Canadian satellite basics

Regulations confront northern native communities

BY JAY HERRINGER

In the rush towards progress that was the '60s, it was considered of prime importance that Canada develop its own satellite system. Telesat, the company which operates Canada's satellite service, was formed by an Act of Parliament on September 1, 1969. Barely catching its breath, and despite the fact that the system was designed for telecommunications, Canada began broadcasting by satellite in 1972.

Why was it so important for Canada to develop its own satellite system? Furthermore, what is its role in broadcasting, and how should the broadcasting use of satellite systems be managed in the future?

One factor in Canada is, of course, the matter of geographic size. Canada is a huge country. Trying to develop and maintain a communications infrastructure across this huge country is a herculean task. By the '70s Canada had a complex system of microwave and cable systems to bring telephone and broadcasting services to the majority of Canadians. However, beyond the small strip of populated territory, close to the U.S. border, communication services were minimal and expensive. To introduce communication services into areas outside this strip by conventional terrestrial means was considered next to impossible. Radiotelephone service, and radio broadcasting did meet some of the needs of remote areas for basic communication services, but the harshness of climate, the distances involved, and the state of technology did not ensure consistent service. Television broadcasting in northern areas consisted of local over-the-air broadcasts in some small centres, and a service of southern television programs sent by mail in the can for rebroadcasting by local stations. Of course, outside of the broadcast areas of the local stations, nothing could be picked up.

TRYING TO DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN A COMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE ACROSS THIS HUGE COUNTRY IS A HERCULEAN TASK.

Jay Herringer is a lawyer, and communications consultant with a special interest in aboriginal communications.

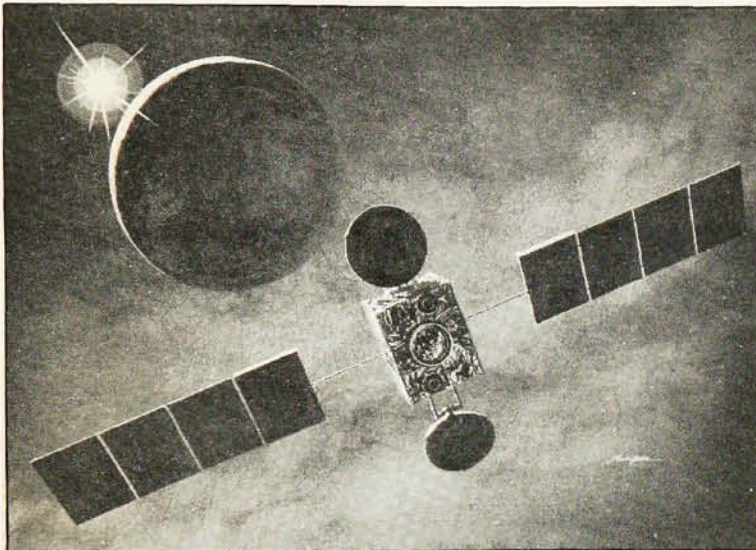
The advent of satellite technology gave Canada the technological base for solving some of the problems of extending communications services beyond the southern populated strip.

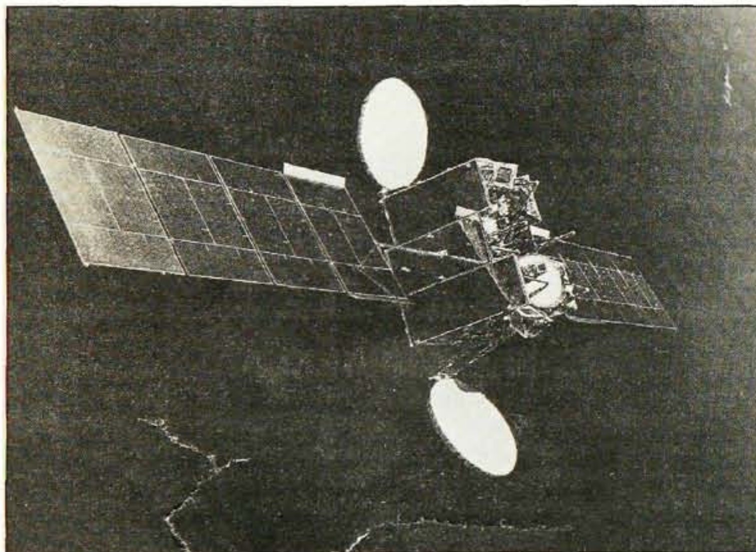
The second factor is the limited number of spots in the "geostationary orbit" that lend themselves to effective satellite communication. Most satellites used for telecommunications and broadcasting must be placed into an earth orbit approximately 35,000 km above the equator. They travel at a speed that positions them over a particular point of the earth, where they remain stationary relative to the earth. This position allows for the satellite footprint beam to cover the desired territory, and to function without interruption or repositioning of earth stations. Geostationary orbital positions for effective satellite communications were becoming a scarce resource soon after the development of satellite technology. As satellite technology was being tested in the '60s, Canada did not want to be left out of the race to procure a spot in the geostationary orbit by other statec with satellite capacity. If all the geostationary orbits were occupied, Canada would be unable to develop the type of communications infrastructure needed.[1]

