



to: Stephen Chesley

Laurinda Hartt

Richard Dreyfuss . . .

so much more than Duddy

Abrasive, pushy, cocky like Duddy Kravitz? Perhaps, but there's so much *more* to Richard Dreyfuss that makes him a fascinating individual quite unique from any one character he has portrayed on stage, screen or television. Even when Dreyfuss is relatively relaxed and candid, his amazing personal energy and sense of total commitment are always there making his words and ideas seem blunt, final and inflexible. But then there's that keen sense of irony, that certain wit, that makes his performance as Duddy a special pleasure and his off-screen personality so peculiarly charming. His sudden smiles and infectiously humorous laugh break through the aggressively confident exterior to reveal a young man of intelligence and self-effacing good humour. He unabashedly extols his own virtues but is the first to point out his faults and to make fun of his own excesses. He is a person of strong convictions yet those convictions will be reshaped in the face of logical reasoned argument. A Duddy Kravitz wouldn't have the confidence or the courage to expose his vulnerability in any way and so openly. The actor who made a basically disagreeable character like Duddy come alive as a human being worth caring about, is an actor and individual worth more attention than that granted by the current fascination with how much Duddy there is in Richard Dreyfuss. We all possess a bit of Duddy's obsessive aggression; unlike most, Dreyfuss isn't afraid to admit it or to come to terms with it.

The following are excerpts from George Csaba Koller's interview with Richard Dreyfuss just prior to the Montreal world premiere of Ted Kotcheff's film, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*.

Have you been to Canada before or is this the first time?

Well, just to shoot the film. That was the first time.

Were you familiar with Richler's work before?

No, I didn't know him at all until I got the role and then, on the train coming up here, I read a lot of it. I like *Duddy Kravitz* the best so far, except for *St. Urbain's Horseman* which is terrific. A great book . . . Alan Pakula is preparing a film of it, that's what I heard. And I don't know how successful it will be. I hope it's going to match *Duddy Kravitz*. (Dreyfuss laughs softly.) It would be nice if they say (he affects a low, overly solemn voice) "Well, it's got a lot to come up to Ted Kotcheff's *Duddy Kravitz*." Of course, they may say (in another, more flippant dramatic voice), "It's *easy* to beat Ted Kotcheff's *Duddy Kravitz* . . ." I was doing that to Ted all during the filming. Every time he would say "Oh, that doesn't matter" about something, I would say (in the pretentious tone of an imaginary critic): "It is the *little* things that count in filmmaking and in Ted Kotcheff's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* that opened last night, once again we see a director that overlooks the essential . . ." And Ted would go, "*Don't do that!!*" (He laughs.)

Fantastic. . . The critics seem to be unanimous in their recognition of your talents. Is that going to your head at all? You know, comparing you at 26 with Newman or whoever?

Who is doing that? Well, first of all, critics have *not* been unanimous about my talent. You know what I mean? I've gotten *really* bad reviews . . . I once got a review that said: "The one unfortunate note in this film is young Richard Dreyfuss." Another review said: "You can't tell one gang member from another although Richard Dreyfuss draws extra attention to himself by overdoing it as usual." A lot of people do *not* think I'm God's gift to the theatre, so, no it hasn't gone to my head. Also — and I think this is true of everyone — when you're good and you *know* you're good, it doesn't matter what people say. You want affirmation of course but you can still get off without it. And when you're bad, just

because someone says you're good, it doesn't make you feel any better, *really*. I've been *bad* in plays and I've gotten good reviews and it didn't make me feel any better. I've been good and I've been the first to say I'm good. And then it's really nice to have people say "Yes, you are good" but if they say you're bad, they're just wrong that's all.

Duddy was artistically the hardest part I've ever done and I don't have any one opinion about my work in it. I'm 50/50 about it – I think fifty per cent is good and fifty per cent is not. Or 70/30 or 60/40 – I don't know what the percentage is. So that's how I'm going to feel about it. I'm glad that Martin Malina (The Montreal Star) said that I was great, but that doesn't change my attitude about the scenes I didn't like.

Can you gauge the audience reaction when you're on stage?

