

TORONTO FESTIVAL

# Bonanza beats all



by John G. Harkness

At the end of the 1980 Festival of Festivals, director Wayne Clarkson said that he foresaw a reduced program with increased repeats for the 1981 Festival. Only half that prediction came true, with increased repeat screenings from every program filling the Carlton Cineplex and the Fox Theatre in Toronto's East End, as well as the West End's Revue Cinema. The first-run program, however, expanded, making it even more difficult for the dedicated moviegoer to see everything - and the truly dedicated moviegoer wanted to see everything. You could see them clustered in the lobbies of the theatres frantically comparing notes; "Asphalt Night, is that bad? Well, if I skip the animation I can make it to that other German picture at the Towne..."

Add to this a round of parties that truly staggered one's tolerance for cold quiche and crackers with interesting cheeses on them and a Trade Forum that ran eight days, and one started to go blurry after about five days - in a Festival that lasted 10.

**The numbers game**

Clarkson had anticipated approximately \$170,000 from the box office. By the first Tuesday, the Festival had grossed \$160,000, causing Clarkson to revise estimates to a gross of upwards from \$200,000. Every aspect of the Festival was up from expectations: over 150 features, plus eight feature-length animation compilations, plus a huge number of short films; an anticipated revenue of \$3000 from the animation series broken by 25% in four days; the Critic's Choice series (which largely consisted of extremely depressing German and Dutch films) 100% sold out; and Jonathan Rosenbaum's series of Buried Treasures reaching 80% of the 1980 box office in four days.

*Dial M for Murder*, which kicked off the Third Dementia series, turned away 1,000 paying customers. *Diva*, a runner-up for most popular film, had a couple of hundred people in the street at a repeat screening at the Revue Cinema. The Opening Night Gala, Ralph Thomas's *John Harkness*, former *Cinema Canada* reporter, is a Toronto free-lance writer and film critic.



● top Fest party at Gracie's Restaurant featuring director Clive Smith and Mellany Brown of *Nelvana* centre bare behinds to promote *So Fine* at the opening party (Four Seasons Hotel) bottom left: Harold Greenberg, Dusty Kohl, and Saul Rubinek at Astral bash (Sutton Place) right T.O. Mayor Eggleton at ribbon-cutting ceremonies opposite (top) Buck Henry, Caryn Smith at Gracie's (bottom) Jonathan Welsh and friend at opening night party

Photos: Ron Levine

*Ticket to Heaven*, even turned away about 60 silver passholders who had paid \$500 for their Festival admissions.

The pass sales for the Festivals all reached new highs, with 180 gold patrons (at \$1000+), 150 silver patrons (\$500), and an estimated 900 straight passholders (\$85-100).

Clarkson said at a mid-Festival press conference that he was seriously considering either eliminating the passes for the 1982 Festival or restricting their numbers and raising the price. Nothing succeeds like excess.

## The trade forum

There was really only one issue at the Trade Forum this year - pay-TV. At a day-long seminar chaired by feature producers Peter Simpson and Bill Marshall, a large number of the regional, specialized and national applicants presented their cases and ripped at each other.

The regional applicants were a fairly unified group, for they had little conflict of interest and a common enemy - the national applicants. Wendell Wilks, representing one of the Alberta applicants, tore into the cable industry,

and the national applicants speak in order of financial promises to the Canadian production sector.

Marshall also voiced a sentiment that must have been on the minds of many. "I have dealt with many of these people as a producer, and despite their promises, I have about as much faith in their commitment to Canadian production as I do in Attila the Hun's commitment to day-care centres."

The Bar Association's two days of seminars were highly technical and, on occasion, impenetrable even to the lawyers in the audience. When Beverly Nix, a lawyer from Warner Brothers in L.A., spoke on contracts and residuals, you could see eyes glazing all over the room.

The Bar Association also threw a luncheon at which the sandwiches were served with the crusts cut off. This reporter felt about seven years old.

The most interesting panel outside the pay-TV seminars was that of accountant Richard M. Wise, who talked at length and with passion on how to read a prospectus from the point of view of an informed investor. It was a breath of fresh air to hear him lace into the

high-budget pictures loaded with "soft costs" - financing, guarantee kick-backs, allowances, overhead fees - that have become so high in this era of 25% interest rates that one can often see a \$5 million-budget film that has only \$2.8 million on the screen.

Yet aside from Wise and the dress rehearsal for the CRTC hearings, one has to wonder about the value of the Trade Forum. Surely there are few businesses as concentrated and inbred as the film industry. (In a way, it reminded me of nothing so much as Rick Salutin's famous observation that in the afterlife, as the souls make their way toward heaven they encounter a fork in the road, with one path labelled "Heaven" and the other, "Panel discussion on Heaven." You can tell the Canadians because they always choose the discussion over the real thing.)