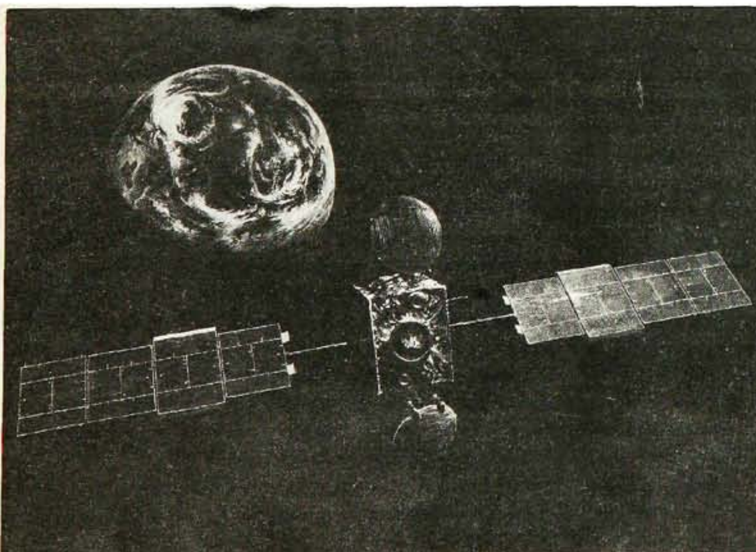
MANY INUIT COMMUNITIES WERE SHOCKED BY THE SUDDEN INFLUX OF SOUTHERN WHITE URBAN CULTURE THAT WAS BEAMED INTO THE NORTH.

There were important economic goals to fulfill. Canada's economy relies on large resource extraction projects. Many of these projects are in the north, and outside of effective terrestrial communications. Resource companies wanted effective telecommunication links with the south. Also, they wanted to provide broadcasting service for their employees. Southerners moving north wanted southern broadcast choices, something which was impossible prior to satellite-distributed signals.

Of course, Canada had always wanted to develop a high-tech, aerospace industry. Even though the first Canadian satellites (the Anik A series) were built in California by Hughes Aerospace Ltd., some components were built in Canada. The later satellite series were commissioned in Canada. (Spar Industries being a major Canadian satellite manufacturer).







photos courtesy of Telesat Canada

The Anik E spacecraft (here seen from three angles) will be the largest, most powerful and most sophisticated satellite ever launched for a domestic satellite company.

Impact of Satellite TV on Northern Native Communities

One of the repercussions of the implementation of a satellite system for delivery of broadcasting to the North was the reaction of Inuit communities to the reception of southern-based TV. Inuit communities, like many aboriginal communities north of the southern population strip of Canada, were outside of TV reception until the advent of the satellite delivery system.

Many Inuit communities were shocked by the sudden influx of southern white urban culture that was beamed into the North. They felt that the invasion of southern TV was a huge step towards the destruction of their unique cultures. Without any aboriginal-language TV available, the influx of southern TV was considered to contribute to the cultural genocide of aboriginal communities.

Speaking of the impact of mainstream southern television on Inuit communities, Rosemary Kuptana, president of the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation, stated to the CRTC:

"We might liken the onslaught of southern television and the absence of native television, to the neutron bomb. This is the bomb that kills the people but leaves the buildings standing. Neutron bomb television is the kind of television that destroys the soul of a people but leaves the shell of a people walking around. This is the television in which the traditions, the skills, the culture and the language count for nothing. The pressure, especially on our children, to join the invading culture and language and leave behind the language and culture that count for nothing is explosively powerful."

Inuit communities recovered quickly from the shock of having a technology imposed on them, largely without consultation, by demanding a significant Inuit language presence on northern TV. Through experiments of delivery of Inuit language (Inuktitut) broadcasting programs by satellite, experience was gained by fledgling Inuit broadcasters. By 1981, Inuit broadcasters had developed an expertise and a program schedule that ensured a modest beginning of Inuktitut TV into the homes of Inuit. The Inuit Broadcasting Corporation (IBC) was formed and licensed by the CRTC in 1981 and today broadcasts Inuktitut programming to over 50 communities in the North. In addition, there are other Inuit-based broadcasters using satellite to deliver signals. Taqramiut Nipingat Inc. (TNI, serving the Eastern Arctic), Okalakatiget Society (serving Labrador), and Inuvialuit Communications Society, (serving the Western Arctic). In addition to the Inuit broadcasters, there are now several other aboriginal broadcasters producing programming in native languages for distribution to aboriginal communities in the north and mid-northern areas.

