

REVIEWS

Ron Mann's Poetry in Motion

Ron Mann's first feature documentary, *Imagine the Sound*, was a compelling look into the worlds and works of Cecil Taylor, Archie Shepp, Bill Dixon and Paul Bley, four highly respected but little-documented figures in jazz music. Mann's second feature documentary, *Poetry in Motion*, is a spellbinding film of poets and poetry.

Individually and together, these two films reveal a filmmaker capable of making the seemingly inaccessible eminently accessible; a filmmaker capable of opening our eyes, ears and minds to worlds not universally known or appreciated. More important, Mann and his associates in both films, the artists in front of the camera and the craftsmen behind, achieve this with startling simplicity: they allow the considerable pleasures, power and resonance of each film to emanate from the documented art form itself and flow directly from artist to audience with a minimum of interference or "translation" for general public consumption. Thus Mann reveals a refreshing respect for the art, the artist, and the audience.

Clearly, Mann selects his subject based on a belief in its inherent expressive power; a power that, if allowed to connect with an audience with the same one-to-one immediacy of a live performance, will prove its own best spokesman. It is a power that underlines beliefs held by Mann and the artists documented in both films: that art is not separate from life; that all art forms share a common human base and are, at their best, living expressions, inherently accessible and intelligible to all, natural extensions of human existence and of each other. *Poetry in Motion* is Ron Mann's second successful attempt to capture and express no less than this.

Poetry in Motion celebrates the potency of the spoken word without sinking beneath the weight of the deadly TV-patented "talking heads" syndrome. This in itself is remarkable. But *Poetry in Motion* goes further. It is a film of electrifying energy – the art and artists pulse with a vitality so galvanizing that audiences viewing the film applaud and cheer spontaneously after almost every one of the "readings." The poets are working the film audience, and that audience is responding, as if the linking barrier-window of celluloid simply does not exist.

For these Canadian and American poets, a "reading" is a performance, a vital interaction between poet and audience, a life-giving act as important as the words it brings to life. And by performance I mean just that: not the lifeless, toneless, laboured readings of poets thrust into an unwanted spotlight, vocally transcribing their printed words, but 23 presentations that reveal the extraordinary diversity of expression, the passion, the creativity, the essential humanity possible in an art form that embraces principles of music and dance, as well as vocal interpretation.

As *Poetry in Motion* begins, the twenty-fourth participant, Charles Bukowski (whose books include "Burning in

Water," "Drowning in Flame" and "Notes of a Dirty Old Man") launches into a scathing assessment of poetry and poets, an interview-turned-monologue that Mann and editor Peter Wintonick have shaped into a deliciously ironic anti-narration that weaves in and out of the 23 presentations and interviews.

"Poetry hasn't shown any guts, any moxie," Bukowski tells us seconds into the film. "Poetry has the energy of a Hollywood movie or a Broadway play. All it needs are practitioners to bring it to life." On he goes, repeatedly decrying the lack of such practitioners as we meet more than 23 of them and sail through 23 performances that are the very embodiments of energy, guts and moxie.

Like a sober warning from an overly blunt friend, Bukowski's sombre and querulous monologue – as much a performance as any of the actual "readings" – periodically intrudes upon the flood of presentations, underlying their vibrancy by fearfully lamenting its general non-existence.

The performances unfold in rapid succession, 23 variations on certain basic themes, exploring the expressive range of the spoken word and of the human voice and body; the word as sound as well as symbol; the musicality of words – alone, in phrases and in sentences; the kinesthetic impact of words soaring out from a body that remains still, bends and sways, or contorts in response to the vocal expression.

Each of the poets is interested in different aspects of these basic concerns; each performance is a variation of these "themes," an echo to each other, as different from one another as they are essentially the same. Every one of the performances, including Bukowski's, is compelling in its own way; and each viewer will have his or her preferences.

But I particularly gloried in the variety. Amiri Baraka's voice becomes a sophisticated jazz instrument without singing a note, a verbal-percussive partner in an electrifying collaboration with David Murray (saxophone) and Steve McCall (drums). John Giorno's powerful unaccompanied voice rises, falls, and rises again with unbounded passion as it plays with different emphases, cadences and implications of words in sentences repeated as many as five times in quick succession with a different mean-

ing each time – the ultimate in exploration of the range and malleability of verbal language. The equally expressive voice of John Cage gains its power from a quiet passion; a calm, gentle voice rising and falling in subtly musical cadences, the sweet clear music of a poet aware of words as "bubbles of sound on the surface of silence, that burst."

For the Four Horsemen (Rafael Baretto-Rivera, b.p. Nichol, Paul Dutton and Steven McCaffery), a poem can be an adventure in abstract sound: an amazing and amusing blend of individual vocal performances that come together frequently in very loud unison 'AHHHHS!'