Yes. . . . I have a very visceral reaction to being on stage. . . . I don't mean to be crude, I mean I *wish* there were other words to use, but when you're working on stage and you're doing it just right whatever the part is and no matter how small, you're fucking an entire room of people – that's what you're doing. I mean you have five or six or nine hundred people making love



with you, whether you're playing a bad guy or a good guy or a comedic part or a dramatic part. If you're good you can just *feel* it in the air and you know that no matter where you are on stage, they're looking at you and you're doing it right and it works for them. And when it doesn't, you just feel that there are these bodies out there that are just putting up with what you're doing. And you think, "I want this evening to be over and I want to go home and I want to watch television and eat myself into a *stupor*." (He laughs.)

What do you substitute for that interaction when you're in front of the motion picture camera?

Well, I haven't had that much experience so I can't say yet. It's bothered me. It bothered me a great deal on **Duddy Kravitz**. . . . I did **American Graffiti** and in that film the character's perception of things is so much like mine, and my experience in high school was so similar to his, that I was totally comfortable playing him because I really felt like I was just exposing myself in front of eighteen million people, that I was really just saying, "This is Rick Dreyfuss, good evening, how are you?" But Duddy Kravitz was *not* me, although I have

Duddy in me. Duddy was work, hard work and it was very rare that I really got off on it. There was a lot of tension on the set that contributed to it, but the one day that I loved was the last day unfortunately. Not because it was over either, but the work I did on the last day of shooting was my favourite work on the film. It was all the Calder scenes – all the billiard stuff and the conversation with Calder. That one scene with Calder is my favourite scene in terms of acting, in how I enjoyed doing it. That scene is not that interesting to the audience, but to me, I said, "Let's do this forever, man! I could shoot this scene every which way! You want me to change it? (snaps his fingers) I'll change it. You want me to do this? I'll do this." And I loved it.

Does that have something to do with the political content because you were telling off the WASP establishment?

No. I think it has to do with the fact that I work on an energy level, unfortunately, and that scene fit the metabolism that I am. That was the scene where I was sitting down like I am now and talking like this. . . . I wasn't standing up and driving hard and I wasn't sitting down and being cool. I was being my own rhythm. And I loved the way the scene was written. Duddy's got that great speech. Calder says, "I want to be fair." And Duddy says, "Oh yeah, fair. So your daughter gets expelled and she comes home to this Yankee Stadium here, and Andy Simpson gets off and he sits on his ass until his father croaks and he inherits enough money to choke ten horses." I love that speech. Actually, what you said is not so far off. It has nothing to do with telling off the WASP establishment, but we've all wanted to tell off *somebody* you know, and to tell off the power structure that be. I don't agree with Duddy that the power structure is Gentile or Christian, but I would like to go up to Richard Nixon and say, "Asshole!" So, in that way, yes, I got off on that.

There's a great debate in this country about bringing in talent from the outside or using Canadian talent.

If it's an art form and if I'm an artist – a director or a writer or an actor with power – I'd hire the best person I could find for the job and if anyone told me I had to hire a member of a certain ethnic group, nationality or religious group, I'd say, "Fuck you!" . . . It's an art not a business.

Yes, but you were talking about unions. There is a union of actors up here – ACTRA – which is trying to protect its membership.

Yes, you have to protect your membership the way England protects its membership and, hopefully, the way the American union would. But if I was a director in the United States and the best actor was Canadian, I'd hire him and I wouldn't care what the union said to me. I'm talking about the art of it. As much as possible I would use the American and you should use the Canadian but not to the detriment of the piece, not to where you have to settle for something you don't want.

O.K. but you must realize that features costing over half a million dollars are put together as packages and they are a business venture whether you like it or not – they're not just an artistic venture. So when a Canadian producer puts together a package he's going to keep in mind that he could use a "name", he could use a Richard Dreyfuss or God knows who – John Bassett was once talking about using Richard Harris to play Louis Riel. And the name has a considerable amount of talent attached to it but still there's a package and a business aspect. . . .

Well, it depends on the given situation. There are situations where the name from Britain is going to do it and fuck the union. There are other situations where you say, "This actor is the best – he's an unknown but I'll make him famous in this part, I'll make him box office for the film." That can happen. It just depends on the individual thing. I can't give you a blanket answer. I want to protect the labour, working class too in that sense, but I would not let it interfere with the film

artistically. Now, if you're talking about box office . . . I would ask, "Are there *any* box office Canadians? Can Christopher Plummer cut this part?" and if he can I'll use him. But my criteria is who is best for the role. I've never produced a film and I've never directed a film and who knows, I might . . . say "Yes! We'll get the best money person for the part." But I'm talking about where I am right now and I would say my criteria is the best actor for the part whoever he may be.

