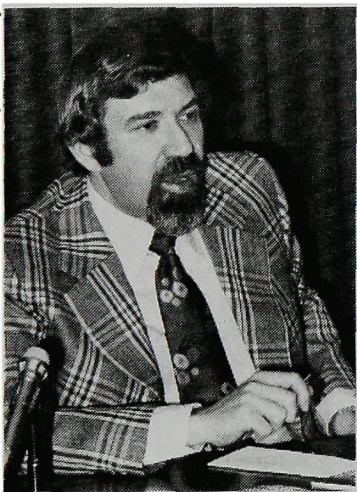
Boyle noted that co-ops rarely deal with investment films, and that it's time to prove to business that film is a valuable area to get into; a high profile is therefore necessary. This comment led to his proposal for a national association of co-ops.

Discussion turned to details: distribution problems, the need to know the market for sales and to seek out the untapped financial sources for backing in each region.

FILM INVESTMENT. The Panelists: Gerald Kyle, accountant; Paul Morton, President of Odeon-Morton Theatres; producer Chris Dalton.

This panel seemed to be groping for some kind of spark to ignite itself but only managed to maintain a calm pace. A few points about approach in financing, plus some recommendations by producers and creators, did come forth. Morton agreed with current U.S. efforts to disallow tax avoidance while accepting tax deferral, thus bringing film financing in the U.S. into line with Canadian attitudes. He said that ministerial discretion assumes commercial reasons, not private tax advantage, as an investing motivation,

photo: Stephen Chesley



Paul Morton



Chris Dalton

CBC meets with the council of provincial education ministers; ethnic broadcasting is now in ferocious debate at the CBC, and at this time there's no indication of how the multiculturalism issue will be resolved.

The attack on the CBC began, with several audience members pointing out personal trials at even getting a phone call answered, and Thomas' joining in with the general lament at budget cutbacks. Shandel said it's silly to criticize the CBC and work within its system, which reflects the country. It's a body that is middle-class controlled and programmed. We have to emulate Quebec's situation where the very fact of its unique existence makes demands. Thomas agreed, saying that Vancouver producers want head office shows, and in Quebec they deal with real things in their own locale. Audience member Chris Dalton pointed out that the CBC is now run by Winnipeggers: Thom

and rightly so. There are new sources of financing, for example oil companies, who need deferrals. Only if a film is marketable is it worth investing in.

'Hustle' came to the fore again, and the emphasis turned to marketing sophistication, especially when crossing the border, film tucked under one's arm. And the problem of financing the apprenticeship of filmmakers sought but was denied any solution by the gathering, except to rely somehow on government as a basis.

Morton recommended that the 100% tax benefit be increased to 115%; otherwise it wouldn't help. And he pointed out that the competition is three-quarters of a million dollars for a big-budget Canadian feature vs. two million dollars for an average American feature.

Director David Cronenberg commented that Canadians were afraid to operate within genres, even when they like to see them, and that distributors are easier to deal with if you can label the film for them.

The CFDC low-budget program was criticized, because the CFDC doesn't seem to know what the program should provide. Morton commented that it was a useless program, especially because the filmmakers would probably never make another film again.

SURVIVAL. The panelists: Producer Pen Densham; Patricia Robertson of the British Columbia Film Industry Association; director David Cronenberg; director André Forcier.

The spiritual presence without the corporeal reality of Francoyse Picard, Canada Council Film Officer, suffused this panel, and somehow, got the whole discussion down to the basics. Instead of zooming off into tangents, Picard's remark about the possible elimination of co-op funding, quoted and returned to by Bill Boyle, pointed up a real separation between types of filmmakers, illustrated the

how much into filmmaking. The 'hustle' concept, here referred to as 'survival', jumped forward but was quickly put aside – until Cronenberg and Tom Shandel began a debate later which was as futile as it was diverting.

