If feminism in the '60s consisted, in part, of a rejection of mothers and their roles in the social structure, the '80s have brought a return to the mother, if not to the domestic and familial values of the '40s and the '50s.

Anne Trister, Léa Pool's second feature, seems to be concerned with this new feminism position which echoes the concerns of other feminist films of the '80s, such as The Bad Sister, made for British television by Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, and Kay Armatage's Storytelling. These films try to find some kind of alternative position for women that is outside the classical Oedipal text. Much of this work is based on the post-Lacanian psychoanalytic theory of such French feminists as Cixous, Irigaray, Lemoine-Luccioni and Montrelay, concerned with the relationship to the mother, the return to the mother and the need to accept the mother if one is to produce a feminist discourse outside the patriarchal Oedipal cycle.

The first shot in Anne Trister is that of a young woman's naked back, she's lying on a bed and crying. The camera pulls back and we see an old woman dressed in black sitting rigidly on a bench a few feet in front of her. She does not move to comfort her. The next shot is of the young woman walking around in a desolate, half-built building whose grey walls are covered in graffiti. We hear the sounds of water and wind. On one wall is scribbled, "Adam and Eve". On another there is a huge drawing of a naked man and woman and two small children. As she walks around this labyrinth-like structure we see another graffiti of a raised fist, some written obscenities, and the words "La loi" appear on another wall. Cut to her face as she walks forward. A woman's voice is raised in the Hebrew prayer for the dead and we see a corpse, wrapped in a white sheet, being carried through the desert on a stretcher. A funeral procession follows, and the young woman is one of the mourners. The titles appear over a close-up of moving sand; the sound of water is heard.

The opening scenes are highly dramatic and their lack of a realistic context makes them seem to be symbolic. Of what, we do not know yet.

A hand paints a red line on a window, the camera pulls back and we are with the young woman in an art class. From this point on the film takes a realistic turn and the emphasis is on the psychological drama of the young woman, Anne Trister, trying to come to terms with her father's death. She decides to leave her lover and go to Montreal. At the airport, her mother (the woman who was watching her cry) speaks to Anne's lover Pierre: of her daughter's despair over the death of her father and how the mother was never able to give her daughter the love she needed.

Loud, dramatic music now and a jerky pan over the skyline of Montreal. It's Anne's point-of-view. She has arrived in Montreal and here she looks up into the sky. One is an old Jewish man who runs a café, a friend of her father. As they sit talking about her father (in a conventionally shot scene consisting of close-ups and shot-counter-shot editing) there is a sudden cut from Anne's face to a video-screen shot of a little girl bandaging a teddy bear. She is being treated by a therapist at the Sainte Justine Hospital. The woman therapist, Alix, is the other person who Anne looks up. She moves into her apartment and the continual and rather awkward cross cutting between Anne and the child, Sara, whom Alix is treating makes it obvious that we are to draw a parallel between their two cases.

One of the virtues of the film is that it is rather hard to tell what will be the outcome of this plot. But one of the disappointments is that eventually we realize that this is a conventional dramatic story, with its usual narrative tension and climax. However, here the roles have been switched and instead of the tension between a man and a woman leading to the climax of their eventual coupling, we find ourselves involved in a love story between two women. One begins to wonder if we'll be subjected to the usual titillating, exploitative scenes of lesbian love-making. Fortunately the film avoids this and Louise Marleau's performance as the therapist caught between her male lover and her concern for and attraction to the young painter is both believably and sensitively played. Albane Guilhe portrays Anne as a lost, young woman looking for herself in her art and in her relationship to another woman. Although she's believable enough in the role of a sensitive girl in need of the care and affection of an older woman, it is hard to see her as conscious or sophisticated enough to create the complex art work which becomes the central symbol of the film.

Alix, her father's friend, and an obvious father substitute, gives her studio. This is hard to see her as conscious or sophisticated enough to create the complex art work which becomes the central symbol of the film.

