

E A S T E R N W A V E

by Chris Majka

In the past I have had occasion to mention the activities of the Atlantic Filmmakers Co-op (AFCOOP) and in particular some of the training programs which they conduct (see *Cinema Canada* # 141). This year for the first time AFCOOP is offering, through the auspices of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NASCAD), not one but two technical 16mm filmmaking courses. During the fall semester there was only a beginner's course. The winter semester offered beginner's and intermediate level courses. They are primarily intended for students of NASCAD but a certain number of spaces are available for other members of the community. AFCOOP stalwarts Mark Simkins and Glen Walton are the teachers this year. At the end of the first semester they organized a public screening of the eight short films produced by the students.

I went to the screening at the National Film Board theatre expecting to be one of a handful of viewers but much to my astonishment found a full house and narrowly avoided having to sit on the floor. Introduced by Walton & Simkins, the screening was sometimes humorous, occasionally inspiring and always enlightening. It was wonderful to see how this varied group of students dealt with technical problems (one group had the majority of their footage come back from the lab fogged), film structure and narrative (long hours of debate at the editing table), and limited funds (i.e. virtually none). The results ranged from almost anarchy to clever and succinct short films which, precisely *because* of their shoestring basis and the resulting inventive approaches the filmmakers had to adopt, succeed as well as any highly budgeted and professional production.

Each group was asked to say a few words about their work and how it had changed from original conception to finished product. One group, consisting of Marion Bryson, Bruce MacLean, Sharleen Alford, Sharon Lanz and Peter MacKinnon, had a particularly revealing tale to tell. At the beginning of the semester students in the course were asked to write down an idea for a film which they would like to make. Students with similar ideas were then grouped together by the instructors. At the end of this process there were five people 'left over' whose ideas were not similar to anyone else's. They became the eighth group. The five spent a great deal of

time arguing as to what kind of film to make and couldn't come to an agreement. Out of this arose the idea that they should make a film about the difficulty of working in a group and about their inability to reach consensus. Unfortunately when they got their rushes back they found that this idea was completely

absent. The resulting film, *Lines*, was about... well...

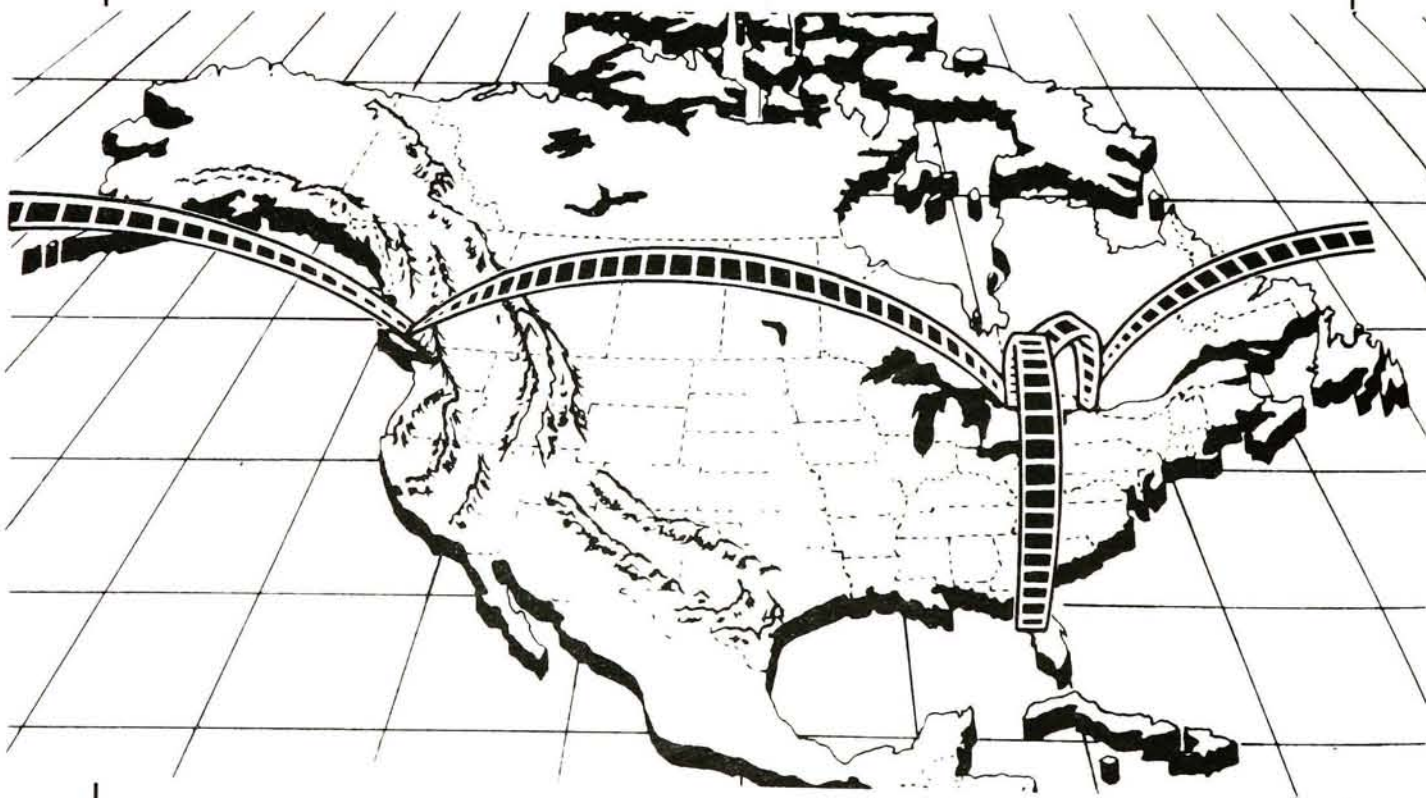
Humorous approaches were used by Andrew Sinclair, Tim Iler and Dave Ward in a four-minute film called *I Would But I Need The Eggs* (about mysterious aliens who have left egg-like structures on the coast of Nova Scotia) and by Sylvie Peltier and Derrick Johnson in *City of Destiny*, a six-minute satire of the Halifax of our

