

Draft submitted for publication:

June 10, 1993.

Why is it that ever since I decided to become a filmmaker, the fates have gone out of their way to see that no day ever goes the way I plan it?

Instead of diligently working on my new film project, my attentions were hijacked by the needs of our local film co-op. It is currently suffering a critical financial crisis, like so much of the rest of the world, and I, as a member of the Board of Directors, received a call this morning from city hall in regards to a funding request we'd submitted. Though the problems were not serious, the paperwork involved took me until late afternoon. During that time, I spent a lot of time thinking about the state of film as an art form, in context of its hundredth anniversary.

When explaining of defending art or experimental film to lay-people, I frequently will call it the poetry of the cinema, as opposed to the drama which I feel compares to the novel. I am afraid that this metaphor instills little optimism for me for the future of this art form. Poetry is revered because we are all taught about it in school. Outside of school, the number of people who are liable to pick up a book of poems is shrinking. Avant Garde cinema has arisen at a time when it's market is similarly diminishing.

Marketability, therefore, is always a sore spot with me. The films I make will screen to a small number of people and are likely to never turn a profit. I talked to some of the film co-op members today and I realize that I have been guilty of being an art snob. Those who are making films with the audience in mind are looked down on by the purists who are creating images for some kind of 'higher purpose'. I want people to see my work, to like my work, so why don't I bend my rules a bit to accommodate those who might sell my work?

I find myself wondering about the importance of what I am doing, or what any other filmmakers are doing. I am particularly interested to avant garde filmmakers, as they will always have the greatest struggle for the smallest credit. There are days, this is one of them, that I can barely stand the idea of exerting the necessary effort it would take to shoot some film this week/month. I remember a stressful day two months ago when this current financial crisis began; I hadn't been sleeping or eating well, and the tension had me near breaking point. Fortunately, I had booked out a camera and recorder and decided to try to carry on with my shooting. I had only a vague idea of what I wanted in the scene and called on my performers to ad lib a bit. I operated the camera myself. When I turned it on, the sound (which was significant due to its age) instantly relaxed me. I felt at ease for the first time in a week. Unable to bear the moment ending, I let an entire 400 feet run out on what will be a throw-away scene. It was the most economical therapy I'd ever experienced.

Why do I even load the camera some days, when the majority of the

time I am only wasting film stock? The key for me is curiosity. When I expose the film, I cannot help but obsess my thoughts with the curiosity of what the photographed image will look like. When I was in grade school and shooting 8mm film, the waiting period, as any waiting period to a 10 year old, seemed endless. Regina is an isolated city, with the nearest lab over 300 miles away. The thrill of receiving a developed roll in the mail could only be compared with Christmas. Although I am 20 years older and my patience is longer, when a roll of rushes arrives the first thing I must do is unravel a dozen meters of it onto the floor and squint at those 16mm images, just to make sure they stuck to the base. I am ever fascinated by the physicality of film, of touching it, smelling it, cutting it and taping it. I have taken to scratching at film, removing and destroying the image with no way of restoring it to its original state. This frightens me. The loss is real but I carry on, always with the hope that the changes I make will improve the film, and not diminish it.

Uncertainty is my mainstay. If I felt completely confident that what I shoot will end up being exactly what I expected it to be, then the thrill of creating would be destroyed. The key to the film experience lies in the beauty of surprise. This must be true for the filmmakers as well as the audience. Although many filmmakers wish to exert absolute control over their images, I believe the struggle of predictability over chaos can never be won. I am seduced by the chance events which make film real.

I concluded my day by watching 45 minutes of rushes from my current production "Life is Like Lint". Although I got this footage back from the lab two days ago, I resisted my curiosity and saved them to watch today (I had to insure that I would have at least one cinematic experience today). I've approached this film in a more realistic way for me, being an unfinanced filmmaker with few resources. Noting that other films I've made, be they seven minutes or 75, have taken me two years to complete, I decided to shoot this new feature slowly over two years. This way I can think about each scene carefully so that it all communicates the feelings and realizations I experience during its shooting. It is no more expensive to be clever than it is to be dull. The footage was successful. The strong and relentless western light is unreproducible in the less arid locals where films are usually made. The light will hold me here, I have a duty to it. Though most filmmakers I know are night creatures, I believe they are all secretly sun worshippers; for film is a celebration of light.

I will continue to work and struggle in/with film. I doubt that I will ever be a star, but that does not lessen the joy of reaching for them.