

# Sonatine : 'Film maudit'

A conversation  
with director  
Micheline Lanctôt

by Connie Tadros

*As an animator, an actress and a film director, Micheline Lanctôt has excelled, richly earning the Award for Excellence which the Academy of Canadian Cinema gave her in 1981. It's too tempting to talk about a Renaissance Woman, but in lining up her achievements, that is difficult to avoid.*

*Trained as a musician at the Vincent d'Indy conservatory in Montreal, Lanctôt began animating at the National Film Board in 1967. Like other French filmmakers of the period, she left the Board and found work in the private sector at Potterton Productions where she worked on The Selfish Giant. It went on to win an Oscar nomination but she, a woman, never got credit for the drawings she contributed.*

*As she worked at her drawing table, Gilles Carle watched her, and began to fit the character of Bernadette to the warm, energetic and outgoing person he saw. Casting her in La vraie nature de Bernadette led Lanctôt to the Canadian Film Award for Best Actress in 1972; she was nominated again for the award in 1978 for her role as Lucky in Blood and Guts. Meanwhile, she had played Yvette in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz and had left Montreal for Hollywood with the film's director, Ted Kotcheff. During three difficult years there, she animated the titles for two of Kotcheff's features, organized a retrospective of Quebecois film, and commuted to Montreal for work in features and on television.*

*She became a public figure in Quebec when she held down a starring role in an immensely popular Radio-Canada series called Jamais deux sans toi, and eventually left the series in an effort to regain her privacy.*

*The Handyman, a film she wrote and directed, followed just three months after the birth of her little girl, and the film's success took her to the Directors Fortnight at Cannes, and was well received, especially by the audience at the Festival of Festivals where it played for the first time to an English-Canadian audience.*

*Now, her second feature, Sonatine, has been invited to the Venice Festival and will be shown out of competition. Lanctôt admits that it is a difficult film, contrasting sharply to the light wit of her first feature. But it is a film which is intensely personal, and which required all the talents and training she could bring to it.*

*Sonatine (a small sonata) is a film in three movements. In the first, an adolescent rides the bus every Friday evening, establishing a warm and tenuous relationship with the bus driver. In the second, another adolescent boards a ship, hoping to meet adventure, which she does in the figure of a warm and protective Bulgarian sailor. In the third part, the girls, best friends, contrive to challenge an indifferent public with announcing their impending suicides and imploring passersby to stop them. Lanctôt discusses the film, and the tensions from which it stemmed.*



photo: Ron Levine

**Cinema Canada:** You gave a television interview just after you came back from California, and what I remember best about it was the tone. You were steaming mad, raging about Hollywood and the effect it had on you. I had a very real sense, as well, that a lot of what you thought and felt about art, about culture and about yourself had fallen into place – that you had a very clear perception of just what you wanted to do now.

**Micheline Lanctôt:** This was an entirely unconscious process. Ever since I left L.A., I never stopped once to think about it, but you are absolutely right. There was an enormous focus pull done in L.A. and it resulted in *Sonatine*. Everything that I had felt was good about cinema became crappy, and I felt I had to do something else entirely.

The notion of cinema as the American studios make it, where all is gross, crass, commercial, debilitating, was just *indigeste* – impossible for me to relate to, impossible for me to use it as a model, impossible for me to find anything that agreed with what I believed and what I felt one should do when one made films. And I guess it must have generated a whole process of rethinking. I really found nothing in Los Angeles that could approximate what I felt I should do.

**Cinema Canada:** Was this something that came to you when you were in California and caused the move back to Quebec?

**Micheline Lanctôt:** No. The move back was visceral. I felt so cornered that it was a purely unconscious, spontaneous move, I just got out. I didn't want to go back there.

**Cinema Canada:** When I watched *Sonatine* with its themes of not communicating, not understanding, feeling estranged, wanting in and not being accepted and recording one's own notions which don't correspond to those of others, it struck me that this was the echo of that other rage that I had heard many years ago...

**Micheline Lanctôt:** That particular theme is always prevalent in me, in everything I do. It's my stamp. The thing I suffered most in my life, whether true or imagined, was feeling outside. I was the third child in my family and when it comes down to the third... there's time for the first, there's time for the second but the third always seems to be too much, you were too busy with the others' needs... Anyway, whatever it was, it branded me with the notion that I was different from my family, I was never accepted, and that stayed with me and made me go through a wretched teenage period. So, *Sonatine* is a direct reflection of that, but it was embodied when I was in Los Angeles and, of course, ever since I began going out into the world, I keep repeating the same patterns. I keep putting myself in the model that I lived through as a child which is being outside a situation and being left out. I don't think those tensions will ever be resolved but it was unlivable in Los Angeles because on every level it was so tangible, so palpable. Plus the fact that I didn't like the physical area, the physical aspects of L.A., and plus the fact that being a woman, being somebody's wife in L.A., is just about the worse position you can imagine and it almost destroyed me... so it was flight, instant flight and it resulted from all this estrangement.