## The parties

It is an axiom of film industry parties that they are too crowded, and that no matter how early you get there the food is already cold. If the *Chariots of Fire* party at Gracie's proved it beyond a shadow of a doubt (Overheard in the street: "God, they should give this party an award for worst food." "Yeah, but you end up eating it anyway because it soaks up the booze!"), the *Cutter's Way* party at the Blue Angel was a partial disproof. If there were fewer big names this year, there were more interesting character actors around - Robert Caradine, R.H. Thompson, Saul Rubinek, Jennifer Dale, SCTV's Catherine O'Hara, Buck Henry, John Heard and Winston Reckert, to name but a handful.

## The films

If there was a theme this year running through the films in almost every series, it was desperation. It was like having a ringside seat at the decline and fall of Western Civilization. David Overbey's Critic's Choice series was loaded with these pictures, particularly the German films like *Asphalt Night*, *Angels of Iron*, and *Desperado City*. It even seemed to infect the comedy series programmed by Ted Riley and Stephen Cole. The yukfest included such comic moments as *The Apartment* (with the most stunning scene of sexual humiliation in the American cinema), *Mickey One* (the first truly paranoid movie), *Lolita* (murder

and more sexual humiliation), *Shoot the Piano Player* (death and romantic loss), and *Macunaima* (cannibalism).

It is interesting that the audiences at the Festival, in their voting for the Labatt's Most Popular Film award, largely ignored the despair for the nostalgic stuff of *Chariots of Fire*, the eccentricity of *Diva*, and the comedy of *Heartaches*. Strong showings were made by the jazz documentary *Imagine The Sound*, and the films *Cutter's Way* and *Prison for Women* (which was so popular that Pan-Canadian opened it at the International Cinema while the Festival was still in progress).

The Canadian films at the Festival this year were extremely encouraging, with all three of the galas (*Ticket to Heaven*, *Heartaches* and *Threshold*) attracting full, attentive houses and at least respectful reviews. *Heartaches*, despite an antipathetic review in the *Globe & Mail* (which sent a food writer), was especially welcome, as it hailed the return of Don Shebib-at-his-best to the ranks of Canadian filmmakers.

In the other events, Canadian films were well received, with Harry Rasky's *Being Different* drawing sellout crowds, a distribution pickup for *Prison for Women*, and some fine reviews for Gilles Blais' Hare Krishna documentary, *Les Adeptes*. Virtually the only Canadian film to draw universally negative review was Bonnie Klein's *Not a Love Story: A Film About Pornography*, which was cleared for a single Festival screening by the Ontario Censor Board.

This was also the first year in which not a single film was cut by the Board. As a special screening facility, the Festival underwent classification by documentation, and the Board only requested to see 11 pictures - some of them controversial, like *Not a Love Story*, the Brazilian film *Pixote*, and Makaveyev's *WR: The Mysteries of the Organism* (screened uncut for the first time in Ontario), and some which were set for commercial release following the Festival.

It would seem that the Board has finally recognized that the "community standards" which govern their rulings are not necessarily those of Agincourt or Tilsonburg.

By and large, the films this year seemed better. There were no galas as embarrassingly awful as last year's *Loulou* and *Deathwatch* (although *Neige* came close), and if there was no *Les bons débarras* tucked away in a sidebar series, there were such discoveries as Raoul Walsh' 3-D *Gun Fury* in a crystal-clear new print from the Columbia Archives, and the British Film Institute print of Fritz Lang's German-Indian productions, *The Tiger of Eschnapur* and *The Hindu Tomb* in the Buried Treasures series.

## The future

To compound the serious moviegoers' problems for the 1982 Festival, Clarkson has promised the most comprehensive series of Canadian films ever - over two hundred pictures to be screened in five theatres across Toronto. "Quick, Gladys, the Murine." The series will be, according to Clarkson, definitive, and will produce eight to 10 major publications.

There are also rumours from informed sources that 1982 will be Clarkson's last year at the helm of the Festival of Festivals. The question is not what will happen to the Festival, but where will Clarkson go after running the largest publicly-attended film festival in the world? ●



saying that "people think that pay-TV is something new. We have had pay-TV for years, only we call it cable. I don't see any reason that the cable industry, which has contributed nothing to the production industry over the years, should get even richer from this new industry."

All the regional applicants disliked the idea of a national monopoly, but sidestepped questions on the possibility (or necessity) of a purchasing consortium to deal with national and foreign purchases of materials.

The national applicants attacked each other with much greater relish. Jack McAndrew of Performance referred to Canadian Premiere as the "cable company application" (the cable companies hold a 27% equity interest in Premiere). Moses Znaimer of Premiere accused TeleCanada, the universal subscription system, of "being wrong, because it assumes that Canadians will not buy Canadian programming unless it is forced upon them."

Chairmen Simpson and Marshall had perhaps the best perspective on what the cable hearings were about. They



Sergei Eisenstein's *Que Viva Mexico*, newly edited by Grigori Alexandrov, is ready for distribution in Canada. Two film reviews follow. The first, written by filmmaker Philip Hudsmith, is on this version of *Que Viva Mexico*. The second is on Hudsmith's own film, Eisenstein's *Mexico*, which traces the route of the great Russian filmmaker and reconstitutes his spiritual journey.

