The death of Claude Jutra represents an immense loss for the Canadian film world. His name is associated first and foremost with Mon Oncle Antoine (1971), considered to this day as the best Canadian film ever. This film was also acclaimed by the international press, with prizes garnered abroad as well as in Canada. Jutra's renown was based primarily on films he shot in Quebec: À Tout prendre (1963), Wow (1969), Kamouraska (1973) and La Dame en couleurs (1985) are works that have earned a central place in the Canadian film repertory.

It is important, however, to remember that Jutra had a brief but important career in English Canada, and the principal goal of this article is to assess the filmmaker's English Canadian production. This part of the filmmaker's work has been unjustly overlooked by critics and I would like to restore it to its important place within Jutra's oeuvre. In particular, Ada and Dreamspeaker share wholly in Jutra's personal themes and deserve our attention all the more. They must certainly not be seen as minor works. At the same time, I would like to reestablish Jutra's motives for moving to Toronto to work for the CBC.

After the release of Wow in 1969, Jutra shared his thoughts with a Quebec critic:
"The simple fact of wanting to make films in Quebec is a political act. It's only here that I feel myself, I belong here and it's here that I can find my identity. I couldn't create elsewhere. And when we demand the right to make films here at home, we demand the control not only of our cinema, but also of our country."

These comments might seem surprising considering that Jutra made several films outside of Quebec. All the same, we must remember the social and political context Quebec was plunged into during those years. Nationalist feelings were stronger than ever before in Quebec culture. Think of Charlebois's songs from that period or of the appearance of other deeply nationalist popular music. Jutra was himself also caught up in nationalist feelings and these comments are testimony to his intimate ties to Quebec.

In 1975, his film Pour le meilleur et pour le pire was released, an event from which Jutra probably never recovered. The reviews were very harsh, and to make matters worse, weak publicity managed to keep the film only three weeks in its first-run showplace. Devastated, Jutra changed his tone, telling Le Jour, "If I always refused to do film abroad, it was not principles but a state of feel..."
ings that made me do so. Now, today, I'm heartbroken that I've spent two years of my life for a film that lasted three weeks at the Parisien, and that's that."

A profound bitterness arises from these words. One thing was sure, gone were the days of making films only in Quebec on the pretext of being Quebecois. Invited by Toronto, Jutra then decided to go and direct for the CBC (joining several other Quebecois like Gilles Carle, Francis Mankiewicz, and Andre Theberge in the process).

The "For the Record" Series

On several occasions, Jutra declared that he "had to express himself in filmmaking whatever the cost," because it was like a drug, a veritable passion. Directing for the CBC gave him this chance to express himself. His acceptance of several projects in Toronto was due to the fact that nothing interesting was available in Quebec. In my interview with him on October 14, 1986, Jutra offered this clarification.

"Every Quebecois filmmaker who spoke English and who was interested in working in English was welcome to participate in this project. I very often went from one side to the other, that is, carrying out projects at the same time in Quebec and elsewhere. I was doing the Montreal-Toronto shuttle. I took the train to go to Toronto but I would come back regularly to Montreal to work on other projects. People thought I had been in exile in Toronto for years but that's false. In Toronto, everything went well. I really like working with the actors I had. As for the films, they were suggested by the CBC people. They came looking for me."[9]

The main goal of the For the Record series was to reflect Canada in an honest manner, its joys and its problems. In his article on the series, Marc Gervais details that all the films were structured around a rather modest budget. In terms of their narrative design, these films represent a kind of hybrid of fiction and the great Canadian documentary tradition. They explore and analyse different mechanisms of our society, and are praised by Gervais for their high degree of realism and credibility.


"As for Ada, they had me read the short story in question. After reading it, the first thing I did was meet Margaret Gibson. She was a very beautiful woman, of a truly bizarre beauty. She resembles all the characters in the film. She has surely lived what those characters have lived. I worked closely with Margaret. With her, I found myself in unbelievable situations..."

