

SUB-URBAN



5 films about living in suburbia

SECRETS

Mark Williams
13 min 16mm 1995

BRAND

Mike Hoolboom
6 min 16mm 1997

BIG DEAL SO WHAT
Sue Rynard
23 min 16mm 1995

**ETUDES FAMILIALES/
DOMESTIC SCIENCES**
Lisa Fitzgibbons
9 min 16mm 1993

MY MOM WORKS AT SEARS
Maria Drazilov
23 min 16mm 1996

LIFT monthly screening

mon. oct. 28 8:00 pm

cfmhc 37 hanna ave. #220

free to LIFT members, all others by donation





THE LIAISON OF INDEPENDENT FILMMAKERS OF TORONTO

September/October, 1996

Volume 16, Issue 5

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Mazako Nagai

editorial

I've been TIFF'n at the Toronto International Film Festival Straight, undiluted film concentrate for ten days. A cinema bender endowed with such import that I thought it would leave me with the meaning of life or at least the meaning of cinema. What the Festival did bring home to me, re-iterated by the filmmakers I spoke to there, was that cultures all over the world are experiencing the same struggle for the survival of indigenous product against the tidal wave of American consumer culture. Who knew that we would be part of a resistance movement, growing in strength. Simon Perry from British Screen spoke about resistance through co-production (you make one of ours and we'll make one of yours, and together we can stave off Hollywood). Taiwanese director Wang Xiao Di spoke about the need to maintain her identity against a mainland Chinese government who is busy selling off their screens to the Americans. Perhaps the truest words were Irish director Trish McAdam's (Snakes and Ladders) about the tension between art and commerce, "It's a necessary struggle, as long as nobody wins." We decided to focus on two issues: distribution, since that is what the Festival has to offer indie filmmakers, and worldwide film stories, tales from the fringes. Watch these pages now and in the months to come.

message from the chair

The year - in Board terms - is drawing to a close. We are seeking fresh Board Members to take the place of those who's tenure has been completed. Being a member of LIFT's Board of Directors generally represents a two-year commitment to the position, with Board meeting held on the first Wednesday of every month. But it is much more than just a schedule of meetings. The LIFT Board of Directors is an important opportunity for mem-

bers to take responsibility for their co-op, to have a say in the direction of its operation and - to the best of their ability - ensure the co-op's continued success. To be appointed to the Board, please come to the Annual General Meeting in November. You must be a full or associate member in good standing. LIFT is a membership driven co-op. Feel like taking the wheel for a while?

Until the AGM

Hope Thompson, LIFT Chair

The LIAISON OF INDEPENDENT FILMMAKERS OF TORONTO is a non-profit co-operative which supports and encourages independent filmmaking through the exchange of information and access to equipment and facilities. LIFT hosts a program of workshops and monthly screenings and it provides access to information regarding funding sources, festival and grant deadlines and other related matters.

LIFT is supported by its membership, the Canada Council (Media Arts Section), the Ontario Arts Council, Metro Council Cultural Affairs Division, the City of Toronto through the Toronto Arts Council, the National Film Board of Canada, Telefilm, the Ontario Film Development Corporation, the Government of Ontario through the Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation.

Articles published in the LIFT newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors, the Co-op or members of the Board of Directors. Letters to the editor can be sent c/o LIFT, 37 Hanna Avenue, Suite 301 Toronto, Ontario M6K 1W5, Phone, 588-6444; Fax, 588-7017.

LIFT's website was incorrectly addressed in our last issue. The correct address is:

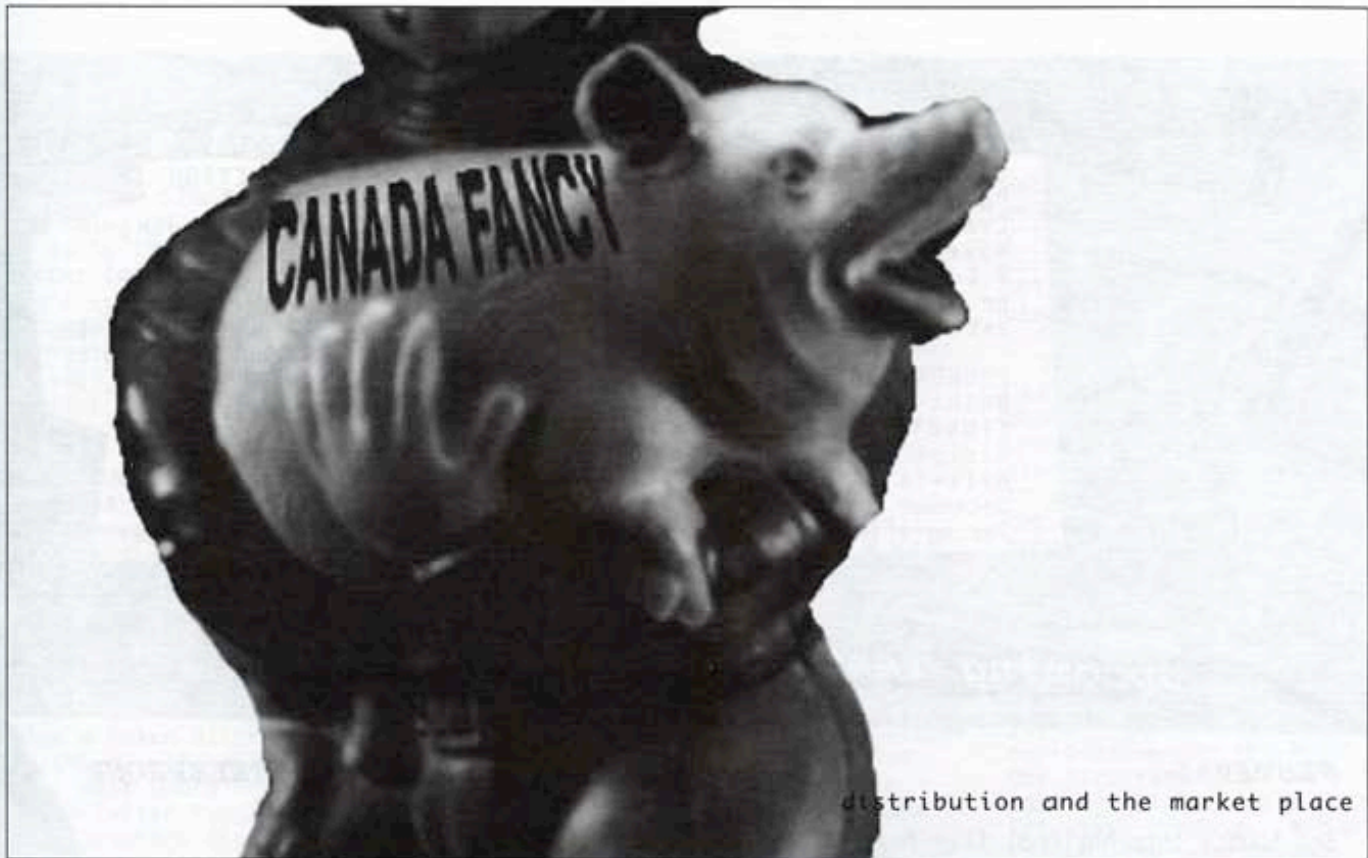
<http://www.inforamp.net/~lift>

e-mail: lift@inforamp.net

Anyone with questions, suggestions or ideas, please call Lisa at the LIFT office, or e-mail us.

DO YOU HAVE e-mail???

Send us your e-mail address and let us know if you would be interested in receiving your bi-monthly mailing by e-mail in the near future. You can e-mail the info to us at lift@inforamp.net



distribution and the market place

departments:

critical dates & dubious deadlines pgs>>4-5

funding & grant deadlines>upcoming festival deadlines>
calls for submissions>community calendar>announcements>

lift news>> pgs>>6-7

congratulations>new members>liftgear & machinations>
lift orientation>thank you>

ads>> pgs>>23

feature:

watermelon felon interview w/ Chryl Dunye>> pgs>>11-14

and this little film went to market...>> pgs>>16-22

reviews:

salon de refus'és>> pgs>>9

film festival>> pgs:>>10

ON THE COVER:

CANADA COUNCIL FILM PRODUCTION
Creative Development grants
November 15. Call Can Council
@ 1-800-263-5588,
or David Poole @ 6143 566 4414
ext 4252

FOUNDATION TO UNDERWRITE NEW
DRAMA FOR PAY TELEVISION
(FUND)
Script Development for
Writers & Producers
December ^ 1996, Feb 14 1997
For more info call. 416 956 5431

THE CANADIAN FILM AND
TELEVISION PRODUCTION
ASSOCIATION (CFTP)A)
1996 Mentorship Training
Programme
Submission Deadline Thrus
Oct 31 1996

Applications are available at the
LIFT office, or contact CFTP)A at
416 927-8942, 1 800 267 8208, or
e-mail. training@cftpa.ca

ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
First Film & Video
January 15 1996
call the office at 961-1660

upcoming festival deadlines:

FESTIVAL

DEADLINE TELEPHONE

FESTIVAL	DEADLINE	TELEPHONE
3rd Sousse International film festival for Childhood and Youth	Oct. 24	
Rotterdam Film Festival	Oct 30	+31-10-4118080
Academy Awards/Documentary Awards	Oct 31	213 278-8990
Ciudad de Jaca Int'l Sport Film Festival	Nov 1	
Paris Fest Int'l du Film d'Art et Pedagog	Nov. 1	42 65 08 88
Paris Int'l Film Fest of Visual Tnthro & Soc Doc.	Nov 1	
University of Oregon Queer Film Festival	Nov 1	503-346-4375
Calcutta International Film Festival	Nov 7	91-33 228 7911
7th Festival Int'l du Film Animalier d'Albert	Nov. 15	22 74 32 44
PARIS 9TH Int'l Audiovisual Programmes Fest France.	Nov 16	33 1 45 61 01 66
Santa Barbara Int'l Short Film Fest	Dec 1	805 963 0023
Montreal Int'l Short Film Festival	Dec 1	514-285-4515
Films de Femmes de Creteil et du Val de Marne	Dec. 10	33 01 49 80 38 98
Edmonton Local Heroes Film Fest	Dec. 13	403 421 4084
Nantes Womens' Film Festival	Dec. 15	33 51 82 31 09
Montreal International Symposium of Electronic Arts	Dec 31	514-990 0229

*Guidelines and application forms for the following festivals are on file and available for photocopying (10¢ a page) at the LIFT office. As much as we'd like to, LIFT staff cannot take the time out to fax forms to members. Please do not ask. If you are unable to make it into the LIFT office, you will have to call the festival directly to request an application form.

