

## Donuts With...Gerald Saul

by John Kennedy

It's that time again.

A few times a year, the communications committee of the Filmpool collectively puts down our coffee cups long enough to scrape together another issue of "Splice". This being a summer issue, makes the task that much more difficult, in that I can think of 347 other things I would rather be doing than sitting in front of the old word processor (In the winter there are only 126 things that I would rather do.).

But the responsibility I feel to keep you, faithful advocates of "Splice", informed spurs me on and keeps me focused on the task ahead. So onwards and upwards. Our interviewee during this kick at the turnip truck was Gerald Saul; filmmaker. Gerald and I shared coffee and donuts at his apartment one late Saturday morning. Coffee, courtesy Gerald and Donuts (of course) courtesy "Splice". The following is a loose interpretation of the conversation. No names have been changed to protect anyone.

**Splice:** So, what's new, Gerald? What are you doing this summer?

**Gerald:** Uhm. Why did that have to be the first question?

**Splice:** I'm sorry.



**Gerald:** I was hoping you would have asked something like "How's it going?", and I would say, "have you ever had one of those days when you can't get the soundtrack from *Last Days of Contrition* out of

your head?" but I guess that part is

blown. I was sitting around and thinking about music and I was

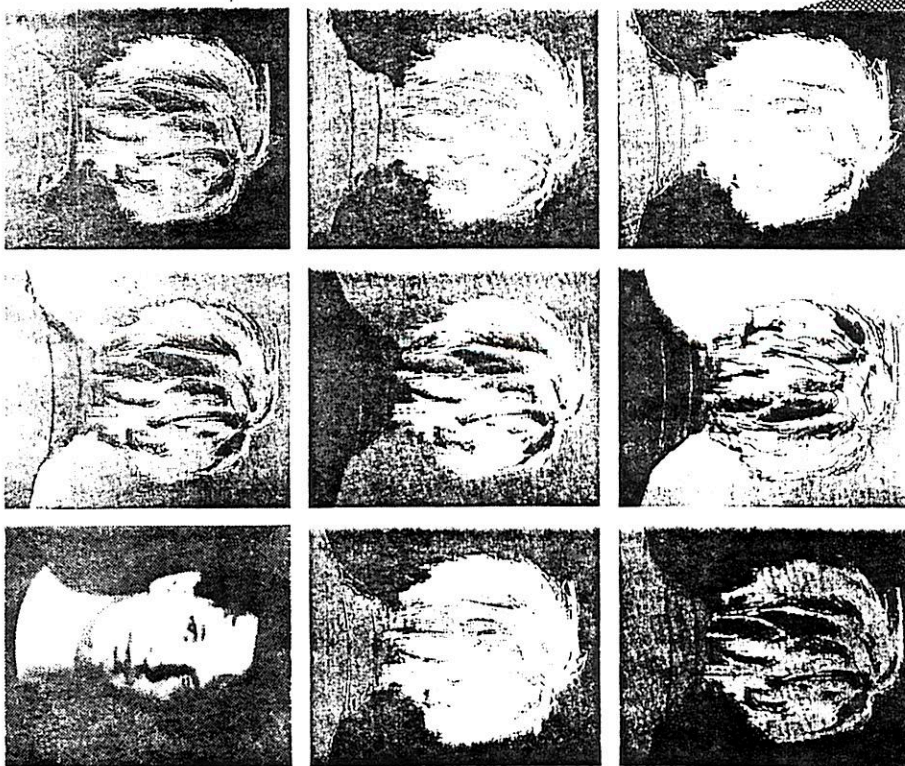
Photo: Gerald Saul  
in T-shirt

trying to block music out of my head. I was actually thinking of, "Love is a Rose"...was running through my head, and you know how aggravating that can be. And I had to blank that out so I was trying to think of other things, then I started to imagine the music / sound in **Contrition**. That spinning sound, kind of metal sound and now it's stuck in my head. All I can hear is that and I can't even describe it. What am I doing this summer? Music videos; writing. That's what I'm doing this week. Proposals to write and that sort of thing. We just finished the Stoaters video and I just finished **Parable** and I'm trying to shoot footage for **Dread**. I never seem to get enough footage done. I'm shooting more photographs than footage, it seems.

**Splice:** There're two things right there we can talk about; **Parable** and **Dread**. You just finished **Parable**. Is it too early to talk about it?

