

Hubert Yves Rose's
La Ligne de Chaleur

La Ligne de Chaleur is a deeply satisfying film that owes its critical success in equal measure to its direction, writing, acting and the filmmaking integrity of the Association coopérative de productions audio-visuelles (ACPAV). It is a moderately budgeted film (at \$1.3 million) that will not make big bucks at the box office but neither do we live in a perfect world. With the exception of extremely minor roles played by Pat Phillips, Lorena Gale, Charlotte Boisjoli and Charlotte Lelièvre, you will not find women in this film or popular inducements like sex, violence and exotic locations that only money can buy.

Rather, *La Ligne de Chaleur* stands as a reminder to the filmmaking community of what can be achieved with a talented cast and crew and the will to make a good film.

In a word the film is "funereal", with a dark pallor hanging over it. It proceeds in whispered tones yet there is much unrestrained emotion. It is an evocative film about the estranged relationship between father and son, a classical relationship that Rose treats with admirable subtlety and respect.

The story opens on a Montreal snowstorm. Robert Filion (Gabriel Arcand) is obliged to travel south where he must identify the body of his father who has died of a sudden heart attack in a Florida resort. Robert's parents have been separated for years just as Robert is separated from his wife and son Maxim (Simon Gonzalez) who is reunited with his father for the trip.

Father and son get along well during the first sunny day on the Florida beach. They share a kindred sense of trust while living in the deceased's beach apartment. Here, for a brief moment, the old man is dead (long live the old man!) and everything is peachy.

La Ligne de Chaleur, the road movie, begins after the body has been shipped north by train, to be buried. Father and son, who have not planned this trip, follow in the deceased's car to find that the coastal road through Florida, the Carolinas, Georgia and Virginia is lined with overbooked motels. As they drive north, the rooms they do find become darker and colder as does the relationship between father and son.

This relationship finally breaks down on the "heat line" (*La Ligne de Chaleur*) where the warm weather meets the northern cold front. What was once a breezy beach apartment has gradually become a low-lit roadside motel where father and son face, indeed attempt to exercise, the fears and anxiety inherent in their relationship. Thus, what had appeared early in the story to be an awkward but not unusual

father/son relationship requiring a period of reacquaintance, becomes something much more menacing.

Norman G. Simpson (Gerard Parkes) is a cloyingly nice, retired journalist who is working on a photo-essay called "Motels and the Decline of Adventure." He is a key character, a simple-happy-go-lucky individual engendering all the characteristics of someone on permanent vacation (a large percentage of Florida's wintertime population). Maxim is fascinated by this old wizard to whom he can talk regardless of language differences, but Robert cannot put enough distance between himself and Simpson.

Robert chooses not to like this older man who appears to want to play the role of his father. His tolerance of Simpson does not improve even after we learn that Simpson is dying of a terminal illness and is lonely.

By, in effect, bringing Robert's father back to life to show the continuity of the father/son relationship through the years and from generation to generation, Rose and co-writer Micheline Lanctot underscore the complexity of such a relationship.

Guilt, a product of his relationship with his late father and feelings of inadequacy as a father to his son, culminate in Robert's dark - albeit drunken - night of the soul.

Here, on the heat line, in the Motel Drama, Chesapeake Bay, Va., the sins of the father are visited upon Robert while his own son is the sympathetic victim/witness.

Arcand, with minimal (drunken) dialogue, is brilliant and Gonzalez does not deter from this first-class performance.

The story ends the same way it begins - in the north on the cold side of the heat line to where the corpse has been shipped, where Simpson

expects to die, where Robert has experienced the mortification of self.

In the last shot, the coastal road leads north towards a tunnel entrance that expands quietly - save for the beat of car windshield wipers - and envelopes the whole screen in darkness.

La Ligne de Chaleur is like attending your own funeral. It should not be missed. You will marvel at what you learn about relationships you thought you had pegged.