Two valid points were made. One was that fighting the battle is not unique to Canada; it happens all over, even in the golden U.S. And the other was a verbal recognition that, while the emphasis was on shorts, there were two types of filmmakers concerned with them in that room: one makes his film to sell it and the other, working through a co-op usually, makes his to make it and show it. The latter group is only now beginning to face the long-run realities of the market-place as a source of income.

IDEAS AND CONCEPTS. The panelists: Claude Jutra, André Forcier, David Cronenberg, Tom Radford, and Silvio Narizzano, all directors.

The theme of this panel, as espoused by moderator Klady, was to try and discover what kinds of ideas need to be generated in the Canadian film industry in 1976. Of course all the usual elements bounced in: regionalism, formula films, and what is a "Canadian" film?

Forcier mentioned the example of **Mustang**, a recent Quebec feature. "It had all the elements and it was a flop. You don't make a film with ingredients. There's no recipe."

But there is content. And to Tom Radford, that means making films about your own region. Westerners making films about the West; that's where the ideas come from. But, said Cronenberg, I never made a regional film. However, my first two films, which were very experimental, were considered by a French critic to be as Canadian as **Goin' Down the Road**. "Any film I make is Canadian because I'm Canadian. And if there are American aspects it's because I was inundated with American culture as I



Claude Jutra, André Forcier



David Cronenberg



Silvio Narizzano

difference between starting out in 1976 and 1966, and allowed Pen Densham to remind all of a basic guideline they forgot they knew: be positive and just go out and make films, and forget the bitching and negativism, concentrating your energy on learning the market and making and selling your film.

The existence of the co-op as a base, often the only one in certain regions, for filmmakers to get started and make films, is now taken for granted. It's there, and any discussion about the necessity of co-ops is beside the point, according to Boyle. But, said David Cronenberg, what if they all disappeared? Would everyone get out of film and go into insurance? Recounting how he started, without any organisational support, whether publicly from Canada Council or privately through official co-ops, he wondered again how much energy should be put into organizing and

was growing up, and so it's a part of me. And if I had a theory about Canadian film I wouldn't consciously try to incorporate it into a script".

Narizzano said, "I don't think I'm a Canadian filmmaker because I've never made a Canadian film. But I am Canadian, and when I work with actors and I have to get as personal as possible, I use my Canadian experience". Just as, said journalist Les Wedman from the audience, Ted Kotcheff used his memories of Ontario mining in making **Outback**.

Radford suggested that in one way times were changing. "The important thing is to be able to make films where you want to make them, and it's more possible to do it each year. I used to feel isolated, but now I see value in isolation because you're not trying to make a film the expectation of an industry that is really American".

Narizzano commented that the first step is to make Canadians interested in Canadian films; other countries will want to see them if they are curious about Canada. The discussion then moved into distribution and exhibition and funding mechanisms and support; it's all been covered before. Only a few tantalizing tidbits were thrown to the crowd from the panel as to where the specific ideas for specific films come from.

POLICY. The panelists: Producers Kirwan Cox and Tom Shandel; CFDC Executive Director Michael Spencer; distributor Linda Beath; Government Film Commissioner and NFB head André Lamy; CCFM Chairperson Sandra Gathercole.

After cruising rather slowly at a very even speed through three panels, things heated up substantially in this panel. It was partly due to the government agency heads on the panel, partly due to an accepted level of knowledge about the current industry situation, and not, strangely enough, due to the activists on the panel, namely Cox and Gathercole, who restricted their input to officially announcing a request for a combines investigation into the foreign components of the Canadian distribution and exhibition sectors.

No, the assault came from the audience; from producer Chris Dalton calling for legislated quotas "otherwise we're just jerking off", from André Forcier agreeing in french, from CTV V-P Larry Hertzog admitting and emphasizing that the problem is common to all media. The emphasis became political, and the recognition that the solution is ultimately political - Shandel saying hit the Liberal Party and Michael Spencer, after unconvincingly saying that current Faulkner measures were interim and time is needed, agreeing to go with the CCFM to a meeting with the Ontario Government, if, as he says, they should be convinced first and the other provinces will follow.