IBC now produces 7-10 hours of original programming a week for distribution in the North. IBC has collaborated on joint productions with BBC, Greenland TV, Alaska TV, *Sesame Street*, Japan TV and others. Their programming covers the gamut of community needs: news, and political coverage of events important to the North; drama (Inuit soap operas are very popular); sports; children's programming; women's programming; traditional skills; nature programs etc.

There is no doubt that IBC and other Inuit and aboriginal broadcasters have emerged as a significant group of producers of "Canadian" television. The major problem they face is that of bottlenecks in distributing their programs to their audiences. The Inuit broadcasters depend on the satellite system for that distribution. Currently, this is done on a contractual basis with the CBC Northern Service, which has access to satellite transponders leased by CBC. The problem of access has become the most contentious issue among aboriginal TV producers, as they are dependent on the networks that service the North by satellite. CBC services the North through CBC Northern Services. However, the Northern Service only goes on the air after CBC has finished its use of the satellite for national service programming, and for shunting programming around the country to affiliates. Once the Northern Service has finished its programming, the IBC gets on the satellite. Very often, this happens at irregular intervals, and at inconvenient times. Inuit programming often comes on late at night, making it inaccessible to many viewers. As well, the Inuit broadcasters are liable to have programming preempted at short notice, without the provision of make-up time.

One solution to this bottleneck of satellite use for northern TV is the use of a satellite transponder dedicated to northern use. This has been suggested since 1981 by the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation and other Inuit broadcasters, and endorsed by the CBC Northern Service. However, the cost of leasing a transponder is upwards of $1 to $1.7 million/per year and CBC has no budget for it. It is considered too expensive, especially in an era of CBC budget cuts to mainstream services. If the cost of a leased transponder was more within CBC's reach, greater access would be made available to Inuit and other aboriginal producers. Inuit broadcasters would not have to wait third in line for use of the satellite, and CBC Northern Service could expand its regional broadcasting mandate.

What is it that prevents the leasing of a satellite transponder for a "public community-oriented service" in the North? Prohibitive cost, and the inflexibility of satellite regulation in Canada has prevented a more accessible use of satellite for fledgling Canadian broadcasters.

Satellite Regulation in Canada

The satellite services of Telesat are regulated in

Canada by the CRTC, as are all broadcasting and telecommunications services in Canada. However, the CRTC is split into two sections: one deals with broadcasting; the other deals with telecommunication services (telephone and data). Satellites are regulated on the telecommunications side of CRTC, not the broadcasting side.

The regulation on the telecommunications side of CRTC has a particular set of guidelines for regulation. The legal foundation of this regulation is based in the National Transportation Act and the National Railway Act. Tariffs are to be "just and reasonable" as determined by the CRTC. There has developed a tradition of setting rates for telecommunication services in Canada across the board. Rates are set, and fluctuations from these rates are rare. There is little room in the regulations or in the law for the setting of preferential rates, or low-cost rates for public-service-oriented programming. Thus, rates for the leasing of satellite transponders is based on the regulatory process for telecommunications; telephone and data. It is not geared for use by broadcasters, with their varying needs, and public service orientation (especially in a Northern context). The rates are high, and as there is little room for deviation from these rates, broadcast use of the satellites becomes expensive.

The irony of the Canadian situation is that the majority of users of satellite services in Canada are broadcasters, not telephone/data/common carrier companies. Fully 60% of the use of Canadian satellite capacity is by broadcasters. This use is expected to double by 1995.[3]

What is needed in Canada is a change to the regulation of satellite use. Instead of being regulated solely for the purposes of telecommunication common carriers, satellites should also be regulated for the purposes of a national broadcasting strategy. This would mean regulating broadcast satellite use on the 'broadcast side' of CRTC, which would have the flexibility to allow preferential rates for satellite use, especially for public interest use. The result of this would be a lower-cost transponder lease available to smaller, emerging, minority broadcast programmers.

