Jean Beaudin’s Mario

Jean Beaudin’s (CORDELIA, J.A. MARTIN PHOTOGRAPHE) latest work has the ethereal quality of a legend. From the moment its first image bursts onto the screen, you know that, like the evanescent stuff of dreams, what you see will soon quietly disappear in the recesses of your mind, leaving a fleeting, if recurring, impression.

Mario (Xavier Norman Petermann) is a 10-year-old boy who doesn’t talk. Whether he is mute or autistic is of little concern. The fact is, Mario does not communicate or feel empathy for anyone except his 18-year-old brother, Simon (Frances Reddy), who populates his dreamworld with visions of past heroes and revolutions of the battles they waged. As the film opens, the two boys, after having reversed Louis Riel’s defeat and retold the battles of the Aztecs, have turned into isolated soldiers coming to civilize the Gauls.

Mario and his brother live with their parents (Murielle Dutil, Jacques Godin) on the picturesque Île-de-la-Madeleine. It is an isolated existence, and in their isolation the boys have ample time to live out a fantasy existence as rich in their acting out as it is rich to our eyes — in symbols.

But with the summer season comes tourists, including Hélène, a beautiful young girl who casts Simon under her spell. She draws him into the real world, away from his brother and their dreamworld games. Left alone with only his stuffed coyote for a companion, Mario retreats even further into his imaginary world. Incapable of venting his anguish and frustration, he becomes destructive, using the other children on the island as scapegoats. Although vaguely aware of his brother’s desolation, Simon refuses to acknowledge it; and as long as Hélène is there, he has other interests.

With summer’s end and the departure of Hélène, however, he turns back to his brother... but it is too late: the games have been destroyed. Realizing the ephemeral quality of their world, the brothers reluctantly turn away from it in a final search for the absolute.

While the social worker who had caught wind of Mario’s plight is on the case, trying to take the boy away, Simon scripts a different farewell scenario.

In the end, it is Mario who guides his brother to what seems to be a familiar spot by the ocean... their final escape. In an ambiguous final scene, an explosion occurs: the boys had always imagined going out with a bang, and this seems to be their destiny.

This sad little tale is beautifully told, with a visual intensity and force reminiscent of the magic realism of Prat and Coville. The bleak and blunt visuals add an ethereal dimension to what is really a tale of misery on mould. The acting ranges from the believable to the superb, with the highest marks going to the parents who manage to bring out all the dignity and the sadness of their minor characters. Unfortunately, Nathalie Chalifour (Hélène) breaks the spell her presence creates on the screen every time she opens her mouth, and one wishes she had been cast in Mario’s mute role.

Although Jean Beaudin claims that Mario is not so much a story of people and nature, but rather about children, games and real and imaginary worlds, the characters of this film are essentially born of the landscape around them. Mario in particular is a product of sand and sea and wind. The brothers’ deaths only returns them to what is theirs.

But once the films has receded in the mind’s eye, the way a summer romance fades from the heart, what are we left with? As the beauty of its camera work and François Dompierre’s score dominate the film as much or even more than the poignancy of the story, one wonders if the film is a little more than another moment in the seemingly unending saga of Quebec angst-on-film. And indeed one wonders if relating the theme of alienation to its most simple form, Quebec filmmakers are not evading the complexity of a more complex composition.

Josée Miville-Dechêne

MARIO


There have been several previous screen productions concerned with Marshall McLuhan and his ideas, but it is fitting, four years after his death and in the relevant year of 1984, to have yet another look at the man who devoted his life to understanding media. This particular program — telecast by CBC on Oct. 18 — takes a closer look at the man, and to a certain extent McLuhanism, mainly because it is produced and directed by his daughter: Stephanie McLuhan. She has wisely used, rather than masked, the intimacy of her knowledge to inform this production.

The structure of the program is a fascinating interweaving of the public and private sides of McLuhan. The former is conveyed through a remarkable sequence of television appearances by McLuhan on various talk-shows — Stephanie McLuhan says she called 118 hours of archival tapes to make her selection — in which his aportunities open. As for the new viewers new to McLuhan’s thinking, these sequences may spark curiosity and intrigue, sending

November 1984 — Cinema Canada/25
Three short films this month, including two seen at Toronto's Festival of Film in September.

**TRASH TO TREASURE**

The prosaic garbage truck is centre screen, there’s a drum beat or two, and then into the titles. An interesting opening to a look at Ana Teresa Novaes, a talented and energetic artist who arrived in Canada. Looked around, and decided to teach kids an “alternative language through puppets.” Combining her worry about technology and “what is left behind” with her considerable creative talents, she hit upon a kids’ workshop utilizing “usable garbage.”

Ana Teresa Novaes has found a way to link children and seniors with the huge amounts of trash discarded by today’s society. She says, quite rightly, that old people are the best collectors — they keep everything — and she encourages them to collect for her and her kids.

From plastic bottles, egg cartons, paper tubes — almost everything is usable. She motivates the children in her workshop to use the emotions inside them. They invent uniquely weird puppets, cutting, gluing and experimenting, and talking about creating with “stuff” that isn’t new. Novaes shows them how to bring the life to the puppets with movement and dialogue in their own words. The kids admit to being scared at first, but progress rapidly to enjoyment and showmanship, and stage entertainments for local audiences including the seniors who gather the discarded material for them.

Ana Teresa Novaes has a vivid and delightful personality that shines out of the screen, and the kids are fun too. However, the film is rather awkwardly put together, with a plethora of information and effects designed together — a collage of family photographs recollating the artist’s Brazilian background: traveling matte — old people collecting; the workshop and puppetry; the puppet performance — but hey! let’s not come down too hard on Steven Demo. He’s obviously talented and in love with his chosen craft, so one looks forward to more of his films.

**REVOLUTION**

An animated piece involving first of all, a triangle lazily revolving, and then joined by another shape. And that’s all it really is, lots of shapes having a good time. Rough round the edges, a sort of anifilm, but curiously, and restless. As the miscellaneous shapes metamorphose, and spin and turn in space, it could be interpreted as being about making decisions, choosing the right path or, again, any other thing the viewer wished to inject into or impose upon it. Of course, what is anathema to some is paradise to others...

A film by Daniel Sokolowski, 1984. 16mm. running time: 10 mins. Availability: (613) 728-9860.

**LAS ARADAS**

In many ways, this is a non-film. The eye feeds on peaceful visuals of trickling streams, rivulets of water over rocks, a mountain path — but the female voice-over is recounting in graphic detail the 1980 Sumpil River slaughter, when an entire village was massacred by San Salvadoran soldiers. A deeply disturbing emotional experience, considerably heightened by the simple structure of the film.

A film by Janice Lundsman, 1984. 16mm. running time: 6 mins. Dist.: Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre, 299 Queen St. W., Toronto M5V 1Z9 (416) 553-1808.