

ion. The filmmaker must have also felt a lack because her use of music becomes over-emphatic, making sure we understand the dramatic emotions involved in her story and threatening to turn the whole thing into a melodrama. When the chords started plunking at every kiss of the climactic scene I definitely squirmed in my seat. The non-diegetic use of the song "La main gauche" seemed rather excessive. Especially as its message was already present in the conflicting emotions passing across Louise Marleau's wonderfully expressive face. That the intricate and painful emotions of such a relationship could be so subtly portrayed in the acting and then marred by the shortcoming of the film is doubly frustrating.

In the end one is left feeling that the film is taking a strong feminist stance. But what is it? Certainly the men in the film seem silly and inconsequential (except for the dead father and he only lives on as a ghostly presence). It is the women who are strong, interesting characters and their dilemmas central to the plot. That Anne is trying to get back to her mother through Alix is made obvious in two passages in the film; the Petit Poucet story, and the letter she writes to her mother. At one point, Anne listens to a tape from her lover telling a story of the Petit Poucet finding his way back to his mother's womb. And towards the end of the film, Anne writes a letter to her mother which sounds as if it's written to her lover. Towards the end, the scene of Anne crying in the bed with her mother looking on is repeated with Alix in her mother's place, but this time the mother figure crosses the space between them and holds her. This is the climax of the film.

Thus Anne Trister can be seen as a re-working of the Oedipus myth in feminist terms. The fall of Oedipus, as a tragic hero, comes about because, in his hubris he kills his father and marries his mother. The girl-child also experiences her first erotic attachment to the mother but in working out the conflicting emotions inherent in that relationship she rejects the mother and transfers her eroticism to the father. However this entails a rejection of solidarity with her own sex and an acceptance of her role as secondary to that of the male. In Lacanian terms, it also entails an acceptance of patriarchal law and an entrance into the symbolic; the codification of reality by language. A return to the mother thus signifies a return to the imaginary, the pre-verbal world, that she is associated with. Although the mother is the spokesperson for the symbolic order she bars total access to it. The never-ending fascination of the relation with the mother holds part of women in the imaginary order and for her to be able to speak for herself she must acknowledge the permanence of this relationship.

As Anne herself says as she rejects the standard forms of the still life to achieve the conception and actualization of her imaginary architectural environment, "One has to be in an extremely serious situation to be able to move...I would like to have the courage of my dreams." For her this situation is the death of the idealized father. It leaves her in a state of disarray clearly articulated by the multiple perspectives and dizzying imbalance of her creation. But it also al-

lows her to find her way back to the mother through her relationship to Alix. In her role as therapist Alix also plays the part of the mother, mediating between the imaginary and the symbolic, dream and reality, past and present.

However, like the tragic hero, Anne, in her hubris, brings about her own fall. This is already implied in the falling red chair she paints on the wall. As in the original childhood conflict, she stands between the father and the mother, in this case Alix and her lover, Thomas. It is after Thomas comes and tells her that he loves Alix and won't let her be destroyed that she forgets to set the lock on the wheels of the scaffold and this oversight is the occasion for her fall.

In mythic terms, the fall of the hero is also the fall into time and reality, as in Adam's fall from Paradise. But it is also a fall to the natural cycle and can imply a sense of liberation, as well as a passage from innocence to experience. Anne's artistic creation is destroyed when the building it was housed in is demolished. But this scene also suggests a sense of liberation as fresh air and sunlight are allowed into its closed world and we hear the sound of the bird escaping.

The scene of Anne crying on the bed is re-enacted at the end of the film, but this time the return to the mother is achieved through her relationship with Alix. The film ends with a home-movie of Anne in Israel, besides her father's grave, but the desert around it has blossomed into flowering plants.

If *Anne Trister* for me succeeds less well than *La femme de l'hôtel* as a visual, artistic whole, it provides deeper and more complex characterizations in the two leads. Unlike the earlier film, these characters do not remain static, trapped in their neurosis, but achieve both transformation and growth.