Jan Chantale •

LA LIGNE DE CHALEUR p. Marc Daigle d. Hubert-Yves Rose sc. Micheline Lanctot, Hubert-Yves Rose d. o. p. Michel Caron sd. Yvon Benoit p. man. Danny Chailour 1st a. d. Lise Abastado continuity Thérèse Bérubé loc. man. Carle Delaroché-Vernet casting Deirdre Bowen. Annie Pierard makeup Micheline Trépanier dresser Mario Davignon props Simon La Haye chief elect. Jean-Marc Hébert electricians Pierre Provost, Jean Courteau key grip François Dupère grip Christian Benard 1st. cam. asst. Christiane Guernon 2nd cam. asst. Martin Dubois gaffer Claude La Haye set designers Jean-François Leblanc, Simon Laforge p. admin. Marina Darveau p. asst. Louise Cloutier p. sec. Suzanne Castellino, Denise d'Amours accountants Luc Forcier, Marie-Reine Mailhot ext. loc. man. Marie Potvin, Jennifer Jonas prod. assts. Alain Labrosse, François Paille, David Morin, André Dupuy still photog. Paul-Émile Rioux a. d. trainee Annie Pierard American crew: prod. coord. Gary McNutt, Ron Oer electrician Russell C. Parsons Jr. Virginia: prod. man. Timothy Gabbert 2nd cam. asst. David L. Haycox prod. assts. Denise Nations, Donna Toole, George Koury, Vernon Nimetz Florida: p. man. Sally Glaesner 2nd. cam. asst. Gary Schlifer grip Scott Mumford p. assts. John Piccolo, Ray Nieman orig. music Richard Gregoire musicians Marc Gillett, Pierre Daigneault sd rec. & mix. Joe Petrella sd. ed. Marie-Claude Gagné sd. fr. Lise Wedlock sd. fr. rec. Jocelyn Caron asst. ed. Theresa De Luca asst. sd. ed. Paule Bélanger ed. trainee Marnie Stubley mix Michel Descombes l. p. Gabriel Arcand, Simon Gonzalez, Gerard Parkes, Charlotte Boisjoli, Gérard Poirier, Pat Phillips, Lorena Gale, Jean Mathieu, Paul Glaros, Vlasta Vrana, Charlotte Lelièvre, Carl Norling, Moses Gibson, James C. Montague, Lucien Hamel, Herb Lifschultz, James W. Almond. Produced by the ACPAV, with the financial participation of Telefilm Canada, Société générale de cinéma du Québec. 35mm, colour.

Bruce Elder's
Consolations (Love is an Art of Time) Part III: The Body and the World

"Well this is a mission and I do hope to say that Western concepts of reason have driven us into an absolutely extreme situation - a situation that threatens life on this planet, actually. And these films are partly a call to recognize this extreme condition."
(Bruce Elder, *Cinema Canada* #124.)

It's a small word, but it means a lot, "us." In the above quote it seems to me to be the key to understanding Bruce Elder's recent film work. Though the quote is taken from an interview conducted after the completion of Elder's *Lamentations*, it remains applicable to *The Body and the World*, and it sums up what I believe to be that film's central issue - community.

The Body and the World is the last film in the *Consolations* trilogy, a 14-hour experimental work completed this year. Elder describes *Consolations* as being about "resentment and its overcoming, that is, about the overcoming of the pastness of the past through grasping its presentness and through a thankful submission to the Wholly Other, since nothing is more obvious than that Hell is to be one's own." Hmm.

But *Consolations* appears to be about nostalgia rather than resentment. If, as Michael Dorland suggests, *resentment* is in part "the emotional content of the catastrophe of modern culture", with modern culture being defined as that which totalizes and obliterates difference, nostalgia precedes it. Nostalgia felt and re-felt develops into *resentment*. But *The Body and the World*, the culmination of a trilogy that purports to be about the overcoming of *resentment*, instead travels back through the layers of "re-feeling" to reclaim the original sentiment - nostalgia.

Instead of rejecting totalizing forces, *The Body and the World* swoons elaborately in a wished-for but never realized unity with a whole host of others, among them women, tropical cultures and the landscape. And the film's strategies - epic length, extensive quotation, avant-garde formal practices, "essential" concerns (being, knowing, loving, losing, etc.) - allow it to take on the guise of universality, certainly of Significance. The film presents such exhaustive "evidence" and cloaks itself so completely in the garb of Western intellectual avant-gardes that it forgoes its status as the product of a single



A drunken Robert (Gabriel Arcand) struggles to communicate with his son Maxim (Simon Gonzalez) in *La Ligne de chaleur*

PHOTO: PAUL-ÉMILE RIOUX

consciousness and presents itself as the *only* intelligent response to "our" times.

There are ramifications, but first it is necessary to describe the film.

