



Gerald's Guide to No Budget Filmmaking

- ◇ *Gerald Saul was the winner of the Best Super 8 in the 5th \$100 Film Festival. The following is an excerpt from his MFA thesis "Canadian Avant Garde Film in the 1990's". Here is cost saving advice to the fledgling independent filmmaker.*
- ◇ *Edited for publication by Scott Penny.*

I believe that creativity, not money, is the most essential ingredient in making any film. However, cost is always an issue to me when I make a film. Keeping costs down can be achieved through common sense and through proficiency with materials, tools and procedures.

Materials are simply the props; film stock and other materials (editing supplies, audio tape and leader) you need to make your film. There are obvious ways to get around buying props, such as shooting on preexisting locations or writing scenarios which only require props and costumes which you already have or can acquire cheaply or free of charge.



determine at the beginning of a project how much film they can afford to purchase and develop. When that film is used up they declare principal photography to be complete.

After the film has been developed, the filmmaker must do his or her best to make use of all the film shot. Creativity, rewriting and sound can be relied upon to help integrate a "flubbed" shot into the film without seeming to make concessions. Shots that cannot be fit into the current film project can be saved and written into a future film.

Film stock is not as easily bartered for props and costumes. Sometimes film coops or other non profit organisations can acquire film stock Fuji or Agfa for half price or even free. Unfortunately, this is usually only possible for special projects such as film for workshops or community services; therefore it is not an approach an individual can easily negotiate. Some discounts are offered to students (especially by Kodak) or to people buying large quantities of film, but otherwise one must pay the list price for raw film stock.

Therefore, a filmmaker facing the costs at list prices must economise on the use of film stock. First and foremost, a filmmaker can attempt to shoot as little film as possible. The conventions of coverage of a dramatic scene from a variety of vantage points and multiple takes of each shot must be seriously rethought. Animation, when carefully planned, is often shot at a one to one ratio so there is no wastage. Many poetic style films are not planned and are made up of a large assortment of shots, captured over a period of time.

I've known filmmakers working in this way who

Sometimes the film can be shot in order and edited in camera, so that no cutting is needed therefore editing equipment and supply costs would be minimised. Footage that ends up being too dark or too light, out of focus or generally just unusable can still be made use of by scratching, painting, or bleaching it. If the volume of unusable material is very large, it can always be utilised in other plastic arts such as being glued to paintings or sculptures. I believe that if a filmmaker vigilantly maintains that all materials are of value, and keeps on the lookout for ways to put those materials to creative use, he or she will be less likely to waste them.

Working with found footage, that is acquiring pieces of other people's films and cutting them together as your own, is perhaps the least expensive form of filmmaking. A film artist can also draw and paint directly onto the film itself, either on clear leader or footage with images on it. Clear leader can be purchased or can be quickly created using regular household bleach to remove the emulsion from found film. Markers, ink, paint or glue can be used to put images onto the film. Scratching into dark areas

of film with a sharp tool can also yield interesting results. Either black leader of found film can be used as the base for this work

Equipment costs are often reduced by using low end equipment which the filmmaker can either purchase (especially super 8 which can sometimes be found at yard sales or junk stores for under \$20) or rented or borrowed from film cooperatives or other artist friendly people or institutions. Cameraless work such as scratch or drawn/painted animation or found footage filmmaking also reduces equipment costs although editing and projection equipment are still necessary.

Depending upon the equipment available to a filmmaker, it is often cheaper to record sound than it is to shoot a film. A filmmaker may be able to make an interesting sound track which can convey the desired message at a very low cost. Even if a sound mix is not affordable, a cleverly edited sound track could be assembled on a single track so as to avoid any mixing. However, it should be kept in mind that it is most often less expensive to make a silent film than a sound film. A silent film has nothing to rely upon except its own images so all the more care needs to be taken with its visual construction.

The necessary services which amount to a sizable portion of an independent filmmaker's budget include labour, laboratory film processing, negative conforming or cutting when the negative of a film is carefully cut to conform to the editing done on the workprint. When looking to avoid costs from professional film labs, a number of ideas must be considered. For those of us who wish to avoid the need for chemical processes at film labs, there are a few obvious approaches. First a filmmaker can avoid loading a camera and still make films with found film or drawn or scratch animation as described above. One can also film images the traditional ways, with a camera, and then process the film oneself. There are small tanks that can be used to process 50 feet of 16mm black and white film with some consistency. Hand processing within bathtubs and buckets is a popular means as well.

When seeking to reduce production costs, the easiest course of action for most experimental filmmakers is not to pay anybody who works on, or appears in, their films. They use friends, relatives, pets, or inanimate objects as cast and crew. The drawbacks of not paying a crew are that the filmmaker may not be able to make strong demands on the crew's time, and cannot always count on their loyalty to the project for the duration of a lengthy production. However, film students and film cooperatives' members are often very skilled and willing to work to gain further experience or just for the joy of making movies.

Next Issue: Gerald Saul discusses how he applied this cost saving approach to the making of his own experimental film "Doubt".