Anybody can feel estranged in L.A. but it's worse if you are a woman and if, on top of that, you are a Quebecer and

## Lanctôt on women's films

No women's films have really made their mark. Because films are made by women does not necessarily mean they're brilliant. They have to learn like everybody else. I don't have Gilles Carle's experience so I cannot make a film as well as him. Why should I be mentioned just because I am a woman? I don't see that people should distinguish women's films just because they're made by women. If they make a good film, people will talk about it. It doesn't matter if it's made by a woman or not. So many women's films are dull that they start accepting this as a woman's voice. We don't make action films. We make slow, unbearable films... I find it insulting to have people think my film has a women's voice. I don't see what's feminine about a film or what's masculine about a film. There have been feminine films made by men and gays and there are some very mascu-

line films made by women. Why should such distinctions be made? I can see why most reviewers and film analysts are desperately trying to find a label that says: 'This is a woman's film' I find that limited; restrictive; reductive. I don't like to be reduced. I'm sure nobody does. A lot of women make feminist films but that's very different.

I don't make feminist films. I don't believe in 'feminism' as such. I'm an anarchist. It's my voice and I speak it. It's just my voice. I don't want to grow as a woman. I want to grow as a person. Then I'm a woman. Then I'm a Quebecer. Then I'm 36. Then I'm a mother. I'm myself. They can bunch me up with the mothers because I'm a mother. They can say I make mother's films. But, honestly, I can't think of a worse label than "Quebec women filmmakers." How many minorities can you possibly bunch up in one sentence?

(From an interview by Suzan Ayscough)

you speak French and you have my kind of personality, which is not exactly average. If you combine all these elements, you cannot fit, plus the fact that I can't lie. So when I met all these people they just could read utter contempt on my face and it became impossible. I couldn't go anywhere. They could read very squarely what I thought of them. And they were obnoxious to me person-

ally and professionally. It killed any chance I could have had of doing anything in L.A. I just had to open my mouth and speak to them and they knew... I was very violent. There is no glory to me in working for people I despise. I can't do that. Some people do. Some people will manage, anybody who is in L.A. ends up that way. They end up working for people they have no respect for. And

it's a hard contradiction to live with. I couldn't...

**Cinema Canada:** And it must have been more difficult still because Quebec, at the same time, was being swept by nationalism, and was feeling very confident, very proud. That is, before the referendum.

**Micheline Lanctôt:** Well, all the while I was in California, Quebec was coming up as a PQ power. It was emerging as a cultural entity and that made it all the more pulling for me because even though I don't like Quebec particularly, it's the one place I feel rooted. Unfortunately, when you live abroad as I have, the minute you uproot yourself from somewhere, no place is good enough for you after this. And I still suffer from that. Quebec is a place for me to work, but that's about all I can say about it. It's here that I can work and here I'm known and here my work is known and my work is fostered and encouraged and here I can function, but I could not function in Los Angeles. It was very hard knowing I couldn't raise a little finger in L.A., when I knew what I had access to work in Montreal, and of course it became impossible to travel back and forth. I was commuting once every two months and didn't know what time it was, what day it was, where I was... I'm a very physical person and that's the one thing about travel that kills me – getting used to new light, a new set of colours, shapes and odors, and that monopolized a lot of my energy. It killed me.

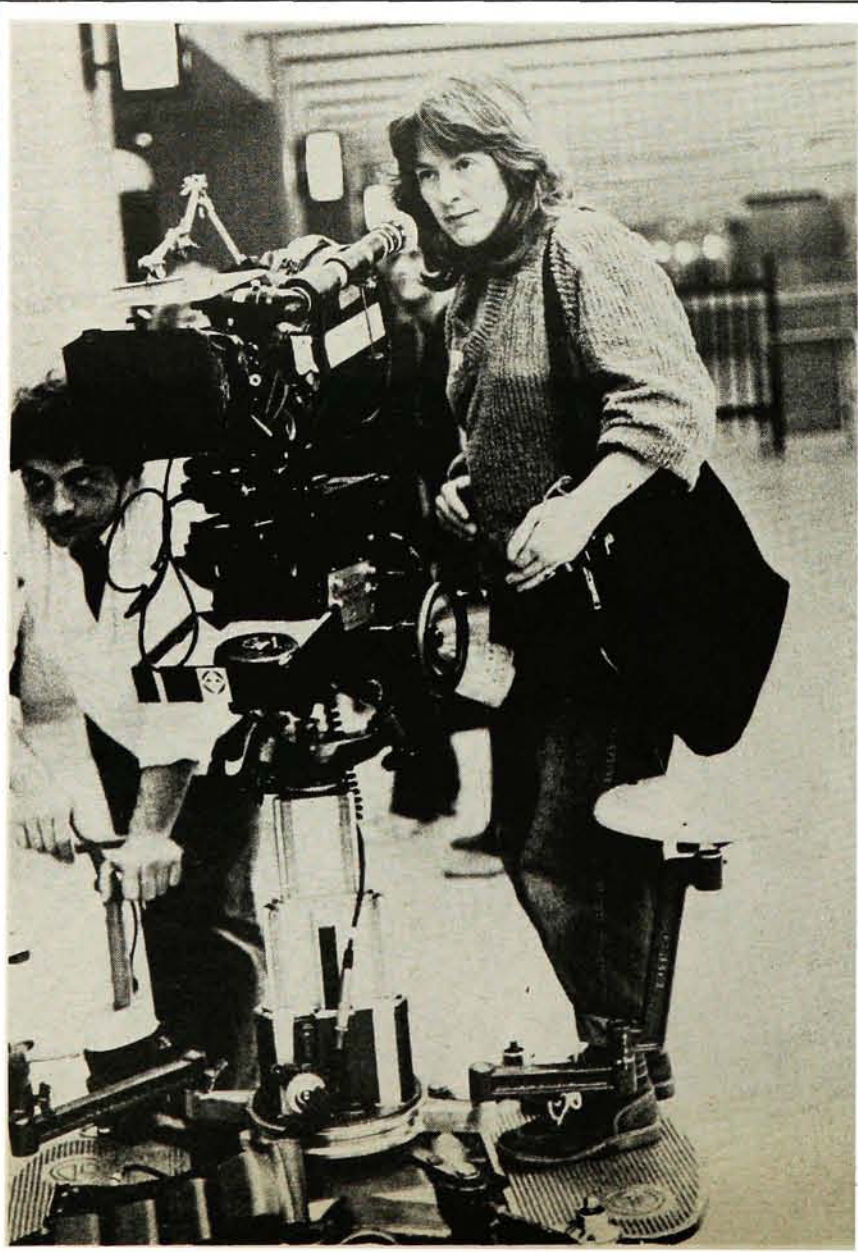
**Cinema Canada:** When I looked at *Handyman*, it seemed to me that you had come back very deftly, very light-heartedly and really thumbed your nose at the Hollywood way to do cinema, and it was so witty and so good and so honest. It was an easy film for the audience to relate to. In terms of tone, *Sonatine* is very different. You really are aggressive with the audience. Tell me about it.