The picture of the battle was very real. Linda Beath urged using the quota as it is while you've got this much and getting the right salesman to do the foreign work for you. Cox pointed out that the American companies recently added several lobbyists to work in Ottawa; the players are powerful. But the overall impression has to be, to use a term with too many wrong connotations, solidarity. Lamy barely spoke, but he did emphasize the enemy: American political and economic power. And Spencer's inadequate defense of Faulkner's bumbling political efforts to eject *Time* and *Reader's Digest* only served to emphasize the difficulty of the problem of obtaining federal political support. But the bitching was absent; no one accused the NFB or CFDC of doing too little or nothing or all the wrong things for the industry; the discussion was miles beyond that kind of energy-wasting activity.

Four bits of information went out at the beginning of the sessions, and they should be noted: André Lamy said that the NFB's regional plans include transferring some activity from Montreal to the regions, and farming out more sponsored films from Ottawa to the regions. And, in a further elaboration of the NFB's role in distribution, he expressed the goal of getting the best Canadian films into the NFB network, even to the point of eventually including non-Canadian films from Canadian companies.

Michael Spencer added two bits: he repeated that distribution operations had been added, he'd like the CFDC to get into shorts, and no decision had been made yet on increasing the low-budget program to \$150,000. That we knew. But he did emphasize that the CFDC favours continuation of the low-budget program. And he announced a new goal: trying to formulate a method of financing

middle-budget films, that is \$200,000 to \$250,000 on some basis.

It was a good panel.

THE CO-OP SITUATION. In a denouement to the proceedings, two meetings were held on the last day of the Symposium, when no panels had been scheduled. Both concentrated on the co-op future, whether for those already in existence or those about to be formed.

The first discussion concerned establishing a national union of co-ops. It was very practical, with political action, exchange of newsletters, using the local media to promote Canadian film; and tentative agreement on a union. The gathering also served as a forum for communication between regions; discussions centred on availability of films to the public within and from without the various regions. The concept of the co-op was debated, and the result was a great deal of common thinking among all the regions. Politicization levels of young and older filmmakers in each region was outlined.

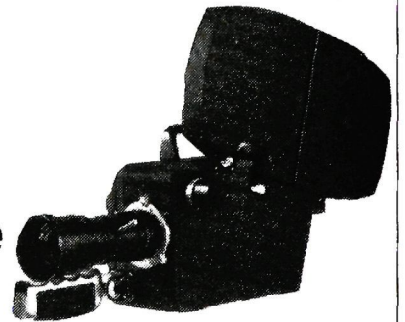
Present were the Pacific Film Co-op, the Winnipeg Film Group, the Toronto Filmmakers' Co-op, the Atlantic Film Co-op, and interested individuals.

Later in the afternoon, representatives of the above groups met with Canada Council Film Officer Francoyse Picard, and she elaborated on her quote in regard to co-op funding. During the next three years, said Picard, the Council would like to phase out direct grants to co-ops. Perhaps other bodies, such as provincial Arts councils, could contribute instead. Instead of direct funding for operating expenses, each co-op would apply to the Council for a grant for a particular film, under any suitable Council program.

And the next morning we flew home. □

There are over 200 CP16R's in the News

Here are some of the reasons...



- Lightweight • No cables • On shoulder shooting, no tripod necessary • Rugged and reliable in any climate
- Extremely mobile • Light Nicad batteries give between 3,000 and 4,000 ft. per single charge • Full reflex • Quiet operating, a really silent partner • Camera, amplifier & battery, all in one.

**Cinema Products, CP16R,
a complete camera system.**



Alex L. CLARK CO. LTD.
Toronto • Montreal • Calgary
Toronto - Telephone (416) 255-8594