Ada tells the story of the relations of a group of women living in a psychiatric hospital, relations that are sometimes very tender but often very tense. The theme of the film clearly relates to Jutra's personal experience, since he had studied medicine before becoming a filmmaker. Ada's statement is coloured by a violence that the viewer may find hard to take. This stand is justified by the filmmaker's own words:

During the Duplessis period, I was finishing my last years of medicine. I was very interested in psychiatric problems. Working in these specialized hospitals, I was familiar with the patients' miserable conditions and the injustice that could exist."

The use of a certain kind of violence became a means of making these conditions and this injustice more convincing. In Ada, injustice centres on the lobotomy that the doctors had committed on the brain of Ada, one of the characters. But far from sensationalistic, this violence is motivated and part of the author's statement. Ada is primarily a film where the intimate relations among the characters are in the foreground. Jutra's approach was scrupulous.

"I believe that you can in fact make a connection between my medical studies and this film. As for the failure of medicine, it's a hard problem to resolve. I used to believe in medicine. My father was a doctor, my grandfather was a dentist. I was obliged to believe in medicine. From my point of view, I didn't make this film as an accusation against doctors. That was already present in Margaret Gibson's story. All the same, the institution is an alienating place. I think that it would be ridiculous to make a film showing that people coming out of that hospital become 'normal' and happy again. That seems impossible to me."

Ada offers to the spectator an impressive gallery of characters. Jutra always said that he was more interested by the psychology of women than of men. Gibson's story thus became a perfect vehicle for analysing, in depth, relations between women. The cast was made up almost exclusively of actresses from the theatre, including Anne Anglin and Janet Amos for the leads. For a long time, Jutra himself had studied and performed for the theatre. That explains the importance the filmmaker placed on the acting of his players.

"My relations with actors are always established directly, since the world of actors was also my world. When I direct, the performance of the actors is what's most important, it's a priority."

It should be noted that during his stay in Toronto, Jutra participated in theatrical activities as well. In particular, he directed Il Teatro del Pepperonini, a comedy of errors praised by the critics for its originality. In addition, Jutra performed in several of his own films, including Le grand confort, Mon Oncle Antoine, and Pour le meilleur et pour le pire.

The scenario for Ada remained very faithful to Gibson's story. The film's dialogue is, with some exception, an exact transcription from the original.

Dreamspeaker, also from the For the Record series, was shot on Vancouver Island. One more time, an institution of rehabilitation is presented as an alienating place. The film's plot goes like this: Peter, a young boy suffering from serious psychological problems, escapes from an institution and finds refuge with an old Indian living in a forest. In touch with nature, Peter gets back his equilibrium and his serenity. But the authorities recapture him and send him back to the institution. He can't tolerate this existence and commits suicide.

With Dreamspeaker, Claude Jutra renewed a theme that he had long given special emphasis: youth. On this subject, he explained:

"Youth. I am the prisoner of my youth. There's nothing I can do about it. I think I will be always talking about it in one way or another. The more I move ahead the more I progress. When I was 30 I made A tout prendre and the same year in Toronto, I made Mon Oncle Antoine, they're 14."

Strangely enough, this phenomenon
of regression with time Jutra refers to is verified all the more in his last films. Dreamspeake
r features a young boy of 11, while La Dame en couleurs re-
counts the life in an orphanage for chil-
dren between 8 and 15. Dreamspeake-
ker, it should be mentioned, was named in
1977, the “best Canadian TV drama” by
the Canadian Film Awards, an honour
well deserved.

Jutra saw a major difference between a
film shot for television and a theatrical film:

“I'm much less interested in television
than I am in film or in theatre... The
thing about television is it is instant, it
is ephemeral. You get quite a bit of feed-
back immediately after a programme
Instantaneous exposure. But, though it
has a wide audience and reaches a great
number of people on all levels of soci-
ety, it is forgotten. The impact is as brief
as it is impressive.”

