L'homme renversé is a feature-length film which deals with the 'new man', i.e., one confronted with a world where his male prerogatives are no longer taken for granted. How does this 'new man' react to the changed situation? Has he himself really changed?

My first thought on looking at this film was that a woman should never have been sent to review it. I felt like a voyeur looking through a peephole into the boys’ locker room. Indeed there is something of himself when they were young. Daniel and are joined by Claudine. Guy was of himself when they were young. This is another catching-life-on-the-move, mode:

A woman parking a car. In the studio where the workshops are to take place, and catching a glimpse of the other studio where the workshops are to take place, and catching a glimpse of the other

The last scene of the film also seems to have some sort of symbolic import. Guy is left alone in the studio, rejected by his woman, tortured by his insecurities and, in a very theatrical scene, he ends up sitting on the floor in front of a curtain which covers one of the walls. Guiltily, Daniel, who had abandoned him, comes back only to punch him out as Guy ends up sitting on the floor, side by side, huddled and miserable, in front of the curtain; freeze framed-end of film. The film closes with this apparent dénouement.

Perhaps this lack is also felt by the filmmaker for he makes a further jump from the fictional to the symbolic mode. Without any preparation, he cuts to a scene which seems to have no relation to the rest of the film, since none of the characters we’ve previously encountered appear in it. It is a rather strange scene. The camera is focused on the back of a truck which moves through a small town or a suburban setting. On the truck sits a man, naked except for a loin cloth, facing the camera, with his hands chained to the side of the truck. He is covered in white flour. Several other men, who are also on the truck, keep pulling raw eggs and other objects on to his body. He makes no protest. As the truck drives along we see reaction shots of people watching from the side of the road. This is quite a long scene but there is never any explanation given for it. It seems to be a ceremony which is sometimes still seen in Quebec, a rite of passage for the about-to-be married male. I presume it is meant as some sort of symbol for the masculine condition. The man certainly seems to be trying to prove that he can take it like a ‘man’.

The film remains semi-amused, semi-фrustrated by these men who are trying to play the game of self-disclosure which was such a big part of the consciousness-raising groups in the women’s movement.

But these three do not just sit around and talk. Being actors they try to use improvisation techniques in small skits which deal with masculine roles. However there are problems. Guy is the first one to show his reluctance. “Je veux pas appor­ter mes bibles,” he says. And Claudine replies, “That is the masculine condition.” This, it seems to me, is the thesis of the film. For Yves Dion the masculine condition seems mostly to be an inability to communicate one’s intimate problems. Perhaps, even an inability to acknowledge them. Even Daniel, who is the more extrovert of the two actors, says that his goal in life is to never have to talk about himself in front of a camera. He points out that the male is always playing the role of the super-hero, like James Bond, equal to any situation.

The fact that we are never sure what is screenplay and what is not becomes an excellent device to keep the audience questioning the truth of these statements. For myself, as a woman, the film was doubly strange cinema-verite. The fact that we are never tied up these experiences in any direct way. The man certainly seems to be creating fictions based on real-life situations. The basic conflict in the film, between the director and his actors, is thus symptomatic not only of the male condition but also of the failings of cinema-verite. A situation is set up by the filmmaker where his actors are supposed to reveal their inner lives but find themselves unable to do so. I have always wondered how much of the truth about themselves people really told in interviews. Who wants to disclose their private selves in front of a camera, anyway? Perhaps only a very exhibitionist personality like Shirley Clarke’s Jason. Documentary filmmakers seem to have realized these limits and thus the birth of the docudrama.

But is such a new form? It seems to me very close to Italian neo-realism in concept if not in execution. Perhaps this is because the docudramas are mostly based on the emotional experiences of the characters and unlike neo-realism do not tie up these experiences in any direct way to the physical, social and political environments in which they are lived. This, in my opinion, gives a closed, studio feel to the docu-dramas which is claustrophobic and limiting. For instance, Guy over dinner. Daniel tells Guy that when they were young, he had witnessed Guy being sexually harassed at the corner grocery store. Why did he deny it? Guy replies that he was already being taunted with the label of homosexual by the gang of boys to which they belonged and asks Daniel why he never defended him? Daniel answers that he couldn’t do anything about it. This triggers Guy’s anger at Daniel’s superiority in any situation. The competitiveness which is perhaps at the core of every male relationship surfaces here, and is underscored in the film by a little vignette seen from Guy’s point-of-view. Teenagers come out of the alley next to the restaurant, two boys and a girl. The teen very brashly starts to playfully hit one of the boys. They run off together and end up making out while the other boy wistfully looks on.

The questions that come to mind are: is there such a lack in the documentary mode that the filmmaker has switched to fiction? Or, is the whole film a fiction from beginning to end? The filmmakers seem to find it more honest to create fictions based on real-life situations. This, in my opinion, gives a closed, studio feel to the docu-dramas which is sometimes still seen in Quebec, a rite of passage for the about-to-be married male. I presume it is meant as some sort of symbol for the masculine condition. The man certainly seems to be trying to prove that he can take it like a ‘man’.

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Inside the studio we see the two actors, who were apparently childhood friends, meet. They are Guy (the driver) and Daniel and are joined by Claudine. Guy is in TV commercials, and Daniel acts in experimental theatre and Claudine is there as a representative of the women’s movement. In an interview, Yves Dion asks her for her reaction to being asked to take part in a workshop on the masculine condition. “Amused at first,” she replies. Indeed her attitude throughout the film was really never seen the forces that have shaped them. The role of the Catholic Church in Quebec society, for instance, is never mentioned. I suppose that the director is trying to address a universal ‘masculine condition’ but it seems to me that the particular can make the general more interesting.