This change in regulation has been endorsed by two recent federal reports dealing with broadcasting. The Caplan/Sauvageau Report, released in 1986 (Federal Task Force on Broadcasting Policy), and the Klingle Report on Access to TV in Underserviced Communities, released in 1985, both called for a new, more flexible regulation of Telesat's satellite services used by broadcasters. As well, the Caplan/Sauvageau Report has recommended that broadcasting services of public interest utilizing Telesat services should be federally subsidized in order to provide for the viability of satellite broadcasting in Canada.[4]

Relating this charge specifically to the example of Inuit broadcasters, CBC Northern Service would be able to afford to lease a transponder dedicated to northern service, and could lease larger chunks of time to Inuit and other aboriginal TV broadcasters. As well, given a smaller transponder cost, Inuit and other aboriginal broadcasters could lease their own transponder, and organize a schedule of use to fit their needs and priorities, rather than having to fit into third use of someone else's satellite time.

Telesat is, in fact, trying to make rate structures for transponder leasing more flexible, in order to accommodate new broadcast users. Deferred payment plans allows new broadcasters to defer payment for first-year transponder leases until revenues in later years can pay for early satellite use. However, Telesat admits that it is constrained by telecommunication regulation which prevents it from deviating too far from basic regulatory rate-setting.[5]

Lower cost and partially subsidized transponder fees could be made available to fledgling minority broadcasters in the south, too. Minority language communities spread across the country could coordinate the sharing of programming as shunting material, and sharing programmes becomes more feasible, as costs for satellite use drop. Programming by other 'marginal' groups would become more feasible, and communities could become closer through the use of shared programming. Artists, women's groups, refugee communities, education exchanges *et al* could become the beneficiaries of a lower-cost access to satellite time. Just as computer networking is putting marginal communities in touch with each other for a fraction of the cost of meetings and visits across this huge land, so also could a creative use of video and TV 'events' (meetings, festivals, special events etc.) lead to a new form of networking and keeping in touch. As the definition of 'community' expands to include people over great spaces (rather than defined solely in terms of a small geographic areas), the creative use of broadcasting technology becomes an instrument of taking control over aspects that previously were left up to others, usually others outside the community.

For the Inuit, the development of Inuit language broadcasting services has created a new sense of community across the Arctic. The far-flung Inuit communities now have a communications link between themselves that was previously impossible. This emerging sense of community is in part due to the ability to discuss issues and see reflected on TV aspects of Inuit social, political and cultural life that contribute to a more solid sense of self. Inuit broadcasters, pioneering a community-based satellite broadcasting service, can be a model to others who could benefit from lower-cost access to satellite time for distribution of their programming signals. ●

FOOTNOTES

[1] The rush to gobble up the spots in the geostationary orbit by the advanced technological countries has created a disparity, as developing countries emerging into space (India, Indonesia, Mexico, Brazil, China) find the majority of the advantageous spots taken. At recent meetings of the International Telecommunications Union, (the international body that regulates satellite communication) and INTELSAT, the developing countries are demanding a redistribution of geo stationary orbits to better reflect the fairness of a global use of a natural resource that belongs to all humankind.

[2] CRTC Hearing, Hull, Quebec; December 1, 1982.

[3] *Report of the Task Force on Broadcasting Policy: The Caplan/Sauvageau Report*, Ottawa, Department of Communications, 1986, p. 591.

[4] *Caplan/Sauvageau Report*, p. 598.

[5] Conversation with M. Bryan, of Telesat Canada, October 26, 1987.

The ABCs of sats

Television broadcasting by satellite began in Canada in 1972, with the inauguration of the Canadian domestic satellite service. The service is provided by Telesat Canada, a company established with monies from the private and public sectors (The Government of Canada owns 50 per cent of the shares of Telesat). Telesat, which operates as a private company outside of direct government control, was formed by an Act of Parliament on September 1, 1969. The Canadian satellite service was the first of its kind in the world. There had been satellites used for international telecommunication traffic provided by Intelsat, the international satellite telecommunications company (telephone, data and some broadcast transmission), but the international system was not designed to service the needs of a particular country. In Canada's case, a number of factors led to the introduction of the satellite system.

What is a satellite system?

A satellite system consists of two main parts; a) the satellite itself (known as the 'space segment'); and b) the earth stations (or 'earth segment'). Radio waves are sent out from a transmitting earth station (the uplink), and are received by the satellite 'transponder'. A transponder is a transmitting receiver unit on board the satellite that transmits a signal upon reception of the proper input signal. The radio signal is beamed back to earth. The signals sent from the space segment satellite can be directed (downlinked) to a particular earth station, or stations. An example of this would be CBC sending national programming to regional CBC stations via satellite for use in a broadcast day. The signals transmitted by the satellite transponders are also available to be received by homeowners with the appropriate satellite dish antenna. If signals are part of a subscription service, as is pay-TV, then the signals are scrambled, and a homeowner must install the appropriate decoder in order to watch the broadcast.

