

FILM REVIEWS

Claude Lelouch's *A Nous Deux*

p./d./sc. Claude Lelouch asst. d. Jean-Claude Ventura, Roger De Monestrol ph. Bernard Zitzermann asst. cam. Bruno de Keyser, Michel Mandreau ed. Sophie Bhaud, Hugues Darmois sd. mix. Harald Maury cont. Lise Ferran, France Boudreau key grip Henri Cayrol grip Yves Fayt key gaf. Joël David a.d. Jean-Louis Poveda set design. Claude Marchand m. Francis Lai singing Fabienne Thibault lyrics Pierre Barouh cost. design. Marie-Françoise Perrochon wardrobe asst. Adrienne Bacou cast. Arlette Gordon make-up Alfonso Gola hair. Jean-Pierre Berroyer l.p. Catherine Deneuve, Jacques Dutronc, Jacques Villeret, Gérard Caillaud, Bernard Crommbey, Paul Préboist, Gilberte Geniat, Bernard Lecoq, Jean-François Rémi, Monique Melinand, Guy Retore, Marie-Pierre De Gérando, Karine, Xavier Saint-Macary, Evelyne Ker, Anne Jousset, Simon Lelouch, Olivier Lai, Natalie Caron, Jacques Godin, Émile Genest, Daniel Auteuil, Alain David, Jean-Paul Muel, Bunny Godillot, Myriam Mézières, Evelyne Gilbert p. Claude Lelouch, Denis Héroux, Joseph F. Beaubien, co. p. a Canadian-French co-production p. manager (France) Daniel Deschamps, (Canada) Justine Héroux unit man. (France) Dominique Lallier, (Canada) Micheline Garant p.c. Claude Lelouch, Denis Héroux and Joseph-F. Beaubien col. 35mm running time 90 min. dist. (Canada) Cine 360 Inc.



Momentary stand-in for Jacques Dutronc, director Claude Lelouch spells it out for Catherine Deneuve on location with *A Nous Deux*

and above all the moving camera elicit strong emotional responses, and the elliptical links between scenes prime one for some intellectual payoff. Yet, for all this emotive strength, there is no developed understanding of character or situation. When the film switches to present time, one is exposed to the most banal sociological determinism. "Like Father, like son," is the reductionistic formula upheld throughout. Simon Chassaing's crimes are constantly explained as a product of his family's past. When hiding Simon after his jail-break, Uncle Music says it reminds him of the time thirty years ago when he hid Simon's father. Simon is a crook because it's "natural."

The same false profundity characterizes the rest of the film. After a particularly savage rape, Françoise engages in a career of seducing prominent men, setting them up for the police to collect evidence of adultery. The "dime-store Freud" explanation of her motive cannot bear the weight of importance given it.

Introduced separately, these two characters are fated to meet. Again, a simple reductionistic quality informs the film. In a different setting Simon can escape the burdens of his past and find a new life in

"honesty" together with Françoise. Similarly, Françoise can get beyond her shattering experience through "honesty" with Simon.

The self-enclosed couple is a dubious romantic ideal, and Lelouch has difficulty in handling this content. He uses whatever emotive technique that first comes to mind, with little regard for formal integrity. His stylistic range simply provides a mixed bag of effects to draw upon. Consequently, the film is unified only by the love-and-chase plot.

The Canadian money that went into this co-production resulted in its strangest quirk. Why Québec is even mentioned when obviously New York was always envisaged as the city of freedom remains a mystery. The traditional border-crossing adds nothing, and the distant shot of New York appears distinctly un-New Yorkish. One wonders if it might not, in fact, be Montreal!

Also unfortunate are the film's references to Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde*. The comparison to that famous couple's adventures only emphasizes the essentially hollow experience of *A Nous Deux*.

Mark Mercer

For whatever reasons, films from all genres and filmmaking cultures have been constructed around the exploits of a man and a woman who share adventures and come to love each other. Recently, this includes many interesting love-on-the-run crime dramas. Unfortunately, the promise of something interesting, suggested by the early moments of Claude Lelouch's *A Nous Deux*, is soon dissipated when the couple comes together and starts running. For all its cinematic show and flash, *A Nous Deux* is a destitute film. Lelouch has the technique — as one would expect from a director who was initially a cinematographer — but in this film at least, that technique is confined to gaudy flourishes. The film itself has no real substance, and is constantly plagued by a lack of stylistic integrity.