Mary Alemany-Galway •

**ANNE TRISTER** d. Léa Pool sc. Marcel Beaulieu, Léa Pool, from an original idea by Léa Pool p. Roger Frappier, Claude Bonin exec.p. Roger Frappier 1st a.d. Mireille Goulet cont. Monique Champagne d.o.p. Pierre Mignot cam. Jean Lépine 1st asst.cam. Serge Lafortune 2nd asst.cam. Michel Bissonnette video cam. François Gill sp.efx.coord. Jacques Godbout assts. Philippe Palu, Pierre Rivard, Antonio Vidosa, Gilles Rieupeyroux stills Bertrand Carrière sd. Richard Besse boom Yvon Benoit sd.efx. Ken Page asst. Vital Millette sd.efx.rec. Claude Chevalier mus.rec. Louis Hone mix. Jean-Pierre Joutel, Hans Peter Strobl p.man. Michel Dandavino, Marie-Andrée Vinet p.assts. Norbert Dufour, Ghislaine Mathieu, Tristan Roy loc.man. Pierre Houle, Pierre Plante unit man (Switz.) Gérard Rucy unit man (Isr.) Shlomo Paz admin. Monique Létourneau asst. Louise Cousineau, Evelyn Régimbald p.sec Johanne Pelletier, Nicole Bernier p.acct. Daniel Demers, Louise Dupré tech. coord. Edouard Davidovici post-p.sup. Suzanne Dussault painted environment concept & d. Geneviève Desgagnés, Daniel Sirdey assembled by Marie Maltais, Peter Hastings, Caroline Drouin assts. Greg Charlton, Georges Léonard, Paola Ridolfi art d. Vianney Gauthier asst.art d. Patrice Bengle on-set props Daniel Huysmans props Ian Lavoie, Pierre Gauthier cost. Gaudeline Sauriol dresser Marie-Anne Carter make-up Diane Simard hair Gaétan Noisieux, Lyne Normandin hd.lighting Roger Martin elect. Normand Viau, Jean Trudeau trainee Sylvaine Dufaux key grip Yvon Boudrias grip Jean-Pierre Lamarche loc.scout Michel Dandavino ed. Michel Arcand asst.ed. Alain Belhumeur orig.mus. René Dupéré with Daniel Deshaime mus. Sylvain Clavette, Claude Vendette mus.rights Evelyn Régimbald, "De la main gauche" comp.& sung by Danielle Messia, "Kaddisch" by Maurice Ravel int.by Marie-Danielle Parent, soprano, and the Studio C chamber orchestra directed by Richard Hoenich, "Ridiculous Love" comp. & interpreted by Daniel Lavoie, "Primadonna" by Gianna Nannini p.c. National Film Board of Canada, and Les Films Vision 4 Inc. produced with the participation of the Société Générale du Cinéma du Québec, Téléfilm Canada and the Société de Radio-Télévision du Québec dist. Ciné 360 Inc. running time: 115 mins. l.p. Albane Guilhe, Louise Marleau, Lucie Laurier, Guy Thauvette, Hugues Quester, Nuvit Ozdogru, Kim Yaroshevskaya.

Yves Simoneau's **Pouvoir intime**

"God, that was good! But, uh...what's the point?"

— overheard after screening

A black screen: the darkness oppressive as the gritty sound-track insinuates itself into consciousness, then the story slowly unfurls with deliberate, careful pace. Now a unique visual style washes over the screen: the first characters you see are in eerily beautiful shadows reminiscent of the black and white classics of the thriller genre, yet made prosaic by a strange new voice. As further characters are introduced, each with a different and spectacular cinematic device (overhead travels, back to cameras, low-angle backward, etc.) you feel them gaining a physical existence with a control of effects that belies this director's youth, but not his talent.

By the time the audience cries out in unison at the first surprise fright, we're hooked.