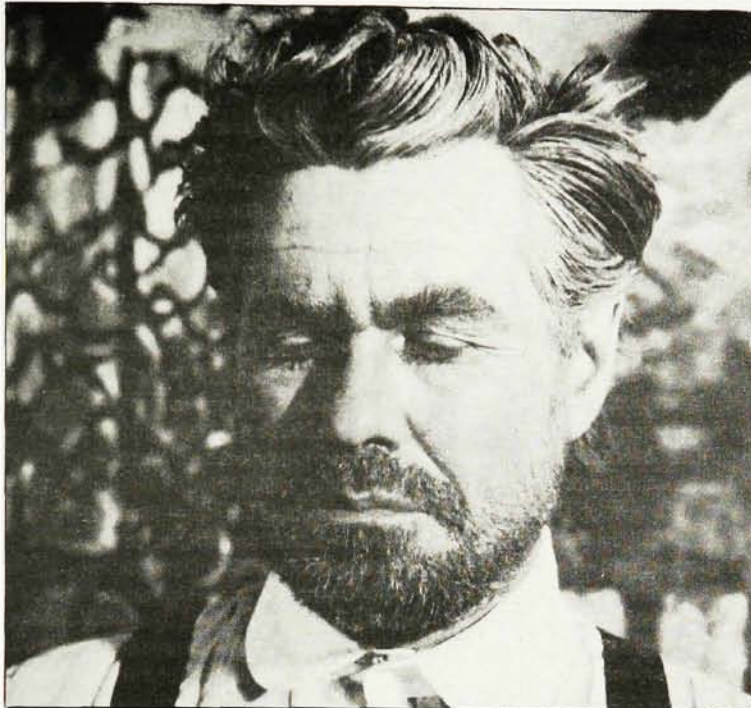
The Body and the World works by an antiphonal structure. The basic material is made up of shots – usually framed by an erratically moving camera or edited together rapidly – of the external world. These shots fade in and out of existence, and are most often of the following: brightly-coloured "postmodern" apartment buildings of the sort found in the U.S. sunbelt, European baroque architecture, sandscapes, roads and road signs, fire, a carousel, and women's naked bodies. There is much more, but this is the basic material.

Fairly regularly, white text on a black screen interrupts these images, a technique that appears regularly in recent Elder films. The text is presented as *print* – that is, in a recognizable typeface with regular margins – and appears to be quoted from sources external to the film. Sometimes these "quotes" are attributed to writers, e.g. "Wittgenstein"; at other times they have no attribution. But there is no perceptible difference in content or form between what is attributed and what is not. Partway through the film mathematical equations are also presented in the manner of the quotations.

This two-part structure (text and images) is in turn interrupted, though less frequently, by acted sequences. These sequences vary widely in tone, length, number of participants, and fictional time and space, but there are some commonalities. All use non-actors, for example, and all use quotation. In one of these scenes a character named "Paul 1986" explains his nuclear-resistant sunglasses to an "interviewer", then goes on to play *The Star Spangled Banner* and *In the Hall of the Mountain King* by slapping his cheeks. In another, Elder stands before a cloth painted to resemble a European square; he is wearing 19th century garb and aged by make-up and he recites a text.

In still another scene a man in an office recites a text into a tape recorder, then sits impassively while a country song plays. And in one long sequence a middle-eastern scene is set, with palms and pyramids on a painted backdrop, and American advertisements displayed in the foreground. A veiled blonde woman performs a belly dance, while a man reads barely discernible philosophical material (including Nietzsche's *The Will to Power*) from behind a cocktail bar. Then, a naked man enters the scene wearing a large wolf's head and diving flippers. Elder enters shortly after in a bathing suit and relaxes on the chaise lounge in the foreground. The belly dancer has by now removed her veil and is sweating profusely. Elder attempts to engage in financial transactions with the woman and the reader.

Again, this description cannot do justice to all of the dramatized sequences in the film; it merely suggests their range.



Bruce Elder as poet Ezra Pound in a dramatic sequence from *Consolations*

The film's soundtrack, composed by Bill Gilliam and assembled by Tom Thibault, Alexa-Frances Shaw and Susan Oxtoby, is an extraordinarily complex mix of found sounds, electronically generated noises, and processed voices. Since much of the film is text and voice-over, the soundscape serves to diffuse the directness of speech into a rich background of partial, constantly shifting sounds.

But the larger meanings generated by the film's various strategies all return to nostalgia. The dependence on texts written at least 50 years ago, the repeated return to an image of a woman's breast, even the melancholy tone with which Elder reads, all contribute to an acute sense of loss that the film never overcomes. But *The Body and the World's* post-lapsarian anomie doesn't result from a Biblical fall from grace; to follow the film's suggestion, the fall came with the move from Europe to the New World, specifically Canada.

