

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-

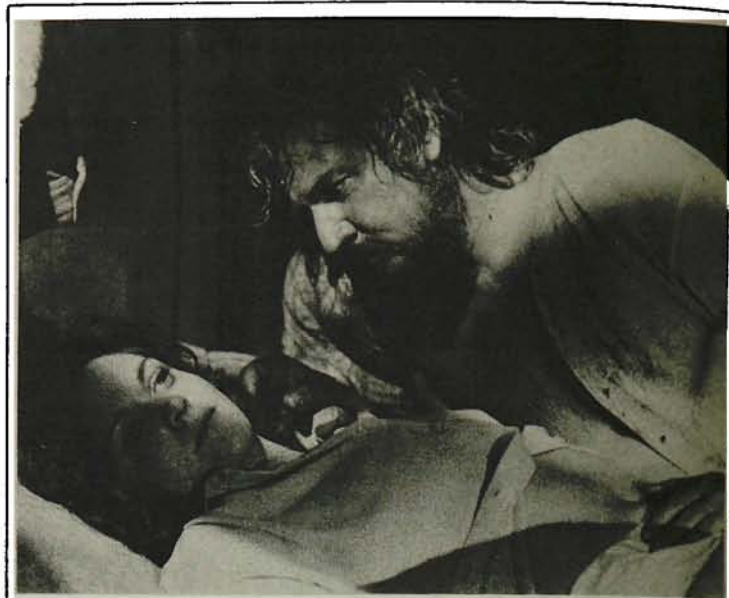
ful, understated grace.

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 Capabanal 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 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 Pavey 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.