Ann Waldman moves like a dancer, responding to the music of her own vocal rhythms as she explores the attributes of "empty space." In Ntozake Shange's collaborative performance with dancers Fred Gary and Bernedene Jennings, and pianist Hank Johnson, she reads her work as the dancers' movements offer a parallel physical commentary. Diane di Prima creates delicate word-images of light, while in the background darkness, abstract slide-images of nature, visual manifestations of light, glow and dissolve into each other as pianist Peter Hartman plays an equally delicate and sensual musical composition.

Allen Ginsberg's voice becomes an urgent social-political commentator as Ginsberg bobs and weaves in response to his words and to the equally insistent rhythms of his collaborators, the Ceedees, a Toronto-based New Wave rock group.

The potency of the performances is so great that even when the crystal clarity of the film's soundtrack is compromised by a sound system as distorting as that used during the film's world premiere at the 1982 Festival of Festivals in Toronto, the audience still responds with amazing energy.

Although Mann has chosen to emphasize content over film style, he has not abdicated his rights as creative visual interpreter. In addition to on-location performances, Mann presents many of the poets performing in the same in-studio set: a white, wooden-slatted structure not unlike a stylized rendering of a forest lean-to or farm building; a stark blend of the natural and the abstract. The set is relit for each performance, creating a different mood,

in colour and texture, within an environment shared in succession by each of the artists. The result: a subtle yet eloquent visual statement of the diversity of expression offered within a shared context – the art of the poet.

Poetry in Motion is not perfect. While striving to eliminate barriers, Mann erects a few of his own, particularly in his frequent use of voice-over introductions. This attempt at informality and fluidity causes confusion when applause drowns out some of the poets' names. And, without the visual reinforcement of on-screen titles, it is very difficult for those of us not acquainted with many of the poets to remember a name called out once in the dark.

Nevertheless, *Poetry in Motion* fills an enormous void. "You're a poet," says John Giorno, "and there's an audience, and whatever happens in between is the poem. It takes place in performance, on the page, and in any other fashion that connects with an audience." And now, it takes place on film.

Laurinda Hartt ●

POETRY IN MOTION d./p. Ron Mann
assoc. p. John Giorno exec. p. Murray Sweigman
d.o.p. Robert Fresco ed. Peter Wintonick c.f.e. p.
sd. David Joliat asst. d./p. man. Ratch Wallace
asst. to d. Colin Brunton, David Segal lighting
Jock Brandis cam. operator Fred Guthe, Rene
Ohashi cam. asst. Sharon Lee Chapelle, John
Hobson focus puller William Reeve 2nd. asst.
cam. Peter Metter, Helen Henshaw, Jeff Powers
add. cam. Marc Champion, Steven Deme, Bruce
MacDonald, Richard Camp, Peter Bellenger rec.
asst. Clark McCarron add. rec. Peter Miller, Gar
Smith re-rec. Eilius Caruso p. des. Sandra Kybartas
best boy David Willetts key grip Norman Smith
dolly grip Sean Ryerson art grip John Deagle
assoc. p. Peter Wintonick asst. ed. Greg Lynn
ed. Elaine Foreman asst. ed. Allan Lee
tech. advisor Gregory Mirand research David
Segal p. consult. Emile de Antonio asst. to p. John
Sullivan, Rick Preiskal concert p. Gary Topp, Gary
Cormier assoc. p. Sandra Kybartas pub. Elliott
Lefko atllis Sally Hutchinson, Peter L. Noble p. asst.
Vanessa Cox, Bruce MacDonald, Alex Currie, Yo-
landa Zarkel, Marvin Pludwinski, Gary Viola, Shelly
Storz, Dan Casse, Brian Harmes, James Manse, Mark
Gaudet, Chris Bolton, Lucy Tetrault, Camella Frie-
berg, Kevin Johnson legal Robi Blumenstein acct
Steve Rosen, Harley Mintz, Stan Spencer (Mintz &
Partners), Cindy Scott neg. cut. Dennis White p.p.
Sphinx Prod. in assoc. with Giorno Poetry Systems
poets: Charles Bukowski, Amiri Baraka, Anne
Waldman, Ted Berrigan, Kenward Elmslie, Ed
Sanders, Helen Adam, Tom Waits, William S. Bur-
roughs, Christopher Dewdney, Michael McClure,
Ted Milton, Robert Creeley, John Cage, Four Horse-
men, Michael Ondaatje, Jayne Cortez, Dianne Di
Prima, John Giorno, Ntozake Shange, Gary Snyder,
Allen Ginsberg, Jim Carroll, Miguel Algarin. colour
16mm running time: 90 min. dist. International
Tele-Film Ent.