And yet Elder's films do not simply reject Canada. There remains a strange tension between a desire to be swept away by Europe, a keening passion for the intellectual high courts that once dictated what was and how it was, and a desire to discern Canada, to discover and maintain a uniquely Canadian tradition in cinema. Deborah Knight has called this pull between the there-then and the here-now "exquisite nostalgia", but the adjective may be a matter of taste. Knight also notes that in the Canadian and Quebecois cinema the sense of loss or desire is usually focussed on an abstraction or concept rather than the fetishized female body, as is the norm in Hollywood cinema. *The Body and the World* counts as

something of an accomplishment, fetishizing both women and ideas.

Elder's "Wholly Other" may represent some divine presence, a transcendental, signified, God, but within the context of *The Body and the World* the term also connotes those areas inaccessible to the white, male unified subject, constructed as he is so thoroughly by "culture" – women, blacks, the landscape, for example.

And so women are constantly within the film's frame but they rarely speak. At one point a black woman gazes sullenly at the camera, and late in the film the camera dwells on the body of a muscular black man, but the film's philosophical pearls never cross their lips either. Women and blacks are iconic in Elder's film, like the sand and the architecture.

A shot tracking down the length of a woman's body is intercut with the curves of a desert landscape, while a section of the Song of Songs is read. And in what must be the most repeated single image in the film, the camera returns endlessly to a woman's nipple, fascinated. These bodies (or parts of bodies; they are almost never framed whole) are made to bear the weight of otherness and transcendence within the film. Regardless of formal innovations or lofty intent, some things remain unchanged from dominant to experimental cinema; one of them is the positioning of woman as spectacle.

One might also quibble with the dearth of women's voices among the many quotations. *The Body and the World's* erudition is impressive but highly selective: there is no Kristeva slipped in with Wittgenstein, no Cixous next to Spinoza, no Mary Daly to match the Song of Songs. The film ignores the fact that much of the best recent

scholarly and creative writing on the body has been done by feminists. That can't be taken as a slight, though, because it ignores nearly all recent writing.

The Body and the World is a film from another time; it attempts to work through some sort of *fin-de-siecle* sentiment, but watching it one can't help but feel that it is speaking from the end of some other century. Its tone suggests that everything has ended and there is little left to say, but nowhere does it acknowledge that this opinion doesn't hold sway everywhere, with all people. But the film's intended scope is universal; it speaks consistently (and at length) of "us."

In one telling instance, a speaker on the soundtrack speculates on "beings with a temporal perception rooted in the present." "If we encountered such beings," the voice muses, "we might be unable to communicate."

This "we" once again includes the audience (and all audiences) in a Western concept of time, and relegates to imaginary beings the centuries-old African notion of time based on simultaneity rather than duration. But given the film's other weak spots, ethnocentrism comes as no surprise.

The Body and the World speaks from an age when white middle class men could comfortably express their concerns as the concerns of the world, and when they could enforce their power with no fear of contradiction because they controlled the critical apparatuses – the press, university teaching and publishing, museums, etc. – that celebrated and reinforced their ideas.

This film acts as a sort of microcosm of those structures of control. Its density barely allows a place for the viewer to help complete the film text. All of the print on screen, including the equations and questions, function as assertions, and the assertions come non-stop, each of them carrying the force of Western high culture. Though it deals with a subjective apprehension of the external world, the film appears universal because it does not locate the subject within the class and gender and cultural contexts that shaped him. Further, the film's images aggressively position women, blacks and tropical cultures as Other, as raw material for metaphor. The viewer must either reject that positioning or reject the film. The viewer of *The Body and the World* realizes early on that if she's not with "us" she is against us. The viewer is pinned.

Cameron Bailey •

CONSOLATIONS (LOVE IS AN ART OF TIME) a film by Bruce Elder co-maker Alexa-Frances Shaw asst. Cindy Gawel, Marilyn Jull, Susan Oxtoby, Tom Thibault comp. matte prep./opt. print. Cindy Gawel mus. comp. Bill Gilliam perc. Richard Sacks sd. asst. Tom Thibault titles/photog. Sue Cormack addnl. photog. Gerald Packer neg. assembly Piroshka Hollo scene painter Greg Carleton l.p. Yasmina Ranzzy, Ron Tomlinson, Jim Smith, Ellen Ladowsky, Seth Feldman narr. Cindy Gawel, Peter Harcourt, Marilyn Jull, Doina Popescu, Shelley Morgan King. Produced by Lightworks with the support of the Canada Council and the Ontario Arts Council.