**Micheline Lanctôt:** Ah! You found the right word; *Sonatine* is a very aggressive film. With *The Handyman*, I was coming back and I was offering myself on a golden platter and saying, 'I'm back, the prodigal girl. I'm back, here.' And the film wasn't very well received. In English Canada it was very well received but not in French Canada. And that felt like a slap in the face. I have a very controversial reputation – people envy people who go abroad and whenever you have a little bit of success, they wait for you with an axe. And there was a lot of "règlements de comptes" that went on around *L'Homme à tout faire* and I was a totally innocent victim because the film was done really with so much earnestness that it was almost embarrassing. And it really killed me. I couldn't walk out of my door for three weeks after the reviews came out.

**Cinema Canada:** Are you talking about the critics' response?

**Micheline Lanctôt:** Yes, and the public. All of us felt, (executive producer/distributor) René Malo and I, that the film was so simple and so warm that we were going to have a good response. And it was a success – but half of what we expected. So he lost faith in the film and I thought, they can't understand such a bloody simple story, they don't understand the simplest thing about this man. And I'd say: What's complicated about it? Of course, the film wasn't made in the conventional way. So that

● Lanctôt helming *Sonatine*. 'Nobody else could have made the film in such an obstinate way'



implied a certain effort on the part of the audience and even that effort is too much. And so I became enraged, and I went completely in the opposite direction. I thought, I'm not going to do films for these people. They don't come and see my films. The film was so simple, why didn't they relate to it? It angered me really, profoundly, and although I didn't purposely set out to make a film that nobody would understand, I guess *Sonatine* just reflected how I felt. I felt so utterly misunderstood! It made me very determined to go through with that film the way I saw it. *Sonatine* is so deadly in its logic that though I could have compromised and made the girls attractive and made the public go with them, that's not how I wanted to make them.

**Cinema Canada:** *I don't think you have to get very far into Sonatine before you realize that you better sit up and take note and I don't know what percentage of the filmgoing audience is ready to make the effort.*

**Micheline Lanctôt:** It's not for the average moviegoing audience. I never wanted to make a film for the average audience because all they want to see is these James Bond films. I hope *Sonatine* is going to find an audience somewhere else... I wouldn't expect crowds... It's such a personal film nobody can find a groove for it, it's a "film maudit"...

**Cinema Canada:** *I'd be interested in knowing in what ways you find the film so personal that it's difficult?*

**Micheline Lanctôt:** Because, as somebody pointed out to me, the actors are not actors. They are just things that directors use to make a point. And the film makes a point about me. It doesn't tell a story. You can't relate to the girls as normal girls. There is no point of contact with the audience. I wanted to keep the public outside of their story so you can only identify to what the director wanted to say. As such it's really an "auteur" film. I don't think anybody else could have done the film that way. In such an obstinate way...

**Cinema Canada:** *You say that Sonatine expresses your dark side, about the inability to communicate, the alienation...*

**Micheline Lanctôt:** It comes from that side of me which is neurotic. That side which feels it is perpetually misunderstood, left-out. And rightfully or wrongfully - I never took much time to analyse it - this is like a sore that I carry and I'll carry it all my life. Stravinsky died at 85 years old and just before he died, he said his greatest pain in the world was that his father always preferred his oldest brother. And all his life what he wanted was that his father would say, 'Igor, you are a nice boy, I like you.' And he never did. And so, as I said, it's part of the tensions that make you go on. If I didn't have that I don't know what I'd be talking about.

