



NOTES FOR A SPEECH BY
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FEATURE FILM:
THE ENGINE THAT DRIVES CANADA'S TALENT
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(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

Thank you Jesse, and thank you for the enormous task that you're undertaking on behalf of Indigenous creators across the country. Your tireless advocacy and fearlessness has made you an important voice in Canada's audiovisual industry, and we all benefit from your work.

Good afternoon everyone. It's a pleasure to be here at my first **IIC annual conference** as Executive Director of Telefilm Canada.

The discussions and debates over this past day and a half have been both stimulating and illuminating, and I hope that they will create a wealth of opportunities for Canada's content creators.

As the head of the federal agency tasked with the development, production, and promotion of our national cinema, I'd like to share with you some ideas, questions,

and possible solutions that address some of the Panel's themes.

Preamble

Today marks 90 days since I took the helm at Telefilm Canada. These past three months have confirmed what I already believed: that this country has all of the right ingredients for success – world-class talent, award-winning content, and a mature industry ready to seize every opportunity.

Increasing & rebalancing production funding

Feature film plays a central role in reflecting our national identity in all its diversity on screen. Moreover, the sector is also a major economic driver, on the national, provincial, and local levels that result in an average of \$300 million in national production volume a year.

However, as I travel to our provinces and territories meeting with partners and clients, one thing is abundantly clear: **there simply isn't enough money in the system for the production of more high-caliber films in this country.**

In fact, in the 15 years since the federal government last updated its Canadian Feature Film Policy, there has been **no significant increase** in funding support to the production of Canadian films. Meanwhile, production and promotion costs have greatly grown.

As a result, the sector struggles to retain top creative talent. We need only to look South of the border to see that this is true. While we are all proud of the international success of film directors like **Denis Villeneuve**, currently preparing to direct the remake of *Dune*, and **Jean-Marc Vallée**, who has been tasked to bring John Lennon and Yoko Ono's love story to the big screen, these examples also confirm the trend.

I cannot help but wonder, can Canada still afford a Denis or Jean-Marc?

Every year, it becomes increasingly difficult to finance quality Canadian films – I'm sure that I don't need to tell you that!

Over the last ten years, we've seen negative growth in the number of feature films produced annually, and the average production budget has also decreased.

Finally, those that are produced face increased competition for limited shelf space and audience attention.

We also face the challenge of discovering and developing a new generation of Canadian filmmakers, and of reshaping

the industry to be more open and inclusive to women, Indigenous talent, and diverse creators.

In 2016, the industry set an ambitious objective for itself: to build, by 2020, a representative and diversified feature film portfolio that better reflects Canada's population, including gender parity and Indigenous filmmakers.

Today, we are seeing change, and results indicate that we are moving in the right direction. However, the greatest challenge lies once again with bigger-budget films.

One piece of the puzzle to increase production budgets is **coproduction**. Coproductions have significantly higher budgets than domestic productions, and attract A-list international talent, ultimately improving the film's marketability.

Co-productions are exportable, generate more sales worldwide, and reach audiences.

Despite success, though, there has been a significant decline in the amount of foreign financing in Canadian feature film production – **a reduction of 80% over the last three years.**

Thus, in order to ensure the long-term viability of feature films in Canada, an even greater number of international coproductions **must** be made.

For Canadian films to compete in this new global media landscape, to find and reach bigger and new audiences, more production funding is needed to produce larger-budget productions that will employ, develop, and **retain** our talent at home.

What's more, increasing the financial support to Canadian filmmakers would further the government's feature film policy.

So, if feature film is the industry's engine, then let me ask "*la question qui tue*": where is feature film in the Broadcast and Telecommunications Legislative Review Panel's examination?

Promotion, partnerships & platforms

Six years ago, Telefilm opened the first symposium on the promotion of Canadian films and television programs at this conference, and challenged the industry to work together to solve a key issue, which is a question that we continue to ask ourselves today.

How do we put our productions in front of bigger, more, and new audiences?

A lot of work has been done since that day, and progress has been made. However, ensuring that our productions connect with audiences everywhere remains one of our industry's most important priorities.

To tackle this seemingly simple yet somewhat elusive question, we need to collectively challenge ourselves. More and more, the concept of “discoverability” is replaced by “**reaching audiences**”. And increasingly that “audience” is the world.

So, what does that mean precisely for the industry at a time when exports, coproduction, platforms, and new creative partnerships are all part of the equation of reaching audiences worldwide?

How do we leverage new partnerships with broadcasters, who already play an important role in reaching Canadian audiences?

How do we grow successful partnerships, and build on achievements like Telefilm's **Rendezvous Canada iTunes** boutiques, where we've seen tens of thousands of transactions for Canadian films; like the **Canada Media Fund's Encore+ YouTube** channel where classic Canadian film and television series have been watched millions of times; and the **CBC's recently announced Gem**.

How can Telefilm, the CMF, and our other partners better collaborate to finance new kinds of productions?

Survey after survey confirms that films matter to Canadians, and that audiences young and old are watching them on multiple screens. Our research also finds the broadcasters remain central to the accessibility and discoverability of Canadian films.

To this end, and I have had many productive discussions with Catherine Tait about exactly this, the CBC/Radio-

Canada, as Canada's premier broadcaster of Canadian programming, has a critical role to play in supporting the production and promotion of Canadian feature films.

To succeed, all of the industry's support mechanisms need to work together. To the extent that our broadcasting system supports our film industry, it would also support the objectives of the Broadcasting Act.

Each part of our industry has something to contribute, and that, in this new multi-platform world, **smart promotion** is about leveraging partnerships in order to amplify the message.

Conclusion

In order to respond to the continuous change in our industry, we will all need to be a little innovative. But, what does it mean to innovate in today's context?

As someone who comes from the interactive milieu, I am no stranger to innovation – nor to the struggle to define how it applies to a sector in transformation.

What is clear, though, is that the long-term growth and sustainability of the audiovisual sector requires new and innovative long-term funding strategy that better reflects the realities of the feature film environment and prepares our talented filmmakers for increased export success.

In an environment offering a plethora of subscription OTT and app-based options to Canadians, if we want to become one of the world's top producers of independent content, the legislative, policy and regulatory framework

must be robust enough to ensure the financing and promotion of Canadian content.

Today, more than ever before, we all must increase its efforts to nurture and support Canadian talent, to make Canadian films available to audiences everywhere, and to ensure that our productions and talent shine on the world's stage.

As I look to the future, I'm very optimistic. Because, together, we **can** and **will** see bigger.

Thank you to the IIC for inviting me to speak at this year's conference, giving Telefilm an opportunity to take part in these important conversations.

And now, please welcome **John Lawford**, Executive Director and General Counsel, Public Interest Advocacy Centre.