Having made this distinction, Jutra
didn't conceive his work for television
differently from his usual work for the
cinema. To say "a film made for TV"
was in his opinion unjustified and ridicu-


Surfacing and By Design
Surfacing and By Design are the two
feature films that Jutra directed in En-
glish Canada, both produced by Beryl
Fox. However, I don't believe we can
consider Surfacing as a Jutra film in ev-
ery respect. Based on Margaret Atwood's
novel of the same title, the plot is fo-
cussed on Kate, a young liberated woman
who decides to drop everything to look
for her father who has disappeared. As
the search advances through the nor-
thern woods, Kate’s own interior search
is revealed to the spectator through her
tense and violent relations with her
companions.

In fact, according to journalistic ac-
counts of the film, Jutra was called in at
the last minute to save the Surfacing
shoot. Originally, Beryl Fox had hired an
American scriptwriter, Bernard Gordon, to
adapt the novel, as well as a cast of
American actors, notably Kathleen Bel-
ler and Joseph and Timothy Bottoms, the
latter dropping out before shooting be-
gan. The director was to be Eric Till who
also withdrew just before the shoot. The
film's financing thus seriously threaten-
ed, it would have had to be cancelled.

Surfacing, it was said, "transformed
Atwood's unfilmable quest allegory into
a simplistic feminist equivalent." I
myself consider that Surfacing is not a
significant Jutra work, showing none of
his stylistic and thematic concerns. Per-
haps the only common point between
Surfacing and the other films is the nat-
ural location of the action, the privileged
setting where the truth and the charac-
ters' emotional instincts and drives
come to the surface and explode.

In agreeing to direct Surfacing how-
ever, Claude Jutra made an important
bargain with the producer – Beryl Fox
agreed, in return, to produce his next
film, namely By Design.

By Design is a light comedy in which
Jutra explores the theme of lesbianism.
The highly original conception can be
summarized thus: two women love each
other and decide jointly to have a child.
They embark on a real manhunt to ac-
complish their goal.

This time, even if Fox continued as
producer, Jutra was completely in char-
ge. Inspired by an original idea by Joe
Wiesenfeld, Jutra co-wrote the script
with Wiesenfeld and David Eames.

Unfortunately, Jutra and By Design
scarcely had it easier this time round.
One more time, Jutra ran into hostile cri-
tics, not to mention a full year's delay in
the release date. Critics accused the film
of superficiality and of ridiculing margi-


Notes
1. Conseil Québécois pour la Diffusion du Cin-
ema Claude Jutra, collection “Cinéastes du
Québec”, 1970.
2. Le Jour, Friday February 27, 1976.
3. Interview with Claude Jutra which took place
Tuesday October 15, 1986.
5. Gibson, Margaret, The Butterfly Ward, Or-
tawa, Oberon Press, 1976.
6. Interview with Claude Jutra which took place
Tuesday October 15, 1986.
7. “Entretien avec Claude Jutra: ce sont ces édions
du cœur qui m’aiment”. Cine-Bulles, Febra-
uary/March 1985, pp. 4-7.
8. Entrevue réalisée avec Claude Jutra le mardi
14 octobre 1986.
10. Conseil Québécois pour la Diffusion du Cin-
ema Claude Jutra, Collection “Cinéastes du
Québec”, 1970.
11. Kneiman, Paul, “Jutra on the tube”, Cine-
12. Atwood, Margaret, Surfacing, Toronto,
McClelland and Stewart, 1972.
13. Kneiman, Martin, “After we came in – Mum’s
the word”, Take Two: A Tribute to Film in
Canada, Edited by Seth Feldman, Irwin
14. Ibid.
15. Petrowski Nathalie, “Le retour de l’exilé: en-
tretien avec Claude Jutra”, Actualité 5, January
1980.