*JUST IN: 1996 edition of the AIVF Guide to International Film & Video Festivals. An invaluable resource for planning your festival entries for the upcoming year. Available as an in-house resource for all LIFT members.

calls for submissions:

LIFT & CINEWORKS Vancouver are doing an exchange screening in early 1997. If you have a recent (after September 1993) short (under 12 minutes) that you would like to submit for screening in Vancouver as part of LIFT's 90 minute program, contact Deanna @ LIFT 588-6444, email lift@inforamp.net

WOMEN IN THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR A national professional development workshop conducted by Anne Wheeler at the Banff Centre for the Arts, January 18-29, 1997. Six actors (M/F) will be required for scene study with the trainee directors. The workshop budget (pending funding) will cover all expenses, plus a token stipend for the workshop. If interested, please send your photo and resume and a cover letter to: Actors/Women in the Directors Chair, Attn: Carol Whiteman & Gabrielle Rose, c/o 1622 West 7th Avenue, 1st Floor, Vancouver, V6J 1S5 or c/o 200 Homer Street, Vancouver, B.C. V6B 2W5

SHAMELESS SHORTS is an alternative half-hour program dedicated to independent short films from Canada and around the world. Showcase the work of female directors. Their tastes are eclectic so send your comedy, drama, animation, documentary or experimental work. Send a VHS copy and publicity material to Laura Michalchyshyn, Producer, Shameless Shorts, WTN

WANTED INFORMATION ON ARTISTS AND PROJECTS IN NEW MEDIA. V Tape is embarking on a pilot project to collect and catalogue information about artists and projects in new media including CD-ROM's, selected audio artworks and creative internet projects. The catalogue is intended as a platform for artists to showcase projects available for sale to arts and cultural organizations. If you are an artist with work appropriate for inclusion, please contact V-Tape with the following information: title of the art work, description of the piece,

relevant information; a biography and CV. Submit to John Chung at V Tape, 401 Richmond St W, Suite 452, Toronto MSV 3A8, Tel 351-1317, Fax 351-1509, Email video@astral.magic.ca

THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA is launching a production program to expand filmmaking opportunities for aboriginal peoples in NFB production. The AFP is a 3-year initiative from the English Production Branch. The program will set aside \$1 million for each of the 3 years to finance its productions and will provide an opportunity for independent aboriginal directors from across the country to produce or co-produce film or video projects. The AFP will serve as a replacement for the NFB's Studio One structure. For more information contact Louise Lore, Executive Producer, NFB Ontario Centre, 150 John Street, Toronto MSV 3C3, Tel 973-2979/Fax 973-7007

PLEASURE DOME is seeking submissions from Toronto-based film & video makers for their New Toronto Works show to be held in January 1997. Please contact Pleasure Dome at #220, 37 Hanna Avenue, Toronto M6K 1W8, tel 416-966-8732/email skink@io.org Website www.io.org/~skink



You will submit to the 10th anniversary **IMAGES FESTIVAL OF INDEPENDENT FILM AND VIDEO** to be held this spring. Report to festival headquarters by Dec 1st, you worm. For applications and more info call 416-971-8405.

Screenings? TV dates? Events? Let us know and we'll run them in a calendar

Name that Newsletter! The LIFT Newsletter wants to make a name for itself. Any suggestions? Write, call Deanna or Email

Storyboard - we are trying to update the storyboard. If you have new work or work that is in the works or recently completed, call Deanna at the LIFT Office. The entire, comprehensive storyboard will come out in December

The **BOARD OF DIRECTORS** is looking for new members. See news about the Annual General Meeting in this issue

announcements:

DESH PARDESH is looking for Committee Members in the following areas: Fundraising (Grant Writing, Fundraising Events), Ongoing Programs (Overall Board Vision), Festival (Working Committee), Avec Pyar (Pamphleteering). Call Desh at (416) 504 9932

new members:

Welcome new members
as of August-October

Christopher Ball
David Cropper
Matthew Crowe
Adam Fahandezh
Anthony Forrest
Dawn Friesen
Rachel Gray
Walter Kogel
Micheal Larsh
Latin American
Artists Network
Stephen Lee
Malcolm Marcus
Ruba Nadda
Alexandre Oktan
Janice Porteous
Hollie Shaw
Peggy Smith
Katherine Wawrzakowicz
Julian Wierzbicki

congratulations:

Congratulations to independent filmmaker/producer and LIFT member Jennifer Holness, and filmmaker/Trinity Square Video Technical guru David Sutherland who were married on October 20, 1996

thank you:

LIFT LOVES KELLY MAKIN Incredible Equipment Donation Received

LIFT would like to thank Kelly Makin, a Toronto director whose recent credits include The Kids In The Hall film Brain Candy, for donating some incredible equipment to LIFT. It arrived safely to its new home on September 19. This generous donation included the following equipment in excellent condition:

- 1 Eclair NPR 16mm camera package with Angenieux 12-120 zoom lens, 4 mags, 3 matte boxes, Barney, and tons of great filters
- Cinegon prime lenses (5.7mm, 10mm, 16mm, 25mm, 35mm, 50mm)

- Sachtler Tripod with standard legs, baby legs, and high hat
 - Bolex underwater housing (for a paralax Bolex)
- All equipment has been sent for testing and an overhaul before we make it available for rental. We'll keep you posted on rental rates of this great new stuff

Special thanks to LIFT members Carolyn Wong and Roberto Ariganello for their help in acquiring this donation

lift orientation:

LIFT Orientations Tuesday,
November 19, 1996 11:30 -
1:00 p.m.

There will be an orientation session for individuals who are thinking about joining LIFT and members who haven't yet familiarized themselves with the co-op's facilities



Sally considers her future now
that she has left LIFT GOOD
LUCK SALLY!

liftgear & machinations:

Monday, April 1996 What's new with equipment @ LIFT?

Protools Update

Eight members and 1 staff member were trained on LIFT's new Protools system at the end of September. Workshop participants were heard saying "incredible . versatile. so much better than cutting on mag! . awesome . I'll never go back to the sound bench". We look forward to some new projects starting up soon. Renovations are underway in the grey suite beside the Oxberry room. This will be the permanent location of the Protools suite. Until the renovations are complete (late-Oct), the room rates have been discounted at \$7/hour for full members and \$14/hour for associate members. The rates in the new

facility will be \$10/hr for full members and \$20/hour for associate members

Two more Protools workshops have been added. Session 1 Nov 21, 7-10 pm and Nov 23 & 24, 10am - 6 pm. Session 2 Nov 21, 7-10 pm and Nov 30 & Dec 1, 10am - 6 pm. Enrollment is limited to 4 per session. Cost: \$125 for LIFT members, \$160 for non-members. Registration began Oct. 8. Call the LIFT office to see if any spaces remain, or to have your name added to the waiting list.

FREE PROTOOLS PRACTICE HOURS
TUESDAY 10 am - 1 pm

LIFT has set aside three hours each week to allow full and associate members to practice skills learned at Protools workshops, or for those with experience on similar systems who require a little time to make the switch to Protools. If the session is not booked the Friday prior, an editor may book the time for use on a project, for which they will be billed the regular rates. Up to two people can book the session, and work together.

LIFT Technical Coordinators, Lisa and Greg, are busy compiling "How-To" Protools manual.



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would not su



Digital Non-Linear Editing Available at Trinity Square Video

LIFT's sister organization, Trinity Square Video, just acquired an EMC off-line digital picture editing suite, designed to generate a neg cutting list or a video EDL (Edit Decision List). It is a DOS based, windows environment interface, with source window, master window, and time line. It does dissolves, fades, and other effects. Picture can be digitized from Betacam, Betacam SP, 3/4", SVHS, and/or VHS. Trinity will be holding orientations and workshops very soon.

LIFT members can access this new technology by hiring an editor or operator who is a member of Trinity Square Video, who must be in the room whenever you are there editing. Under this

arrangement, the project is billed at an Intermediate rate, which is 60% higher than the member rate. At press time, the rates had not been set, but a Trinity Square insider revealed that the rates would be "very very competitive". To find out more details about Trinity's new edit suite, call them at 593-1332.

Just to clarify policy, LIFT members can use LIFT equipment on non-LIFT members films, but the member is responsible for the equipment and for paying the bill. Plus they are billed at the Associate rate, regardless if the LIFT member has full status. So, under this policy, a Trinity Square Video member (or any non-LIFT member for that matter) can

use LIFT's new Protools Digital Non-Linear Sound Editing Suite, as long as they have a LIFT member working for them as Sound Editor or Protools Operator. The LIFT member must be in the suite for the whole edit, and is responsible for all bills incurred by the non-member in their name. Since copyright of the film is not held by a LIFT member, they will be billed at the Associate rate (\$20/hr). LIFT cautions its members from entering into an agreement like this with a non-member, since the LIFT member is 100% responsible for all bills in their name. A few LIFT members have been left with bills incurred by non-LIFT members, and have been required to pay them.



other people's money....