A Nous Deux begins in France in the 1950's among gangsters who have become rich during the occupation. The opening sequences are gripping — a piano sing-song, the Marquise's face slapped, a brutal retaliation. The music, setting,

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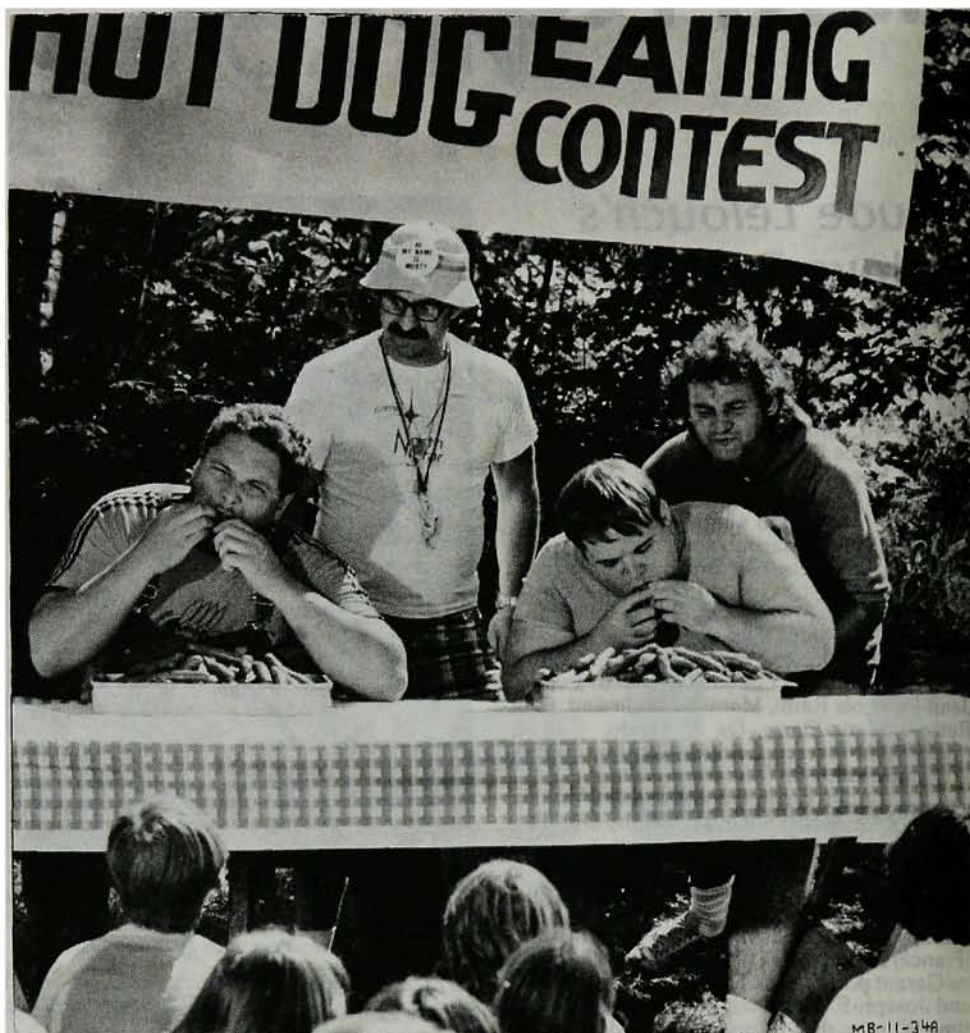
Ivan Reitman's Meatballs

d. Ivan Reitman asst. d. Gord Robinson sc. Dan Goldberg, Len Blum, Janis Allen ph. Don Wilder sd. Richard Lightstone p. designer Judy Gellman l.p. Bill Murray, Kate Lynch, Russ Banham, Margot Pinvidic, Todd Hoffman, Norma Dell'Agnesse, Jack Blum, Sarah Torgov, Keith Knight, Kristine DeBelle, Matt Craven, Cindy Girling exec. p. John Dunning, André Link p. Dan Goldberg p. manager Bob Bayliss p.c. Haliburton Films Production, 1978 col. 35 mm Can. dist. Cinepix

All the ingredients are there: the pompous camp director, the over-sexed head counsellor, the not-too-good looking female staff, dozens of screaming kids, and of course, the ritzy rival encampment across the lake. **Meatballs** depicts the typical summer camp. From ingenious pranks to romantic flings, the spirit of many a summer month in the Haliburton wilderness is recaptured for those lucky enough to have attended one of these camps. For those who lack the experience, the film offers ninety minutes of good fun, laughter and release.

Canadian successor to Ivan Reitman's **Animal House** (a film about a fraternity of rejects situated somewhere in the mid-U.S.), **Meatballs** employs the same basic style of slapstick humour.