# Mexico

## DOUBLE TAKE

### TAKE ONE

## Better late than never

by Philip E. Hudsmith

*Que Viva Mexico!* was a cause celebre back in the thirties. Conceived as an epic poem about the Mexican Spirit by the famous Russian film director Sergei Eisenstein, it became a tragedy with tears when Eisenstein's backer Upton Sinclair, the left-wing author, halted production and refused to let the Russian genius edit his film; instead, he let Hollywood's favourite Tarzan producer, Sol Lessor, put out a travesty called *Thunder Over Mexico*. Much thunder echoed around Sinclair's ears after the premiere at New York's Rialto cinema, and miles of ink and paper have since been expended on the aborted movie. The ensuing furore did little good for Sinclair's reputation. Eisenstein, of course, was heartbroken.

Eisenstein (who made such memorable films as *Battleship Potemkin*, *Strike*, and *Ten Days That Shook The World*) never did get to lay hands on his rich material again. But almost everybody else did, including Eisenstein's biographer Marie Seton. The results were all pretty mediocre and none of them did very much for art, poetry or the Mexican Spirit. Long after the deaths of Eisenstein and Tisse, Grigori Alexandrov brooded alone in Moscow, waiting for Upton Sinclair to die so that he could get his hands on the remainder of the material and complete the film. Finally in 1973 the State Film Fund of the USSR purchased what was left of the footage from the Museum of Modern Art where it was being preserved under Sinclair's strict edict that it was never to go to Russia. Fortunately for Alexandrov, Sinclair shuffled off his mortal coil in 1968.

There is a school of thought which maintains that if a film director dies, the film should be abandoned and nobody should attempt to complete it. This is a ridiculous precept of course, because studios usually have a lot of money wrapped up in any film. For reasons of financial solvency they are unlikely to leave it on the shelf out of deference to a dead man. A thankless task awaited Alexandrov in his attempt to complete Eisenstein's film, because he was in one of those damned-if-you-do and damned-

*Philip Hudsmith is an independent filmmaker, author and songwriter. He has produced several of his own features including, Tahiti Mon Amour, Eisenstein's Mexico, Journey to Hong Kong, and Apollo and the Aquanauts.*



● above Eduard Tisse, Eisenstein (holding fan) and Co. on location in Mexico other photos production stills from *Que Viva Mexico* (also used in *Eisenstein's Mexico*) courtesy of Lilly Library, Indiana, Mexico

if-you-don't situations. Alexandrov, however, is obviously a man of courage. For, with only the scraps left at the bottom of the barrel to work with, he had the temerity to go ahead anyway. His efforts have given us a substantial glimpse of what Eisenstein's dream might have been.

Basically Alexandrov constructed his film close to the lines of the scenario he and Eisenstein completed in 1930. There are of course gaps where material is missing, such as an episode about the soldaderas who followed their soldier husbands into battle under Pancho Villa. The bullfight story called "Fiesta" also leaves a lot to be desired: if it was intended to impress bullfight fans it misses by a mile and is at times badly edited. Whoever heard of a downed picador placing the banderillas (brightly coloured barbed sticks) to impress his lady love? This episode is also incomplete in that it lacks the "Our Lord of Chalm" sequence, which Eisenstein had intended to use to interweave reality with the metaphysical.

The prologue and the "Sandunga" story (about the matriarchal system in tropical Tehuantepec and the necklace of gold coins that is actually a woman's dowry—a hangover from the days when British engineers were attempting to build the Tehuantepec Railway and the Tehuanas refused to accept paper money), are well done. "La Sandunga" is the song of Tehuantepec, and the sequence captures the feeling so well-

expressed by a local poet when he wrote:

*When the longed for day is here  
When Death's agony with stiff,  
compassionate fingers,  
Closes at last, my eyes,  
Play the Sandunga and if I do not  
awaken  
To its plaintive sound  
Let me sleep on, for I shall be dead.*

The epilogue is as good as Alexandrov could have made it with the footage that was left to him. It is still possible to see the big wheels of laughter, as Eisenstein called them, making the empty eye sockets of cardboard skulls wink "as if to say that death is an empty box through which the vortex of life will always force its way no matter what."

On the negative side is a lacklustre narrative which is informative at the wrong time. When you really want to know something it is painfully silent. This may be a fault of the translation from the Russian. The music too is ill-conceived, and practically non-stop throughout. It seems to be largely the Russian concept of what Mexican music should sound like. The "Sandunga" though, as indicated before, is extremely memorable and lingers in the mind long after the credit titles have rolled. One wonders why heavy electronic music was used for the prologue when the Eisenstein-Alexandrov scenario specifically calls for "the quaint rhythm



of the drums of the Yucatan music, and the high-pitched Maya song" to accompany the funeral procession.