It is, indeed, at the visceral level, where thrillers should act, that *Pouvoir intime* works so astonishingly well. Director and Genie-winner Yves Simoneau, 30, manipulates tension and suspense using a triple-whammy combination of masterful pacing, original visual style and a surprisingly effective soundtrack. Without resorting either to the genre's typical gore and car-chases, or to stereotype over-kill, he tells his story — in fact, grinds it into you. *Pouvoir intime* contains scenes that reverberate in one's consciousness days after viewing, as a distant echo of some forgotten horror. We live with these characters, their courage, their fears, their limitations, their failures. And we curse their deaths.

The premise of the story, the conflict between power and the lack of it, between control and being controlled, is transmitted through the vehicle of a

botched security truck robbery. The thieves, a pair of down-and-out ex-cons, the son of one of them and the girlfriend of the other, act under the illusion that they are working for themselves, for Big Money. Actually they are mere pawns in the hands of a powerful and mysterious civil servant and his seedy go-between who are after secret documents inside the truck in question. Only the ring-leader, Théo, is aware of the game.

Through an unforeseen turn of events, a guard is left still alive inside the truck after it has been successfully taken and hidden in an old theatrical warehouse. The plan for a quick getaway is foiled by the guard, who makes a courageous stand inside the locked vehicle despite every attempt the thieves make to dislodge him. The torment of each opposing faction as they strive against each other with courage, determination, violence and the threat of slow death makes for gritty scenes of incredible, blood-curdling power. This cinematic rendition of conflict is its purest, abject form, implicit and realistic, is among the strongest I've ever experienced in any Canadian film.

The script, co-written by Simoneau and actor Pierre Curzi, handles action, fear and tension better than it does the dialogue, which is adequate but unremarkable. True to the genre, all the female roles looked flat compared to their male counterparts. In an unsuccessful effort to add flesh to the Roxanne character (played by Marie Tifo), the script operates a stereotype-in-reverse. Instead of a chesty, squeaky-voiced blond bombshell, we have a plain, androgynous and square-boned woman who wanders into either men's or women's bathrooms indifferently, whose existence seems ill-defined and unrealistic.

The characters form the spectrum of the thriller format: 1) the manipulating bad guys, first lit in black and white shadows but moving on to artificial lighting, which, much like their interests, are preoccupied with exterior, modern, superficial desires; 2) the anti-heroic thieves, true "beautiful losers" of Canadian lore, who wear their humanness as a badge of glory and die with tears in their eyes; 3) the honest, good guy, security guard Martial, terrified,



• *Pouvoir intime* works at the visceral level: Jacques Godin holds Eric Brisebois as Marie Tifo and Pierre Curzi look on

wounded, just trying to stay alive, but barely retaining his sanity by clinging to his one remaining pillar — the love of his life. (But when even she appears to have conspired against him, he is destroyed); and 4) a side-line love-interest is thrown in, but in a departure from the norm the character, Janvier (Jacques Lussier), is a gay young man. However, the central relationship between the leading female role, Roxanne, and conspirator Gaétan, is never properly defined and seems confined to looking at each other with misty-eyes.

As for the father-son relationship of Théo and Robin, mighty efforts are required from both actors to keep from falling into a stereotype — and they just barely achieve it. Jacques Godin shines, as always, as a strong and loving father, while 16-year-old actor Eric Brisebois gives a good performance as a young man caught in the maelstrom of enveloping violence.

Another veteran actor, Jean-Louis Millette, fits his role well as a shady low-life who actually raises a flag to decency before he too is crushed by events beyond his control.

Robert Gravel, playing the security guard, renders a truly stunning performance as a man caught in a deadly situation, and gradually being destroyed by slow, painful inches. Some of his scenes are among the most memorable of the film.

Director of photography Guy Dufaux brings a look of strong linear beauty to Simoneau's direction (which must have been difficult to shoot at times), while artistic director Michel Proulx works wonders creating a realistically gritty yet beautiful world for the actors to fit in. Despite its \$1.7 million budget, this film *looks* like it cost five times that.