Although Canadian satellites provide broadcasting services, the satellite system is not actually designed for broadcasting. The current Canadian satellites are designed for telecommunications use; that is, private telephone and data transmissions (called 'point-to-point'), or 'point-to-multipoint telecommunications'). A series of special satellites designed for direct broadcasting by satellite are proposed for the 1990s.

Canada's satellite system consists of four satellites; the ANIK C 1; and C 3; and the ANIK D 1 and D 2. The ANIK C series has a capacity of 16 transponders each, capable of carrying two colour TV channels or 1,344 telephone calls (called 'circuits') at any one time. The ANIK D series has a capacity of 24 channels each, capable of carrying one colour TV signal or 960 telephone circuits. The ANIK E series, consisting of two satellites, with a capacity of 56 colour TV channels each, will be launched in 1990.

The ANIK C 3 and ANIK D 1 are the satellites used for broadcast purposes, although all have a broadcast capacity. The transponders on these satellites are leased on a full-time basis, or available on an 'occasional use' basis.

Jay Herringer ●

State of the art

New Brunswick filmmaking update

BY BETH POWNING

The film industry in New Brunswick has grown to such an extent that the Hatfield government, in 1986, commissioned the Coopers Lybrand firm to produce a hefty tome called "A Study of the Film and Video Industry in N.B." Most N.B. filmmakers, encouragingly, are too busy to wade through it, but those who have read it find it disquieting. "Art," protests Rudolf Caron, of Ciné Marivie, "is not a business like making shoes. The government is looking at film as a potential job-creation industry. They forget that you don't make films simply to make money."

This comment typifies the attitude of independent filmmakers in the province who continue, despite perennial lack of funding and increasing competition for available funding between "commercial" video companies and "artistic" filmmakers, to make the kinds of films they want to make.

The National Film Board gave a few people their start 15 years ago, with loaned equipment and training allowances; it continues to be a central force in the province, both in the francophone and anglophone filmmaking communities. NFB films examine questions both of identity and of human rights; *Toutes les photos finissent par se ressembler*, by Herménégilde Chiasson, has won recognition for its portrayal of a generation passionately committed to an Acadian identity. This fall, several films by Acadian women filmmakers won awards at the Atlantic Film Festival; the Award of Merit for Direction went to Claudette Lajoie for *Les Femmes aux filets*, a film exploring the difficult working conditions of women in fish-packing plants; and an Award of Excellence went to Anne-Marie Sirois for her animated short, *Maille, maille*. Herménégilde Chiasson examined Jack Kerouac's Canadian roots for NFB's "Americanité" series with *Le Grand Jack*, which won an Award of Excellence. Currently, Fredericton-based Kevin Matthews is directing a 30-minute documentary on groundwater pollution, a hot issue in N.B. at the moment.

It's possible, now, to at least make a start as a filmmaker without leaving the province, thanks to two co-ops, "Ciné Marivie", in Edmunston, and the "N.B. Filmmaker's Co-operative" in Fredericton. Both are nonprofit co-operatives where students and independent filmmakers have access to an equipment pool, studio space, editing facilities, film production workshops and seminars, and public screenings. Canadian Filmmakers Distributors, in Halifax, picks up some of the co-ops' completed films. Again, few of these films are inspired by the profit motive, which allows for experimentation; *Manic Film Session*, for example, by Bev Thornton, is described as a "post-modernist experiment in spontaneous cinema." A recent Fredericton co-op success was *The Spectre of Rexton*, made with funding from the Canada Council, the NFB, and the provincial government. This film, based on a local ghost story, was shot at King's Landing Historical Settlement, and was enthusiastically received.

But there are, of course, different financial realities for larger productions. Jon Pedersen, executive producer of Capitol Films, N.B.'s first film company, got off the ground with a $1.03 million grant from Employment and Immigration through the Local Employment Assistance Development (LEAD) program. LEAD is part of the Community Futures program, one of six initiatives that make up the Canadian Job Strategy. Pedersen has combined idealism and pragmatism in order to make the kinds of films he believes in. His first feature film, *Tuesday, Wednesday*, an 82-minute, 35mm colour film, was shown in the World Film Festival of Montreal, the Atlantic Film Festival, and the Olympic Arts Festival in Calgary. The film is currently being "shopped around" by a producer's agent based in L.A., who will also show it at film festivals around the world. Capitol Films hopes that the film will eventually be taken by a small distributor; there are about 12 in the U.S. who deal specifically with independent films, and Pedersen feels that a small distributor would work harder to market the film. A film like *Tuesday, Wednesday*, he feels, might be simply absorbed by a large distributor and never seen.