On the plus side are Eisenstein's staggeringly beautiful foreground compositions and his use of the triangle motif throughout, obviously inspired by the volcanoes and pyramids of Mexico. There is also Eduard Tisse's matchless exterior photography to marvel at. From the cinematographer's point of view *Que Viva Mexico!* is a joy to watch. This part of the original dream for the film was realized widely, boldly and significantly. But as one watches the magnificent vistas unfold, it is impossible not to wonder what Eisenstein would have done with his magnificent footage.

All in all, there is much to admire in *Que Viva Mexico!* But most important is the praise due to Grigori Alexandrov for his valiant attempt to give life and form to his friend's long-lost dream. In the precarious world of film many scripts never get past the producer's waste basket, and it is encouraging to know that a film can still be completed after fifty years of waiting. Canadian filmmakers with unborn masterpieces wasting away in desk drawers can surely take heart from Alexandrov's example. Persistence and patience do, eventually, pay off. ●

### Que Viva Mexico!

d. Sergei M. Eisenstein sc. Sergei M. Eisenstein, Grigori Alexandrov d.o.p. Eduard Tisse ed. Grigori Alexandrov p.c. State Film Fund U.S.S.R. dist. Frank Taylor Films Inc. & Creative Exposure.



## TAKE TWO

# Mañana never comes

by Rudy Wrench

*Que Viva Mexico!* has been a problem to film people ever since America's favourite left-wing novelist, Upton Sinclair, got worried about the mazuma that was being spent on S.M. Eisenstein's Montezuma epic, and pulled the plug. It all happened way back when in the thirties.

Since that unhappy time, more has been written about *Que Viva Mexico!* than any other film, finished or unfinished, with the possible exceptions of Melies' *Trip to the Moon*, Griffith's *Intolerance* and Gance's *Napoleon*. It seems that Eisenstein, the Russian film director (who startled the world with *Potemkin*) got fed up writing film scripts for Paramount and wanted to get away from it all. Browsing over some books in a Hollywood bookstore, he decided to head for Mexico, and found a backer in Sinclair.

It took him, so the legend goes, a couple of months of drifting all over the place before he came up with an "I Love Mexico" script that made his backers chortle as they imagined themselves turning cartwheels all the way to the bank. Needless to say, they gave Eisenstein the go-ahead, and in his own inimitable style the famous Russian churned mile after mile through a hand-turned camera, and filled hundreds of cans with unusual compositions and striking pictures of Mexicans at work, play, in bondage, and exhibiting a religious favour that was the direct legacy of the Conquistadors who visited the country back in the 1500s.

When his backers pulled out, Eisenstein returned to Russia. Worse was to come when no one would let him edit the film he had shot — while everybody else was allowed to do what he liked with it.

The director was not the only one upset by the fate of his film — which was never completed. Sympathetic to Eisenstein's problem, Philip Hudsmith crossed the Rio Grande and started back-tracking along the Russian's trail to see if he could discover a few clues. The result was the film *Eisenstein's Mexico*, dedicated to Anita Brenner and the Mexican Spirit. (Brenner was the lady who temp-

ted Eisenstein to stray beneath the border in the first place with a book called *Idols Behind Altars*. Her book described how Catholic altars were built on Aztec Pyramids. This practice apparently caused considerable confusion among the natives who lived unhappily ever after because they couldn't make up their minds which type of sacrifice they preferred — Aztec or Christian.)

Unlike Eisenstein, Hudsmith got to edit his film, and stoically endured the agonies common to most filmmakers who try to get their films to the screen. The subject matter in Hudsmith's film is unusual. Most moviegoers are accustomed to seeing *finished* films. Hudsmith, on the other hand, shows us, in part, how Eisenstein's film was *not* made.

The film begins in an eerie dead world — much as Eisenstein's film was supposed to begin. Ghostly footsteps of a sacrificial victim move upwards to the top of a pyramid, a knife falls, and pyramid and gargoyles turn red, suggesting the blood that has flowed down their sides. A wind echoes hauntingly, reminding us that we are in the past. After the titles, more ruins follow and some of the places where Eisenstein filmed his prologue are seen. Some images from his film are shown, but these are stills: surprisingly, Hudsmith does not use any of Eisenstein's actual footage, only stills, drawings and paintings. The stills are well chosen and include many we have not seen before of Eisenstein at work on his film. With one exception the drawings are well done and add colour. The exception is a close-up of Eisenstein smiling. It is clumsily executed, and the smile seems incongruous at the moment it appears, be-

cause it coincides with some fairly melancholy subject matter.

The famous symbolic image of the three lions — sleeping, walking and aroused — from *Battleship Potemkin*, rendered through the medium of water-colour sketches, is used as a stepping-stone to a discovery of Eisenstein's editing techniques and his passion for montage. This in turn is related to the type of symbolic imagery Eisenstein had planned to use, giving the viewer an insight into what his film might have looked like.