● Poetry means performance to an old hand like Allen Ginsberg



Claude Jutra's By Design

Inevitably one comes to realize that the vacuous nature of Jutra's newest film, *By Design*, must also reflect his emotional and artistic alienation in English Canada. The film exhibits a faint imprint of his earlier work, but his use of the medium clearly indicates that the shift which has occurred in his own mind, and in cinematic terms, is leading to the Waterloo of a creative artist. There are few moments where Jutra succeeds in transforming an otherwise unsuccessful venture into a meaningful, touching film.

If we remember that Jutra once said, in 1973, speaking of his and others' decision to boycott the Canadian Film Awards: "We are intent on asserting there are two cultures. We have not the same goals, styles, techniques or spirit. You cannot put these two under one roof," we can also better understand what keeps Jutra in Toronto and points west (quoted in Martin Knelman, "Claude Jutra in Exile," *Saturday Night*, March 1977). With the scripts and offers that float about in Toronto, Jutra can keep working (something he can't do in Montreal, due to the industry's stagnation in Quebec), and jump into the North American mainstream. Culture, though, goes deeper than language.

Skill and dedication to his work — whether the acclaimed *Ada*, *Dreamspeaker* or the ill-fated *Surfacing* — are, I'm sure, his utmost concern. However, his motivation for working with an issues as mental health (as explored in *Ada* and *Dreamspeaker*) is very different from what, according to Knelman, people like Jutra and Geneviève Bujold were doing a decade ago in *Kamouraska*, "dramatizing things they knew in their bones — the exciting intensity is lost when talented people are forced to

work on subjects more remote from their own lives."

Understandably *Surfacing* did not work out simply because Jutra had little control over the script, and finally the music and editing work were redone by the producer. But the whole question of his work, in English Canada or anywhere, is a gnawing one.

In another interview, he stated he dreams to make one film a year in Quebec. For now, he has work in English Canada — such as *By Design*.

In the film's opening minutes one senses that Jutra's approach is ill-conceived and badly executed. In the lead scene, he awkwardly introduces his main characters in a sequence which is disturbing in its juxtapositioning of sharp, upbeat titles — bright orange, and electric blue — pulsating title song, and waterfront setting. The camera moves, capturing birds on a pier. It follows two women walking through this setting. Then it cuts to a different locale, a static warehouse interior.

As the film evolves it becomes obvious that *By Design* is lacking in vibrance and clarity. It never picks up a stride, and its ambivalence in direction, where Jutra wants it to go, is the film's most serious problem. The film cannot be appreciated as a whole. For instance, the punk titles and raucous soundtrack of the opening do not mix with a later scene in which the camera moves aimlessly in the darkness, finally entering a cabin bathed in golden light, where the two lovers talk about conceiving a baby.

Any attentiveness to character or subject is spare. Rapid shifts in mood, the contrast between soft visuals and hard

— where faces and bodies are set against cold, stark, environments — drain the film of any cohesiveness. Any intelligent development in the storyline is often overrun by an insensitive scene which follows, or the introduction of a character who appears for one brief scene, never to be seen on screen again. It is impossible to discern the filmmaker's intent — as if Jutra himself was unsure of what he wanted to fashion with this film. Nor does he seem to recognize his own uncertainty of vision. He has been interviewed saying that his movie expressed something deep within his soul. But the film's postures and mannerism (with one exception) exhibit a style so devoid of soul that one is left saddened by the empty promise implicit in his remark.

The film focusses on two women — fashion designers, lovers — who choose to have a child. The director has chosen to emphasize none of these issues directly. Rather, one speculates, he has padded the film to reach a larger audience. For example, the essence of femininity is seen as a wall of blown-up photos of breasts, expressed as "a breast, rhythmic — give it a name... TITS TRANSCENDENT." This line drew a chuckle and a snort from the audience. But why resort to such cheap exploitation when, in other sections, the actors seriously suggest that they are on the threshold of pain and pleasure? Could Jutra not have extended the possibilities of one or the other to create a more intensive argument?

Other shots relay chronic, overbearing stiltedness which further cloud the film's vision. As the fashion models appear,

the camera goes 'to the crotch, and closes in from below. The world of high fashion, we are lead to believe, portrays women without feeling. This is reinforced in that even the designers' creations which the models are exhibiting have no flair, no meaning.

The man viewing the fashion parade has a tired expression on his face. The 'look' which is repeated many times over in the film is best termed exhausted. The dialogue is banal. The words, which seem to spring from situation comedy, fall flat.

These tatters — movement and sound — appear strung together. Perhaps Jutra felt that to counterpoise these images would strengthen his central idea, but, ultimately, the movie's images say nothing startling, expressive, or even progressive.