The \$200 million Dollar Fund

A pragmatic reason for pursuing the possibilities in Broadcast is the new \$200 million dollar fund announced by Minister of Canadian Heritage Sheila Copps at the Toronto International Film Festival. Available for the creation of indigenous Canadian programming, this fund absorbs the \$50 million Broadcast fund and the \$50 million Cable Production fund and adds a further 100 million to the pot. Eligibility? 50% of the fund is earmarked for CBC-Independent "co-productions", in order to financially commit to the CBC's new requirement to show only Canadian programming (the Corp cannot however use it to fund in house programming or to offset budget losses). The remaining 100 million is to be spent on drama, variety, children's shows, documentaries and performing arts programming. Production must meet 8 out of 10 points on a Canadian Content scale and be broadcast on prime time within two years. Any Canadian-controlled production entity may apply for financing. "Current general eligibility criteria employed by Telefilm Canada and the Cable Fund for independent and broadcaster-affiliated production companies will remain in place."

Of course, questions remain about access - and the serviceability of this fund for the truly independent filmmakers, not all of whom have been graced by recognition from Telefilm.

More importantly, though, it seems to put the onus on Broadcasters to determine the direction of "indigenous Canadian programming". With our theatrical feature funding in more or less crisis, and less and less will to repatriate Canadian screens or claim ownership of that audience, will our stories now be told only in a way suitable for prime time? That's the way it looks.

In the next issue What have the Arts Councils been up to lately?



Just back from the Toronto International Film Festival and of course I kept my ear to the ground while the alcohol was free and the tongues were wagging. Of course, in the name of good gossip I had to suffer through some incredibly bad parties. One was held in a shopping mall with escalators, business men cutting the rug to the latest sounds from the eighties and a few drag queens obviously paid to be there (are we going to see drag queens at Disneyland soon, hugging tourists?) Oh well, on with the dirt...

What singer/actor/PSA (Plastic surgery addict) gave new meaning to the phrase "we can rebuild her" during her stay in Toronto? Before a press conference, she had a whole team of special effects makeup artists trying to cover up her Michael Jackson like death mask which makes Joan Rivers' face look positively flabby.

What actor, who starred in a film in the festival and has an even more famous acting brother, was recently in town shooting a movie where he terrorized the cast and crew, drank until he was incoherent, and had to be fed every line while shooting? And most of the cast were children...

What has-been, way down in the gutter star pissed off an art director on the shoot of his umpteenth attempt at a comeback (of course the film went straight to video)? The cast and crew were ready for a take and being the noble gentleman he is, not wanting to hold back the expensive production with a washroom break, the star whipped it out and relieved himself in the corner of the set, much to the horror of everyone.

What big (and growing) French film star, in town to promote a film at the festival, just ended his torrid love affair with his male lover? Who was his lover you might ask? None other than that married seventies film star who has recently risen from the ashes to become one of the major stars of the nineties.

'til next year...

The Salon des Refusees

There is an audience that won't cross the street to attend the TIFF, eschews the lineups, ridicules the glamour and finds something obnoxious in the TIFF's claim to discovery of independents that they have allegedly 'found'. This is the audience that accuses the TIFF of tokenism, prefers to seek out the clandestine screenings and suspect films year round and tends towards the other, smaller, more selective Festivals that present a fare that's way way out there by TIFF standards; and whom the TIFF tries to appease with the Cinematheque... These wise people comprised the standing room only crowd present at the LIFT Salon des refusees, now in its 3rd successful year.

The packed Rivoli showing included

Dike by Lisa Hayes, in which a young woman battles a flop sweat problems.

Four of a Kind by Ron Koperdraad and Joe Mahoney: As Koperdraad describes it, "A new guy joins a poker group and is mercilessly taunted by another until things go terribly wrong." What happens in the end?" I ask. "The weenie blows off the taunters arm." "So it's about empowerment?" "I guess that's about the only socially redeeming message you could get out of it."

Roses are Blue by Edie Steiner. A lyrical meditation on longing and the desire for change. The film portrays a woman's passage through a series of life images that connect to her choreographed performance in the film. This choreography introduces us to the symbolic significance of the blue rose - an object of fantasy that is at once desired and unattainable, beautiful and sorrowful.

Killing Time by Paula Tiberius is a dark comedy about what happens right after your house burns down. Kate (comedian Tanya Henley) wanders the streets of Toronto in a state of shock and finds no comfort in the unsympathetic reaction of her friends (stand-up comics Eric Marier and Randy Metson).

Hangman's Bride by Naomi McCormack This is a great movie, based on the true story of serving maid Francois Rolon and Jean Croelere, two condemned prisoners convicted of theft and illegal duelling respectively incarcerated in adjoining cells, "This neighborly arrangement launches an alliance based upon honour, guided by seduction and cemented with a conspiracy to outwit the law." I won't give away what happens, but I really want to...

Leap in the Dark by Kiomars Bazrafshan. A narrative drama about a bosnian refugee quest to bring to Canada her daughter and husband from whom she had become separated during their flight from thier home.

Neighbours by James Desrosches, a comic journey into paranoia and madness as a man finds himself obsessing about noises from the house next door, that might not really be there...

Good Night by Rick Palidwor: Larry and Louise are from the planet earth, and show no sign of leaving. Ever. A horror film disguised as a comedy about the last couple at a party. (On September 20th, Good Night received honourable mention at the Lighten Up Festival of New Comedy in Jamestown, New York.)



still from *Four of a Kind*



still from *Good Night*
background image: still from *Roses are Blue*



still from *Killing Time*

KATE (TANYA HENLEY) & MAN ON BENCH (RANDY METSON)

Get some Perspective

Barb Mainguy reviews the Toronto ^(TIFF) International Film Festival's Canadian Perspectives

The Canadian Perspectives series is intriguing and controversial. It at once tries to satisfy demands for a representation of indigenous filmmaking and present a context in which Canadian cinema that looks commercial. It is criticised for being too commercial, and being a ghetto, for failing to provide for the truly diverse voices and perceptions in Canadian film and for tokenism in its efforts to do so. Eminence grise of film criticism Peter Harcourt lamented the absence of Richard Kerr's first feature, and that of Lucie Lambert - Paysage sous les Paupieres - as missing distinctive voices on the Canadian Film scene, left out, he speculates, because they were not commercial enough. We all know people's whose imaginative and excellent work was inexplicably turned down: where, for example, were Bubbles Galore and Fish Tale Soup? On the other hand, this year Alliance, the major Canadian distributor, held back films like Joe's So Mean to Josephine, Boy's Club and Hard Core Logo because they were to go into the Perspective Canada programme rather than as part of the Contemporary World Cinema lineup that tends to include the hot young talent making its first - or breakthrough - feature efforts. Ironically, Canadian films that can get a huge audience at the Festival often can't get 18 people in the theatre once the champagne haze drifts away from the city. Distributors are afraid that positioning titles as Canadian films will detract from their audience.

Got it... Need it... Got it...

At the Festival I saw: Fire, Kissed, Shoemaker, Cat Swallows Canary and Speaks, Lilies, Project Grizzly, Trouble, The Cockroach that Ate Cincinnati, L'Escorte, Lulu, Moscow Summer, Alone, Bangs, 8 Men Called Eugene, Evangeline, My Mom Works At Sears, Can I Get a Witness, Lodola, Frostbite, BBQ Muslims, A Hunter Called Memory, Shhh, and Alone.

As always, LIFT can proudly align ourselves with the accomplishments of our members, whose films were among the most successful at the Festival. John Greyson's Lilies is gorgeous, Jason Romilly's Alone set my teeth on edge with its representation of bad junkie life and delivers a sad, sad message



still from Frostbite

about the human condition. To name a few, The Cockroach that Ate Cincinnati is very very funny and weird, 8 Men Called Eugene is a witty, frightening deconstruction of the human genome project, Wrik Mead's scratchy-old-movie Frostbite is a moving portrait of a man whose lover has frozen nearly to death (is this the quintessential Canadian love story?) I loved My Mom Works at Sears (as did the audience), A Hunter Called Memory is an evocative and subtle dance film (also in the Moving Images festival), Carolynne Hew's first film Bangs wittily uses hair as a central metaphor for identity exploration, On the Rocks by Grima Ardal investigates the culture of the homeless, and of course Mike Moolbloom's excellent work, Letters from Home was awarded the TIFF's John Spotton Award.

In other programmes I stuck to first features, with special attention to first features by women and then low-budget independent stuff that might have a bit of an edge to it... That means I saw, in no particular order, Dog Run, Long Day's Journey into Night, Accidental Hero, Lars von Trier's hand held 35mm film Breaking the Waves, my personal festival favourite, Shane Meadows's Small Time, (made for £5,000 starring his friends) which is like an early Ken Loach. The Last Angel of History, which introduced me to the work of John Akomfrah and made me an immediate fan, I Bring You Franksense, Mirror Mirror, Pin Gods,

Visiting Desire, Fetishes, Microcosmos, Black Kite, The Girl on the River, by Dong Nhat Minh, The Pillow Book, Missed Alex Cox's the Winner, one of my favourite directors, saw Volker Schlöndorff's inexplicable homage to Nazi glamour The Ogre, Steven Soderbergh's hilarious Schizopolis, Irma Vep, Snakes and Ladders, by Trish McAdam, Stefanie's Present, a depressing film about German inner-city life, Little Angel, the smart, smart Watermelon Woman. I missed the controversial Aristotle's Plot, variously described to me as superficially intellectual and brilliant.

In future issues, the LIFT Newsletter stoops low low budget in interviews with Fest directors like Shane Meadows, Wang Xiao Di, and Trish McAdam.

*Just for fun, I made the following list:

PERSPECTIVE CANADA INCLUDED:

16 features over 60 minutes in length: 4 by women, 12 by men.