A good deal of the film's effectiveness in creating a suitably tense atmosphere, its deliciously acrid tang, is achieved in the marriage between Simoneau's direction and the music track created by Richard Grégoire.

Simoneau develops the story with a detailed awareness of pacing and creating atmosphere. He adds broadstrokes of tension like an artist applying paint — layer by poignant layer, playing on every fear and phobia common to man, weighing each stroke for its effect as much as its reasoning. As a result, tension builds to a seemingly inevitable crescendo. Therefore more is the pity when the true ending dissipates this pent-up energy with one senseless, nihilistic and anti-climactic orgy of self-destruction of the main players, the very characters the audience have

come to *care* about, and just when the script had pointed brilliantly to a moment of confrontation that should have been the high-point of the story. Instead, when the heavy arrives, two of the four thieves are already dead (one by his own hand).

Despite the unsatisfying ending to a memorable tale, **Pouvoir intime** is an important work of cinema, that could win wider markets than its present local release (though, it's been doing well in its first week). A European release is entirely conceivable, as the French are great fans of American-style thrillers.

Someone is bound to wonder what Simoneau could possibly do as an encore, given a heftier budget and an outstanding script. Judging by the brilliance of **Pouvoir intime**, it would be well worth finding out.

André Guy Arseneault •

Ron Mann's

## Listen To The City

Ron Mann's **Listen to the City**, the first (and to date, only) dramatic feature by the celebrated Toronto documentarist (**Imagine the Sound, Poetry in Motion, Marcia Resnick's Bad Boys**), was completed in 1984 but, by 1986, still hadn't more than a scant handful of public screenings in Canada.

Following a carnivorous nasty reception at its premiere at the '84 Festival of Festivals in Toronto, the film was re-edited by Mann but its distributor, Spectrafilm, remains reluctant to push for screenings. Whether that's because the film still bears the taint of high-profile humiliation (and no beast is tougher than Torontosaurus), or because its formal and political eccentricities make it a hard sell for a commercial distributor seeking first-run engagements in commercial theatres, (its best context would be a classroom or a political meeting) the virtual non-release of **Listen to the City** is unfortunate. For it is one of the more original features produced in English Canada in this decade. (Only in Canada. Pity.)

A self-described "political fable" that combines elements of Godard, Marvel comics, Orwell, rock video and King Vidor's **Our Daily Bread**, **Listen to the City** takes the form (but thankfully not the tone) of an academic argument: it addresses a particular problem and posits a possible strategy for solution.

The problem is unemployment. As introductory titles inform us, Canada's ever-escalating unemployment rate is encompassing increasing numbers of Canadian youth — a situation that cannot bode well for the fostering of a healthy sense of optimism and commitment concerning the nation's future. **Listen to the City's** quasi-utopian, urban romantic solution, which it will allegorically illustrate, is job rotation, the concept of rotating work periods so great numbers of workers can share the same jobs. To create, as the titles boldly prophecy, a "new social solidarity in which ever scarcer jobs are shared by more and more people."

But what follows is not the didactically strained *agitprop* these titles ominously foretell. Quite the contrary. In fact, for all its initial political threats, **Listen to the City** has actually far less political savvy than it has aesthetic gumption. Its cultural concerns are firmly of the pop variety, and its somewhat scattered social improvement strategies are finally less convincing or captivating than the sheer formal exuberance of the film. This affinity to art before politics is in fact immediately established in **Listen to the City's** first sequence, which shows an apparently bedevilled hospital inmate (played by poet-songwriter-reformed junkie Jim Carroll) taking to the street armed with sunglasses, an intravenous stand and a steady stream of prophetic poetic platitudes ("Power is not wealth and power does not serve wealth...", "Our work is our passion and our passion is our task..."). The poet-songwriter figure, a romantic symbol of the exaltation-through-suffering of art and artists, who will re-appear throughout the film like some Christly panhandler, has a signifying resonance far more profound and immediate than most of the more elaborate and developed scenarios he's constantly barging in on. He stands for art and pain and vision and such, and his romantic function in the movie can actually stand for the whole movie, which

is really more a plea for art than a call to arms.