**Gerald:** What's it about you ask! Don't ask! Well, that's my animated film which I was supposed to do in a year, but it took me two. I got Canada Council money for it two years ago and once I got the money I decided, "hey, I've been much too lazy with my animation, thus far. I should really put more work into this. I got good money for this, Canada Council is behind it. I've got to get some respectability." I could have made the film in a month and schlocked it off like I usually do. Well, maybe not usually. So, I decided - "What's the

maximum amount of work I can tolerate putting into this?" So, I decided on this concept of creating a single sheet of paper for every single frame of the film, and painting each one of them individually. I would still use photocopies, which I use to cut down on work. There are almost no drawn images in it at all. It's photocopied images throughout and then stamped images for some of the motion.



But the stages of it entailed a stack of paper two and a half feet tall and two years work until it was finally done. I finished the sound in the last few weeks and mixed about six days ago and now I'm waiting for an answer print. I guess I didn't say what it was about.

**Splice:** You don't have to tell us what it is about.

**Gerald:** It's about little animals. It's such a nice story. Bring the kids.

**Splice:** The other thing that you were talking about was **Dread**. You've got kind of a different thing going here with the **Dread** Hotline.

**Gerald:** Well, yeah. **Dread** is like...I think I'm playing it up as a whole art concept. It's not

just a film, it's more than a film....Oh, there goes the **Dread** line going now. I should have changed the message. The one that is on there now is for my regulars. I try to leave them amusing messages. The newspaper must be out. I left a message in the newspaper that simply says, "Tell your fears, machine: 525-0156."

not a still from **Dread**  
**DREAD** asks the question,  
 "What do you fear?"

two minutes they call back. It seems to go in pairs.

**Splice: Dread** - tell us about that.

**Gerald:** It's about fears. The concept has been evolving. Part of the concept has really a slight narrative behind it, which is about a person who has just died and is drifting around, experiencing little snippets of people's lives with no real control of motion, no real control of what this person...this ghost is seeing or hearing. Sort of just tapping into fears primarily without...but that's only a slight underlying thing. It turns into mainly a documentary, really loosely knit documentary, which just has interviews, you know, the soundtrack is made up of interviews and answering machine messages with people giving me their thoughts on what fear is or what they are afraid of. So, John! What are you afraid of?

(At this point Gerald leans menacingly in my direction and thrusts a tape recorder in my face. Feeling incredibly alone and totally uninspired I blurt out the first thing that comes to mind; that I am afraid of (you guessed it), tape recorders. (Is it okay to put an aside surrounded in brackets within another aside surrounded in brackets?) Gerald kindly and gently pointed out that this was the response that he got the most of and that it was, in his opinion, a sign of a weak and uncreative mind. Argh!)

(We stopped, listening for a response to the **Dread** line. Unfortunately, the caller hung up before Gerald's message had ended.)

**Gerald:** They hung up. Oh, well. A lot of times people call twice. They call once to listen to the message and then get nervous and hang up and then

**Gerald:** Well, I'll just leave my tape recorder here on top of your tape recorder. So, as this evolves we'll both record it.

**Splice:** Who knows. Maybe you can use some of the Donuts With... interview in **Dread**. It'd be a beautiful thing.

**Gerald:** Yeah.

**Splice:** Where did the expression "Free Form Depressionist" filmmaking come from?

**Gerald:** That was actually in the title of **Wheat Soup**. It's one of the opening titles - a Free Form Depressionist Film. Well that came out of university, a group of us in university that hung around together and never had any good thoughts or anything good to say about anything or anybody. I don't know if it's changed all that much. It has a bit. It's one of those school things where you are trapped in this florescent hallway for most of your day and you can't help but be miserable.

**Splice:** If you had a common theme or series of themes that runs through your work, would it be misery or dread or is that more of a....?

**Gerald:** It's becoming a theme. I seem to be more motivated to make my films when I'm unhappy. When I'm happy there is nothing driving me to work. Why would you work...why would you try to get ahead when you are already happy. So, I usually feed on

things that are going wrong in my life, which there is always, you know, enough of. With that as a guiding force, naturally it takes in that direction. But I like to think that I have a sense of humor about it. Things that are wrong in my life or in the world, I more or less accept as being there and they don't usually go away by me being miserable about them, so I just sort of enjoy them and appreciate my misery for what it is.