5 at 1/2 hr - 1 hr: - 2 by women, 3 by men

22 at under 1/2 hr: - 6 by women, 16 by men

Watermelon felon

an interview with Cheryl Dunye
by Glace Lawrence

Glace:
So Cheryl, is this your first time in Toronto?

Cheryl
No, actually I was here for the Gay and Lesbian film festival and also in honour of African American writers - another conference on diasporic issues a couple of years ago, and I was on a panel

Do you realize that your short films and videos have been played regularly here at the Gay and Lesbian film festival over the years - the Potluck and the Passion, She Don't Say, Vanilla Sex, and in fact, WTN, the women's television here, which is national, bought Greetings from Africa.

Oh my God you never know these things will make it I'm so honoured,

You really didn't know?

I have about three or four distributors in the states - 3rd World Newsreel, Video Data Bank, Frameline in San Francisco, that distribute my work and I do get reports every once in a while, and they never tell you what's going on with your work So, oh my God

You have a lot of fans here of your work, including myself... I've been following you for awhile... What drove you to put yourself into your work? When did you start putting yourself into your work?

I did this video called Jeanneane when I was in grad school and the events around the making of Jeanneane are what really got me involved in putting myself in my work I'd been actually trying to make a video - unsuccessfully - about black women artists, a little documentary with pictures on the wall on videotape I was going to play some music and really talk about the lack of representation of black women



Glace Lawrence interviewed Cheryl Dunye at the Toronto International Film Festival, after the premiere screening of her mock-dock Watermelon Woman

artists, I was struggling with my feelings for that - I mean there's so much to say on that For some reason I started to think about my past and this relationship I'd had with a girl in high school and I thought, "This is taking up more space than it needs to Why don't I sit down and tell the story on camera and see where I go with that, and then I'll continue to videotape these pictures by black women artists up on the wall" And that led into my being in the work I wasn't supposed to be in my work after Jeannine - there was another women actress cast as the lead - actually the women plays Margo and it's supposed to be Margo's story, but I realized that I was more comfortable with doing that and I was really having trouble connecting with her as a director - she was not getting what I wanted to get out of it, so I ended up taking that script and inserting myself into the narrative and that's where the talking head thing came from, because I was able to take the footage that I had shot and rework it in video with the talking head and kind of correct things So it became this journal of corrections - I met this women on the street so I was

able to use that footage instead of scrapping it all It became this really fun thing and it just developed into a schtick, as they say

It's very dangerous to put yourself in front of the camera. I've been watching your work over the years and it's like we know you... the audience knows you - we can just come up and say, "Hi girl, how're you doing!"

Yeah, that is a problem - I become something that you become familiar with It's like a soap opera for some people, you see my hairstyle change and its like, "Oh, she doesn't need glasses!" and "Look at her she's getting real fat!" But I actually am performing a character, Cheryl is a character in the work Some of the stuff is real and some of the stuff is not, in the Watermelon Women, I did use my mother and I did not work in a videostore ever But it's making people want to believe that I want, and showing them that we can all have different stories and people can believe in those different stories I'm using the realism to make people care

again about issues and stories, and I'm also trying to bring in what we don't quite know about my character and about these lives that are in the film, because they're really forgotten people - black lesbians - in the States and even worldwide, I'm sure Nobody really cares about our stories, but we were angry about our stories and our lives are just like everybody else's lives. So that's what I try to get into. I've been able to work it best by using myself as an organ, because I have a kind of control or empowerment that happens from doing that. But I really do think that Watermelon Woman is kind of the pinnacle of Cheryl as a character and I might want to move away from doing that and move on to investigate other things because I am an artist too, beyond being a filmmaker or writer/director.

So how did you develop the faux documentary, and where did the idea come from? Because until the end of the film I thought the Watermelon Woman - I had a hard time - was for real.

I teach this class - I teach film and video production and criticism class at Piii college in Southern California, but I started teaching in New York at the New School, and I call the New School the black women's college because there are so many interesting black women who work there and teach there and are learning. I was trying to formulate a great class and I came up with this class called African American Women in Cinema. And in putting this class together I realized that there was this mammy period in Hollywood where tons of black actresses were getting work and it was the most active time for black women to be employed in the media industry, yet there was nothing written about them. There was really nothing to research in text. I mean I could watch these films, but I couldn't find documents on them, and so I thought, that's interesting, I think it's something that needs to be addressed, so I put that on the burner and

thought about it. Then I actually saw this film, a 1970 film called the Watermelon Man, with Godfrey Cambridge, which is kind of pre blacksploitation, but it actually is a black comedy - drama thing, and I was like, this is great, maybe I should do Watermelon Woman, just a simple adaptation of it. Then I thought, that's too simple. How can I incorporate something I'm already interested in? which is this invisibility factor of black women actresses, and I kind of started to go with that. Actually these black actresses or some of them were rumored to be in the cultural life that was going on them and some of them were lesbians, and so I really wanted to investigate that. And a theme that I was investigating but I felt needed to be dealt with more is inter-



still from Watermelon Woman

racial relationships, historically and interracial desire. Nobody talked about that at all, but everybody had an opinion. I really wanted to do something about that.

How did you hook up with your producers [Barry Swimar and Alexandra Juhasz], particularly Barry Swimar co-producer of Paris is Burning?

It's funny. You'd think somebody like Barry would be in Hollywood now, or making tons of money, but actually Paris is Burning was a very different project for them to manage in the sense of getting people interested, like we are. So Barry actually was just kind of around, and a writer friend of mine, a literary agent, turned me on to him, and we had these

meetings and I said, "I have money," and he said "I don't, how much money do you have? I'm interested in producing your film." And I was lying, so completely lying. He was definitely interested in the film but he really couldn't do anything until there was seed money invested. Then I got the NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] grant which I got 500 dollars so I rel to make an independent film. I'd really been searching for an African American lesbian or woman to produce the film but there was this man around. It was really difficult for me to find a woman who was willing to get involved with no money in the project - it needed a lot of time, so that's how I was able to make that work. In the past, I'd been wearing all the hats, but I knew that I couldn't wear all the hats in this one. The ideal producer of this film for me would have been a black lesbian but there were no free black lesbian producers around and no black lesbian producers who would work for free. I don't think there are that many in the world, so it was all about timing and invention, Barry happened to be in the right place. The other producer of the film is actually my lover, girlfriend, and she'd been watching me trying to make this film and my short, Greetings from Africa, that played in the Berlin film festival. It was part of the plan to do that first and then make this feature. I came back from Berlin in tears because it was just so real, because people who have no idea of who aren't really thinking about work who are just crossing over and selling, I was just struggling.

I think the whole concept of an independent film right now is the crossover factor. Folks want to have the cheaply made Hollywood-looking form that's called independent that's quite boring to me. Actually that these festivals and markets that they're making them cheaply and they actually get bought up for very cheap and marketed and sold, and I just saw that happening with lesbian and gay cinema - a lot of people thought that's what they could do - actually some of the black independent film that happened in the early 90's Lesley Harris but we also were starting to see

projects that had meaning - like Daughters of the Dust - they had ideas and thought behind them and they weren't being brought up and they were using the mechanisms for themselves, and they work with their family and they work with their friends.

So you have this fabulous film, and some politician wants to use you as an example, or use the funding that you got for this film because of the love scene in the film to get the NEA cut. How did you deal with that?

Well, I think it's quite absurd, I must say, that they tried that old trick again those kind of conservative, right-wing people thinking that they could use something as humble as a film about unspoken, invisible people to wipe out the whole organization. It's just ridiculous.

In fact they wanted to cut the NEA by 31,500, the exact amount of money that you got.

They came up with the Watermelon Woman amendment to take away the money. The article that did it was written by a newspaper, by a woman from the newspaper that's run by the Moonies - its called the Washington Times, and an interesting tactic that she used that made it such a controversy is that she said it was the most sexually explicit love scene in any lesbian film.

Bullshit.

Some gay press had written that I did not work. What was really scary is that she interviewed tons of black conservative Christian folk and asked them what they thought about the film, and course one of the reasons to make this film was to give these folk some dialogue to talk about sexualities and different identities in the African American community, because we haven't started talking about that ourselves. So part of the film's reason was to use it as a way to bridge the painful gap that so many lesbian and gay people have in the African American community. But she went ahead and did it for me, and we were getting comments from black cons who were saying things like, "there are no black people who are gay." I don't even know

why they would say something so evil - "We're good loving negroes, we're heterosexual and anybody who would use gay issues to make a film about black stuff is crazy." I think that had to be the scary thing. It also seemed like it might be a tactic that the republicans might use to gain black support in this election year in the United States, and that was the scary thing for me about the article.

But a black woman, Sheila Jackson, a democrat from Texas, stood up when they were arguing on the house floor, and said, look, I've seen the film and I think that it's saying important things. She's a first time filmmaker and I'm in support of her, this is a difference of opinion and can't we just table it as that, and anyway, she's protected by the first amend-



ment, so there, mother. Basically the right-wing man from Michigan - Hoekstra - who's up there trying to have this Watermelon Woman amendment said, O K, I'll withdraw this, but we're going to do anything to defund the NEA and get rid of it when the republicans get into congress. So it was a scary moment, but it really made me wake up and realize that we have to do something about the way that politicking of issues can get played out before we even, as artists and corporeal producers, get to make that work. We think that we're able to use that space to intellectualize and talk about ideas and issues and work them out and start dialogue but its not a safe area. We have to stand up and represent ourselves and not let these folks come in there with their "family values" or whatever

00213

they are and taint us. Because we need to do that work ourselves within our communities. We have so much stuff going on in our own struggle - identity politics, identity issues, sexuality issues, representing ourselves, being mixed race, whatever, we need to talk about these things ourselves before somebody comes in and talks

I have 2 more questions for you. The watermelon woman in your publicity is described as a metaphor for your search for identity, community and love, and I wanted to find out, did you find what you were searching for?