Capitol Films started in 1984 and has worked hard to gain credibility. That they have done so is evidenced, Pedersen feels, by CBC's recommending his company to produce *The Unpainted City*, a $2-3 million film about Saint John, N.B. in the early 1950s. The project is still in negotiation, with the possible involvement of the NFB and Telefilm. Their LEAD grant comes to an end this month; "The government gave us a chance to gain credibility. Now they'll be expecting us to continue with revenue from the films we've made." There may have to be some cutbacks this month, but Pedersen is confident that both funding and revenues will continue to come in, and has three films in various pre-production stages; *Four Way Split*, a film based on the life of a rock and roll musician; *Goodbye Pussyfoot*, the story of an Acadian nun who encounters prejudice in a Saint John convent in the 1930s; and *Chemical Eric*, a parody of "an academician in stress."

PHOTO: JOANNE GALLANT

Marcia Pilot and Herménégilde Chiasson, director of *Toutes les photos finissent par se ressembler*, an Award of Excellence winner at the Atlantic Film Festival last fall.

The only independently-owned sound-studio in the maritimes is owned by Carota Films, located in Shediac, on New Brunswick's east coast. Carota's bread and butter comes from high-quality industrials, but its sister company, "East In", produces feature films. A fantasy-adventure, *Warrior of the Borrowed Heart* is currently in development, and looking for financing. This film, co-scripted by Karen Carota and Bill Wilson, would be a co-production between Canada and Germany, and would be shot in N.B. and other parts of Canada.

Maurice Thorburn, film commissioner for the province of N.B., is working hard to entice outside producers to come to the province. The new government, he says, "really wants film and video to go ahead here." And "outsiders," like Patrick Palmer, producer of *Children of a Lesser God*, have spread the word about N.B. "The big plus here is the friendly atmosphere. People in N.B. are in love with movie-making; here, it's new."

To date, four outside films are under discussion, with one of them, as Thorburn says, "150 per cent sure." Via-le-Monde-Bertolino will be producing *Où va le vent*, a $3 million film co-produced with France. To be directed by Bruno Carrière and produced by Monique Messier, the film will be shot on the rugged Fundy coast, near Cape Enrage and the Hopewell Rocks, as well as in the fishing village of Caraquet. Shooting is scheduled to start in the fall.

Contingent on financing, other films that may be produced in New Brunswick include a film on the life of the N.B. boxer Yvon Durelle, a $3.5 million production directed by Bruce Pitman; *The Truce*, a $4.5 million (U.S.) Plumm Production, to be filmed in the Saint John area; *Trails and Tails*, a travel-adventure film; and *Evangeline* by East Agencies, a Boston studio which plans on opening a studio, with sound-stage, "somewhere in the province."

The film industry in N.B., while large enough to warrant a government study, is small enough to be extremely vulnerable. Independent filmmakers have recognized this problem, and to address it have recently formed a chapter of the IFVA (Independent Film and Video Alliance). This organization will not only address the problem of lack of communication between filmmakers themselves, but may also influence government policymakers to view the industry as filmmakers would like it to be seen, not merely as a component of a job-creation strategy. Given an entirely new government, the task of influencing decision-making may be easier than it was with long-established and more intransigent politicians.

"The people making films in New Brunswick," says Jon Pedersen, "are very busy." The most positive trend, he says, is the growth of self-confidence among N.B. filmmakers. "It's not really so important what they think of us in Toronto," he says. "It's what we think of ourselves that is changing. We're doing okay."

Beth Powning is a freelance writer living in Sussex, New Brunswick.

A medium of contemporary memory

Canadian Art Video Festival at the Videographe

BY FRANCINE DAGENAIS

Conceived in 1971, the Vidéographe was the logical videographic offshoot of the NFB's *Challenge for Change* project. After 1973, the NFB opted out for political reasons which caused a small group led by Robert Forget to move for its incorporation. With this *15th Anniversary Canadian Art Video Festival*, we are given an excellent opportunity to judge whether the Vidéographe's original social and political mandate has borne fruit and to see how far afield it has strayed from its initial documentary tradition.

The festival, held at the Joyce Yahouda Meir Gallery in Montreal, was a modest presentation of approximately 30 video works, 17 of which were made in '87 or '88. The selection emphasized the difference in tone and look between regional production and other Canadian works. Organizer and curator Jean Tourangeau has always viewed videographic production in this country as reflective of the fractured Canadian mosaic.

True to his principles, the festival was shown in a commercial gallery and was made easily accessible to the public. Also in accordance with his beliefs, he offered a program of established art in combination with works by newcomers.

It's thumbs up for Doug Melnyk's impressive first production, *Las Vegas*

As a critic, Tourangeau viewed distribution as a logical tool for the promotion and development of Québécois video production. As a distributor, he has done much to expand video artists' options outside of the usual narrow boundaries, selling selections to major American museum circuits.