**Cinema Canada:** *Because I had a feeling that one of the things that made it very difficult is that it also comes very close to the heart of other things that preoccupy a lot of people. One is the whole question of adolescence - that it's so difficult to communicate. The other thing is just being overwhelmed by the technology. When you watch that film, there is a feeling, 'My heavens, I understand the metro better than I understand the girls.'*

## Lanctôt on Hollywood

I had to come back to Montreal. There, I felt that I was just being used. I just couldn't function. I have total, total disrespect for Hollywood. If you're not a great, you're just ostracized. They want you to cater to their very whims. It still makes my hair stand on end. When I see a film, and I read the titles and see the names, I go yuk. They're all creepos. They came in my house and ate my food, and they wouldn't even have the decency to say "Hi, how are you?" I've been introduced to the same guy thirteen times, and every time he would say "Hi, darlin', how are ya? What's your name?" The thirteenth time, I got very fed up and said "Fuck you."

It's a terrible place to be. A really terrible place to be. If you're with somebody else - if you're there with somebody else, ... you're never a person. You're only as good as your bankability.

All the stories you hear about Hol-

lywood... they're true. I've lived it. I've lived the A's and B's parties. They have the A list and the B list. I went to a party at Robert Wagner's house and we went with friends of ours, and there was a room for the A's and a room for the B's. The A's are people with a title, and the B's are just minor secondary people and agents. You had to stay in the A room.

And I've been to parties with valet parking, where they will only park Mercedes and Porsches. They wouldn't park our car because it was a rented Pinto. It's insane. There are many thousands of things that I've seen happen. It makes me sick. These are things that I just loathe. I cannot talk about it without the hair crawling up my neck. The clothes and the pompadour hairdo and the suntan... I just cannot... it makes me sick.

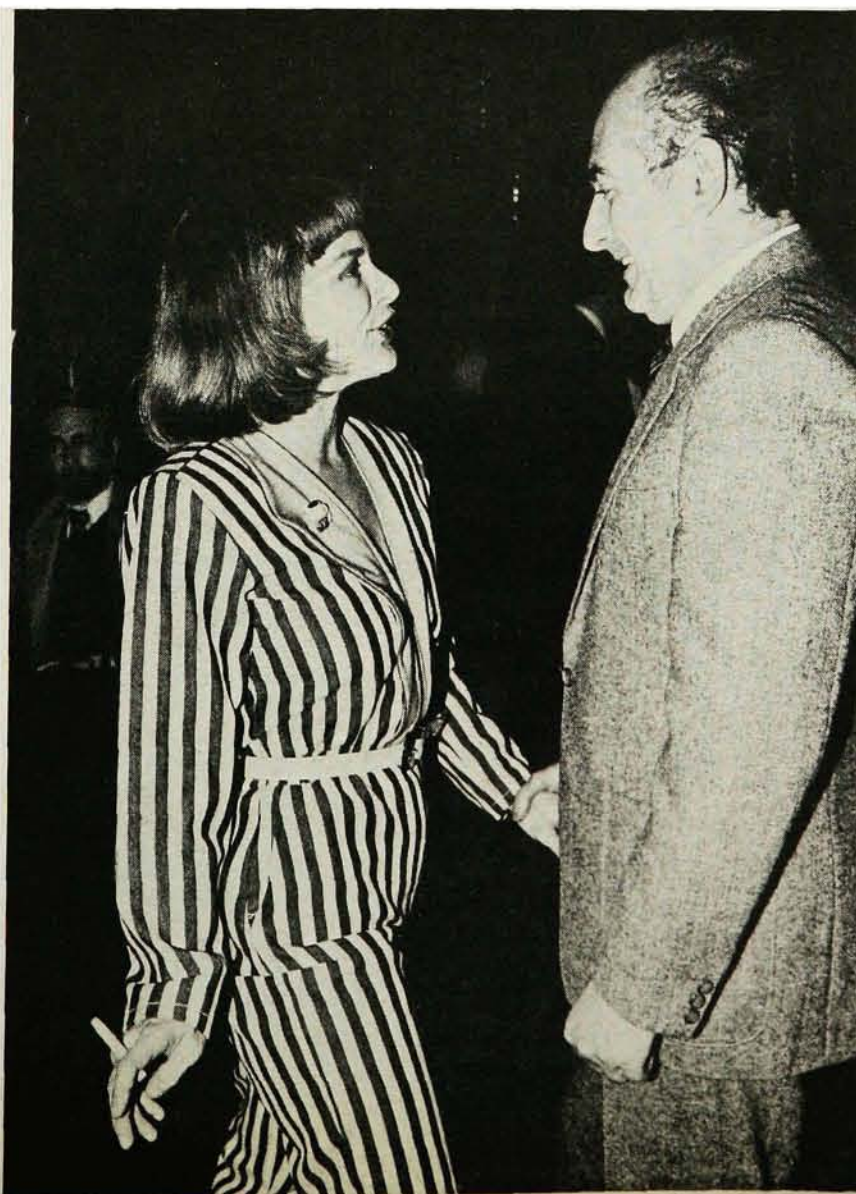
My future was elsewhere. Hollywood was totally foreign to me, so I had to come back.

(From an interview by Suzan Ayscough)

**Micheline Lanctôt:** Exactly. That is perfect. This is what it's meant to do. The metro is an actor in their life. The metro is really treated as an actor and a lot of people resented it because, first of all, they get very agressed by the noise. The metro is, in a way, responsible for the girls' death and the metro is the father.