Actually, the ending of the film was supposed to be ambiguous. It was supposed to be a way for you to start thinking, so what Cheryl did in the film was start to think, and that's the biggest thing that I think someone can get from a search. That you're able to think about yourself differently and that's what I really wanted Cheryl to do, think about how to get on in her life.

There's another question, it's just about how you felt about your film showing at the Toronto International Film Festival because your major screenings this year have all been at major gay and lesbian film festivals.

I'm actually in Planet Africa and I'm really happy about that because I would not be in [the TIFF] I'm sure if it wasn't for Planet Africa and that's a whole can of beans about what this festival means. I think Cameron should be praised everywhere for doing the work and really kind of being a person. I think that's a model for lesbian and gay film festivals too, to actually think about becoming part of a bigger film festival because we've done that first level of identity work. I feel that as African American's, we've done visibility. What we want is more connectedness. We need to start connecting ourselves and still have the representation that





Planet Africa gives, but also access to what we all want We want access to what everyone else has access to

The final question is a gossip question - do you only date white girls? A lot of your work has been around interracial issues. You explained the Cheryl's persona...

That deepest love in my life was this wonderful African American woman named Gail Boyer, who made She Don't Fade, she made Janine with me, made Potluck with me No I don't, I date any interesting person It doesn't necessarily have to do with me at all Right now I'm involved with a Jewish woman and the year before that I went out with some Aian woman My love has no colour and for me an empowering thing about being a person of consciousness and of colour is to be able to understand everyone else and be able to explore those issues So I think that's why i find myself hopping all over the place - not hopping all over beds, as I'm actually a very committed person, into working things out I don't think it has to be black - that's not going to make me love someone black I think that the kind of notion of black issues, what it means to be black person and what black identity is, is a very complicated thing to describe and we don't need the black police in our bedroom, we don't need the black police anywhere We need to black dialogue and we need to think about what black community means, because its not a singular thing It's not making us stronger by having us being divided about our issues There's still a debate about whether homosexuality is a thing for white people or can black people truly be homosexual It's ridiculous things that spread us apart not bring us together I think my work is something that tries to build that bridge and make people think I'm still waiting for the white person to talk about interracial desire and that would be a very interesting thing to see and I only hope that happens soon



still from Watermelon Woman

TRIALS AND INTERROGATIONS: The Case of Richard Bugajski

by: Alexander Shuper

As the iris of public arts funding continues to close and fiscal and political hardships continue to pile upon the filmmaker, fewer and fewer wisps of imagination seem destined to make it to the celluloid state.

One way to counter this bleak outlook is to survey the many films that have been produced over the years in circumstances so dismal and grisly that our laments over diminished funding pale in comparison. Take, for example, the case of Richard Bugajski and his renowned Polish film *The Interrogation* (Przesuchanie [1981-82]).

Bugajski - a native of Warsaw, Poland - always arts oriented, describes seeing Fellini's *8 1/2* as his conversion experience to the cinematic medium, the awakening of his own filmic vision and sensibility. Upon graduating from the famous film school in Lodz Poland (which boasts Roman Polanski, Andrzej Wajda, Krzysztof Kieslowski, Agnieszka Holland, and others as alumni), his career was well underway.

His second theatrical feature film - *The Interrogation* - is his best known film to date. It is notable not only for its powerful dramatic and inspiring examination of a woman wrongfully imprisoned in Stalinist Poland, but also for its production history.

In Communist Poland, film production was tightly controlled by the government. It was a system, Bugajski avows, of "suppression and censorship." All films had to be officially okayed by the Ministry of Culture before they could enter the production phase. Yet somehow, despite his film's obviously controversial subject matter, Bugajski forewent this standard process with the help of Andrzej Wajda, and production of *The Interrogation* was authorized.

No doubt this was at least in part a matter of timing: the Solidarity movement was at its height, the country was in turmoil, and the government was in disarray. Bugajski himself admits it was because "there was

such political turmoil at this time that very few people paid attention to what was going on with film production. It was just a few months before marshal law was introduced and the army was already surreptitiously preparing. So who cared about one film?"

Aside from the usual difficulties of a film shoot, Bugajski faced the possibility that the production could be shut down at any moment, and that the film would be highly controversial, which (in a worst case scenario) could have terrible consequences for those involved since they were, for all intents and purposes, engaged in dissident activities. Still, despite the many challenges, principal photography was completed two days before the government imposed marshal law. The social and political unrest that existed at that particular time in that particular place allowed a unique window to open.

The editing process was a lengthy one, as Bugajski tinkered with a contemporary narrative frame that encapsulated scenes flashed back from Stalinist Poland. Eventually, this frame was dropped entirely. Bugajski knew he had his final cut ready when he screened a tighter incarnation to a select audience. As he describes, "after the lights turned on,

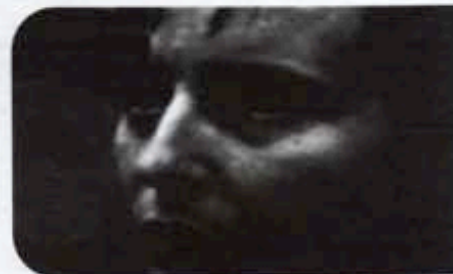
I saw that everybody was crying. So I thought, 'Well, this is the way it has to be.'"

The film needed to be officially sanctioned for distribution. This time, Bugajski was not as fortunate in his dealings with the Ministry of Culture. On being viewed by the authorities, *The Interrogation* was summarily banned. * Certain elements



within the Communist hierarchy actually wanted the film destroyed. Instead, however, the only print of the film was ordered locked away in a government vault. But before *The Interrogation* was confiscated, Bugajski covertly managed to make a video copy of his film. This copy was quickly duplicated many times over and distributed to the general populace by Poland's notorious underground press, which had for years been publishing and distributing literature banned by the Communists. Bugajski became a hero and a legend, but for all intents and purposes, his film making career in Poland was over.

With the doors to the film world closed to him in Poland, Bugajski emigrated to Canada in 1985, qualifying for acceptance into this country under the provisions of a special immigration program for dissident artists. He soon established himself here, working extensively in television and most notably





TRIALS AND INTERROGATIONS The Case of Richard Bugajski

cont. from previous page

directing the feature film *Clearcut* (1991)

With the fall of the Soviet Union, the official ban on *The Interrogation* was finally lifted in Poland. The film was liberated from its secret vault and released internationally in 1989. Climaxing with a Best Actress Award at Cannes for the film's lead, Krystyna Janda, *The Interrogation* was instantly hailed as a masterpiece by the world audience. Bugajski himself was allowed to return and once again work in his native country as a director.

Today, Bugajski shares his time between his revived career in Poland and his new life in Toronto.

The Interrogation is one of Poland's most highly acclaimed films for a number of reasons, not least of which is its garishly realistic visual style. The birth scene, for instance, is most graphically depicted.

Bugajski was adamant about filming a real birth. "It must be a shocking view to the father who is watching the thing from outside," he explains. But, like so many other aspects of producing *The Interrogation*, filming a live birth was filled with obstacles.

In Polish hospitals of the early 80's, contact with mothers and newborns was not even permitted for fathers until well after the birth, let alone for film crews. This policy was for hygienic reasons even though, as Bugajski adds, in the hospitals "there were cockroaches everywhere, . . . but still fathers were not allowed."

Nevertheless, Bugajski was eventually given permission to film a live birth in a special ward for pregnant women who were already sick, where the 'dirty' film equipment would have no bearing on the health of the mother or child. The unfortunate thing was that there were only a handful of women in the ward, each with at least a few weeks left in her pregnancy.

"So we left a simple camera in the hospital, and some basic lights," Bugajski recounts, explaining that there was a sign on the wall in the nurses' station instructing the hospital staff to call the cameraman if and when one of the women went into labour.

Principal photography was already completed, and still no birth scene. Then, marshal law was declared, and because they wanted to keep the ensuing events from being captured on film, the authorities ordered all film equipment to be returned to the studios which were, of course, government owned. And still no birth scene.

When Bugajski's cameraman went to the hospital to retrieve the camera and lights, he was astounded by a surprising development. The declaration of marshal law was such a shock to everyone that it had induced labour in all of the women in the special ward! As Bugajski attests, the cameraman "waited an hour and captured all of [the births]."

As a final weird note, Bugajski adds that the child who appears in the birth scene of *The Interrogation*, "is quite dark, yellow, like brown, . . . because it had jaundice."

-Alexander Shuper



distribution...distribution...distribution

...and this little film went to market... by Barb Mainguy



The Toronto Festival seminar on "Marketing Short Films", led by organizer Kelly Alexander from the Canadian Film Centre included Mairi MacDonald from Channel 4, Hussain Amarshi from Mongrel Media and Laura Michalchyshyn from WTN

Absent were representatives from Global, CBC, the CFMDC and vide distributor Fetching Pictures. Whether they were uninvited or unable to attend was unclear.

Unfortunately, the statement that set the tone of the breakfast meeting, was Kelly Alexander's "A short film is made as a calling card". She went on to confess that she was new at film distribution, since the Canadian Film Centre had only recently taken it on

The imposition of this framework limited the discussion to available resources and state-of-the-industry what is, rather than what could be. I had been hoping for more speculation about the market potential for short film, including discussion about the notion of short film packaging, such as that being currently attempted by Fetching Pictures with the work of Ann Marie Fleming (see this issue).

Of course, whatever your intention in making a film, the outlook for distribution can seem bleak.

Theatrical distribution of shorts in Canada essentially means festival screenings, or private film society or club (or co-op) screenings. The benefits of festival screenings are 1) you get to travel to exotic locations, 2) there are lots of Festivals with prizes which can add to your personal prestige and power, and help you make video sales, 3) your film gets seen by a big audience, which, though you don't get a cut of the gate, nevertheless feels good, 4) critics go to short film screenings looking for hot new talent, viz Jay Hoberman (the Village Voice) 'discovering' Guy Maddin, 5) t v

scouts go to festivals and watch short films looking for gems appropriate to their broadcast needs (see below).

