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It's a rainy night, and the nice old man is happy to get to the restaurant. He's obviously a regular and, in between reading his newspaper and attempting a crossword, takes pleasure in observing the others around him. Nearby trains rumble by, shaking the chandelier, but the warm and cozy little world enfolds everyone.

The tables are occupied by a fine variety of people – a family birthday party for grandmama includes a baby and the dog, and two smart little old ladies tackle a scrumptious tea. A group of businessmen solemnly discuss big deals, while a woman alone casts a roving eye around the room.

The old man leaves his newspaper and a tip for the waiter and departs into the night. The rain continues to fall.

A subtle and gently perceptive first film by animator Wendy Tilby, made over a period of eight months, as her graduating film from Emily Carr College, Vancouver. Using oil on glass, she creates wonderful figures, reminiscent of soft sculptures, that have a life and a believability. Her observations are deft, acute, full of warmth and never sentimental. A

## MINI REVIEWS

by Pat Thompson

first-rate debut film – remember this animator's name!

Winner of the Grand Prix de Montreal for Best Short Film in Competition at the 1986 World Film Festival in Montreal.

An animated film by Wendy Tilby. Col. 7 1/2 mins. 1986. 35mm/16mm/VHS. Availability (604) 731-0797 (1626 West 11th Ave. Apt 4, Vancouver, B.C. V6J 2B9).

### THE BIG ADVENTURE

Just hold on there – a commuter's ride on the Toronto subway was never like this – from Wilson in the north of the city to Union in the south in three minutes! Time-lapse photography hurls the viewer along at a simulated speed of 350 miles per hour, through tunnels, out into the light, past squeaky-clean deserted platforms, to a breathless standstill. The driving, pulsing music adds momentum to the wild dash along the rails.

Impeccably shot and edited, and accompanied by original music, it

has distinct theatrical possibilities and would wow an audience in 35mm...

Premiere at 1986 Festival of Festivals, Toronto.

A film by Colin Strayer (Northland Pictures). Orig. mus. Kevin Hunter. Col. 3 mins. 1986. 16mm/3/4"/1/2". With assistance from Toronto Transit Commission/Wellesley Sound/NFB, Ontario Region/Alex Ferguson.

### BARABA

The lawyer's business is picking up, but Mrs. Michaelson is not coping too well, so he wants to find a first rate legal secretary. At this point Baraba appears in his office. She can start right away, and does. On her first day, although the lawyer thinks she is "possessed," he has to admit that the continuously clacking typewriter is "music to my ears."

For two weeks Baraba appears to work day and night, and one weekend when the lawyer comes to his office, she won't let him in, "I

prefer not to open the door right now." Then Baraba stands by the window in her cubicle, "I have given up typing." And so it goes – in spite of every plea Baraba remains immobile and, finally, the lawyer says, "I will have to leave her," and moves his office. The owner of the building tells the lawyer to get her out of the vacated space, various suggestions are made, but Baraba remains until the police remove her to jail.

The lawyer, feeling some guilt, agrees that "She was a good employee, but a bit eccentric." He visits her in jail and Baraba says, "I know who you are and I want nothing to do with you."

This strange allegory, if that's what it is, skims over the soul and doesn't touch the heart. Its chilly perspective of a kind of nothing-world is difficult to appreciate, though perhaps others would care to impose their own interpretations and fantasies upon it. However, the first firm conviction that it is wilfully enigmatic still remains.

p./d./sc./ed. Aaron Shuster. Cam. Martin MacInally. Mus. Richard Nimmo. Col. 40 mins. 16mm. Lp. Lyle Nickle (Lawyer), Baraba (Cayle Chernin), Mrs. Michaelson (Luba Greenberg). Availability: (+16) 860-0534.