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JUTRA: a report

1972. I'm still teaching in the same way. "Men Queue Antwein, Staring " returned. But a stranger has appeared and the film is already finished. "Shouldn't be doing. Claude can't afford it." By now, it has been sold in many countries and has made a good money. Nobody noticed. Two charged years to get "The Better or for Worse." The idea is to get the film out there and under the ground. Released in one theatre and under construction. Many of my friends are still unrequired. Construction. Many of my friends are still unrequired.

1987. I'm still teaching in the same way. "Men Queue Antwein, Staring " returned. But a stranger has appeared and the film is already finished. "Shouldn't be doing. Claude can't afford it." By now, it has been sold in many countries and has made a good money. Nobody noticed. Two charged years to get "The Better or for Worse." The idea is to get the film out there and under the ground. Released in one theatre and under construction. Many of my friends are still unrequired. Construction. Many of my friends are still unrequired.

"Jutra: charts the distance travelled"

CLAUDE JUTRA

1930 - 1987

Jutra charts the distance travelled

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1930 - 1987

Jutra charts the distance travelled
Photos from Morocco, taken in Rabat by Terence Macartney-Filgate

A sense of freedom:
Michel Brault and Claude Jutra by the water in Morocco, 1960

FILMOGRAPHY

1947: Le Dément du lac Jean jeune (d. – with the collaboration of Michel Brault)
1948: Abstraction (d. – animated film)
1949: Mouvement perpétuel (d. – with the collaboration of Michel Brault)
1950: L’École de la peur (original idea, sc. – televised theatre for Radio-Canada)
1954/5: Images en boîte (writer and host – 13 shows for Radio-Canada)
1956: Pierrrot des bois (d. sc. ed. and actor)
1956: Les Jeunesse musicales (d. and sc. for NFB)
1957: Il était une chaise (co-d. with Norman McLaren and actor)
1958: Les Mains nettes (d. – NFB)
1959: Anna la bonne (d. – produced by François Truffaut)
1959: Fred Barry, comédien (d./sc.) – episode of Profils pour la télévision, NFB
1959: Félix Leclerc, troubadour (d. – for Profils pour la télévision, NFB)
1961: Le Niger – jeune république (d. and ed.) NFB
1961: Golden Gloves (co-d.o.p. with Brault, d. by Gilles Groulx for the NFB)
1961: La lutte (co-d. with Michel Brault, Claude Fournier and Marcel Carrière, for the NFB)
1961: Cinéma canadien (writer and host – a series of 13 shows for Radio-Canada)
1962: Québec – USA ou l’invasion pacifique (d., d.o.p./ed., for the NFB)
1963: Les Enfants du silence (co-d. with Michel Brault for the NFB)
1963: Petit discours de la méthode (co-d. with Pierre Patry, ed. and narration, for the NFB)
1963: À Tout prendre (d/sc./ed. and actor)
1966: Comment savoir (d. for NFB)
1966: Rouli-Roulation (d/d.o.p/narration and ed., for NFB)
1968: Le Viol d’une jeune fille douce (d. by Gilles Carle – Jutra participated)
1969: Wow (d./sc. and ed., for NFB)
1969: Au Coeur de la ville (d. for OFQ)
1970: The Act of the Heart (actor) film d. by Paul Almond
1970: Marie-Christine (d. for OFQ)
1971: Mon oncle Antoine (d./ed. and actor, for NFB)
1973: Kamouraska (d. and co-sc.)
1975: La Fleur aux dents (actor) d. by Thomas Vamos for NFB
1975: Pour le meilleur et pour le pire (d.sc. and actor)
1976: Québec fête (co-d. with Jean-Claude Labrecque)
1977: Dreamspeaker (d. – episode of For the Record for CBC)
1977: ADA (d. – episode of For the Record for CBC)
1978: See's Was Here (d. for CBC)
1979: The Wordsmith (d. for CBC)
1979: Surfacing (d.)
1980: By design (d.)
1984: La dame en couleurs (d.)