An attempt was made years ago to run Canadian made short films before features at Cineplex Odeon, but this initiative was abandoned because such screenings cut into 'popcorn time', time the audience spends purchasing snacks at the cinema's candy counter. Famous Players and the National Film Board have agreed to show archived NFB shorts in some theatres (remember The Cat Came Back? but there is no indication that this is being tried elsewhere).

Rep cinemas don't even play very many shorts, though they could now, couldn't they?

Hussain Amarshi (see elsewhere this issue) stressed that the primary markets, festivals notwithstanding, are colleges, schools and libraries. In some markets, B C for example, a school board will 'certify' a film, and buy myriad copies, paying \$8,000 to 10,000 for the privilege. Rumour has it that Alberta, Saskatchewan and B C are considering consolidating this school board function so that a 'western consortium' will purchase the film.

cont on pg 22



FETCHING PICTURES is the brainchild

of York graduate Lincoln Stewart. Stewart made two shorts and a feature during his stint at University, and had trouble finding distribution for them. One short, Crad Kilodney, a documentary about the Toronto character, played at the Toronto Film Festival, but his other work, including the feature, Underwhelmed, did - er - underwhelmingly. Perceiving this as a Canadian cultural problem, Stewart undertook to start his own video label, and in 1995 released his inaugural video a compilation of the work of Ann Marie Fleming from 1987 - 1995. Using slogans like "Cheap indie film snob? We can accommodate," and "When was the last time you had an independent filmmaker in your living room?" Stewart offers his films through subscription (\$75.00 per year for four video releases) retail (HMV, Art & Trash Video and Sam the Record Man all accommodate him by 'front-racking' his product, and Suspect, After Dark and Revue video all carry his films) and by mail order - an individual tape sells for \$25.00.

Stewart asks for North American video rights and provides the filmmaker with a website for the film and filmmaker, an e-mail address and a 50/50 split on the profits, most of which, at the moment, comes from his own pocket - his salary from Art & Trash Video. He has tried to crack the Blockbuster Video corporate facade, but, he says, "They won't even watch the tape. It's too bad. I think Ann Marie Fleming would give hip value to Blockbuster." Of the 300 tapes produced of the Fleming films, 100 have been sold. Stewart comes under some criticism for undercutting the CFMDC's institutional rate, and in Fleming's case, he held back from distributing in their market. For future videos, however, he plans to be less circumspect, and claim all non-theatrical video rights as well.

San Diego indie filmmaker David Wells's film Fairground is his second film, and Lawrence plans to release new videos quarterly. His agenda is "unspecific" and he is looking for anything that he likes as his third release. He is currently reviewing pixel-vision and experimental film. For details, call 416-534-5603, or e-mail info@fetching.com. BJM

HUSSAIN AMARSHI of Mongrel Media

Interview by Lee Shane

Hussain Amarshi has had a variety of roles in the Canadian film industry including festival organizer, film producer, theatre manager and now founder of Mongrel Media, a small yet highly regarded film and video distribution company. Mongrel Media grew out of a perceived need for a company to promote alternative visions and voices, and support such work that might otherwise be neglected by conventional distribution companies. Initially conceived as a non-theatrical market distributor, the company's collection of works on video which are organized and marketed by theme, includes one on race, culture and identity, another called Contemporary Canadian Documentaries, and a third coming out shortly composed of biographies. The filmmakers represented include John Akomfrah, Maureen Blackwood, Gurinder Chadha, Ali Kazimi, Peter Mettler, Marlon Riggs, and Mina Shum among others.

Mongrel Media jumped into the theatrical distribution market with the Tunisian film *Silences of The Palace* (Moufida Tlatli) in 1995, when Hussain fell in love with the film at the Toronto Film Festival and discovered that no other distributor had offered to pick it up. Since then Mongrel Media has acquired nine other theatrical films, including *The Summer of Aviya* (Eli Cohen), *I am Cuba* (Mikhail Kalatozov), *The Man By The Shore* (Raoul Peck), *Gabbeh* (Mohsen Makhmalbaf), *Will It Snow At Christmas* (Sandrine Veysset) and *A Tickle in the Heart* (Stefan Schwietert), the last two of which screened at this year's festival. With plans to add a video collection every six months, and another 5-6 features next year, Mongrel Media is fast becoming a significant distributor in the Canadian marketplace, and one of the few with a compassionate conscience and an eye for original and often underappreciated work.

On September 19, I met with Hussain Amarshi at Dooney's on Bloor. We talked about his early experiences as a festival organizer in Kingston through to his contemporary circumstances as distributor and cutting-edge cultural impresario. What follows are highlights from this discussion.

Tell me a bit about the International Film Festival in Kingston and your motivations for organizing the event.

When you look around here [in the West] and you see how little choice you have most times in terms of what kind of films are available to you- and my sense has always been what I learned about the West for better or worse came through media images on television or in films- and when one comes here one sort of realizes how little people in the West are exposed to the other traffic from the rest of the world- that was the motivation of the festival that I was working for. It was based out of the International Centre at Queen's and the mandate there was to educate people in Kingston about what was happening in the developing world so to speak.

So I started the festival with the intention of bringing international work, but it soon became not just international work but it had to sort of cover a variety of other neglected, so to speak, cinemas- Canadian cinema for instance became an important part of the festival- issues on race, culture and identity in the West became an important mainstay- we started doing gay and lesbian work in the festival- so it was a wide range of sort of- I won't call them marginalized voices, but images or issues that were not getting the attention they deserved.

Then you came to Toronto I gather, so tell me about what motivated that move.

After I finished the festival in Kingston I moved to Toronto to run the Euclid Cinema. I was there for about 6 or 7 months and in that period the attempt was to restructure the Euclid, to make it more like a showcase for independent films that were not getting any kind of a commercial play. We opened with *Manufacturing Consent* [Noam Chomsky and The Media, Mark Achbar & Peter Wintonick] and it did amazing business. Right after the Toronto Festival we had booked it. Now nobody knew as to what the potential of that film was. And we were all very sort of amazed at the number of people who came to see that film. We did close to \$10,000 worth of business, clearly the best selling film in Toronto that week. I would think. And then it went on to make over a million dollars in theatrical box office in the United States.

One never knows what will work and what won't work, I mean that's what it comes down to. Most films don't work theatrically, we know that. Hollywood cannot make it work let alone independents. And there is something about this business that is tied with luck, with positioning, with placement, with a certain zeitgeist- I mean if it hits people at the right time it becomes a hit, and when it doesn't, you know you can have the best film, the most amazing film in the world and if it comes at the wrong time and at the wrong cinema it doesn't work.

Since you brought up the Euclid, tell me a bit about your coming to work there, what that was like, and why you ultimately left.

I came to it because I saw the need for that kind of space for the community, and I mean community not in the exclusive sense but in the more inclusive sense. Community that sort of considers cultural work as somewhat of a centerpiece in their lives- I mean people who write, who make films, who do theatre or whatever- there's a large community that is somewhat disaffected from the traditional notions of community that are organized around faith or around colour or whatever it is. But a community that is more geared towards intellectual and cultural pursuits. There is a need for a community centre that supports these people, and we don't have that in Toronto. And that was what attracted me to the Euclid because it was one place that was built on that ideal. But Euclid was carrying a baggage of problems that was very difficult to untangle, I mean it was an act of will on our part to sort of take over and try to turn it around. It had a very uneven track record. I finally realized that so many people had so many different ideas about the place that it was going to be very difficult to put a new vision into place in the time that we had. If I were to do the Euclid again I would probably position it very differently and position myself very differently. I came to the Euclid thinking "okay there is a problem here we need to fix it."

What would you say the problem was?

The problem was it didn't have a sense of identity, it was all over the map. There was no community ownership over it—it had a sense of being under siege. Rather than sort of taking that as a great opportunity that here we are and we've got this theatre and let's make something out of it, it always positioned itself as a victim of cutbacks, or lack of funding, or lack of attention, or lack of audiences or whatever it is. It had this sort of culture unto itself that made it very difficult to sort of pull it by its horns say, no, let's turn it around and let's go this way. It sort of played the funding game and there was the problem where everybody wanted center stage so we had to give the same attention to short films, to videos, to experimental work, to independent features, to theatrical features, to festivals—everybody wanted to be the centre of the place.

What would you say prevented you from creating that vision which would have allowed the Euclid to become economically and culturally viable?

Personally for myself, I became impatient with the time it was taking for people to turn it around. We came up with a fairly interesting business plan and worked on it for months, and came up with a plan that was quite viable, but it required a certain amount of time to be realized and a certain amount of space from the often contradictory demands that were pressuring it—demands are fine as long as there's a certain sense that, "this has to work."

And the funding situation was pretty messy. There was a massive debt and there was an emergency last bit of money that had been thrown in, and half of it had been spent before I came here. Finally I sort of gave up. Although I continue to maintain a desire to create a space.

So would you undertake that kind of endeavour again?

Oh yeah anytime.