Hudsmith also uses photographs or drawings of certain famous people who speak in the film. Familiar Film Board photographs of John Grierson accompany Grierson's critical assessment of Eisenstein's abilities as a filmmaker. This is logical enough, but some viewers may be unaware of Grierson's own prestige as a filmmaker and critic. An introduction, or at least a name subtitle would have helped. (Perhaps this could be rectified in future prints.) Structurally *Eisenstein's Mexico* is sound. Hudsmith appears to have found the ideal shape for the exposition of his material. It provides an excellent overview of the problems encountered by a famous film director making a film in a foreign country. When treating the various stories Eisenstein had woven into the fabric of his screenplay, Hudsmith gives them a different order. He lets them evolve out of their new context. Instead of attempting yet another reconstruction of *Que Viva Mexico!* Hudsmith concentrates on the Russian's creative ideas about Mexicans and their culture.

These days too many Canadian films rely on rapid cutting to get their messages across. Hudsmith occasionally also

wanders off into some frenetic montage patterns of his own. But towards the end the pace slows down and the film becomes purely contemplative. As the various threads of the intellectual arguments presented come together we begin to realize just how great a tragedy the loss of this particular film was to Eisenstein. We are also led to reflect upon the possibility that the world has lost an extremely valuable work of art which would have offered a unique look at the Mexican soul and its part in the scheme of things. Regrettably, for some great artists and their work, *manana* never comes.

**EISENSTEIN'S MEXICO** d./sc./p./d.o.p. Philip Hudsmith additional photog. Bob Fresco art James E. Smith, Anthony Westbrook fotomation David Adolphus narrator Derek Best voices Peter Losovic (Sergei M. Eisenstein), Ralph Brunjes (John Grierson), Frank Demsar (Lev Kuleshov), Delip Mirchandani (Santa Anna, Juarez, Augustin Aragon Leiva) stills British Film Institute, Lilly Library/Indiana University, National Film Board quotation from "Sergei Eisenstein" (biography), permission from Marie Seton. Produced with the assistance of the Ontario Arts Council p.c. Hudsmith Productions (1978) running time 50 min. dist. Frank Taylor Films Inc. in collaboration with Creative Exposure.

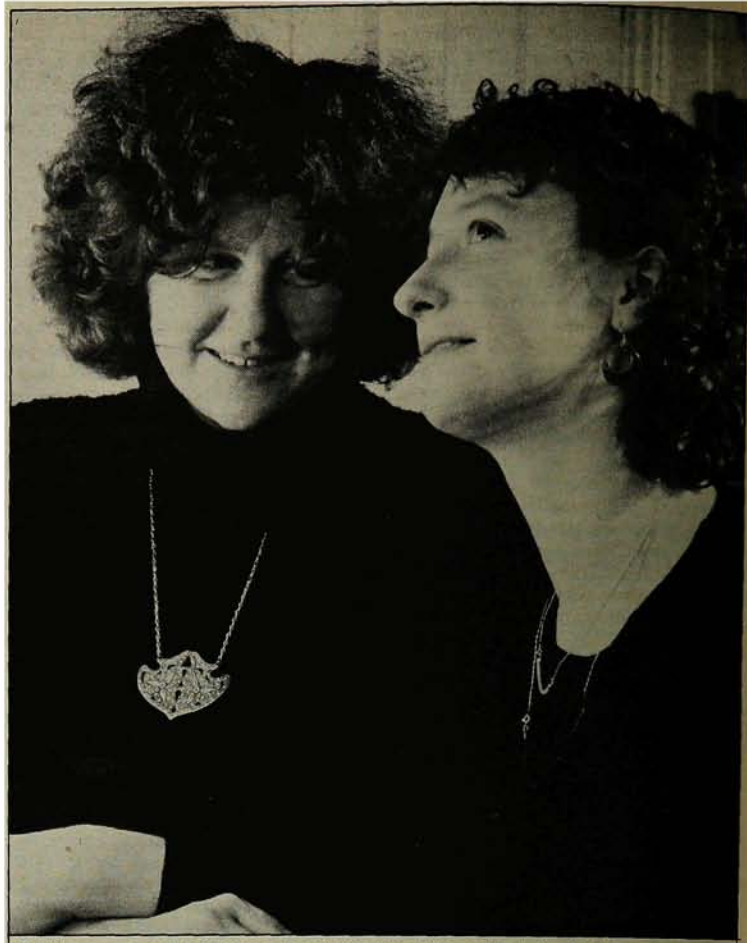


Rudy Wrench is an independent filmmaker, free-lance writer and photographer. His films include *Blizzard*, *Sequences*, *The Film Craft Series (NFB)* and *Full Circle (NFB)*.