At his best, Jutra is capable of sensitively integrating his characters within their settings and circumstances. But in *By Design* only a single, brief close-up of the two lead actors conveys their sense of love for each other. Instead, the film is saturated with vulgar, inconsequential details, lacks good pacing, and serves more to mock his actors than present them effectively.

If the film was to have been a bold, inventive, humorous and touching tale, it is instead a completely forgettable experience. Lacking a coherent structure and tone, the film only serves up a mish-mash of moral overtones and misgivings.

Philip Szporer ●

● Mixing controversial designs in a controversial movie, Patty Duke Astin sits and listens as Sara Botsford plots the course.



Robert Ménard's Une journée en taxi

Chalk up some points for dramatic irony. Just as the Applebert report set off another round of collective hand-wringing, an honest-to-God case in point for the viability of Canadian culture, *Une journée en taxi* (A Day in a Taxi), tiptoed sideways into Montreal theatres, did lousy at the box office and disappeared — all this within a scant three weeks and despite the warm critical embrace offered the film by the French press. Fairness or lack of it is quite beside the point: the fact is that Robert Ménard delivered the goods, and that hardly anyone here bothered to pick them up. Score zip for the home team.

This delicate, positively luminous little movie belies Ménard's status as a neophyte feature director because it flows with the graceful self-assurance you'd attribute to a seasoned filmmaker. And in a way, that's precisely what he is. Several years as a feature producer and a ten-year wait before his first shot at directing seem to have primed him for a glowing debut. *Une journée en taxi* serves up the special blend of emotional resonance and stylistic clarity that characterizes our best films, and then goes one better: this Franco Canadian co-production is at once so very Quebecois and so blissfully international that it slides into that special 'movie-movie' category, the kind of film that fills a particular cultural 'context' chock full of universal touchstones. It's open to anyone who wants to take a look.

This is a 'road movie' in a small-scale, very literal way, and it's faithful to the genre. The unlikely fellow-travellers

BY DESIGN d. Claude Jutra p. man. Hugh Spencer-Phillips a.d. Don Granbery (1st), Derek Gardner (2nd), Scott Mathers (3rd) p.a. Catherine Leiterman loc. man. Fitch Cady cont. Monique Champagne p. sec. Anne Mathisen (Vancouver), Yvette Cutrara (Toronto) p. acct. Bernard Ross, Sandra Palmer (asst.) d.o.p. Jean Boffetty cam. op. Peter McLennan asst. cam. Tim Sale (1st), Phil Linzey (2nd) stills Alan Zenuk art d. Reuben Freed, Graeme Murray (asst.), Jim Erickson (asst.) art dept. trainee Lorrie Russell props Wayne McLaughlin set dress. Kimberley Richardson (dept. hd.), Sandy Arthur (best boy), Annamarie Corbett, Sean Kirby, Jennifer Hinde (trainee) painter-trainee Sandra Fox ward. Trish Keating (head), Linda Langdon (asst.), Tiah Monaghan (asst.), Phillip Clarkson (asst.) make-up Phyllis Newman hair Salli Bailey gaffer Don Saari best boy Leonard Wolfe elec. David Grinstead gen. op. Barrett J. Reid, Ray McCurrach key grip Roger Cadieux, Thomas (Paddy) Holleywell (asst.) dolly grip Dave Gordon grip Alan Campbell, Jim Hurford craft service Maureen Young sd. Larry Sutton boom Graham Crowell transp. co-ord. Brian Boyer drivers George Grieve (capt.), David Bowe (co-capt.), Bill McCurrach, Jan Boyer, Peter Lassen, Andrew Neville, Scott Irvine, Danny Johnson construc. man. Barry Brolly scenic artist Floyd Gillis d.o.p. (2nd unit) John Seale cam. op. (2nd unit) Rod Parkhurst cont. (2nd unit) Pattie Robertson gaf. (2nd unit) John Barley p.a. (2nd unit) Tom Braidwood casting Clare Walker/Walker Bowen, Bette Chadwick/The Other Agency Casting Ltd., Lyonne Carrow ed. Toni Myers, Steve Withrow (asst.) pub. Glenda Roy, Les Wedman C.F.D.C. observer Gail Singer l.p. Patty Duke Astin, Sara Botsford, Saul Rubinek, Robert Benson, Clare Coulter, Alan Duruisseau, Jeannine Elias, Jan Filipis, Joseph Flaherty, Jim Hibbard, Mina Mina, Sonia Zimmer p.c. B.D.F. Productions Ltd. exec. p. Douglas Leiterman, Louis Silverstein p. Werner Aellen, Beryl Fox assoc. p. James R. Westwell running time: 93 min., colour, 35min. dist. Astral.