**Splice:** So you don't subscribe to Thomas Hardy's themes of characters being born, suffering for sixty years, and then dying.

**Gerald:** Oh, that sounds logical. Yeah, sure. I subscribe to that. Once you accept that, then what is there to be miserable about. Okay, I'm 27 now, I have another 33 years to be miserable. You know, just live with it, and have a sense of humor about it. So **Dread**, even though I'm trying to find psychopaths to phone this number...that number again is **585-0156**, I'm looking for the darkest ideas, but what I end up getting is regulars calling up and enjoying my messages, and enjoying talking on the machine and getting a kick out of it, and it's turning into a comedy.

**Splice:** Have another donut, Gerald. They are yours now, you know.

**Gerald:** Okay, I'll have this chocolate one with the sprinkles on it.

**Splice:** Okay, Gerald. You've been out of film school for four years and you have developed a bit of a reputation as being one of the best and most prolific filmmakers in the province. So, what's next?

**Gerald:** Uhm, it seems music is...I seem to be drawn to music and it seems to be drawn to me. Both music videos and music-oriented projects. Stuff that has a lot of music in it. I seem to be working a lot more with it and am getting more contact with bands and all that stuff in that direction. I just made some motions in that direction and would like to be working closely with the music industry on some projects. And, I want to make another feature soon, and **Dream Sequence** will hopefully be done soon. That will be a nice thing when it gets done.

**Splice:** What is more satisfying to you; the process of making films or the finished project?

**Gerald:** I would like to be sitting around coffee shops, dreaming up ideas, and going to the theatre next week and seeing it. There are satisfying elements in the middle, but I don't mind writing proposals, trying to think of new slants and new twists on a particular theme; I enjoy that a lot. Especially if I can find someone to create with. You call this person up in the middle of the night when you get a different idea and you can get excited with this person. To find someone else that is excited about a project is great.

Ordering stuff and shipping stuff, and hauling gear; those things are drags. A budget would allow me to hire someone to take care of the things that I don't want to do. That would be great.

**Splice:** We should talk a bit about the Filmpool. That is one of the reasons that we do these interviews. You've been involved in different ways with the Filmpool. How long have you been a member.

**Gerald:** 6 years...6 years and counting. Yeah, well, the Filmpool is great. It's the best place. I don't know. There's nothing that I could complain about, if you are looking for complaints, because they have funded half the films that I have made in some way or another and you know, it's always been there. I was at the Winnipeg Film Group and I was quite inspired. I was getting a bit of advice, and seeing what they are doing. They have a large staff. They seem to be a couple of years ahead of us. If we look at what they are doing, we can hope to be doing that in a couple of years. It's just the size of the city that makes the difference. It would be really great to keep the Filmpool growing that quickly.

**Splice:** What about the Filmpool's role within the industry or whatever you want to call it, in the province? It seems that everytime Showcase rolls around, inevitably two or three Filmpool members walk away with awards.

**Gerald:** I think the Filmpool survives because it has never been very closely connected with most of the other film organizations in the province. That independence from everybody has allowed them to continue on making things the way that everybody there wants to make things; with a certain degree of integrity and creativity. Though I really wish we could tap into some of the money available out there in the other organizations. **SaskFilm** is great, it does some good things and all that, but for one development grant - phase one; if they gave that to the Filmpool for production, which is difficult for them to do, maybe impossible, but the amount of production that could come out of that money is incredible. We turn \$5,000 into a half hour film. Money goes in good directions out of **SaskFilm**, but still - carve off a little slice to go right into the artists' pockets and that would make a tremendous difference.

**Splice:** Do you think that **SaskFilm** is taking a more serious look at the Filmpool and its members?

**Gerald:** I think that they have a respect for people who have self initiated work, which makes up most of the filmpool members, those who make films. I know that helped me, when I applied there. I got the money much easier because I had made films independent of any of the big funds. I made them out of my own pocket, and arts grants, and through the Filmpool and made things

because I wanted to and proved myself that way. I think they prefer that rather than someone being a welder for three years, 'but I think I would be good at making films, so give me money.' I think they do want you to prove yourself first.

**Splice:** Thanks, Gerald.

**Gerald:** That's it? It's just going to end? Press stop and the interview will be over? I still have half a pot of coffee...