dreams. Greg Denton, Richard Brannen, Michael Ringham and Steven McNiven used a talking-heads-single-subject-telling-an-offbeat-story approach in *Teacher's Included*. *Beach* by John Scott, Roxanne Petipas and Jenny Maarschalk and *Developments* by Tina Leighton, Stephen O'Keefe, Naomi Slater, Michael Weir and Shannon were experimental in their outlook.

The stars of the program

were *Public Gardens* by Valerie LeBlanc and Allison Howells and *Red Herring* by Barbara and John Taylor. The former is described as "one man's reflections on the Public Gardens." It is a simple series of reflective anecdotes about people, trees, ducks and bandstands that is both humorous and touching. The simple theme gives it an introspective quality which reaches beyond

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the surface of the subjects which are being discussed. Shot in black and white, the cinematography is moody and evocative.

The latter is a documentary about the Red Herring

Bookstore, a co-operative venture which has been one of the mainstays of alternative literature in Halifax for many years. The Taylors are involved in the running of Red Herring. In this seven-and-half-minute film they give an overview of the ideals and objectives as well as the practical difficulties and fun that running such an enter-

prise provides.

All the productions screened were only in workprint form. Significantly the makers of **Public Gardens** and **Red Herring** plan, with their own resources, to take their productions the next step and make a finished film from them. I couldn't be more pleased. They prove that creative ideas

and approaches are not always dependent upon significant funding to be realized.

Another well-attended screening was the opening at the Centre For Art Tapes (CFAT) of a program of recent vid-

eotapes produced in Toronto by Emma Productions, a feminist collective which creates videos and other audiovisual materials. Producing the material was producer and Atlantic-area expatriate Marusia Bociurkiw, formerly a NASCAD student and member of AFSCOOP and CFAT. She screened two tapes. The first was the first screening of one half of a work in progress called **Bullets For the Revolution** which received its premiere in Toronto on January 21. It is a documentary of a group of women who go to Nicaragua to help harvest coffee.

The second was **Playing with Fire**, a 75-minute dramatic tape directed by Bociurkiw and starring Jane Fuller, Maureen White and Kate Lushington. It is about a woman who loses her sexual memory and, together with another woman, reconstructs the meaning of taboo and pleasure.

Bociurkiw's approach to media, even since her AFSCOOP production, **75 Terrific Looks**, might be described as highly self-conscious and inwardly reflective. In the case of **Playing with Fire**, this works in her favour whereas in **Bullets for the Revolution** it gets in the way of the story. In the latter, the camera dwells on Canadian women who go to Nicaragua to such a degree as to detract from the social / political / economic analysis of what is taking place in the country. It leads one to think that the Canadian / urban / left intelligentsia has seized the revolution in Nicaragua for its own purposes and sees in it, and in its reflection, what it chooses. Recording images of these women in the reflection of this glow seems to predominate within the production.

In **Playing with Fire**, Bociurkiw's reflective and self-reflective approach gives the film a sense of warm irony and humour as three women discuss and explore the contradictions within themselves of traditional vs radical values. The film is political with a small 'p' but explores its realm in a non-polemical and undogmatic fashion. In an ambitious undertaking for a low-budget drama, Bociurkiw, through artful scenes, skillful editing and good dialogue, keeps her audience's interest. There are some problems in terms of production values (one scene is almost obliterated through some kind of dreadful background howling noise) and structure (the story never quite succeeds in reaching beyond its particulars to connect with a larger *raison d'être*). However, it is a sensitive, at times funny, and thought-provoking tape. The exhibition runs all month at the Centre for Art Tapes Viewing Room.

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Complete the following by placing a check mark in the appropriate box.

I'm shooting my next production in Toronto because ...

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b. Production budgets buy more in Toronto.

c. Toronto's locations adapt to time and place.

d. Toronto Film Liaison provides a comprehensive service that is fast, efficient, and free.

e. ALL of the above.

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Naish McHugh
Toronto Film Liaison
City of Toronto
Planning and
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18th Floor, East Tower,
City Hall,
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M5H 2N2
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(416) 392-7570