O.K., here's some background in terms of what is going on in Canada: the Canadian public has been brainwashed by American media for so long that they don't recognize anybody who is native as having talent because they don't see them on the TV talk shows every night. So there has to be a doubling of efforts to counteract all that crap that's flowing here from the States. I'm not saying that everything is crap. I grant all the talent that you guys have down there. But I'm saying that there has to be a point where we dig in our heels and say "O.K., from now on we'll try to develop our own talent", like Ingmar Bergman did in Sweden. He developed his own group of actors who are becoming world famous – Max von Sydow, Liv Ullmann.

Yes, you see, that's exactly what you have to do.

But it took years and years.

First of all, it takes individual Canadian filmmakers with that kind of point of view and also it comes about from a sense of national feeling. You can't create a film industry that has important stars and important directors in a country that doesn't feel itself important, or doesn't take pride in itself. Canada is just beginning to emerge from two hundred years of an inferiority complex, and the film industry is not isolated from the rest of the country in that way. When you start developing a feeling of Canadian pride – *real* pride – you'll have Canadian stars and you'll have people saying "Yeah, he's interesting!" I mean the only way the movie industry got stars was that *people* made stars. The producers didn't make the stars, they were against the star system. But thousands of letters came in asking, "Who was that little blond girl?" Well, her name was Mary Pickford.

. . . **who is Canadian.**

Is she really? Is Mary Pickford a Canadian?

She was born in Toronto.

Far out! (laughs) But that's how it happens. And the Canadian public will create stars for you. Is Micheline Lanctôt a star in Canada?

In French Canada.

Well, that's because the French are beginning to feel a sense of unity. When the English Canadians get off their asses and start feeling that, then the problem will solve itself. As a matter of fact, in 1914 and 1915 and all through the nineteenth century, the actors in the Western Hemisphere were mainly British and it took a long time for American actors to get into the film business as opposed to saying, "Let's bring over those British actors that are so hot." And it took a long time for America to develop its own industry – the motion picture industry – and to develop its own star system. Because even *now* Americans suffer from this British thing. Robert Vaughn, a few years ago, did *Hamlet* at the Pasadena Playhouse. He was ripped to *shit* for doing it – it really *hurt* his career! Can you imagine? It hurt his career because he had the gall to play *Hamlet* in Los Angeles where they do films and he was an American actor with no British training!

Richard Chamberlain – who is not a very good actor – went to England, developed a style of English acting, came back, and everyone in America says he is a brilliant actor. Bullshit. I mean, I admire his career – it's the kind of career I want to have; I want to be validated enough so that I can play classical theatre but I *don't* want to be a copy of the British. Old style English Shakespeare is *England*, it's not mine, it's not

the way I want to do it and I'm not going to do it that way. . . . So we suffer from it too. You're suffering from it in a larger sense if you think "It can't be good if it's Canadian." Well, when it comes to Shakespeare in the States, "it can't be good if it's American" . . . It's bullshit. . . . If you'd stop talking about it so much and just start *doing* the films, if you'd stop (comparing yourselves to Americans) and just live your own life and deal with your own country, you'd be a lot better off and you'd develop. That's what the French did; that's what's so exciting about Quebec. They said, "Screw the English! Screw America! We're going to do this!" So you go to Quebec and everyone is doing things. It's really exciting in terms of culture.

There's a lot being done in English Canada too, but you haven't seen it and the reason you haven't seen it is because the distribution-exhibition machinery is controlled by U.S. dollars. I mean, there's no getting away from it.