The six programs were divided into "first" and "new" productions, landscapes, a few Canadian cities, portraits and finally performance/dance videos. The works were, on the whole, fairly recent, the oldest tape dating back to 1982. In the selection of first productions, Paul Landon's *Estompées déjà* ('87) stands out as the most interesting. Using the medium's inherent distortive quality, the image breaks up and fades through successive erosions in the same way that the diffluence of memory distorts our sensory impressions. Interestingly, many of the artists in this selection have turned away from self-imagery to project their presence in the biographical content of a text or in the urban environment as landscape (notably, Bourdon, Paradis and Bendahan), tracing the hazy corridors of memory as subject-matter. Here Robbe-Grillet's *Dans le labyrinthe* serves as a basis from which the absurd interplay between the ephemeral spoken French and its English titled translation appropriates its durational visual presence, a duality/ambivalence which exacerbates the blurred perception of the decaying monuments of Venice. Description is not truth, the flux of the video signal becomes a metaphor for the intangibility of memory.

Francine Dagenais is a Montreal-based freelance writer specializing in visual arts.

Luc Bourdon's video adaptation of Barthes' *Fragments d'un discours amoureux, The Story of Feniks and Abdullah* ('88), winner of the first prize at the Atlanta Festival, dissects a moving travelogue/landscape, a poetic evocation of romantic alienation and unrequited desire. The off-screen voice addresses the unseen lover while also serving as a diary narrated for the voyeur/audience. This narrative device widens the scope of individual self-representation (the presence of the author is felt but remains unseen) to include a more global depiction of the human condition through a surveillance of daily human gestures. Here the bilingual textual splicing also accentuates the feeling of strangeness, robbing the audience of the original pleasure of the text. *Touei* ('85), another tape by Bourdon juxtaposes the reappropriated images of landscape and human bodies.

Video veteran Marc Paradis, whose work *Lettre à un amant* ('88) is the last in a trilogy on love, narrates the story of a separation, this textual evocation is visually punctuated by erotic recollections of his lost lover in various states of undress and at various stages of sexual arousal, escalating to crescendi of verbal and physical ejaculation. Like Bourdon's work, this tape touches on the question of estrangement, a sense of loss, the piecing together of memorial remnants of unilateral desire.

Michèle Waquant's elegant pictorial work was represented here by three videos: a progression from a very lyrical still life portrait, to the very humourous dialogic relationship between the fish within their "civilized" environment and the fishermen/predators outside a pond, to the *mise en scène* of hands in the act of speech. She has always accentuated the flatness of the medium, using the frame to deny any illusion of perspective. In *Portrait de Pauline* ('84), for example, there is a single full-length shot of the subject; she is treated as a flat object or still life. Generally Waquant prefers to let her subject move or gesticulate before the camera rather than to travel with it. She works with restrictions, hence in *Leurs mains* ('87), the framing is confined to the hands. Just as we are not allowed to glimpse at the faces of their owners, we are not allowed to hear the words echoed by their gestures, gestures far more telling when they are divorced from their linguistic accompaniment.

Flow II ('83) by Japanese artist Shinsuke Ina, was one of two visions from outside of Canada, this one illustrating the positive interplay between nature and technological culture. The well-known and popular *Options* ('86) by Marielle Nitoslawska shows us the portrait/life of a Polish artist filmmaker. The absurdity of the image/word juxtapositions, the claustrophobic footage of a world circumscribed within his window/aperture proposes a political statement through a *mise en scène* of objects, familiar events, people and words. Conversely, the humour of *Demi-portion* ('87) by Maurice Van Themsche lies in the absurd irony of a man living uncommitted

in our democratic society, in the profiled flatness, never being able to give anything up while at the same time being unable to face up to anything.

Martin L'Abbé's *Première édition* is based on the legend of the *Pied Piper* (after Goethe and Browning) in combination with a more topical narrative outlining the threatening invasion of a community by a retrovirus. Using a newscast format interspersed with pseudo-scientific microscopic imagery, everything – even the most banal object (like chairs for instance) – is made to seem strange. It is the hybrid quality attributed to the usual which confers upon this bizarre account the science fiction quality of ambivalent intermediate space.

Most of the video makers subscribed to the post-modern conception of simultaneous stimulation, transmission/reading. The sound tracks, for the most part, played an important and integral part of the musical/textual/concrete message. The music videos, two of which could fit into this category, included *What* ('87), (first-prize winner at the Seattle Festival) a fast-paced, intermittent visual/musical composition and Scott Robinson's technically sophisticated performance video titled *The Visual Race* ('87). The latter presents an uncanny reversal of the discourse-laden tapes of the other programs, achieving a total separation from its self-referential foundation, the distorted image and digitalized sound ruptured into multiple rapid splinters of unintelligible non-message, (a functional virtuality of media meaning.)

