

Claude Jutra, the writer-actor-director-survivor from Quebec, has moved gracefully from French language features to English language films for the CBC. He talks with Paul Kelman and share his opinions on the medium and the message.

by Paul Kelman



jutra on the tube

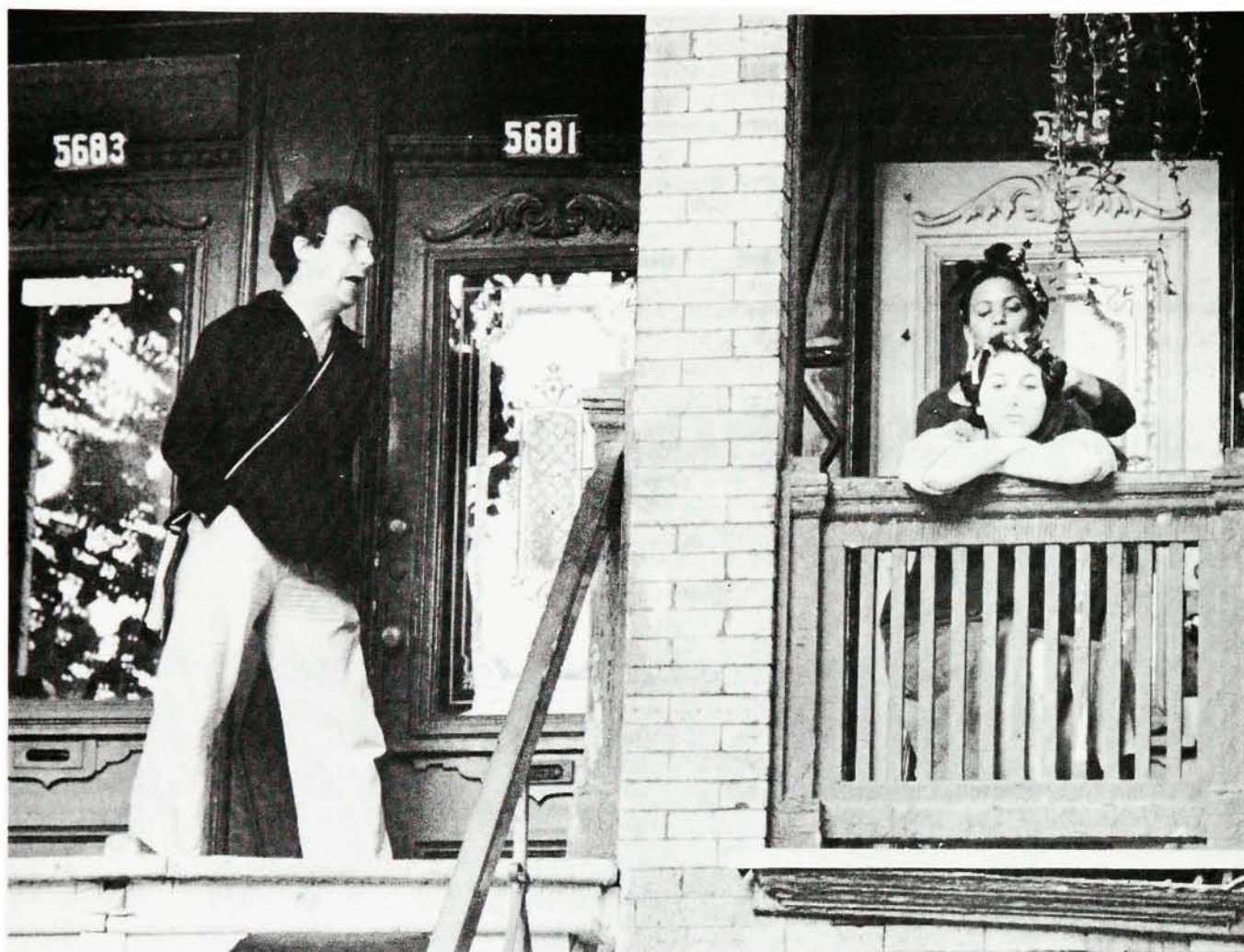


photos by Lois Siegel

"On T.V. I watch the news. When I say I watch, I mean, I turn on the T.V. set with the intention of watching a given program. I watch the news and once in a while a good old French movie or Hollywood movie. Sunday night is very good for that it you are home and you have nothing to do and if you are not too sleepy."

"... as much as T.V. has a wide audience and reaches a great number of people on all levels of society, it is forgotten. The impact is brief as it is intense."

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Jutra in action on *The Street* shoot

Award winning Québécois filmmaker, Claude Jutra, has all the intensity and energy resources attributed to a star. At first, Jutra seemed destined to be born, not a star, but a medical doctor like his scientist father. But, not unlike a modern day Molière, Dr. Jutra was drawn to the theatre and eventually to film, where he has been acting, writing and directing for the past thirty years.

At 49, Jutra is very busy working in television, film, and for the first time in two decades, theatre. His performance in his *Commedia Del Arte* show "Pepperoni" won him critical acclaim in Toronto, not only from the reviewers but also from the theatrical community. One has only to see his fiery

performance on-screen as the priest in *Two Solitudes* to understand his popularity.