One of the scenes in the film that best sums up the film for me I had to fight for, tooth and nail. No one understood it. It's the one when they are sitting and waiting at the Jolicoeur station, and the metro comes in; they are waiting and exchanging cassettes, listening to each other's cassettes and the metro rolls in, and Louise (Marcia Pilote) waves and she

● Excellence rewarded: Lanctôt and her executive producer René Malo at the 1981 Genies



runs after it and she says: "Papa!" and the metro goes away. Well, René Malo thought it was a useless, wasted piece of footage and I said, it's exactly what the film's about. The metro is the father and the father is the one thing in their life that counts. The exchange of the cassettes is a ritual. The whole scene is coded - you would have to be a cryptologue to understand the scene, but it's all there. It wasn't obvious when I shot it but when I was editing it I thought, there's something in that scene which is more than I wanted to say and one day I watched it on the big screen and when she runs and she says: "Papa!" it really came to me that the whole film was about looking for your father about this search for the father image - that the subway was the father and the father was in a way responsible for the death, and these signs make the people very uncomfortable at the end. And if the people had identified with the girls, they would not have gotten such a clear perception of the subway. As it is, the only people they can identify with in the film are the people sitting in the subway. And these people are directly accused of indifference. One reason why the film was so unpopular is that people feel totally incriminated; they become almost violent to the film.

**Cinema Canada:** *But the film is so ominous because we are surrounded by people like that. People pass me on the street and they have Walkmans on their ears and if I wanted to speak to them they couldn't hear. There is even the fear that the girls can hardly communicate to each other except through their Walkmans and the cassettes that they exchange.*

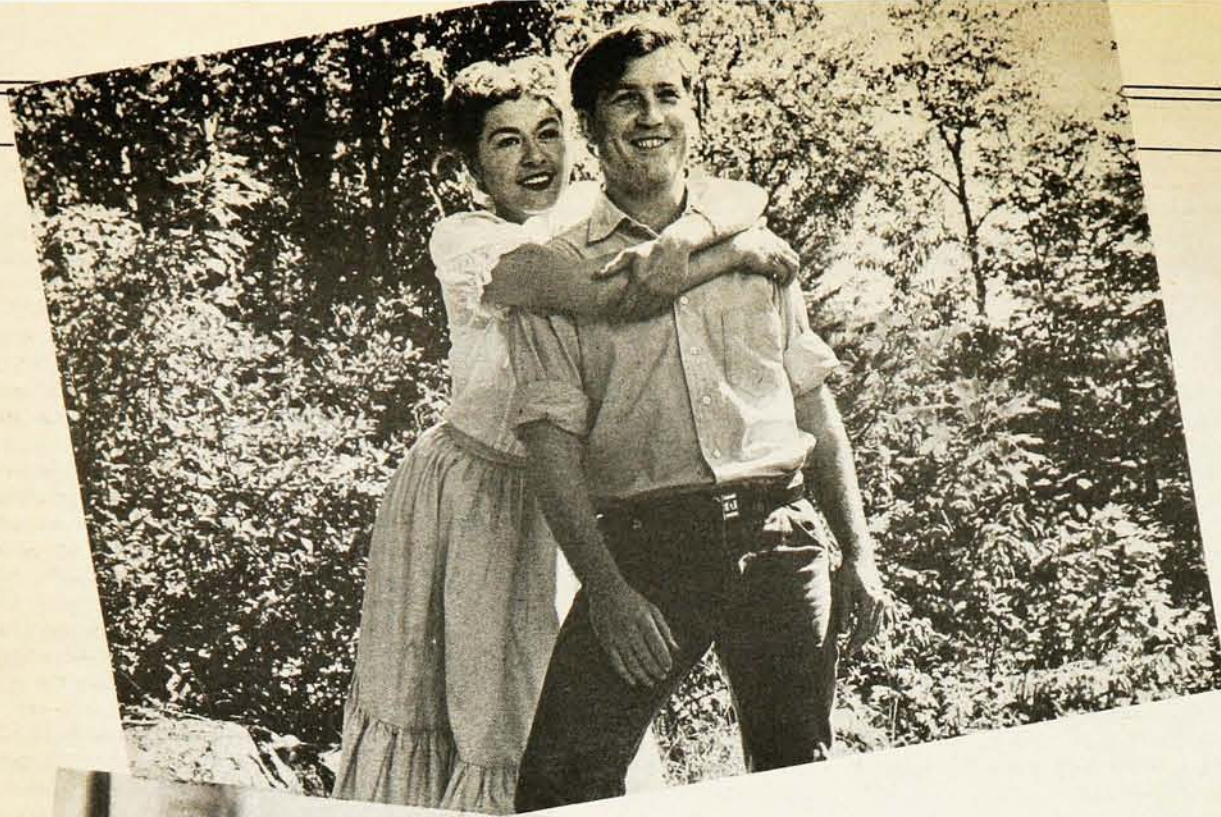
**Micheline Lanctôt:** Well, I think there is a breakdown in communication. There has been for a long time. The Walkman was the epitome of that. The encapsulation of the individual. It's not necessarily a bad thing because it all goes, in my mind, with the sociological phenomenon of the computers and it's going to put people in touch with their own selves a lot more. But it's certainly very hard to live through, for our generation anyway. Because we were not brought up with this. I don't think the girls mind. They have adapted to the situation. I think that the generation that will follow them will be positive. Their generation is not "sacrificed," but it is a sort of mutant generation.