Bill Murray, as head Meatball at Camp North Star, is much like the Belushi character in **Animal House**. In fact, both Belushi and Murray owe their exposure to **Saturday Night Live**. Murray also toured with the original troupe of Second City, so he comes to the Canadian setting well-seasoned for his role as Tripper, the quick-witted camp clown. At times he tends to be as obnoxious as Belushi and yet holds a kind of fascination for the



Two beefy contestants in **Meatballs**, with judges Harvey Atkin and Bill Murray presiding

viewer. Tripper is the counsellor who might be voted Most Likely To Succeed — be it through consoling a homesick camper or 'making it' with one of his female associates when the campfire is over.

From the word 'go' we see the side of

camp life that is most remembered — not the petty arguments or too much of the homesickness, but mostly the fun and comradeship that evolves after two weeks at a summer retreat.

The opening scene introduces the film's two rival camps. Larry Solway, as part of the news crew covering the beginning of the summer camp season, interviews Murray to find out about camp life. Murray, however, pretending to be the director of the rival camp, Mohawk, across the lake, advertises its loose lifestyle and degenerate game-playing. All this is said with a dead pan expression belying Murray's dry wit.

The annual Olympiad provides the focus for the good-spirited rivalry between the two camps. Predictably, the good guys seem to lose at everything. Mohawk has the better players, better uniforms, and even the better looks. How could they lose? Then there's North Star — they've got Tripper, and... well, you don't even wonder why they lose, 'cause after

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all they're a bunch of meatballs. But they do have spirit and they do know how to play dirty! With Tripper's cheer of "It just doesn't matter," the Meatballs go nuts. They turn Globetrotters with their antics on the basketball court and win, buns down, in the hotdog-eating contest.

This year North Star is determined to win. After much contestation about who is to replace the injured Cindy in the big finale, the cross-country race, the task is entrusted to Rudy, the camp runt. In a magnificent sequence following Rudy and his Mohawk opponent through the surrounding woods, Rudy's runt-turned-star performance earns North Star the gold medal for the first time in the history of the two camps.

No camp life would be complete without at least a hint of illicit sex. **Meatballs** abounds in inoffensive innuendoes — and the occasional offensive one as well! The CITs (counsellors-in-training), provide the entertainment as they conduct their own sex education course. The initiation

of Nerd, one of the junior staff, takes the male half of the crew on a mission to the girls' cabin, where a typical hen session, complete with 'true romance' magazine readings, is underway. Safely tucked under the cabin, the guys settle in for some cheap thrills — a perfect setting for the slapstick humour to follow. The girls, discovering their peeping toms, succeed in partially disrobing them and scattering them helter-skelter back to their own cabin — the battle lost, but the war just begun!

Although the critics haven't been overly kind, **Meatballs** has proved to be a great Canadian box office success. With its more-or-less universal theme, the film appeals to all ages and all persuasions. The difficulties encountered in shooting the film with so many amateurs — including the actual campers of a session at White Pines — seem to have been worth it in the end. Ivan Reitman, I sympathize.

Michèle Maheux

André Blanchard's **L'Hiver Bleu**

d. André Blanchard **asst. d.** Camille Belle-humeur **sc.** André Blanchard, Jeanne-Mance Déglise **ph.** Alain Dupras, Madeleine Ste-Marie, Jacques Marcotte **ed.** Francis Van Den Heuvel, Ginette Leduc **sd.** Robert Girard **set dir.** Luc Quesnel, Andrée Barrette, Louise Laferté (script) **l.p.** Christiane Lévesque, Nicole Scant, Michel Chénier, Roland Pelletier, Claire Nault, Père Léo Cantin **p.** Marguerite Duparc, Cinak **p. sec.** Claudine Fauque **p. manager** Louis Dal-laire **col.** 16 mm **running time** 84 min. **dist.** Les Films du Crépuscule.

Now that Canada and Quebec have entered an era of big-budget productions — for better, for worse, and for however long — some old questions have been raised. Is marketability incompatible with artistic vision? Do investment returns rate higher than didacticism and the altering of our sensibilities? What about national cinema? Are big production values inseparable from political bias (most often capitalist)?

Answers to these questions may be offered by considering two recent, would-be, anti-establishment, Hollywood films: **Apocalypse Now** and **China Syndrome**. Both are less successful in shaking the status quo than in glorifying the big-buck technology and power-hungry mentality they decry. Both are slick products which inspire awe and stupefy. (**Apocalypse** is a

great recruiting film, **China Syndrome** a star vehicle for U.S. back-up systems that work.) Considering this, and the Canadian social and political problems which won't disappear in a cloud of Clark's consensus, **L'Hiver Bleu** (Blue Winter) can be neither sunk because it's out of synch, nor obliterated for its blizzard of graininess.