photo: Alan Zenuk

here are a small-time con on a 36-hour leave from prison, and the jaded French cabbie whose services he leases for a day's drive to nowhere in particular. Michel (Jean Yanne) is a softspoken, cultured loner, a man who shut himself off from the world and left accounting for cab-driving eight years ago when his Québec-born wife died of a heart attack. Very little in this world can provoke a reaction or ruffle his feathers, and that's initially a source of great irritation to his almost hyperkinetic passenger. Johnny (Gilles Renaud) is a perpetual loser with the emotional maturity of an overgrown adolescent and a propensity for waving a handgun around like a baseball penant. He's decided to use the occasion of his thirty-fifth birthday and this short-term freedom to pay off some debts, but nothing comes off quite the way he planned - when it comes to the crunch, he can't pull his trigger on the ex-partner who did him dirty, and he can't pull it on himself. His almost childlike despair and his utter loneliness finally win Michel's sympathy, and two polar opposites begin to explore some common ground.

This friendship of circumstance develops and expands and draws you in, even over those little moments when motivation and believability are severely tested. One such case is Michel's almost immediate forgiveness of Johnny after a brutal attack - it's problematic and a little sentimental, but it still squeaks through, maybe because the whole movie is so subtly sentimental from beginning to end. That fact works in its favour, as do the myriad other tones and elements that make up the film. Gilles Renaud has quite a task before him: Johnny is none too bright and rather unappealing, but Renaud still evokes a strange sympathy for the character as he stumbles about in blind desperation. The contrasts between this working-class Québécois and the somewhat erudite Frenchman are beautifully drawn (a wine-tasting lesson in a fancy restaurant is warm and funny), and Jean Yanne's performance is a masterpiece of subtlety - he extracts as much expression from a shrugged shoulder or a raised eyebrow as from the top-flight dialogue (on which he collaborated with Ménard). The chemistry of the two leads propels the movie forward, but Ménard has dropped in a marvellous series of cameos by leading Québec performers as a kind of gentle 'icing on the cake': watch carefully and you'll see Monique Mercure, Marie Tifo, Gilbert Sicotte, Yvon Dufour, Jocelyn Bérubé and even announcer Jacques Fauteux waft in and out of scenes with a delight-

ful, understated grace.

Ménard has the ingredients, and he's turned them over to a first-rate gift-wraper. Montreal absolutely shimmers under the lens of cinematographer Pierre Mignot, radiating a genuine movie presence hitherto uncaptured by any other DOP. *Une journée en taxi* confirms Mignot's status as one of this country's most exciting young cameramen; look no further than his work on Altman's *Come Back to the Five and Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean* and then contrast it with the images in this movie to get an idea of his range and sensibilities. The quality of his light here is clear and yet suggestive, and it imparts a purity of texture to the film that accounts in good part for its special 'movie' flavour. You just capitulate to the pictures.

Une journée en taxi is far from flawless, but the simple elegance of form and spirit here tend to wash away your reservations; you'd love to see it score in a big way. It should be noted that a series of financial mishaps during production nearly axed the movie altogether, and that distribution deals for the rest of Canada remain nebulous as of this writing. This was almost the picture that didn't get made; in particular view of our current cultural angst, it should not become the picture that didn't get seen. That would really be a bit too much.

Anne Reiter ●

UNE JOURNÉE EN TAXI p./d. Robert Ménard sc. Roger Fournier dialog. Fournier, Jean Yanne d.o.p. Pierre Mignot art. d. Vianney Gauthier ed. Marcel Pothier mus. Michel Robidou, Pierre F. Brault cost. Louise Jobin, Suzanne Harel sd. Serge Beauchemin 1st asst. d. Michel Gauthier 2nd a.d. Michele Mercure cont. Thérèse Bérubé 1st asst. cam. Jean Lépine 2nd asst. cam. Nathalie Moliavko-Vitotzki stills Warren Lipton stunt Robert Blais, Céline Fournier head gaffer Kevin O'Connell gaffer Daniel Chretien key grip Raymond Lamy grip Philippe Palu props Claude Paré cost. Diane Paquette ward. Sylvie Rochon make-up Micheline Foisy boom Esther Auger asst. ed. Hélie Crepeau, Dominique Parent, Paul Dion trans. captain Jacques Arcouette p. assts. Julek Winniki, Pierre Paquette, Christian Gagné, Harold Trépanier, Angele Bourgeault-Cyr, Paul Hotte p. sec. Elaine Roy p. acct. André Charron, Pierre Trémouille unit pub. Les Paradis sd. ed. Marcel Pothier sd. eff. Terry Burke neg. cut. Jim Capabana mix. David Appleby lp. Jean Yanne, Gilles Renaud, Pierre Bergeron, Jocelyn Bérubé, Joël Le Bigot, Normand Brathwaite, Solange Brodeur, Yvan Ducharme, Yvon Dufour, Murielle Dutil, Sophie Faucher, Jacques Fauteux, Jean Lafontaine, Michel Forget, Pierre Gobeil, Marcel Huard, Pauline Lapointe, Marcel Leboeuf, Jean-Denis Leduc, Monique Mercure, Jean-Pierre Saulnier, Robert Séguin, Gilbert Sicotte, Marie Tifo loc. man. Michel Lemieux unit man. Yolaine Rouleau p. sec. Louise Lépine-Ménard p. man. Suzanne Roy line p. Kristian Girard, Paul Maigret assoc. p. Marcel Pothier, Jean-Pierre Rassam admin. Jacques Dick exec. p. Joseph Beaubien, Claude Berri lab. Bellevue Pathé (Québec) p.c. Les Productions Videofilms Ltée (Canada), Renn Productions S.A.R.L. (France) colour 35mm running time 88 min.



