

Michel Juliani's
Instantanés

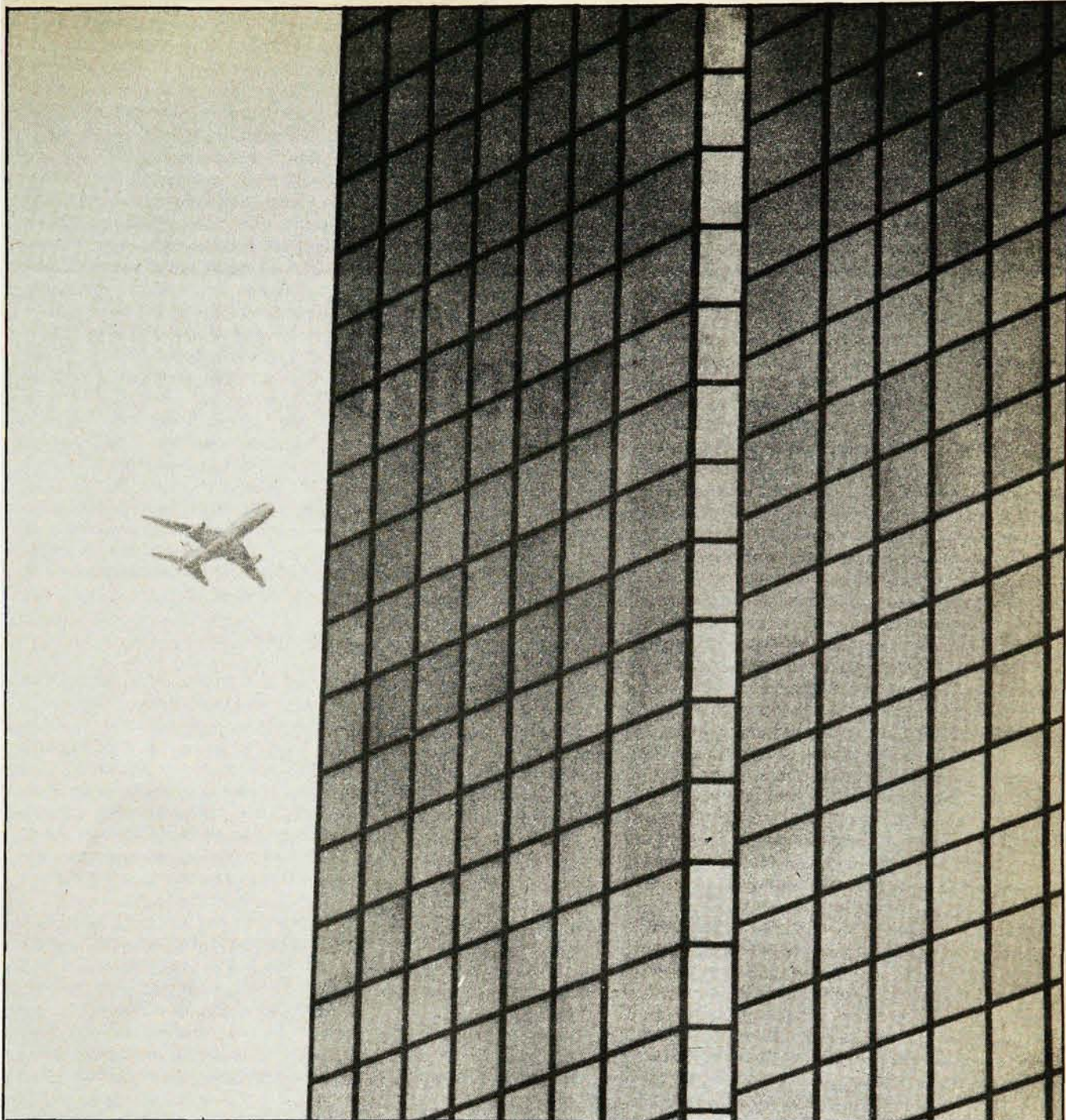
The photographic *instantané*, according to one recent definition, is an observation of the urban mix as it looks in everyday flux. And that definition could serve as a description of Montreal film editor Michel Juliani's first **auterial** feature (director, producer editor, scripwriter, etc.) – though one would have to qualify this somewhat since Juliani's film, as a film, is as much in flux as the mix of five Montreal artists whose everyday life it portrays.

Some of the flux can be accounted for by the fact that Juliani's is a feature almost out of nowhere. That is to say, **Instantanés** is a film made with minimal institutional support – an NFB development (PAPFFS) grant for some of the negative and some of the sound, and post-production through the good offices of Montreal production house LaGauchet. In other words, it's your typical Canadian personal feature and so shares in both the strengths and the weaknesses of that tradition.