During the winter months, Cinema Canada will pay special attention to the young filmmakers who have made an impact recently. Although the commercial feature boom has all but obscured the other work being done, a new generation of filmmakers is on its way, winning awards and making a mark. Halya Kuchmij took the Genie last year for her short *The Strongest Man in the World*, Clay Borris took his *Alligator Shoes to Cannes*, Sturla Gunnarsson received broad press attention last month for *After the Axe* which was recently shown on the CBC, and Ron

Mann is wowing the festival crowds with *Imagine the Sound*.

The following is an interview with directors Sophie Bissonnette and Joyce Rock. Together with Martin Duckworth they won this year's Prix de la Critique Québécoise for *A Wives' Tale*. The prize is awarded each year by the Québécois critics for the film judged to be the finest of the preceeding year. Their choice was at once a commentary on the commercial production scene, and a great honour for these two young women directing their first feature-length documentary.



• "When you see this film you see our signature..." Joyce Rock, Sophie Bissonnette

# Docu strikes home

by Jacqueline Levitin

*A Wives' Tale* (*Une histoire de femmes*), has been one of the most enthusiastically received films of the year in Quebec. Recording the participation of the wives of the 12,000 strikers in the historic eight-and-a-half-month-long Inco strike in Sudbury, Ontario, directors Sophie Bissonnette, Martin Duckworth and Joyce Rock have brought to their story a warmth and intimacy that is rare in political documentaries.

As in the 1958 Inco strike, the strikers' wives in 1978 formed a wives' committee, but an independent committee this time instead of a wives' auxiliary. The group included 250 out of a potential 7,000 women. Sixty were active. The strike was already in its fourth month when the three filmmakers first went to Sudbury. They stayed for the next four-and-a-half months. Joan Kuyek, a community organizer whom the women had chosen to chair their meetings introduced them to the committee. Together they negotiated the terms of their presence - permission to attend and film meetings, permission to follow certain women on their daily activities in the service of the committee, and general roaming privileges in exchange for the wives' power to decide, by a majority vote, to accept or reject the finished film.

The women they followed closely, a representational group, became the "main characters" of the documentary. Each of the filmmakers had accommodations in the home of a striker's family (often a main character's) where there was sufficient room to make a long-term arrangement tolerable. Their rapport with the women is evident in the spontaneous quality of the conversations in the film.

Jacqueline Levitin is a film professor at Concordia University in Montreal.

**Sophie Bissonnette:** We knew what kind of political film we *didn't* want to make. We didn't want to make a film where we would be talking in the place of the women who were there. We thought that in a lot of films that we had seen about strikes, at some point just as someone was getting into something, you felt that the filmmaker was scared of what that person had to say; of where it would lead to.

What was most important to me was the feminist films I had seen and the approach of letting women speak, and of a more intimate understanding and portrayal of human relationships.

A lot of films about strikes, or about working-people's struggles, seek out people in leadership positions or people who are extremely articulate. They give a very glossy picture of what the strike is about, as if they are afraid to show that a strike is more than that. You hardly ever get a more intimate portrayal of what people might get out of a strike other than what they've won in their negotiations. For example, for one of the striker's wives it might be that she decided to learn how to drive - which, in a housewife's life, can be an enormous step.

But because we knew what we didn't want to make, but weren't sure of what we were going to make, we constantly had to fight our own fears. We thought "maybe we should go and get the union's point of view on this," or "maybe we should find out what the husbands think." We ourselves were afraid of what kind of film we would have, if it would be a valid film if we *only* had the women's point of...

**Joyce Rock:** ...If "the girls" only speak for themselves.

**Sophie Bissonnette:** You have to

constantly fight against those images that are in your head, that you see on the news, that are in every documentary and every political film you've seen. That you're supposed to be making a film about a strike and should film a picket-line and all those obvious things. So we had to put our foot down. We had to be clear about what this film was going to be about. And also fight against our own fear of "Am I completely crazy to want to film this kind of situation?" Because it was new territory. Can you imagine that in Quebec I can't think of a single film that talks about working-class women? They're a majority of the population and they've never been on film! It's very terrifying to make that first film because you don't know how to show them. Because the only images you have are the soap operas in the afternoons and the ads you see. And the question keeps coming back "Maybe they don't have anything to say. Maybe this is totally boring." It's a lot like what those women were going through during the strike. Suddenly during the strike they could afford to think things they thought were crazy alone in their houses. Maybe it was unthinkable alone in their houses to say "I should be able to go to the general meetings" but then three of them would get together and find out "you think you should go to general meetings also!" We tried to show in the historical part of the film that all the women in 1958 and before would have done all the things the 1978 women had done, but thanks to the feminist movement there was a feeling that these women could think these things and not be crazy, and we could make this film and not be crazy.