● Another chance meeting, another odd couple: Andrée Pelletier and August Schellenberg

John Juliani's **Latitude 55**

Having heard almost nothing about *Latitude 55* before seeing it, I had few expectations upon entering the theater: the title conjured images of the north, but not the far north; of wilderness, but not complete wilderness. As the film unraveled, I found that the expectations which arose in me spontaneously in response to the developing story were being systematically thwarted, which is as it should be with a well-told story.

But by the end of the film I felt that the filmmakers, director John Juliani and co-scenarist Sharon Riis, had taken this technique too far, had, by presenting scenes ever more mysterious and strange, left themselves no fully credible explanation for it all. If a story is to have maximum effect, it must finally relate to my own experience, to reality as I understand it. It is quite possible that one objective of *Latitude 55* was to lead me from the apparently familiar to the palpably mysterious, even mystical, and thus to a new understanding of my own reality, but as the rug of what appeared to be real was continually pulled out from under me I became merely suspicious, and skeptically curious to see how the filmmakers would explain themselves. The final revelation, that the film's events had not been physically real at all, but had taken place in the heroine Wanda's mind, or in some other immaterial limbo before her body gave up the ghost, was, I felt, too easy an explanation for the inconsistencies of the film.

Latitude 55 opens with Wanda (Andrée Pelletier) trying to start her car in a blizzard. The slow pace of this scene indicates that this is no adventure film; there is plenty of time for Wanda to light a flare, wash a few pills down with whiskey, tune in to several radio stations, and then to fall asleep to the sound of Bach's fifth Brandenburg concerto on a portable tape deck. Some time later, Wanda is rescued by a man who carries her back to his isolated cabin, thaws her out, feeds her, and provides accommodation until when-

ever the blizzard might be over. At first Josef (August Schellenberg) seems just a Polish potato farmer, an apparently simple, earthy World War Two refugee, who has a few strange possessions: a metronome for timing his eggs, a storage room containing an ikon and a jester's costume. Wanda is merely puzzled by him - until the time Joseph lies in the grip of a nightmare, thrashing and yelling in Catholic Latin. When he wakes she angrily, tearfully asks, "Who are you?" - the question which is the film's main-spring.

The remainder of the film takes place inside Josef's cabin, does not include any other characters (which, along with the film's primary reliance on language to convey its meaning, suggests that it might have been presented more effectively as a stage play), and consists mainly of questions and answers made by each character to elucidate the other's past. Their motives differ: Wanda tries to solve the puzzle of Josef's true identity, while Josef increasingly assumes the role of mentor or omniscient guru, whose statements are intended to have an enlightening or therapeutic effect. Wanda, we learn, is 30, married to a "man of the cloth," the daughter of an anglophone Albertan and a Québécoise, and works appraising the products of remote Albertan artists to determine which will receive government assistance. Her life, she is made to realize, has been repressive and pretentious. Wanda's and Josef's increased intimacy leads, by way of sex, experimental role-reversal, and cut-aways (to hand-held-camera shots of snowy woods, a native Indian tripod from which dangles some mysterious object, and Josef's face - made up variously as a woman, a Polish officer, and an Indian shaman) to Wanda's final emotional crisis - whether she can reconcile herself with her own life.

Along the way, small, almost technical, details have interfered with the authenticity of the story: the incompletely convincing snowstorm; the nagging indeterminacy of Wanda's accent - West Canadian, edging sometimes into a Quebec twang; the inserts (flashbacks? dream sequences?) of Wanda walking through a picture gallery... Are these ambiguities intended, one wonders, or simply an artefact of in-expertise, of a low budget? By the time they are explained, retroactively, it is

● A curious friendship gets at the end of a long day: Gilles Renaud comforts Jean Yanne



too late; my doubts have prevented my full involvement. It becomes clearer that the filmmakers are not attempting realism, but are creating a filmic or mental un-reality with its own rules, arbitrary and unfamiliar to me, which obviate the need for concrete, realistic explanation and motivation. Seeming discrepancies have made me withdraw my commitment to the characters; they are figments long before the final scene makes this explicit.