I find that interesting. What sort of criteria would you have—having gone through your experience with the Euclid—before you would undertake such a proposition? Obviously I assume there would have to

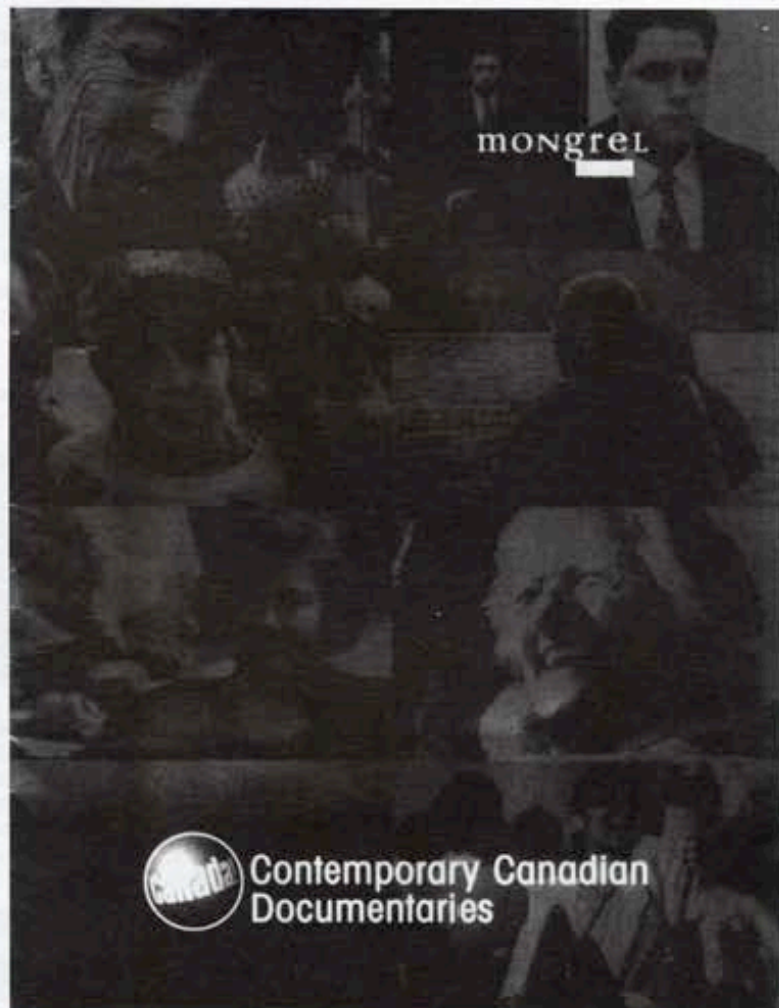
be monies in place, but what other sort of elements might you expect before you would make a go of it and try to create that sort of space?

If I had the money right now I would do it right away. But I think it would be a significantly different project now. I don't like this self-positioned marginality—I've never believed in it, and I don't think I in my work, that I try to celebrate that. I don't consider myself marginal to anything, and I don't want my life or work to be set up as marginal. I have no interest in what is considered to be mainstream, and that's a choice that I've made. For me, where I get sustenance is from stuff that has historically been classified as work from the margins. So in my mind such a place has to be in the centre, it has to be positioned location-wise right dead on centre. I would like it to be right in the middle of the main street where ever that is.

With whatever I've done, I'm basically picking up material that has historically been marginalized and packaging it in such a way that when I take it to people, they think well this is too slick, but that's fine. But that's exactly what I want to do. It's how you package material and how you present yourself. How you present it to the world that the world then starts believing, well, no, there is something to it.

Tell me how you founded Mongrel Media, what its mandate was and perhaps still is and how the company evolved to where it is today?

Mongrel Media comes out of a continued interest in bringing to the centre, so to speak, work that otherwise would not get around. I didn't realize this, but last year I ran into a friend from Kingston who said I was talking about distribution even then [1989]. Mongrel Media has evolved in response to what I perceived to be the problem which was



that a lot of films that I liked were not getting around. I went back to people I know at the Euclid and even at the Kingston Film Festival. I said, "Look, I want to do this and see what happens," and that's how it started. I overestimated the market- it was the worst time to come into the market and it still is one of the worst times

When was this '92-

'94 This is September '94 when I registered the company. So it's just about 2 years old now. And the idea in my mind was if I package it right and if I price it right perhaps the market will be there. And clearly the packaging and the pricing is hot. I've moved a number of units, at least of videos of titles that would otherwise not have gotten out anywhere. It's not enough though. It's a small country we're talking about. By and large it's conservative- you know not conservative with a big "C," but just in the sense that people are not as willing to

try new things, and do take time to try new things

Were you from the beginning approaching non-theatrical markets? Who were you approaching and how were you going about that?

There is the traditional non-theatrical market which is colleges and universities, libraries and schools. And they are audio-visual buyers, although they used to be much more extensive departments with a lot more money at one time. And that was not so long ago, only three or four years ago, the Toronto Board of Education had a hundred thousand dollars that they were spending on buying A/V materials every year- now apparently they don't have anything. That's what they tell me.

And then what I've done is try to go into non-traditional non-theatrical markets like community groups and various associations and there are a number of other groups that we've tried, not all successful-

ly, depending on the kind of titles

So what is your method of approaching these non-traditional groups?

What I find is with the kind of material I'm carrying, there's not a huge demand out there. The material I'm going with is somewhat difficult in terms of length-wise, content-wise- formally it's much more challenging because it's not straight, linear material. So you're working with those kinds of films that do not lend themselves to just straight sales. You have to really work with your audience and your buyers and follow-up on a constant basis. And whenever I've been able to do that it has been successful, but it's very difficult to sustain that on an on-going basis, given the rewards are not huge right now. That doesn't mean that will always be the case. I do hope that things will turn around. I don't know exactly how they will turn around but I hope that they will, because as a new generation of people come in they will probably be more exposed to more interesting videos one would hope.

When you talk about the new generation though, I really think you're probably talking about an urban population such as in Toronto, that has been and will be exposed to a broader range of media. Or can you see that happening on a larger scale?

One has to take into account the fact that right now a lot of the traditional known theatrical buyers are in their fifties and they've been in this business for twenty years. They're used to a different kind of way of getting materials and they're under threat right now because of cut-backs and things they're not used to. In the next ten years there will be a new generation of people who will be teachers and buyers and assistants and audience. One would hope that at that point some people with more desire to change things will come in and that will generate interest in the kind of work that I will be carrying then as well.

Tell me about the first film Mongrel Media marketed theatrically, Silences of The Palace.

Silences of The Palace was a film that I saw at the Toronto film festival in 1994, and totally fell in love with the film as I saw it. It

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was around this time that I was looking at setting up this distribution company with very little capital and with the intention of building one step at a time. As soon as I saw the film I was afraid they may not get a release in Canada and I told the sales agent if no one picks it up I would love to pick it up—without even thinking about what it would involve, I mean I had never done a theatrical release.

I recall that you were actually quite successful. How did you approach it— as you've said, "you broke even and therefore it was a success."

I was quite scared I guess, that was the main sort of reason why I really pushed it.

When I saw the film I realized there was a variety of audiences that would go see the film. It was then a question of identifying four or five key audiences, or key groups— key target markets— whatever term you want to use. And then really trying to make inroads in each of those communities. It's a very commonsensical approach to marketing.

Most importantly, I never ever questioned the merit of the film. I was quite ready to lose out and pack up after that film, because if the film wasn't really successful I likely would have had to at least get out of that game for now because I didn't have the kind of back-up to say, "well I'll try three films and then decide." That was it.

Most films don't work. Independents competing against so many other options. You must have a film that will make them come out. You can't rely on people that will look in the paper and say what do you want to see tonight. You have to work with a group of people or try to create an audience who this film will speak to, and they will make an extra effort to come down and see the film.

You've said you see films you enjoy but you don't believe you can effectively distribute. Do you see space or markets that you think other people can support or effectively service, or do you think there's only so much audience to go around, as it were?

There is a market. When I say also I have practical concerns I mean in my case once I have a relationship with certain markets it's easier for me to work with those markets than to have to develop new markets, which is in some ways quite

an effort.

And then there's a certain responsibility as well. Once you work with a market and it proves successful you want to bring something else to them, because it's mutual. I think that this whole idea of 'supporting' is not a good term, I don't think people should be asked to support things.

Well it makes it sound like it's a burden in a way, rather than a pleasurable or enjoyable experience— or a sort of symbiotic relationship between the cultural product and the audience.

Exactly. Here I see I have two films that I know that some of the audiences that I worked with would love to see. I think there are a number of other markets that I will just never be able to approach—

Because you just can't do it all?

Yes. The problem with distributing in Canada is that you can have a great success in Toronto, and what do you do with that success? I can only break even here, which is a success in Toronto, but then where do you make money?

Well, how do you get it into the one movie theatre in a small town.

Yeah. And to make it work there. That's a challenge. So when I say about the markets— one has to think about Toronto as a launching pad, but you also have to think about what you are going to do after.

Do you think there will be a resurgence in a protectionist response— be it a governmental, organized or community response to the fact that so many Canadian screens are controlled by Hollywood product and American interests?

If there was a time, it was probably in the past. I don't think that's going to happen. I think what we need though is some kind of a public/private collaboration to build a theatre in Toronto with 3 screens that is dedicated to more international work and Canadian work.

What do you mean by public and private collaboration— do you mean big business investment?

No it doesn't have to be big money, but it has to be a cultural centre, not just a cinema. That's how you position yourself differently. If there was an option that people had to go to a more community space, a multi-cultural space. And when I say community, I don't necessarily mean in the sixties kind of sense. It has to have its own distinct personality, it has to have a certain sort of air about it, so that it's not so commercially see-through. You have to make money— in order to sustain it, it has to be profitable, otherwise it's not worth it— we do live in a market economy. But I think it's possible to have independent cinemas in this country, at least in the major urban centres.

So what do you see as the characteristics of this community centre? You said that you didn't think it was sort of a Sixties model of operation, so could you describe what you think it might be?

Again a distinct personality. So with a cafe and a bookstore, and stuff like that. To have staff that do know film. To create a hang-out kind of a place. Where people go not just to see other films but to meet other people. To have a place that treats cinema and cinema going as a pleasurable experience but also somewhat seriously as well. Where you can have directors coming and talking. You can't do that at the Carlton which is the only alternative theatre we have. Some kind of a place where you could have a celebration of this medium. It has to also be top notch. It has to have the best facilities. It has to have a sense of itself where it positions itself at the centre, and it shouldn't be like the Euclid where the seats aren't that great and the lobby is dark. Though you also wouldn't want it to be clubby, or where there is a certain sort of dress code or exclusion.