**Cinema Canada:** *At the end of the film, there is a juxtaposition. The girls are dying in the metro because of people's failure to communicate while you, the filmmaker, are orchestrating the passage of the metros with their colors and rhythms into a technological set-piece which is really moving and brilliant. It's as if we can control the machines; it's just the humans that are out of control.*

**Micheline Lanctôt:** But that's absolutely right. That's why the metro is a character, in a way. Every motorized vehicle in this film is used in a very deliberate way and you are absolutely right - you get the impression that nobody relates.

**Cinema Canada:** *And the sounds. Often when people are communicating, we in the audience can't quite hear, but the sound track is very rich and everything fits. It made me think of concrete music.*

**Micheline Lanctôt:** The sound was all post-sync. And I made the score that



● Lanctôt as actress: (top) *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*; (center) *La vraie nature de Bernadette*; (bottom) *Ti-cul Tougas*.



thick. I made a score for all the effects and it was very, very thrilling to do because I suffered a lot from not being able to manipulate the sound on *The Handyman* but for this one I said, we're doing everything over again. I had a very good guy, (sound assistant) Michel Charon, and we took all the sounds from the busses and the boat and it really was all written down. Here you can hear the trains; there the *spash* of the water. It was really like a concrete music score and it paid off because most people relate to it. The whole passage on the boat relies on the sound-track for punctuation. Somehow you hear these strange sounds and all the life on the boat comes in the sound. You hear the sailor's accordion and something rumbles down in the boat, the pumps - everything was cued in to heighten and carry tension throughout the piece because so little happens in the image. It's meant to orchestrate tensions and in a sort of way to compensate for the visuals and that was fun to do. (Sound mixer) Michel Descombes and I had such a wonderful time, it was extraordinary.

**Cinema Canada:** *So where does all this lead you? After The Handyman you decided to really give the audience something to chew on, and that was Sonatine.*

**Micheline Lanctôt:** I don't know, I think both films were experiments. I'm learning my way through cinema. I can only imagine that the third film will be somewhere in-between. I certainly do not want to purposely alienate an audience. I don't wish that *Sonatine* would never have been made had it not been for the Institut's *plan quinquennal*... I don't think I could have raised the money. I know now that *Sonatine* is not a sellable film, and I think I know exactly what has to be made to make a sellable film. But I don't want to. What I now have to find is a voice. And that's what I'm looking for and that's what I'm going to try and find. There are a very few filmmakers that I really admire nowadays and the ones that I find myself really relating to are not necessarily the best but the most personal. Somebody like Jacques Doillon (*Le Pirate*), for instance, mesmerizes me. I don't think I've ever seen such highly personal films. He's just now starting to be comfortable with the type of film he's making but I'm sure it wasn't easy for him.

**Cinema Canada:** *But certainly, the list of directors you have worked with as an actress is pretty impressive. What did you learn from these directors in terms of directing?*

**Micheline Lanctôt:** You don't learn anything as an actress. You are too wrapped up in your own self to learn anything about directing. You learn something about behaving on the set, but that was the problem with *The Handyman*. When I got onto the set I knew nothing about camera places and techniques of filming, and sheer instinct got me through - plus my training as an animator that came back, thank God.

**Cinema Canada:** *Now, when you look at your career - music, animation, acting, writing, directing - how does the directing fit in with the rest?*

**Micheline Lanctôt:** It's the sum of the parts. Directing is the activity that takes most out of you. It appeals to everything. You have to know everything to be a good director. Most good directors I know are culturally rich. Most of them

either have an architect's formation, or design, music or literary training. You have to know technical aspects, you have to know human beings, you have to know acting, you have to know light, photography, design, architecture, you have to know everything to be a good director. You are determining every single shot you make and if you don't have these qualities, if you're not visual, if you are not graphic, if you don't have taste and culture, you can't do that and you can't rely on everybody else to do it for you. You can hire good people, but the decision's yours. And the vision is yours, if your vision is not really a sum total of all these parts, it's lacking something. It's not as whole as it should be and I guess that's why I became a director.

It's not so much that I wanted it, but because it was such a logical step from all my training. Because my training didn't serve me in anything I did. My training as a musician didn't serve me, my training as an animator didn't serve me as an actress, my training as an actress didn't serve me as a musician. I don't use the skills and I had to find something when I use everything I can do, and more. And in directing there's place for more.

It's very satisfying. It's certainly the most satisfying thing I've ever done. I still prefer animation as an art, it's still to me the golden art of Art, but there are a lot of things that I couldn't put to profit as an animator and that are better used in making films as a director.