John Juliani, perhaps due to his theatrical background, has, in *Latitude 55*, banked on the power of dialogue and strong acting, making little use of the medium's audio-visual capabilities, and Pelletier and Schellenberg have both delivered; I was never bored with the film, only doubtful and sometimes irritated. The script provided a number of scenes interesting in themselves, but did not create a sense of rising drama as the characters' involvement deepened. There are certainly some excellent moments, as when Wanda, after a crying fit, says, "This is gross." I was convinced, and strongly wished that the film's dreamy matrix contained more such gems. It is as though Juliani and Riis made *Latitude 55* in the belief that cinema would free them from the sometimes cumbersome physical reality of the stage, when in fact it seems that film, by its very dreamy intangibility, must cast a particularly strong illusion of concreteness if it is to have our full allegiance. Whatever my complaints, *Latitude 55* is a thoughtful and complex symbolic work of art, and it is gratifying to see a film artist working unabashedly for delicate characterization and thematic depth. But I, for one, would have preferred that Juliani, through film, make his stage the real world.

Alec Lloyd ●

LATITUDE 55 p./d. John Juliani sc. Sharon Riis, Juliani sc. cons. Anne Cameron sc. advisors Sydney Newman, Robert Tessier d.o.p. Robert Ennis, Savas Kalogeras (Montreal), Robert Fresco (Edmonton) 2nd unit photog. John Anderson stills Trig Singer 1st asst. cam. Paul Mitchnik 2nd asst. cam. Michel Lalonde key grip Mal Kibblewhite grip Trig Singer gaffer Randy Tomiuk, Guy Remillard (Montreal), Michel Chohin best boy Bill Montgomery, Claude Derasp (Montreal) cam. Jean-Pierre Lachapelle 1st asst. cam. René Daigle elec. Guy Cousineau, Walter Klymkiv graphic anim. Tom Brydon opt. eff. Susan Gourley, Michel Cleary ed. Barbara Evans asst. ed. Richard J. Martin prelm. ed. Marke Slipp assembly ed. Doris Dyck assts. David Whitehead, Jack Hilton ed. cons. Ray Hall art d. Richard Hudolin asst art d. Jack Hudolin cost. des./ward. Wendy Partridge props Shirley Inget, Marti Wright, Ernie Tomlinson, Bryn Finer make-up Jamie Brown hair Donna Bis const. coord. Dee Embree head carp. Cindy Gordon, Jean Parisien (Montreal) carp. Mike Ellsworth, Don MacKenzie, Mike McQueen sp. eff. Jacques Godbout, Louis Craig (Montreal), Jack Hudolin, Ernie Tomlinson (Edmonton) 1st a.d. Arvi Liimatainen, Marcel Malacket (Montreal) 2nd a.d. J.P. Finn loc. man. Trig Singer post-p. sup. Grace Avrith (Montreal) p. acct./sec. Gloria Singer p. assts. Bill Jamieson, Donna Waring, Patricia Goodwin, Jonathan Leaning, Denise Beaudoin (Montreal) cont. Wendy McLean sp. gopher Alessandro Juliani mus. comp. Victor Davies soundscape Juliani ed. Andre Galbrand asst. ed. Danuta Klis sd. record. Don Paches, Joseph Champagne (Montreal) boom Rick Erickson, Jean-Guy Normandin add. record. Bill McLelland mix. Peter Strobl, Adrian Croil post sync. eff. Ken Pave post sync. dia. André Gagnon titles Louise Overy assoc. p. Tamara Lynch (Montreal) p. man. Harold Tichenor, Grace Gilroy doubles/stand-ins Donna Gruhke, Jan Miller, Basia Broszkowsky, Patricia Goodwin, Gwyneth Walsh sp. skill extras Dan Osbourne, Kerry Jennings, Stephanie Gillespie, Lyn Jackson, Katherine Trowell sp. skill cons. Robert Tessier, John Coeck, Doug Morton, Dennis Woodrow, Bohdan Chomiak, Marilyn Myers, Donna Gruhke, Maria Campbell, Tantoo Martin, Norm Quinzie, Dennis Stewart l.p. Andrée Pelletier, August Schellenberg exec. p. Fil Fraser assoc. exec. p. Donna Wong-Juliani creative cons. Danny Singer co-p. Donna Wong-Juliani labs. Alpha-Cine Service, Vancouver; National Film Board of Canada p.c. Savage God One Film Productions Ltd. dist. Cinema Circle of Canada colour 35mm running time 101 min.