It has to be unique to its own city, and have an organic basis in its own context. What you see on Bloor street for instance—this strip to me Bloor street represents one of the better parts of Toronto. Where it's a mixed economy, mixed class and educational levels and all that sort. It's not like College street where you just go to the cafe or to eat, but here you go to buy books or to buy groceries, or to see a film. That kind of mixed economy context is what one needs. So that going to such a cultural space, it becomes part of your life and it's not an event.

...and this little film went to market...
cont. from pg 17



Ontario has no such system, Amarshi says. Instead, there is a Media Showcase, usually in April, where 150-200 media buyers purchase film and video for institutional use from 25-30 distributors, representing approximately 15,000 titles. There isn't a lot of money in this, unless you are able to achieve multiple sales. Libraries pay under \$100.00 for a videotape, for example. Amarshi stressed that if you are planning to gear a short towards a non-theatrical market, you plan for that end from the beginning.

Amarshi warned that expectations should be kept minimal in the home-video market - Blockbuster probably won't carry your work - but on a smaller scale, it can be successful. Amarshi particularly mentioned Lincoln Stewart of Fetching Pictures who has done well with a collection of films by Ann Marie Fleming (again, see this issue).

The Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre agrees to a 70% - 30% split (you get the 70%) on royalty money, which they are able to do because they are partially publically funded. They carry 1200 - 1500 titles at any one time, though, and haven't the resources to vigorously market all the titles. They will, however, put together packages and solicit festivals on your behalf, for the most part those that pay an artists' fee for screening a film.

Laura Michalchysyn of WTN gave a comprehensive lowdown on television possibilities.

WTN is looking for programming for her Shameless Shorts series. She acquires drama, documentary or experimental film or video under 15 minutes in length. They ask for a 3-year non-exclusive license, for which she pays "about \$60.00 per minute."

Tara Ellis, of CBC's Canadian Reflections asks for a one year exclusive license, but pays "a bit more."

B C's Knowledge Network has the Independent Eye, a one-hour weekly show for independent film. The station pays a non-exclusive fee. Contact Judy Robertson.

CBC Manitoba's 75 minute weekly programme "Open Eye" again buys only a non-exclusive license. Speak to Gary Yeates for more information.

Interstitial refers to the cartilage between your ribs and the occasional gaps between regular t.v. programmes. Since 'dead air' is anathema to t.v., every second needs to be filled with relevant, adventurous,

unique short films. Doesn't it? Anyway, TVO and CTV sometimes buy. It's always worth checking, as they are often looking for 'filler' (or 'interstitial' programming). Global's "New Producer's" series looks for short films as well as half-hours, and are always ready to consider already-produced films or videos.

CBC Canadian Reflections. Tara Ellis looks for films she can program at any time of the day, this avoids controversy, and a large percentage of the excellent work being done by Canadian filmmakers.

Mairi MacDonald of Channel 4, U.K. has a four-hour, weekly overnight (midnight to four a.m.) time-slot called The Shooting Gallery, in which she can play anything. She will consider adult themes of 8-20 minutes in length, which can contain difficult content. It runs for 8 weeks beginning in September. She requires exclusive rights for 3 transmissions over 5 years, and for that pays £120 per minute (that's roughly \$200 to us). Channel 4 has other strands of programming - daytime fillers, which have to be straightforward, with no 'difficult' content, sex or bad language, and a strand that shows more experimental or gay and lesbian themed film.

Despite all the excellent information contained here, a large part of which was imbibed with the coffee and croissant at the breakfast, there was still something missing. In Europe, we are told, they actually think shorts are an entity in their own right, not just a 'calling card', or a film that wanted to be a feature but never grew up. They are seen by commercial distributors as saleable entities. Programmes of them are distributed to theatres (as long as the latest Batman is safely in his cave). This requires intrepid people, not that interested in making a whole lot of money while the market is trained to enjoy art before commerce - but we have lots of those - It requires major theatrical chains interested in showing unique films, and standing by them while they struggle to train an audience used to being thrilled, but not really, er, surprised. It means foregoing popcorn sales in the name of casting a vote for independent filmmaking. Shucks. A person can dream, can't they.



GLOSSARY

Broadcast Quality Varies from station to station, especially where short films are concerned, but in general, if a severely degraded image is being presented, it should be an artistic choice... Images that are a little rough are in right now, however, and treated footage is making its way into the mainstream. Remember, though, that your film will be shown on video, and will have to sustain being transferred onto a broadcast medium - usually Betacam SP or 3/4" without becoming unreadable. Check with the t.v. station for broadcast requirements - some will accept a more degenerated image than others (and we mean that in both senses of the word).

E and O insurance: No, not a railway in Monopoly, though it has some similar characteristics. Have the music, performances and products in your film been cleared for broadcast? You will be asked to sign a statement that they have been, or in some cases, to provide Errors and Omissions Insurance, which safeguards the broadcasters from big lawsuits by giant mice, for example. **THINK OF THIS WHILE IN PRODUCTION, AND GET EVERYONE TO SIGN A DEAL MEMO.** E & O is about as expensive as Park Place (one sad story has the director/producer having to pay the entire broadcast license fee to the insurance agent...)

Cycles: E.G. Ice a year or Zee a year. The number of times per year a programme can be shown.

Strand: Programme or kind of programming e.g. documentary strand, short film strand, which may contain more than one programme.

Exclusivity: This refers to an agreement about how many broadcasters can show your film through the same time period. Various broadcasters ask for various degrees of it: a deal for an 'interstitial' might require you agree to unlimited plays over a period of time, one to three years, usually CBC will ask for exclusivity, at least for the first window. (see window)

Interstitial A film or video moment that fits nicely in between two longer programmes.

Window: a showing. A guarantee that a broadcaster will have 'first window' means that they will get the first showing in a market.

Market The area covered by the broadcaster's license.

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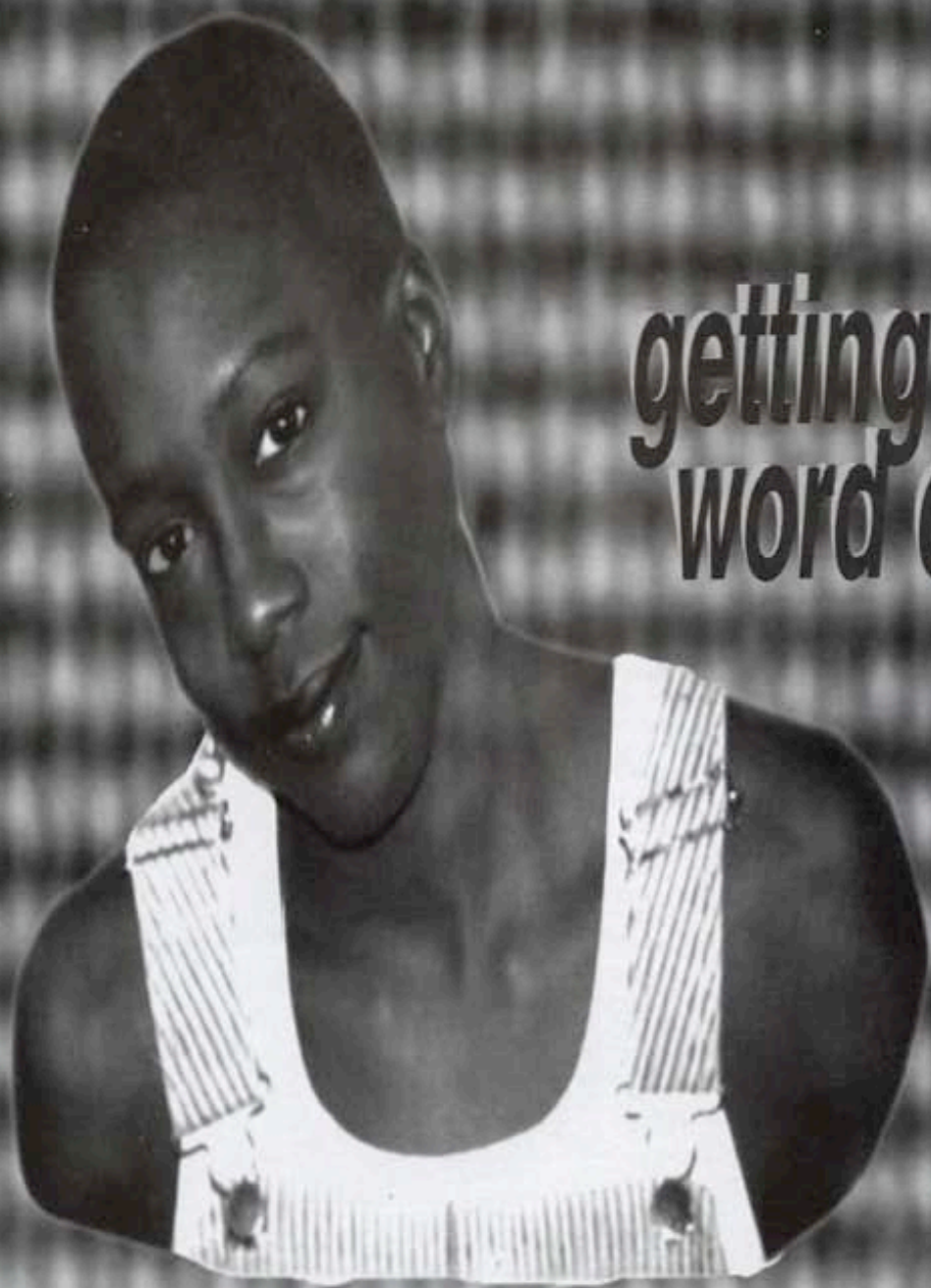
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