**Joyce Rock:** The strongest influence on me making this film was the body of

*cinéma direct* in terms of its attitude and approach. And it's interesting in terms of the acceptance of the film. It's bizarre because the film was 75% in English originally and then translated, yet the film is immediately understood in Quebec. The press and the film critics here never asked questions about the style or what the film was about. They all got the point even when they didn't necessarily agree with it. What I realized was that in Montreal our kind of film, or other documentaries or fictions, have a constant place in the culture pages, while in Toronto it is "What Hollywood starlet is in town?" or "What is Canadian culture?" or "What is Canadian film?" In Toronto, when I would ask critics who came to the press screenings, "Are you going to do an article?" their response was "I couldn't possibly. This is such a terrible film." And when I'd ask them why, they'd ask questions like "Is this shot in 35 or in 16 mm?" and they wouldn't understand why the camera was sometimes shakey. It seemed to me that most of them had no experience of *cinéma vérité*, and the few who did thought that the film must be *cinéma vérité*. I had to explain to them that the predominant use of *cinéma vérité* in the States was generally very manipulative, with an attitude of, "No matter what the cost, I've got to get this on film because this is real and this is life."

**Sophie Bissonnette:** Here political filmmakers, because there is a much greater political consciousness, are not afraid to talk about politics in everyday life, are not afraid of filming very banal situations and presenting that politically. In Ontario or in the films that I've seen from English Canada, I can't think of a political film that is not dogmatic, that is not imposed from the top, that

does not have heavy narration, while here the approach is very different. Here the approach is of going to the people and letting them speak and living with all the contradictions and conflicts and not being afraid of them.

I don't feel a split here between the filmmaker and what he is filming. When I see Quebec films I see emotion and, in a documentary, I see, without narration, that the filmmaker has put himself in the film - not in terms of doing something, but an emotional involvement.

The kind of rapport we had with the wives of the strikers comes from acknowledging in that film that I am a woman making it. Not only that I'm a woman, but that I'm a woman living in Montreal, with certain political experiences.

**Joyce Rock :** We never felt we had to put ourselves physically into the film. Yet when you see this film you see us, our signature, how we structured it, how we ended it. It's very different from the films I don't want to make where people pretend that they're not there and they're not manipulating and then it becomes a manipulative process.

But that's also why the CBC won't buy the film. Their basic argument is that their mandate is to be journalistically responsible, which means covering both sides. I pointed out to them that this wasn't journalism, it's a movie. But they don't make that kind of distinction. I'm not a journalist. I'm a filmmaker and it wouldn't be as interesting a film if we showed both sides. And they say, "What if INCO comes along and wants us to show one of their company films?" Our response was "Great! Show it! Stop treating your spectators as imbeciles. People would understand far more if they had the right to see two totally committed points of view from two totally different perspectives." But that's not the CBC style, nor is it the Film Board style.

I think it is important to ask who makes movies in this society, where do these people come from, what people get to go to film school, or what people got into the Film Board, because now the doors are closed. But twenty years ago when they were recruiting young people how many women did Tom Daly recruit when he recruited all those men? How many working-class men and women? It's given us a lot of good filmmakers. They were white, Anglo-Saxon, heterosexual, educated men. But that also determines twenty years later the kinds of films that come out of the Film Board. So when people say about our film that "I haven't seen a film like this ever, it's terrific," it makes me sad, too. Because I wish this was the hundredth film like this. It should be the hundredth film like this. And if it's not, it's not because these women haven't existed before, or women like them, or this strike, or this struggle, or our approach. It's simply that getting access to the technology and getting access to the money is so hard. And if it's hard for all filmmakers it's harder for women.

**Sophie Bissonnette :** We could come into the lives of the women in Sudbury like we did because there was a crisis going on and because a lot of changes were happening and we were a part of those changes. I'd be surprised if we could do the same thing now in Sudbury or in any situation which wasn't similar. If we were in a house with five women we didn't need to ask questions. There was so much turmoil in their lives and

they were discovering so many things that there was no need to spark off a discussion. And actually, when we did go back to Sudbury, we were amazed by the difference, how much more difficult it was to bring things out. While the strike was going on they saw us as part of the struggle because we were there so much. They would let us know when things were happening. There was that trust that we were making a film for them and about them and they wanted the film to get out because there were things they wanted other women in similar situations to use.

But there was also an initial resistance and I consider it a healthy resistance. The experience the women had with the media was at that time very negative. They were used to giving interviews and seeing that what was edited wasn't at all what they had wanted to say. Or being given five minutes to describe everything that was going on. And that's how the idea of giving them a majority vote on the final version of the film came up. It was a way of giving them a sense that they had some kind of control.

The women knew they had a kind of rapport with us that we wouldn't include scenes they considered too intimate. For example, when after the strike Lossy talked to me very emotionally about how her best friend had gone back to Newfoundland because they had gone bankrupt, she talked about it in a way that was very beautiful - and sad - because for her it was the most dreadful thing that had happened to her in the strike; but she didn't want to say it on film because it was something that was too tragic for her. And that's part of the trust that you establish. They only gave us what they wanted to give us on film. At times it was frustrating for us and it's why some films have to be made in fiction.

