

I guess everyone has a case they can make for either the negative colour system or the reversal colour system in 16mm with some considerable conviction and perhaps, even some tangible proof such as the complete subject on the screen to prove their point. There are many pros and cons and of course, as in all of this mad business of making films, none are completely conclusive.

It is my opinion that the use of one system or the other should really be determined by the ultimate application of the film. My I offer some considered opinions here for your examination?

The lab man's main objections to using a 16mm negative colour are quite simply the excessive dirt, cinch marks, scratches and the general handling mark problems. This physical damage is more exaggerated in the negative system because the negative emulsion is softer and more susceptible to damage than reversal colour stocks. This, however, is only part of the problem. The predominance of these faults in negative is a result of reproduction of them as white images on the screen rather than black in the reversal system and at this point I will take the risk of offending the more knowledgeable reader to describe why; when printing from negative onto positive stock anything on the negative which completely prevents exposure from striking the positive reproduces as a screen bright reflection when projected. With reversal films anything which prevents exposure from the reversal original to the reversal print reproduces as a black image and therefore reflects as black from the screen and is considerably less obvious than white reflection.

All of the selection, pulling of shots for a second take printing, reprinting of takes, etc., etc. that occur during editing are contributors to the negative handling that cause physical damage, to say nothing of the A&B roll cutting. Although the reversal material receives no less handling, the reproduction of negative dirt as white on the screen makes the handling of negative much more risky. Many people who are concerned with this discussion will argue that they have seen clean 16mm films shot in negative colour, so have I, but these are exceptions. Even considering Jalna on television while dirt and scratches are less obvious because of screen size I find reason to criticize the film from this viewpoint. Not only handling of the film prior to printing causes damage but the multiple printing runs in the laboratory are a contribution to dirt and cinch marks. Obviously, one should not make any more prints than necessary from the original. The alternative in the negative positive system is to make a dupe from which prints can be made safely. In the 16mm use of interpositive and internegative it is virtually impossible, because of the grain increase in the two generations of duplication, to produce a satisfactory print. This leaves us with colour reversal intermediate as our duplicating negative from which release prints can be made safely. To say that this results in inconsistent quality is to understate the fact considerably. The results vary from superb to terrible. One Canadian laboratory installed CRI at considerable risk and expense and ran the system for something like two years and has abandoned it. Another Canadian laboratory is running the system and I consider it a tribute to their tenacity. I'm not suggesting inability on the part of these laboratories; the biggest and best in other countries have had equal and greater difficulty in handling this process. These other laboratories to which I refer have had the distinct advantage of larger volume to keep the process more

stable but still have had the worst time producing a consistent result. I have been informed by the senior executives of two of the largest laboratories in the U.S. that they have a three to one ratio output in CRI. In other words, for every good CRI, they have to make three they can't use. From a cost viewpoint this is prohibitive but I surely don't need to point out what this means in time, and who in out business ever asks for something tomorrow?

The negative system has greater attractions in 16mm to the producer, director, and camera-man and from a strictly photographic viewpoint to everyone looking at the screen judging the print from original. The colour quality, the high ASA Rating, the exposure latitude, all make Eastman Negative 16mm a very desirable stock to use. Many of these distinct advantages however become obscured in prints other than rushes (or what you see in the rushes is not necessarily what you get in the final print) or in the words of Abraham "Gosh, it didn't look like that in the rushes! 16mm negative is extremely fine grain, but for theatre screen release the excessive enlargement causes a lack of definition.

The perfect solution would probably be to shoot your film in 16mm negative, make one perfect colour timed rushes print, cut this print in A&B rolls and immediately transfer to videotape, introducing all of the effects required, thereby obtaining all of the goodies that both systems have to offer. How many times is this a feasible solution? All film does not end up on television, and videotape applications are a long way from being used in the many, many places and ways that 16mm projectors are. Let me re-state my original assertion. The use of 16mm negative or reversal is really dependent on the ultimate use of the prints. I don't think enough consideration is being given to this.

Some inquiry has been made by production people towards 16mm negative with the intention of blowing it up to 35mm. In spite of the experience and assertions of Sweden's Rune Ericson. I still have serious reservations. Of the numerous blow-ups from negative I have seen I still prefer the use of 16mm low speed reversal and wet gate printing on to 35mm stock. Not having had the privilege of seeing the Swedish experiment, I suppose these assertions lack conviction. Even the very best negative 16mm original I have seen has left a great deal to be desired in the 35mm print.

The reversal system has some drawbacks too. In order to avoid grain one should stay with the low speed stocks and live with the lighting problems. There is no doubt that the dirt and scratch problems are reduced with reversal film. The second generation film is excellent. The only degradation that causes reversal to fall apart comes from misuse of stock. If you push the exposure index, then you must be prepared to live with the result, however, pushing the low speed ekta stock one stop really does not produce any significant changes in grain. When high speed stocks are properly exposed they stand up extremely well to duplication in second and third generations. They also stand up very well in the blow-up system but you simply must recognize the exposure limitations. Pushing the stock two stops simply destroys the duplication. This is no worse than the condition of negative colour.

Contrast levels can be controlled by flashing, but flashing is a technique which has been badly oversold by laboratories because most of them really don't know what they are doing with it. It has very specific applications and is not the answer to underexposure, large grain, and maidens' prayers. When

properly handled by the laboratory (and few do) it can reduce the contrast that exists in high speed stocks. It is not a cure all and does not allow for poor selection of the film stock.

One cannot leave the negative/positive reversal discussion without saying something about super 16mm. All I can contribute that makes any sense at all is to say that super 16mm gives nothing more than a mathematical advantage over standard 16mm in the blow-up situation. If the error is made to demand more than the system is capable of producing, the resultant product is doomed to fall short of the mark for which we are all aiming.

F.J. Quinn,
President.

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COMING UP IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF CINEMA CANADA:

The July/August issue of CINEMA CANADA will hopefully feature an article on Paul Almond's latest film SILVER LADY RIVER (or will it remain THE JOURNEY?), along with a rare interview with the director. Slovak director Jan Kadar recently showed SHOP ON MAIN STREET at Ryerson, and the ensuing question and answer session with the film students in the audience proved to be fascinating. Kadar at one point called the GODFATHER "that tremendously successful, well-made crap," as he fumed on about the financing falling through on his film planned to be shot in Montreal. He rips into financiers and filmmakers alike during the course of this enlightening session, the text of which will be included in the next issue of CINEMA CANADA. Toronto director Julius Kohanyi talks about his latest film on Auguste Rodin, and an ON LOCATION report focuses on William Fruet's WEDDING IN WHITE.



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Your casting is perfect, your cameraman the best around, all is ready to shoot . . . then your lead breaks his leg or your film stock is faulty or the weather turns bad or the lab messes up and you're in trouble . . . But that's the film game, isn't it? It is, unless you play it smart and protect yourself

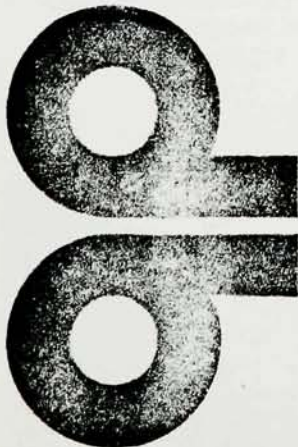
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