Moreover, this one-hour and 20-minute film, written and directed by unknown Andre Blanchard, appears to have been hand-crafted with his friends, and com-

pleted with the help of most of Rouyn Noranda's population, businesses and community organizations — which also star.

As a decidedly low-budget Quebecois film, **L'Hiver Bleu** is interesting for several reasons.

First, it may be an anachronistic post-script to the wave of films made independently by Quebecois for Quebecois. This 'movement' peaked in the early 70's and faded with the P.Q.'s election — for which it may in part be thanked or blamed, depending on one's political persuasion and belief in the extent to which films actually sensitize populations, culturally and politically. Certainly these films provided training for many now working on the big-budget — mostly English — films.

Second, **L'Hiver Bleu** could be the first ripple in a new wave, by a new generation of independent filmmakers. Like its predecessors it touches on problems of labour, the disaffected students and their instructors, the young unemployed, the family, and language. Unlike its predecessors, this film dwells little on sexual awakening — which seems a fait accompli, considering jokes about 52 orgasms! The young appear afflicted with late '70s ennui, in contrast to the fervent political and social commitment of the '60s.

Third, the problems explored are not necessarily the consequences of Quebec's relationship with Canada. Rather, they seem to arise from regional disparities and difficulties in communicating with Quebec City. The climax — if there is one — comes when, after a struggle, the leader of the Association des Accidentés (The Rouyn Noranda Injured Workers



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Assoc.) is finally permitted to contact the Premier's office. He shouts into the phone, "You must pay attention to the workers of Rouyn Noranda, to the problems of north-west Quebec!" Socially and topographically the region is more closely related to northern Ontario.

Although less interesting than the structure, what story there is concerns two girls, Nicole and Christiane, who leave the industrially depressed area of Val d'Or to go to the big city — Rouyn Noranda. There they are welcomed into a communal house, rented for \$50 a month. The residents pay \$15 a week room and board, if unemployed, \$25 if working. The occupants aren't flower children, but frequently "work in their imagination," drawing, painting, singing and drinking moderately.

Christiane chooses to attend the local CEGEP (community college), and with another house resident, Michel, an instructor, attempts to become involved in labour issues. Michel underscores the late '70s problems of activism when he says during a protest, "When I went to university we were always ready to hit the streets. Now



Feeling right at home, in a scene from *L'Hiver Bleu*

the protests are in the attaché cases of some professors, while everyone else watches TV." At the film's end he leaves for the Gaspé, for "the sea and the boats."

Nicole decides to work, to save money to escape to South America. She begins as a waitress, her activities filmed in cinema vérité. This is followed by a stint as receptionist. Eventually she leaves the house because she can't stand the student milieu.

One night the two girls meet in the toilet of a bar and the renewal of friendship is shown in a long static shot of two, closed, water closet doors. A nice distancing device.

There is nothing cathartic in the film; it has the look of cinema vérité but was undoubtedly scripted and shot, for the most part, with a static camera to extend time.

Christiane, the archetypal activist with wire glasses, severely pulled-back hair and a few pimples, opts to stay at school for all its limitations and those of the town, both shown in documentary footage.

Nicole, more romantically cast with long black hair and deep blue eyes (which she casts deeply into the camera in an homage to the '60s, leftist, European filmmakers), leaves for adventure elsewhere.

Dramatically, these episodes transpire over the winter. But the workers' struggles, with which the episodes are intercut, are obviously the result of one afternoon's documentary shooting (the clothing, lighting, placards, by-standers give it away). Thus, documentary time, dramatic time and real time are in conflict. This forces the viewer to decide with which time he or

she is most comfortable. To accept dramatic time is to relegate the workers and their time to second place; conversely, to be most comfortable with documentary time is to negate the dramatic illusion. The viewer is left with real time, and a film he or she can only study, not be involved in.

This quasi-Brechtian device, along with the episodic undramatic construction, the musical usage, and the dense graininess, duplicate '60s experiments by self-proclaimed, leftist, European filmmakers. The politics of the form are further evidenced by gratuitously intercut, Eisenstein-like, factory sequences and sequences of the bleak snow-covered countryside, in which the color has been shifted to blue to add expression to the film's mood.

None of the actors are identified by name. Despite the high quality of their acting, or non-acting, they were presumably drawn from the community. The Institut Québécois de Cinéma and The Canadian Film Development Corporation were credited with production assistance, as was Eldorado Mines.

The day before its seven-day commercial run closed, this film attracted a total of six viewers for two showings, and this on Rue St-Denis near two universities. A comment on our times. For lack of an audience *L'Hiver Bleu* will probably decompose on a shelf somewhere and, if lucky, may see the darkened light of a theatre or church basement once a year...

And yes, we must pay attention to northwest Quebec.

Doug Isaac

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