Because Jutra is so busy, he has a penchant for time saving devices and general electronic gadgetry. At his Montreal apartment he has everything from an electric notepad to a telephone answering machine that he can operate remotely from anywhere in the world.

In the living room stands a Sony color television set. In this interview, done in Toronto where he was editing a film, Jutra discusses his relationship to television.

Cinema Canada: Was *Ada* your first T.V. film?

Claude Jutra: Film for television, yes. There were a lot of short films that I did for the National Film Board, but they were for both kinds of distribution.

At the beginning of television, there were T.V. series that were Film Board series. There was one obligation... well, there were two. The most objective one was that the length of the film be predetermined to the second. And, all of those on the series were vague documentary themes.

Writer, actor and director, Paul Kelman has been working for the past three years with Toronto's *Passe Muraille Theatre*. He recently spent several months in Montreal with this company where he collaborated on and acted in their highly successful presentation of "Les Maudits Anglais."

One of these series was *Profiles des Paysages*. Each show was a portrait of a person. In some cases it was a celebrity. But, it could also be the portrait of a humble anonymous peasant somewhere.

Who did you profile?

I did two. One was on Felix Leclerc, who was rising very fast internationally as a singer, composer, and lyricist; and I did another one on an old actor named Fred Barry, who died soon after. This was 1960.

In 1959, you made a short film with French filmmaker, François Truffaut. Was that also for television?

No, that was a 35 minute theatrical short. I did have a project — semi-documentary — where young people did the film that they wanted to see about their generation. The Film Board only gave me a television budget, which meant it had to be shot in 16mm. I convinced them to blow it up to 35mm and turn it into a theatrical short. So what started out as a T.V. film ended up as a motion picture, entitled **Wow!** I shot in the summer of '68.

How involved were you, then, with television in the early years between the late fifties and the late sixties?

I was never involved with T.V. as such. We were just eager to make films. Whether they ended up on T.V. — we would rather have seen them in theatres. But, if they had to be for T.V., well, it was OK. with us. A lot of Quebec classics were really made for television, in the sense that the budget partly came from Radio Canada (CBC).

Ada, then, was the first film you made specifically for T.V., two and a half years ago. How did you feel about it?

Marvelous. It was a very fine experience. I'm finishing my fourth film now for television with the CBC. All my films for television were made in English and for the CBC.

Have you been approached by other networks to make films for television?

No. Once, a Montreal company approached me. But it didn't work out. Very soon the project failed.

So, CBC is your only outlet for television film?

I can't say that because I'm not looking for such an outlet. It just happened.

If you're not seeking it, what is your relationship to television?

Practically nil. On T.V., I watch the news. When I say I watch, I mean I turn on the T.V. set with the intention of watching a given program. I watch the news and once in a while a good old Hollywood or French movie. Sunday night is very good for that. If you are home and you have nothing to do and if you are not too sleepy.

As a filmmaker, television is not a medium you find exciting to pursue?

I'm much less interested in television than I am in film or in theatre. But, where do you draw the line? Once again it is all based on that.

I like live television a lot more. I've had a few T.V. series of my own, about motion pictures, where I presented films. I have one going now for Radio Quebec. And I know all my

films end up on T.V. eventually. All films end up on T.V. eventually.

When T.V. began, it changed everybody's life and it changed especially the performing artist's life. In '53 when it arrived in Quebec, I was, for example, already in theatre school. I graduated and later went to another theatre school yet I never appeared on the stage till years later. But, you know, where does T.V. start? Where does it end?

The thing about television is it is instant, it is ephemeral. You get quite a bit of feedback immediately after a program. Exposure, instantaneous. But, as much as it has a wide audience and reaches a great number of people on all levels of society, it is forgotten. The impact is as brief as it is intense.

Are you saying that the theatrical film has a longer lasting involvement due, let us say, to its largeness and to the fact that it is an event, as opposed to the television film with its constant commercial interruptions and the on-off switch?

It doesn't have to be like that. But the usual relationship between people and their T.V. sets makes it like that. There is a way of watching T.V. that makes it really equal to going to the movies.

I very seldom turn on the TV. unless I know what is on. I consult the "T.V. Guide." And, if, alone, in a good T.V. room, with a good T.V. set, color, cable, then it is really just as intense an experience as is going to the movie theatre.

How does filming for television compare to filming a theatrical feature?

No difference. I make no concession. I think it is ridiculous to quote, unquote, "shoot for television."