**Cinema Canada:** *One last question. When one starts documenting your career, it's pretty impressive: animating both at the Film Board and on an Oscar-nominated feature, being awarded the Canadian Film Award for Best Actress in '72 and then getting nominated again a few years later; being given an Award for Excellence from the Academy in '81 and having films at the Directors Fortnight at Cannes and now at Venice. What more do you need to convince you that, in fact, you do communicate with people and they they do appreciate what you do?*

**Micheline Lanctôt:** I don't know. I guess more and more of the same. An artist cannot be satisfied. If he is, it's the end of his work. I keep doubting, I keep thinking I'm going to be out of a job any minute. This is my one driving obsession. And there is something in me that has to... that comes from my mother. I was an anorexic child. Only one person saw that in the film - a psychoanalyst. He said, this is an anorexic film. The girls eat their deaths. They eat the pills and they drink the milk; everything is anorexic. The paradox of the anorexic is that he has to prove to people he exists by dying and that's exactly what the two girls do. They have to prove they are there by killing themselves. And I never thought of the film that way, of course, because it's too close to me, I don't delve into these things, when I heard that, I thought, my God, that's absolutely true.

I suffered a lot when I was young because my mother felt I had too much facility for everything and she kept saying, if you worked you could have done better. So I'm persuaded that everything I do is just a tenth of what I can do and that I have to do better.

**Cinema Canada:** *So you're still working to do better?*

**Micheline Lanctôt:** I have to. To please my mother.

## Micheline Lanctôt's **Sonatine**

In the final scene of Micheline Lanctôt's 1980 first feature, *L'Homme à tout faire*, a drunken Armand (Jocelyn Bérubé) has climbed onto one of the overhead spans of Montreal's Jacques Cartier bridge and innocently fallen asleep there while the traffic below rumbles ceaselessly into the city. With steel above and steel beneath, "l'homme à tout faire" has become "l'homme qui ne fait plus rien"; in short, an impediment to the smooth dance of iron rationality. As the end-credits roll, police squadcars, electronic bullhorns, and firemen's hooks and ladders are all reaching mediatively in an attempt to rouse the sleeping good-for-nothing.

The fatal entrapment of human nature within media's second nature is the theme of Lanctôt's second feature, *Sonatine*, which after a brief sortie last spring is scheduled for re-release this fall. Two adolescent girls Chantal (Pascale Bussièrès) and Louise (Marcia Pilote), at the crossroads between childhood and womanhood, each separately undertake an exploratory foray into the adult world. Both are disappointed by the petty realities they encounter; together they plan a third, desperate breakout in an attempt to challenge the world to communicate to them on their own terms. The resulting catastrophe is the tragedy of human, imaginative experience in a mediated world of instant communications. Despite the lightness of its title, *Sonatine* is a dark masterpiece of ellipsis, a film haunted by the impossibility of communication that nevertheless manages via film to demonstrate that impossibility. For the fate of technological man (and technological art) is to sacrifice life to what the poet Rupert Brooke called "the keen impassioned beauty of a great machine." (Whether or not art justifies the sacrifice is, of course, the bitter pill that art itself must swallow.)

At the cost of the lives of its protagonists, *Sonatine* fully unveils the impassioned beauty of a great machine. Much of the film is a delicate dance of large machinery: buses, tugboats, ships, subways swirl about in a frenzy of purposive movement against the backgrounds of

the technological landscape (roads, garages, harbors, tube stations) or an always distant, cold and inhuman nature.

Against technology's primary beauty is contrasted the physical and emotional beauty of the two girls: Pascale Bussièrès as Chantal is utterly breathtaking. But the beautiful is all-too fleeting: with the exception of the bus-driver (Pierre Fauteux) with whom Chantal falls in love, *Sonatine's* other human characters are ugly. If the hirsute Bulgarian sailor (Kliment Dentchev) Louise encounters is not much to look at (and talks far too much Bulgarian) at least his Slavic soul is beautiful to the adolescent girl.

The adult world, however, wears the mask of death. Chantal's or Louise's parents either scream at one another or pass each other by indifferently; the people on the subways are cadaverous; those on the buses worn out by their lives. The weary silence of the human world is filled by media; everywhere the two girls go is littered with blaring radios, chattering TVs, crackling intercoms. Louise in her fugue sneaks through a warehouse in Montreal harbor occupied only by an unwatched television which tellingly is broadcasting a news item about the murder of a young girl. Chantal and Louise both seek refuge from the noises of the world to the mediated sounds of their Walkmen.

For all is not well in the enchanted land of technology. Media-borne violence sweeps through the airwaves; the mediated workforce (organized in labor-unions) is locked in conflict with the invisible owners of the means of communication - *Sonatine* is set and filmed during one of Montreal's numerous urban transport flareups. Chantal's bus-driver fights on board the bus with his estranged wife over a divorce. While Chantal is on the bus he is roughed up by his union colleagues. Cars and courier vans collide on highways; buses are set ablaze by wildcatting drivers. It is a world one wishes only to escape from by any means of transportation, mechanical, electronic or chemical; a world whose inhabitants ironically can only turn to more and more equipment in an attempt to break out of the vicious cycle of entrapment. Chantal and Louise, Walkman on their ears, roller-skates on their feet, circle aimlessly through homogenized middle-class

suburbs seeking a way to the "real" world their emotions, their music and poetry have led them to believe is somewhere out there. In one (of many) wonderful scene(s), Chantal records her bus-driver telling her, after she has said she hurt her back and is on her way to physiotherapy, "Tu es belle pareille." When she plays back his words again and again, however, the phrase comes out as "Tu es *bien* belle pareille."