These video artists are making use of irony to oppose traditional romantic aesthetic schemas and artistic practices. Opposing fiction to reality, live time or "real" time to imagined or synthetic studio time, straightforward representation to broken, fragmented electronic imagery. All of these devices produce an allusive intertext which in turn incites a healthy disbelief in the viewer in the face of these meta-narratives. In both Sylvie Tourangeau's *Le lieu de la mémoire ou merci à Batmine* ('87) and *Blockhaus* ('87) by Johanne Charlebois, the visual parody of the utterly familiar produces a disquieting ambiance, reality's self-reflection as fictional rhetoric in a metaphorical conflation of past, present and future.

An unclad political statement in Marielle Nitoslawska's *Options*..

Denis Lessard's performance documentary *Album* ('86) examines factual as well as fictional rhetoric. Working from the shattered, distorted recollections of his childhood, mixing levels, music, anecdotes and references (Sarraute and Jankélévitch among others): dealing with specific mnemonic traces of imaged time reshaping individual memories rather than generalized impressions.

Raphaël Bendahan's *Le jardin du paradis* ('82) filters the impressions, past and present of a community such as Montreal and Toronto, as it is experienced by an immigrant. The voice-over in both English and French is a lyrical stream-of-consciousness on life, death and everything thing else which touches the realm of affect. This lyrical, subtle and intelligent text exchanges imagery for textuality conferring upon both a great refinement of elocution, leading the viewer in a space of recognition/co-gnition oscillating between intellectual, emotional and visual apprehension. This work is well worth seeing again.

Doug Melnyk's *Las Vegas* ('87), was an impressive first production, criss-crossing the various levels of language alternating between verbal descriptions of archival footage of nuclear testing in the Nevada desert, images of the stillness of the desert and a commentary by a young woman worried about the effects of testing. The absurd cityscape is juxtaposed with deadpan tourist (hilariously rendered) accounts of nightclub acts. The ever invasive close-ups of these talking heads delivering anecdotal descriptions culminate in a full screen ironic, almost threatening smile.

Rumblesphinx ('86), Tokyo Festival prize winner – a wonderful cardboard travelogue through a Pee Wee Hermanesque two-dimensio-nal black and white scenography – passes from the integrity of the image to a digitalized colour pointillism, from flowing time to saccadic rhythmic organization of temporal measures. Tiptoeing through the unreality of stifling, timid, bureaucratic passivity with Mr. Dream as the low-key daredevil guiding us through a slide show that puts our would-be adventurer to sleep. His dream escape is then depicted in the form of a musical interlude. When he wakes up after his maudlin evening, it is only to go back to his safe home where he can hide from travel, plane crashes and everything frightening, i.e., is life in general. In the closing scene, he goes to bed, book in hand (Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*), one of the pages of which makes a wry commentary on the video's budget, he closes his eyes and goes to sleep, ZZZZZZZZZZZs literally coming out of his mouth.

The magnificent Tanya Mars' *Pure Virtue* ('85) is rapidly becoming a cult classic of the genre, her acerbic wit expounds a discourse on representation which travels anachronistically through history as dominant ideology's bequest. It is both thought-provoking and absurdly humourous. Dressed in full Elizabethan costume, the artist visually cites the Betty Davis incarnation of Elizabeth I and mimics her gestures, goes shopping and partakes in a pointed rock video parody of *Love Is a Battlefield*.

Most of the works presented function in simultaneous sensorial layerings. The metamorphosis of the remnants of coeval past, drawing from a collective memory or collective data bank, leading the quotidian into the realm of the metaphorical. Many video artists have relinquished the straightforward documentary format but works like *Options* shape another kind of document, the cultural reflection of our icons decontextualized in a global perception represented in a narrative/anti-narrative dichotomy, a dialectic of form and content, a reflection on the seeming contradiction between intuition and conceptualization as a methodolo-gy. The dialectic of coherence/unity and multiplicity/ fragmentation becomes the substance of the durational synthesis of experienced time, a subjective cognitive processing by which the various levels of intermittent remembrances colour our past impressions private, social or cultural.

The discourse on history has been replaced by personal statements and private memories. As the programs suggest, the multiplicity of genres has made it increasingly difficult to circumscribe or define video production. Video art has evolved into a form of entertainment and it may be possible that the realm of the undefinable in-between space thus created could be the locus for the virtuality of a medium of cultural critique.

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