Festivals (deadlines)

The International Electronic
Cinema Festival
Montreux, Switzerland.
(+41) 219638851 2/15/97

15-th International Film
Festival **Istanbul, Turkey**
(90212) 293 - 3133 3/01/97

Cafe Provincial Film Festival
(comedy) **Fitzroy,
Australia** 2/28/97

Toronto Worldwide Short
Film Festival **Toronto,
Ont.**
Tel. (416) 535 8506
Fax (416) 535 8342 3/01/97

Videobridge Two (First
Nations Video/Film Festival)
Hamilton, Ont. (905)
5297477 2/01/97

Carolina Film and Video
Festival **Greensboro, NC**
(910) 334-5360 3/10/97

Annecy-97, International
Animated Film Festival
Annecy, France
(33) 04 5057 4172 2/21/97

NO-TV 97
Call for submission. Film or
video up to 128 min. on
VHS or 3/4"
(716) -442-8676

Call to artist for short videos
(3min or less) on the theme
**"Big Box Knockout -
Community vs. Consumer"**
(519) 838-9811
02/17/97 - for proposals
04/07/97 - for finished tapes

Trinity Square Video
15th Annual Purchase
Collection 1997, the chosen
videotapes receive a cash
award of \$550 and be
screened as part of a
special Gala event
(416) 6593-1332

INPUT '97 (The International
Public Television Screening
Conference) Call For Entries
Canadian Coordinator:
(416) 484-2600 ext. 2972
Fax (416) 484-7410

Grants (deadlines)

**Asia Pacific Cultural
Project** - projects
eliminated an aspect of Asia
Pacific Culture
(306) 791-8778

**The Canada/Mexico
Creative Artists Program**
(incl video & photography)
(613) 952-5726 5/16/97

Canada Council
First production in Media
Arts
March 1, September 1/97
Creative Development
Grants in Film 3/15/97

AFA has announced that
the new deadlines for for
Film and Video Individual
Project Grants are **APRIL 1
& OCTOBER 1**
You can use old grant
application forms, be sure to
send it to new deadline

Training

Banff Centre for The Arts
Work Study Program -
ongoing.

CFTPA National Training
Mentorship Program (spring)
1-800 267-8208

**NSI (National Screen
Institute)**
Professional Development
Program. Deadlines are:
Producers' Studio 02/21/97
Writers' Studio 02/28/97
Directors' Studio 02/28/97

NFTV Training Conference
is being held in Winnipeg on
Feb. 20-22/97 including
Forum '97, an international
Conference on the Future of
Film and Video and the
1997 Blizzard Awards,
Manitoba's motion picture
biannual awards show and
Freeze Frame, Manitoba's
International Childrens' Film
Festival
Info: (204) 949-8866

Film Festival application
forms available at CSIF

Gerald's Guide to No Budget Filmmaking: Part 2

CLOSE-UP

In our last issue, "\$100 Film Festival" Award Winner, Gerald Saul advised us on cost cutting measures for the fledgling independent filmmaker. Here, Gerald explains how he applied these methods to the making of his own experimental film "Doubt".

Although I had huge creative ambitions for my small film, the material demands of making it had to be kept to a more realistic scale. It's difficult to outline the full themes of the film in the space of this article, so I'll simply describe it as a mytho/poetic/surrealistic fable and leave it at that. Instead, let's explore how I managed to pull it off for cheap.

First and most importantly, my film was storyboarded and scripted to be shot at easily accessible locations like wooded forests and city streets. There were only four props: a spade, a black cloth, a window and a ceramic hand, all borrowed or purchased second hand at no great cost. Cast and crew consisted of myself, my production assistant, (who shot production stills, assisted with the props, carried gear and generally assisted in dozens of other essential ways) and one performer.

Although I stated previously that to keep budgets down one should attempt not to pay performers but instead get friends, relatives, or other movie star wannabes to be in the film for free, I also feel that it is a sign of respect to pay a person for working in their chosen field. My performer is a professional dancer and I signed a release form with an exchange of money written into it so that in no way could he rescind his performance at a later date. The only costume I supplied to the performer was a white lab coat. This was one of the only visible signifiers which defines his character. The contrast of this person in a clean white lab coat against the the backdrop of the untamed forest and city codifies him as a symbolic or mythical figure.

We shot the main action of the film in one afternoon. It was a cloudy day but rather than wait for another time and incur more headache and expense, I

undercranked a number of shots, shooting fewer frames per second and thus allowing a longer exposure time for each frame. The performer, once I'd made him aware of the undercranking procedure, simply slowed down his movements by the appropriate amount to maintain the illusion of regular speed in the final film.

As a student filmmaker I was able to use York University equipment: a Bolex camera, a "low hat" tripod, and instead of a hand held light meter, I calculated exposures based on the readings in my still camera (a fifteen year old Canon AE1 which I bought used for less than the cost of a used Seconic light meter).

The Bolex camera is ideal for creating simple effects in camera. By disengaging the motor and inserting a small rewind crank, a Bolex camera can be easily rewound so that a second image can be super imposed on top of the first. ; an effect I used to symbolize my character's trancelike state. Also, between shots I would often open up the camera to overexpose a portion of film and used this light damaged portion as a transition from one scene to the next.

The Bolex is also an attractive camera to animators as it is designed to accommodate controlled single frame exposures. I used this pixelation style of animating as part of the vision the trance figure has at the peak of his maddened state after tearing out his own eyes. I shot single frames while hand holding the camera, moving it along the forest floor to simulate the character's urge to search and explore. On some occasions I filmed scenes backwards by placing the camera upside down so that the image will run backwards in a projector without using a costly process like optical printing. *Still from "Doubt"*

After the film was processed I used a loupe and a needle point and carefully scratched the emulsion of the film in the exact area of the characters eyes to symbolize the scratching out of one's own eyes. Often I scratched beyond the area of the characters eyes to create streams of beams flowing from /into his eyes, signifying the collecting of imagery by the subject.

I shot only one take for each scene with very few exceptions, thus maximizing the amount of film stock I had. I edited the footage without sound at first then added a soundtrack based upon the visual rythms I had constructed. The soundtrack consisted mostly of pre recorded sound effects, my own recorded sound.

I attempted to hand process some of my film footage at home in my darkroom/bathroom, again to save money. As I was just learning the process this resulted in varying degrees of success but I managed to incorporate much of the failed experiments into the film as black leader and scratch animation.