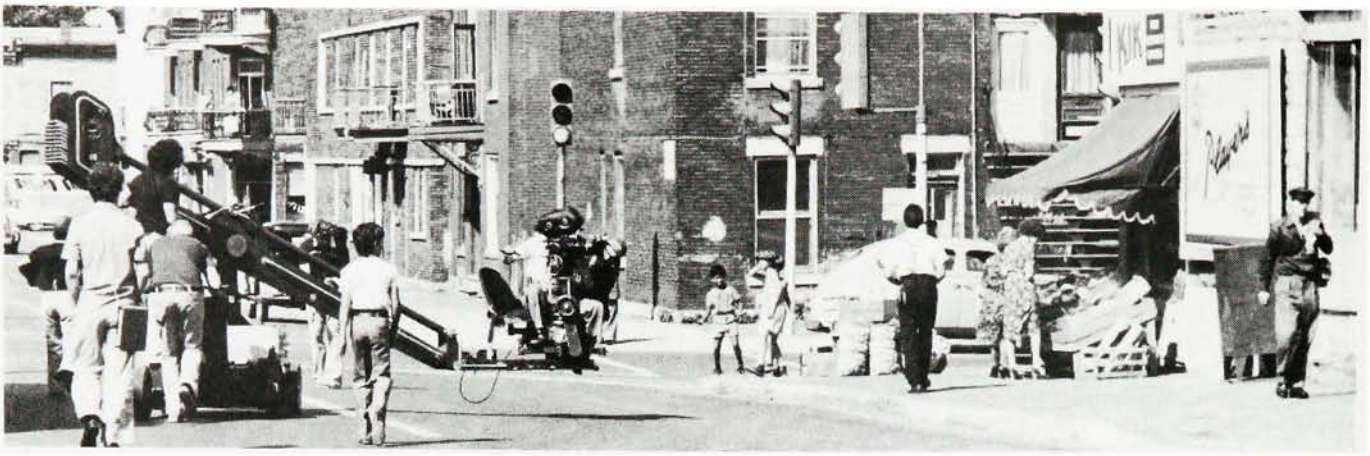
There is no difference in technique?

If I am shooting on film, it is exactly the same. If you are doing a live show or a variety show, then, you have got all



Above, at the dance while, below, the real street people watch the actors





Setting up on St Urbain's St.

those fantastic electronic gadgets, color keying, electronic zoom, reversal of polarity and all those cameras going simultaneously from all angles. Then it is different. But, if you are shooting on film, especially on location, there is no difference.

Aren't you affected by other factors, such as a more limited rehearsal time?

The budget is smaller. It is like doing a low budget movie. The money problem has nothing to do with T.V. T.V. budgets are smaller than some motion picture budgets. But, I don't think for *Ada* or *Dreamspeaker*, the budget differed very much from those which I had to make other films. In the movies we spend a lot more on stock.

There is no difference in directing a performer on film for T.V. or a theatrical short.

None.

What about the often criticized over use of the –

Close-up! Nonsense! I make no difference. I don't give it a thought.

*In *Ada* you were working mostly with stage actors, Ann Anglin, Janet Amos?*

Ann Anglin, Janet Amos, Connie Kaldos, David Fox, Miles Potter, Kay Hawtrey, Sabine Maydell, Jayne Eastwood and of course Kate Reid. Marvelous performers, all of them. For many of these people it was their first film. But if you are working with artists of that calibre, what they have to do to merge theatre with film, they learn in minutes, and it happens.

*The role of *Ada* brought Anne Anglin the nomination for Best Performance along with Donald Sutherland for his portrayal of the title role in CBC's *Bethune*. Sutherland won. Any comment?*

In the Oscars for example, people tend to vote for the films where more is at stake financially and if a film is successful then success breeds success. So, they tend to vote for the popular films.

In Canada those factors don't exist because films don't make a profit anyway. We don't have big stars. We don't have enormous budgets. We don't have to oversell because a product is so huge.

Sutherland is an international artist and star. He was working with Fellini that year. He didn't need the award.

It is for Canadians to appropriate and to keep him here, to say, look this man is a top star and he is Canadian.

Doesn't that discourage the building of a following for the performer working here? Hence, a star-system of our own?

Stardom. It is a youthful dream. Everybody has that dream, more or less when they are young. It is a question of working. Finding things to do that are worthwhile and that you like to do.

My real dream, which I still nurture, would be to make one film a year in Quebec. But, that happens to be impossible. I would very much like to make an American movie these days.

Aren't you considered one of the most well-known film directors from Canada?

I don't want to answer that. I think it is a ridiculous question. There are many well known Quebec directors. Many are known better internationally than I am.

And within the country?

I don't think about it.

We find that odd since there are very few directors who enjoy a popularity with people outside the industry. Particularly in view of the fact that you are also a screen actor.

You see this bag? I just bought it in a junk shop. I paid for it with a credit card and the man said, "Oh, are you *the* Mr. Claude Jutra?" So, I blushed and turned away. But, there he was. I'm always surprised and pleased, to be frank.

But do you think I will evaluate myself against others, as to who has the most points? It is of very little interest. It is like the best seller list or the hit parade. Are you going up? Or are you going down? I make films. I am looking for partners who will help me and provide good scripts and budgets to make films.

I haven't made a feature since 1975. It took me five years to make another film after *A Tout Prendre*.

In terms of what you want to do, is television, then, a bread and butter context?

I never compromise on the content or the nature of what I am doing. I'm just as proud of *Mon Oncle Antoine* as I am of *Dreamspeaker*, as I am of any feature I've made or will make in the future.