Bruce Elder's **Illuminated Texts**

Canadian film has always had a tendency to vacillate between two extremes. On one hand, there is a preference for films about little people in little situations becoming smaller. On the other, there is the wish to break out into epic forms, to people huge canvases with larger-than-life heroics. From *Back to God's Country* to *Silence of the North*, the stuff of epic just barely eludes us. Eventually, the artist is punished for his hubris.

Bruce Elder's new film, *Illuminated Texts*, seems to exist at both ends of this strange dichotomy. It is, as far as possible, an individual work. Aided by an array of home-made electronics and optical printing devices, Elder pieced together the work in the solitude of his living-room/studio. But, more importantly, the film brings together the many facets of a single perspective. We are never allowed to forget that everything we are seeing is the meditation of one man alone in his room.

The solitary nature of *Illuminated Texts* is brought home to us in the film's opening passage. Elder, portraying a professor (which he is) of mathematics (one of his many avocations), welcomes a student into his apartment. Together, they read their respective roles from Xeroxed scripts of Ionesco's *The Lesson*. The professor becomes increasingly perturbed as the student stumbles over the fundamental concepts of addition and subtraction. Slowly we begin to sympathize with the student. In fact, these building blocks of mathematics are not only illogical but inhuman and, finally, as threatening as the rage they induce. Like the hero in Godard's *Alpha-ville*, we are reminded that we can't know what $2 + 2$ are until we know the meaning of "plus."

It could be said that the remaining three hours of *Illuminated Texts* is about the meaning of "plus." Working out of his dramatic prelude, Elder moves into an epic of the mind. The film becomes alive with a collage of spoken and written texts amid a constantly changing pattern of eclectic imagery.

Our first reaction is to look for a thread with which to bind this sensory bombardment. Elder's previous film, *1857: Fool's Gold*, used its two written and one spoken texts as counterpoints to each other, creating the optical thunderstorm of the film's imagery. The film before that, *The Art of Wordly Wisdom*, used a wall-to-wall monologue as its centerpiece.

Where the earlier films appeared referential and self-reflexive, *Illuminated Texts* seems encyclopedic. The thoughts read by the narrator and the many quotations reproduced as titles represent a lifetime of reading and reflection. But they also present, in microcosm, the span of human thought.

If there is to be an illumination of these texts then it is not enough to reconcile the quotations with one another. Frequently, in his reproduction of thought, Elder returns to the writings of Henry Adams who, 90 years ago, gave us a clue as to the task of this film. Adams saw his generation as perched between two dominant iconographies: the Virgin with its implications of selflessness and purity, and the equally religious ideology epitomized by the electric dynamo.



● Part of a composite still form the concluding section of *Illuminated Texts*

As the first philosopher of the new century, Adams looked for a path that would lead from the obsolete mythology through the dangerous, untested technological world.

Elder's vision looks back from a spot well down that path. The technological complexities of his chosen art are continually acknowledged. The "plus" in this film – the organization of its elements – is work made possible by a computer. Before each sequence, we see Elder's editing instructions typed up on a multi-colored terminal. The implication is that the breath and complexity of the 4000 shots to unfurl before us are made possible only by this mechanized hand.

This said, we are asked to avoid the facile conclusion that the film is a cold, structural exercise meant to distance us from a reading of its individual images. There is, in the film, above all, a passion in the thoughts presented and in the intersection of these thoughts with the film imagery. Recently, Elder declared himself to be "an enemy of Formalism." The narrow-minded pursuit of structure in his films is, to use Elder's term, fool's gold.

Nowhere is this more clearly illustrated than in the last section of *Illuminated Texts*. The computer begins to produce

fragments of words, which become fragments of sentences, which slowly come together as the rendition of concentration camp atrocities. The images – processed Nazi footage, home movies of the reconstructed Auschwitz, perusals of sado-masochistic pornography – work closer and closer to the printed texts. Elder's computer begins to speak – as if it could no longer mutely and passively follow orders. It echoes the horrors.

The last sound of *Illuminated Texts* is the now fully vocal computer singing "Deutschland über Alles." The last image is a tiny portion of Elder's face dominated by a large black rectangle. We have come full circle: from the epic to the solitary, from the expanse of human experience to the filmmaker as screen.

Seth Feldman ●

ILLUMINATED TEXTS d. Bruce Elder asst. d. Anna Pasanow op. print. matte prep. Henry Jesionka asst. mus. Bruno Degazio running time 180 min. dist. The Canadian Filmmaker's Distribution Centre.