And the positive side of that tradition lies in 1) its rejection of institutionalized cinema (where an already narrow view of cinema is often reinforced by the committee process of decision-making) and 2) its privileging of the validity of the insights of the individual creative artist. The negative side, by its indifference to the possibility of improvements at the general level of cinematic development, tends to be a permanent condition of re-inventing the wheel. And, in this perspective, **Instantanés** steers a fairly unsteady course between the two poles.

Upfront in its belief in film-as-art (the film's epigraph states that there are artists who say they are artists but aren't, while there are real artists whose work testifies to the truth of Art), **Instantanés** consists of five "chapters," plus an epilogue, about five artists: a writer, a musician, a photographer, and two painters (one male, one female).

What is an artist? According to **Instantanés**, a person like any other (with all the problems, emotional and financial, that entails) except for a greater obsessional disposition expressed (often with great difficulty) via an artistic medium: words on paper, drawing, painting, photographic composition and developing, etc. Each of **Instantanés'** artists (all of them unfortunately too young, in their early to mid-twenties) teeters before the creative abyss: the writer can't write, the photographer can't photograph, the musician can only improvise. The painters, though, do manage to paint. Or because a painting is visibly representational, it can be filmed as an object-in-itself, it is there, and does not require of a film to do much more than shoot it; the film doesn't have to construct a psychology of creativity. As a result of this over-reliance on the created thing, **Instantanés**, in its portrayal of the writer for example, can only suggest an inexplicit torment. This is not perhaps as much the filmmaker's fault as it is a limitation



• **Instantanés**: What is the place of the artist in the modern technoscape?

of the film medium itself: I can't think of a single film ever made, here or abroad, that has been adequately able to convey what it means to be a writer.

Yet in terms of what psychology the film does articulate, the most interesting portrait is that of the photographer, not because the film is particularly insightful about photography, but because this particular photographer has a heavy cocaine habit. **Instantanés**, in a truly lovely sequence of dancing metal figures, manages to express, seemingly with great accuracy, the emotional coldness and remoteness of addiction.

Another fine sequence involves the male painter who is haunted by nuclear fears. In a powerful use of sound and rapid montage of stills, **Instantanés** creates an apocalyptic moment of considerable obsessional force.

Unfortunately, **Instantanés** treatment of the female artist is merely banal (except for her completed paintings at the end of the film). It's off with her clothes as fast as possible and straight into the slow-motion, bouncing titties scene.

Nevertheless, despite their chronic money-worries, emotional hang-ups, etc., the painters succeed in completing their work for the group show that is

the epilogue of the film. Somehow art has happened, and the proof is in the artworks on the gallery walls. Art presumably redeems life; life, meanwhile, continues to flow along its absurd daily course.

Yet what is curious about **Instantanés** is that if one is disappointed it isn't a better film, it's not as bad as all that either. Be it the coke-figurines or the party scene of the epilogue, **Instantanés** contains some effective camerawork and editing. If the locations are mainly interiors, the male artist's loft with its eating platform and barbed-wire reading-corner is suitably bizarre. The film's considerable use of stills, if eventually overdone, inscribes it within the venerable Canadian tradition of using still photography in film. On the negative side, though, the sound is of appallingly bad quality; the music a jumbled medley from electronic to easy listening; the script suffers from not having enough to say; and the acting seems non-existent.

Even so, for all this formlessness, **Instantanés** does manage to convey something of the difficult authenticity required of artistic pursuits in that lofty little world of the St. Lawrence Main. In this sense, **Instantanés** also speaks

about the wretchedness of the artist (that is, someone who, by being 'creative', is essentially useless) in a larger environment whose emptiness is filled with meaningless purposivity.

Finally (and perhaps above all), **Instantanés** is a statement less in itself as a film than of its *auteur's* singleminded determination to make this film no matter what and whom. Perhaps the next time round – and Juliani definitely deserves a next time round – he'll get a little more support in his filmmaking from the official cinematic institution which, despite **Instantanés'** would-be challenge, always wins in the end – out of sheer inertia.

Michael Dorland •

INSTANTANES p/d/sc/ed. Michel Juliani cam. André Martin add. cam. Raymond Gravelle stills Robert Delisle, Michel Juliani sd. Franck Le Flaguais elect. David Poulin make-up Alba Kasfabijj asst. cam. Germañ Gutierrez, Louis Létienné mus. Mathieu Léger p. asst. Dominique Juliani mus. mix/sd. efx. André Dussault (Dusson synchro) mix. Joey Galimi (CinéLume) lab. NFB/BelleVue Pathé paintings Lisette Legault, Roger Pilon, Pierre Castagner stained glass Mario Bouliane l.p. Lisette Legault, Roger Pilon, Paul Carrière, Mario Bouliane, Pierre Castagner, Michèle Poirier, Monique Lalancette, France Morais, Hélène Nadeau, Pierre Legault, *The producer would like to acknowledge the assistance of Les Productions LaGauchet in completing this film.* col. / b & w, 16mm, running time: 75 mins. dist. Expédifilm Ltée (514) 288-4413.