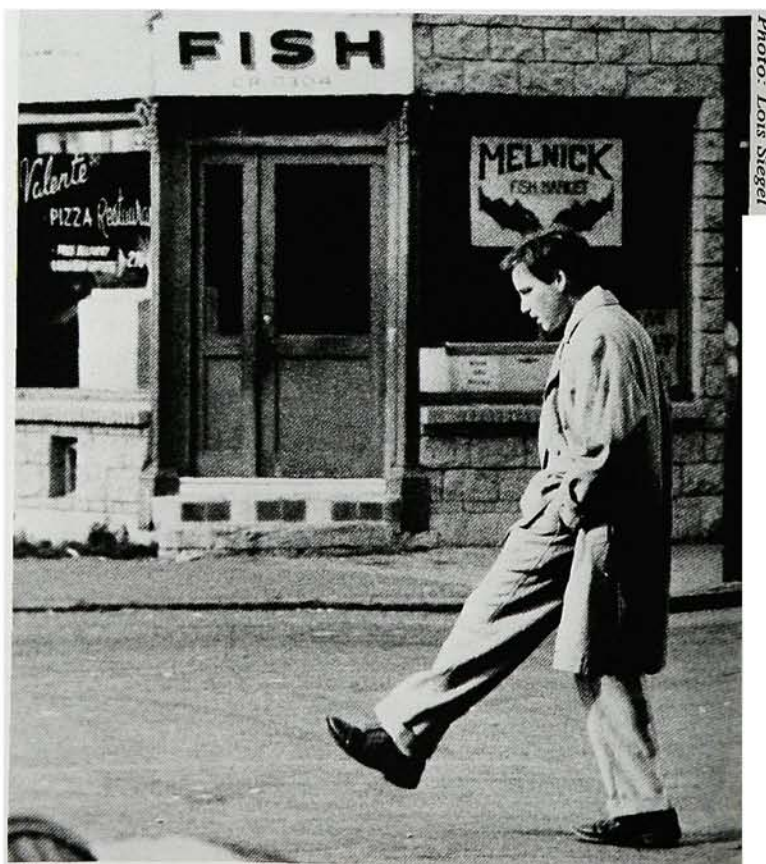
You know, when the motion picture industry started in the States there was a thing called the combine. And the only reason that Los Angeles became powerful was that people like Sam Goldwyn and Jesse Lasky . . . fled New York to get away from the combine which had tied up distribution, tied up the stock, tied up the processing, tied up all the techniques, tied up all the actors. They couldn't get to first base so they left and went to California. . . . Well, in one way or another you have to do that up here – you have to get away from the American trip.

Can you talk some about the people on Duddy Kravitz? Any strong opinions, any mild opinions?

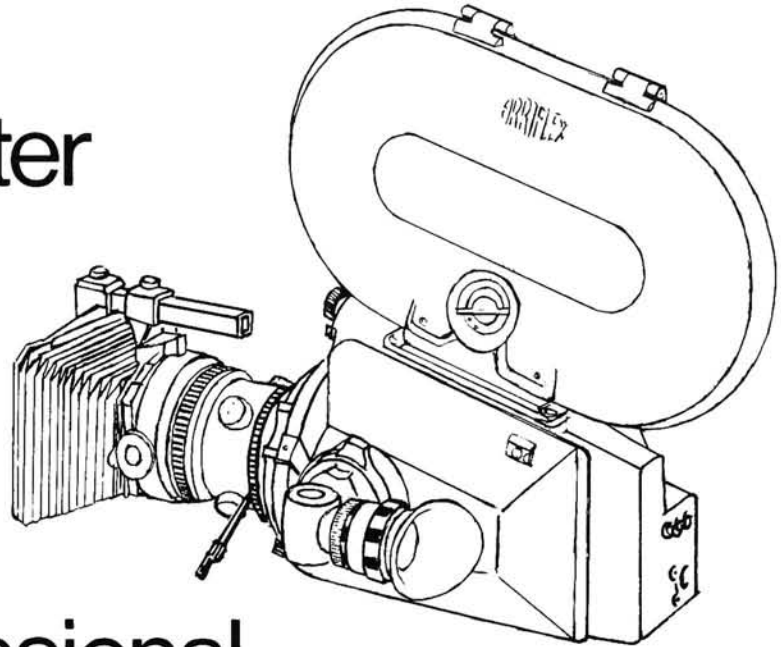
They were all nice people – some of them I got along with and some of them I didn't; some of them I'd work with again and some of them I wouldn't. And hopefully, *I* would be different.

Are you happy about the film?

I can't tell. I'm not objective about it. I've only seen it once and I'm not the one to ask. I think there are some good things in it and some bad things in it and I have no sense of the whole. Right now I'm only aware of what I did not do in my performance and I'll have to see it a number of times before I can assimilate it.



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