

Lining up in an anti-litter commercial produced for the Manitoba Government and Outdoors Unlimited, Inc.

credo wins favor

photos from Credo

by Jaan Pill

Animation is one of the disciplines in which Canadian filmmakers excel. The First Symposium on Canadian Animation, on which Jaan Pill reports below, opens what will be a rich year for animators and their fans. Later this summer, Ottawa will host its second animation festival, making that city the meeting place for filmmakers from all over the world.

The First Symposium on Canadian Animation, sponsored by ASIFA Canada, the National Film Board, the Cinémathèque Québécoise, the Canadian Film Institute and the Canadian Filmmakers' Distribution Centre, was held at Toronto's Harbourfront from March 31-April 2.

Jaan Pill is a free-lance Toronto writer and a great fan of animated films.

For my part, the highlight of the whole symposium was the series of animated commercials from the Credo Group in Winnipeg. A unique feature of Credo's approach to animation is that in making the commercials its animators, such as Brad Caslor (*Used Car* for the Manitoba Consumers Bureau and *Zooming Hoses* for the Manitoba Energy Council, among others) and Chris Hinton (*Harry the Furnace* and *Zambini* for government agencies)

each directed, designed, inked and did the backgrounds for their respective commercials. In other words, each commercial was the work of one person from start to finish. This fact was evident in all the Credo commercials and served to make them stand out: in color co-ordination, story-line, editing, as well as in terms of audience response. Another strong feature of the commercials was the fact that they were conceived first of all in the context

of animation as a form of film, which had to stand or fall on their strengths as films communicating with an audience.

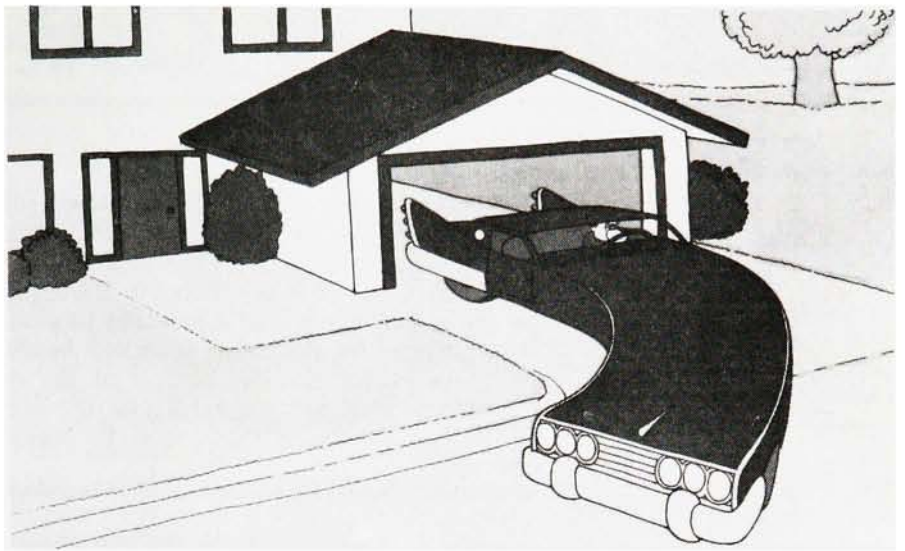
The Credo films' stylistic integrity — in the sense of having a single stylistic point of view — contrasted strongly with the dog's breakfast school of animation which inevitably surfaced in a number of other films shown at the Symposium, in particular the Film Board's *The Hottest Show on Earth*, an amalgam of differing styles of animated and live-action sequences, all of which have a strength on their own — and convey significant information — such as the fact that "North Americans make up only six percent of the world's population, but we use 40 percent of the world's energy, and we waste half of it" — but which when thrown together create a confusing and disorienting hodgepodge of conflicting styles.

Still another highlight of the symposium, was Rick Butler's hour-long documentary on the 1976 International Animated Film Festival in Ottawa. It was fascinating to see the work of award-winning animators, and then to see them in live-action interviews. In particular, Peter Foldes came across as an interesting character. One really got the impression that the former abstract expressionist painter, now sitting in front of a computer, would really have preferred not to be filmed at all. On the other hand, there were also entertaining interviews with fanatical "animation freaks" who were in pure ecstasy at the opportunity to see so many animated films from around the world in so short a time.

Among other films shown at the Symposium were *Allegro Non Troppo*, a feature-length-take-off on Disney's *Fantasia* made by Italy's Bruno Bozzetti, as well as Ishu Patel's *The Bead Game*, Co Hoedeman's *Sand Castle* (the latter two films were both nominated for Oscars this year and the *Sand Castle* actually won that award several days after the Symposium in Hollywood), as well as Jacques Drouin's *Mindscape* and Caroline Leaf's *Metamorphosis of Mr. Samsa*.

The idea for the symposium originated with Derek Lamb, executive producer for English-language animation for the NFB, who did a commendable job as chairman and master of ceremonies for the seminars and screenings.

The first panel — on the Financing and Distribution of Animated Films — concluded that money is a problem, that it's useful to think about distribution before you make your film, and that you're unlikely to make any money at all if you aim exclusively for the Canadian market.



Turning the corner in a 30 second commercial *Zooming Hoses* for the Manitoba Energy Council

The second panel, on the Future of Canadian Animation, was slightly more invigorating. Panelist Michael Mills, of Michael Mills Productions in Montreal, told the assembled animators and would-be animators (and just plain fans) that he's looking for talent all the time and suggested that animation students (there was a strong contingent from Sheridan College) send him sample reels of their work. "I may be able to offer you a full time job before you graduate," he said, and specified that "I like to see line tests. I want to see the way the animator can act, his sense of timing, the way he can move characters, and just the way he perceives the craft." He also said he wasn't looking only for animators, but also for designers, background artists, and people who can come up with original ideas.

Derek Mazur, president of the Credo Group in Winnipeg, whose series of commercials received a particularly favorable audience response during the screening of animated commercials from across Canada, asked the audience not to forget that creativity in Canada is not limited solely to Toronto or Montreal. "There's a considerable amount of animation done in Winnipeg. It's also done in Vancouver. Winnipeg may be cold, but it's a friendly place. I think that that's something you should consider, there are other studios."

The symposium also discussed computer animation. Michael Mills said it was very limited, and that the programming takes so long that by the time you finish it, you would have been better off doing it the conventional way. He said it was like programming a computer to paint a picture, and added that the computer that the NFB's *Hunger* was done on happened

to be the only computer of its type in the world and that it was too expensive to use for TV commercials. "*Hunger* was a very good film. But I think it would've been better if it wasn't done by a computer. Because it has the mechanical feel that computers always give."

Another panelist, John Straiton, an advertiser by profession and an animator "by avocation", said that animation has a limited place in advertising, because it is usually less effective than live-action, especially in product advertising. He also said funny commercials usually work less well than serious ones.

Still another panelist, the NFB's Bob Verral, said that he had much enjoyed a film screened earlier in the day from the University of British Columbia on Darwin's theory of evolution. He said the film (which had much good humor in it, with dead-pan irony in the sound-track playing off touches of irony in the picture), would have a big market in schools "if there would be a way of distributors and producers getting together on that kind of a production... that is for me one of the most exciting fresh films I've seen for a long time."

The panel also featured a convoluted debate about the Film Board's mandate, the financial strictures preventing the Board from making lengthier animated films, and the problems the Board would create if it competed with the private sector in producing films specifically for the "entertainment market".

Finally, Co Hoedeman, president of ASIFA Canada, outlined plans for this summer's 1978 International Animated Film Festival in Ottawa. □