**Listen to the City** tells the story of an eponymous metropolis (undisguisedly Toronto, though not named as such) on the verge of economic collapse as its principal industrial mainstay, Lambda Corporation, is threatening to withdraw because of what slick company spokespersons claim is an irrecoverable decline in profits. We don't trust these silver-haired smoothies a whit and, as it turns out, well that we shouldn't. It seems that Lambda's icily cool and cynical wunderkind president, Shadow (Sky Gilbert), is orchestrating the whole scam from an immaculately sparse office somewhere high in the sky above Bay Street. Shadow's plan is to offer to sell to Lambda workers the seemingly-crippled company at a bargain basement price. Not only will such a scheme bestow upon Shadow a politically progressive nice-guy veneer, it will facilitate his bailing out just in time to avoid (nyah-hah-hah!) the stock market collapse he knows is imminent. It is the agitation of the workers by Shadow's Devo-esque thugs, and the attempts of a reporter (P.J. Soles), a union officer, and a liberal city council member (Barry Callaghan) to put a stop to Lambda's mustache-twiddling subterfuge, that makes up most of **Listen to the City's** dramatic intrigue.

But it is actually the fracturing and disassembly of the parallel scenarios (which collide at the climax) that distinguishes the film, and not their integrated linear momentum. Structured something like a video monitor set on rapid remote control channel-changing, the film conveys more in terms of jarring juxtaposition than it does dramatic development. And while the puzzling parallel intrigues do not fuse in an entirely neat and satisfactory manner in the end, their simultaneity is neither random nor meaningless. In attempting to establish in cinematic terms the same sense of socialist cooperation and mechanical interdependency allegorically alluded to by the voiceover that calls the city a "symphony of voices", Mann's fractured fable acts as an apt working example of politics as process, involving constant changes of perspective and simultaneous individual endeavour. Like the city, political action is not independent entity; it consists of many disparate activities, voices and

• In **Listen To The City**, Sandy Home of The Spoons uses her music to build harmony out of divergent aural and stylistic elements



photo: Joanne Hovey

**POUVOIR INTIME** d. Yves Simoneau p. Claude Bonin, Roger Frappier; sc. Yves Simoneau, Pierre Curzi 1st a.d. Alain "Lino" Chartrand cont. Johanne Prgent d.o.p. Guy Dufaux stills Warren Lipton art d. Michel Proulx set des. Normand Sarrazin props Pierre Fournier p.acct. Daniel Demers asst. Louise Dupré p.sec. Nicole Bernier p.asst. Christine Jasmin mus. Richard Grégoire ed. André Corriveau sup.sd.ed. Paul Dion asst. Marie-Claude Gagné make-up Micheline Trépanier cost. Louise Jobin dresser Luc Le Flaguais gaffer Yves Charbonneau elect. Denis Ménard, Eloi Deraspé, Brian Baker key grip Emmanuel Lépine, grips Pierre Charpentier, Richard Bonin; post-p.d. Jacques Bonin, Suzanne Dusault; unit pub. Danielle Papineau-Couture. Col. 35mm, running time: 87 mins. p.c. Les Films Vision 4 Inc., L'Office National du Film du Canada. With the financial participation of: Téléfilm Canada, La Société générale du cinéma du Québec, and the collaboration of La Société Radio-Canada. Can.dist. Vivafilm (514) 931-2500. Foreign sales Films Transit (514) 527-9781 l.p. Marie Tifo, Pierre Curzi, Jacques Godin, Robert Gravel, Jean-Louis Millette, Yvan Ponton, Eric Brisebois, Jacques Lussier.