**Joyce Rock :** You have to keep checking back almost daily to your sense of responsibility of their trust. Back to what's manipulation, and what's cheap and what's irresponsible. We had a lot of ideas that we didn't even film, for instance, about how many of the women became really afraid of becoming pregnant during the strike because they couldn't afford their birth control pills. We had the idea of getting some women together to talk about some of the more personal aspects of the strike - does it change your sexual rapport with your husband? and, when you work with men in the union and you're not used to it, how is it to have men as friends? But the more we planned, the more we realized that it didn't belong in this movie.

As a filmmaker you have to remember your context. This movie is just one that comes out in a year, in a society where there aren't very many accurate images of working-class people and especially working-class women. It's striking enough to see these women as intimately as you do in their meetings. Perhaps when we have 55 more films of this type, that render more truthful images of women like these women; then, as filmmakers, we'll be able to afford a film that goes beyond and talks in screeching terms about their most intimate thoughts and relationships.

**Sophie Bissonnette :** People give you on film what they're willing to give you. I'm not sure that what they said off screen was the truth. What we got on film was also the truth and what they wanted to tell us about who they are. I

don't think we fool ourselves when we talk about *cinéma vérité* - people in films are always aware that the cameras are there and are always aware that they are giving you an image of themselves. That's part of the control they had over the film.

You may have certain priorities and may say "How come that isn't important in their lives? For me it's so important." But for them if it's not important they're not going to talk to you about it. So you have to be constantly listening to what they want to say about themselves, and be very sensitive, not to what you wanted to see there but to what was actually happening.

**Joyce Rock :** Often we'd suggest things and they'd say "fuck-off." They were too tired, or didn't want to do it. We also got that response. We had to constantly remind ourselves that it was their strike, not our film. When the wives were organizing the mock trial we had ideas and we thought, "Oh, why don't you do this and why don't you do that?" Then we thought "No. It's not our film, it's their strike."

**Sophie Bissonnette :** It was hard when they saw the completed film. There was a very long and deep silence when the film was finished because at that point the strike had been over for a year and a half and most of the women had gone back to their houses and were struggling with the daily routine again. In the film they saw themselves doing incredible things. It threw back an image that most of them didn't have of themselves anymore, that they could do all those things, and it became a basis of comparison with their own lives. But the thing I've become aware of, and maybe I'm mistaken, is that we made a film that is about the wives but not for them. The film isn't addressed to them, it's addressed to women like them. It's raised a lot of questions for me to realize that since we brought the film to Sudbury, it's never been booked by any group in Sudbury other than INCO.

**Joyce Rock :** This strike did a lot to the fabric of the union local, made people aware of the International Steelworkers. But though their immediate crisis, the strike, went away, their situation is exactly the same.

**Sophie Bissonnette :** That's why it's not just the image of themselves that is hard for them to take. It's also what they see their union leadership doing in that film, and questioning that. But a lot of them haven't continued to be actively involved to change things. It's as true for the men as it is for the women.

Joan has told us that, for the men, the film was a very important experience, because it made them aware of what their wives had to go through during the strike. What they knew was that their wives would go off to a meeting and come back and say "We took this or that decision," or "Tomorrow we're going plant gating." It was like women's invisible work. It was just like returning to their house, and their house is clean, and they never see the work that has gone into making that house clean, that's gone into making that supper. And it was the same thing when the women went off to be involved. The husbands weren't aware of all those discussions, of all those conflicts, and the inner fighting with the people from the union. All that the men would see was the final result, that the women had

raised \$5000 at the plant gate, that the women had organized a mock trial. It was very important in terms of respecting their wives.

It's ironic that this was a film that was made by women who didn't have families to worry about. It was a film that was made by women, but also by women who could afford to live the way most men do who make films.

I know a lot of films that should have been done in video, or in video that should have been done in film, in terms of the access and distribution of them, and of the importance of those films. For

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instance, unions will make films around a certain strike on a very cheap budget and they're meant for a very specific public, about a very specific issue. People should make that type of film, but they should know that film is not going to be interesting out of context to an audience that it's not intended for. I think we knew when we were making our film that we weren't making a film that was only going to last for a year. We were trying to make a film that would last a long time, and that's why we put a lot of care, a lot of time and a lot of money into trying to make it as good as possible.

**Joyce Rock :** I would hope that we, and all filmmakers, could free ourselves from what we create as the strictures in terms of filmmaking. There are things like "documentary." And on the other side we put "fiction." It's like you have to be either/or. We take for granted all the time what those two things are. I hope the next time we're more provocative with our form and with our style.

**Sophie Bissonnette :** One of the things I want to do is to have fun with documentaries, lose that sense of putting it on a pedestal as if it is not something that can be played with. It comes from the conception that what you are filming is reality and it can't be played with because you're trying to get to the "truth." Once you're aware that what people give on film is the image they want to project, and that what I am filming is the vision of what I want to see in that image. Once you're aware of that I think you're freed from the illusion that the more bare it is, the more still the camera is, the more objective it will become. I think we're afraid of playing with the image because we think it's reality. ●