La femme de l'hôtel (1984) also deals with the parallels between the artist and the neurotic personality. But in that film there is no separation between the real world and that of the artist's imagination. A soft, muted light echoes the muted lives of the women, and the deadness of the city in winter becomes an ever-expanding metaphor for the deadness and alienation that they struggle with. The inter-relationship of the artist/filmmaker and the neurotic woman who resembles her fictive character is carefully woven out of chance encounters. In other words the inner and outer realities of the film mirror and echo each other in a more subtle and evocative way than in Anne Trister where the continual straight cuts between Anne and her counterpart, Sara, are jarring and heavy-handed. Except for some wintry exteriors, the physical reality of the city does not seem to be used in any metaphorical or even mood-inducing manner. Alix's apartment, with its soft greys and blues and its multiple windows that look out into the real world, does seem to function as an alternative symbol to the mausoleum-like studio. But, like most of the other locales in the film, it looks like a stage set and I ended up feeling that I was watching a play filmed for television.
The filmmaker might have also felt a lack because her use of music becomes over-emphatic, making sure we understand the dramatic emotions involved in her story and threatening to turn the whole thing into a melodrama. When the chorus starts plunking at every kiss of the climactic scene I definitely squirmed in my seat. The non-diegetic use of the song “La main gauche” seemed rather excessive. Especially as its message was already present in the film.

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Thus Anne Trister can be seen as a re-working of the Oedipus myth in feminist terms. The fall of Oedipus, as a tragic hero, is brought about not because in his hubris he kills his father and marries his mother. The girl-child experiences her first erotic attachment to the mother but in working out the conflicting emotions of love and hate, the character she rejects the mother and transfers her eroticism to the father. However, this entails a rejection of duality with her own sex and an acceptance of her role as secondary to that of the father. She becomes a fatal self-rejection and more complex characterizations in the two leads. Earlier, the film, with its heroes does not remain static, trapped in their neurosis, but achieve both transformation and growth.

Mary Alemany-Galway

Yves Simonoue's
Pouvoir intime

A black screen: the darkness oppressive as the gritty sound track intensifies itself into consciousness, then the story slowly unfurls with deliberate care. Now a unique visual style washes over the screen: the first characters you see are in eerily beautiful shadows reminiscent of the black and white classics of the thriller genre, yet made prosaic by a strange new voice. As further characters are introduced, each with a different and spectacular cinematic device (overhead travels, back to cameras, low-angle backward, etc.) you feel them gaining a physical existence with a control of effects that belies this director's youth, but not his talent.

By the time the audience cries out in unison at the first surprise fright, we're hooked.

It is, indeed, at the visceral level, where thrillers should act, that Pouvoir intime works so astonishingly well. Direction. And Genic-winner Yves Simonoue, 30, manipulates tension and suspense using a triple-whammy combination of masterful pacing, original visual style and a surprisingly effective soundtrack. Without resorting either to the genre's typical gore and car-chases, or to stereotype over-kil, he tells his story — in fact, grounds it into you. Pouvoir intime contains scenes that reverberate in one's consciousness days after viewing, as a distant echo of some forgotten horror. We live with these characters, their courage, their fears, their limitations, their failures. And we curse their deaths.

The premise of the story, the conflict between power and the lack of it, between control and being controlled, is transmitted through the vehicle of a hooked security truck robbery. The driver, an ex-con, the son of one of them and the girlfriend of the other, acts under the illusion that they are working for themselves, for Big Money. Actually they are working for the hands of a powerful and mysterious civil servant and his seedy go-between who are after secret documents inside the truck in question. Only the ring-leader, Theo, is aware of the game.

Through an unforeseen turn of events, a guard is left still alive inside truck after it has been successfully taken and hidden in an old theatrical warehouse. The plan for a quick getaway is foiled by the guard, who makes a courageous stand inside the locked vehicle despite every attempt the thieves make to dismiss him. The torque of each opposion as they strive against each other with courage, determination, violence and the threat of slow death makes for gritty scenes of incredible, blood-curdling power. This cinematic rendition of conflict is its purest, abject form, implicit and realistic, is among the strongest I've ever experienced in any Canadian film.

The script, co-written by Simonoue and actor Pierre Curzi, handles action, fear and tension better than it does the dialogue, which is adequate but unre- markable. True to the genre, all the female characters are sequenced flat compared to their male counterparts. In an unsuccessful effort to add flesh to the Roxanne character (played by Marie Tifo), the script operates a stereotype-in-reverse. Instead of a cheap, squeaky-voiced blond bombshell, we have a plain, androgynous and square-faced woman who wanders into either men's or women's bathrooms, indifferently whose existence seems ill-defined and unrealistic.

The characters form the spectrum of the thriller format: 1) the manipulating bad guys, first laid in black and white shadows but moving on to artificial lighting, which, much like their interests, are preoccupied with exteriorreet, modern, superficial desires, 2) the anti- heroic thieves, true "beautiful losers" of Canadian lore, who wear their humaneness as a badge of glory and die with tears in their eyes; 3) the honest, good guy, security guard Martial, terrified, 4) the victim who is the ring-leader, Theo, a middle-aged man in a grey suit.