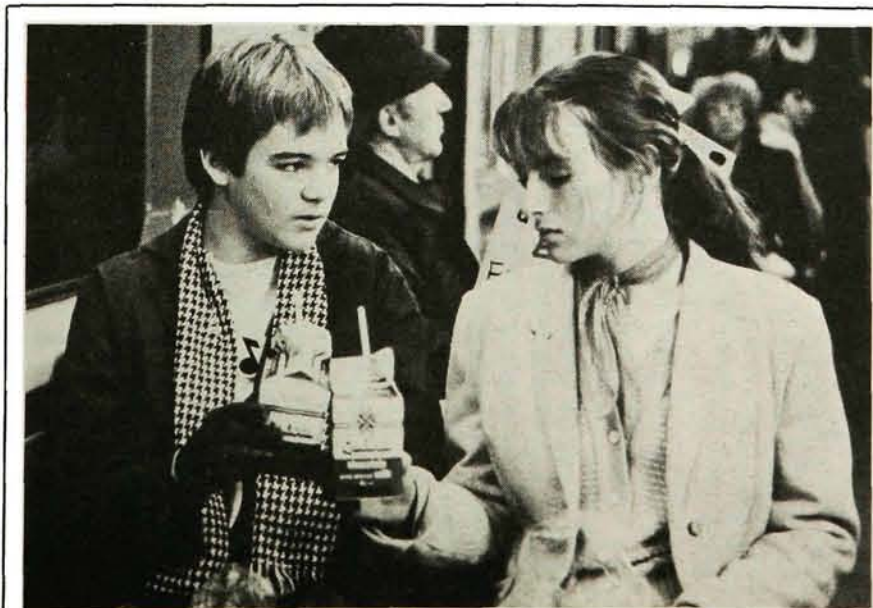
But that "real" world is denied them: Chantal's bus-driver is transferred to another route; Louise's sailor returns the young stowaway to shore while the sound-track echoes with squealing car-tires, human screams and smashing glass. There is no way out: home is a full fridge, a TV set that is always on and absent parents; the girl's high-school is a concrete prison of empty classrooms filled with the green-glowing screens of computer terminals; the subway station tunnels are engorged with anonymous consumers rushing lemming-like here or there, while the subway's overhead intercom system orders the drivers to "Communicate."

Dressed in the latest fashion, Chantal and Louise set off for their final journey towards a communicative ideal stated by the placard they hold: "Ô monde indifférent, nous allons mourir, fais quelque chose pour nous empêcher." Their fate is, of course, not deliberate but the result of a "communications breakdown."

As the striking bus and subway drivers shut down the system, even the p.a. warning passengers to leave immediately is overcome by technical problems. In the empty subway car, the two girls, unconscious from the overdose of pills stolen from their high-school infirmary, are almost discovered by a driver who thinks he's spotted something unusual only to at that moment learn from his overjoyed *confères* that the strike is on. Chantal and Louise die, not by natural causes, since their suicide-pact was intended more as a means of publicizing their plight than as an conclusion to it, but befittingly perhaps for technological beings, as a result of technical failure. As the lights dim in the subway system, there is only the horrified media-eye of Lanctôt's camera left to record the last moments of these two sacrificial offerings to the impassioned beauty of the great machine.

But what remains, of course, is a brilliantly, subtle, profoundly filmic meditation by one of the most contemporary directors in current Canadian cinema.

**Michael Dorland** ●



● Farewell toast: Marcia Pilote and Pascale Bussièrès in *Sonatine*

**Sonatine** d./sc. Micheline Lanctôt **exec. p.** Rene Malo **p.** Pierre Gendron **d.o.p.** Guy Dufaux **cam.** Yves Drapeau, Michel Bernier, Michel Girard **sd.** Marcel Fraser **asst. sd.** Paul Dion, Michel Charron, Claude Langlois, Viateur Paiement **lighting** Kevin O'Connell, Jean-Marc Hebert, Pierre Davreux, Marc Henaut **grips** Yvon Boudrias, Jean-Pierre Lamarche **props** Pierre Fournier, Louis Gascon, Tim Walton, Luc Martineau, Jean-Vincent Fournier **make-up** Jocelyne Bellemare **cost.** Helene Schneider **ed.** Louise Surprenant, Lucette Bernier **mixers** Michel Descombes, Andre Gagnon **mus.** François Lanctôt **a.d.'s** Rene Chenier, Michelle Forest **cont.** Claudette Messier **p. man.** Suzanne Henaut **p. assts.** François Leclerc, Jean Demers, Paul Chartrand **p. sec.** Roseline Poulin **p. acct.** Johanne Choquette, Maryse Beauregard **p. admin.** Claude Bonin **p.c.** Corporation Image M&M Ltee **unit pub.** Publifilms '83 Inc. **Can. dist.** Les Films Rene Malo (514) 878-9181 **int'l. dist.** Films Transit (514) 526-0839 **colour** 35mm **running time** 91 min. **lp.** Pascale Bussièrès, Marcia Pilote, Pierre Fauteux, Kliment Dentchev, Pierre Giard, Therese Morange, Pauline Lapointe.

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