## SCAN LINES

by Joyce Nelson

# Voice Of America

We assembled in the ROM Theatre to be the studio-audience for a television show entitled "Free Trade And the Film and Television Industry" – a debate staged for the Trade Forum in Toronto's Festival of Festivals. At the TV director's cue, the large white screen at the front slowly rose to reveal the set: moderator Chalmers Adams at the podium, flanked by *Toronto Star* writer David Crane and Stephen Roth to his left, economist Steven Globerman and head of the U.S.C. graduate management program Arthur Murphy to his right. Over the next two hours, these four would debate the resolution "that a free trade agreement between Canada and the United States will be of significant benefit to Canadians in the Canadian film and television industries." Crane and Roth took the negative position on the resolved, while Globerman and Murphy (the only American) argued the affirmative.

During the course of the proceedings, some very odd things happened. These odd things seem worth pointing out. First, it became clear that the only microphone for the four debaters which was actually working was the one placed in front of Arthur Murphy, spokesman for the American film and TV industry. Thus, his voice was carried easily to the audience, while we had to strain to hear the Canadian voices, even that of Globerman, Murphy's debating team-mate. As the third speaker (after Globerman and Crane), Murphy's remarks were highly provocative and arrogant, including a number of veiled threats should

Canada in any way attempt to restrict U.S. film distribution in this country. At one point Murphy unveiled the threat by stating that the U.S. would completely boycott Canadian screens, "no more Barbara Streisand," he added. Then Mr. Murphy revealed, in one phrase, the American perception that underlies his country's position. He said: "various two-bit countries have tried such restrictions" and failed. Though it is no surprise to hear a representative of the United States refer to other nations as "two-bit countries," what was surprising was to witness the effect that this imperial arrogance had on the proceedings. Two more strange things happened.

Of the four debaters, Murphy's speech was the only one interrupted by applause from the largely Canadian studio-audience for statements like, "The arts transcend national borders," and "We've got too damn many administrators in the arts." It was also the only speech followed by applause at its end. And once Murphy had finished speaking, moderator Chalmers Adams strangely neglected to follow previous procedure and call for a question from Crane or Roth. Instead, he began to introduce the next speaker (Roth), by passing the opportunity for ques-

tioning Murphy's remarks. David Crane had to interrupt Adams' introduction and remind him of the right to question Murphy. It was as though this Voice of America had hypnotized the room.

Like a metaphor for U.S.-Canada relations, Mr. Murphy's arrogant remarks seemed to weave a strange, hypnotic effect on the proceedings. The only voice carried through the loud-speakers aside from Chalmers Adams' neutral moderating voice, this technological accident synchronistically revealed the larger dynamic at work: the imperial (and threatening) Voice of America, easily heard, is answered by the Canadian voice of moderation. For other voices, we must strain to hear. And as happened here, this Canadian voice of neutrality literally neglects to allow for questioning, or for challenging the American position. It is as though that arrogant Voice of America paralyzes and hypnotizes at the same time: paralyzes the ability to question, hypnotizes with its power. One result of hypnotized paralysis is voiceless applause.

Another result is a serious clouding of perception. And here we must look to the otherwise cogent remarks of David Crane and Stephen

Roth. At one point in the debate, Roth stated the often-heard position that Canada's population of 17 million movie-going consumers is "insufficient to support the industry." That perception is debatable in itself when one thinks of countries like Sweden and Cuba which manage, with a smaller population base, to support their indigenous industries. But the perception becomes much more problematic when it is placed in juxtaposition with a remark stated by Roth's debating colleague, David Crane. Crane informed us that although Canada has half the population of Britain, last year the number of movie theatre tickets sold in this country was **double** the number sold in Britain.

That fact, unremarked upon in the debate, must be central to Canadian thinking. It tells us that the more accurate perception of Canada is that it, as an image-consuming nation, is actually twice the size of Britain. In media terms, it is time to stop thinking of Canada as a small ("two-bit") country when, in actual fact, its 17 million movie-going and TV-viewing Canadians out-consume most other countries on the planet. This alteration in perception is crucial to recognizing not just the importance of the Canadian box-office to U.S. entertainment conglomerates' interests, but to realizing that in terms of image-consumption patterns and figures, Canada is quite literally one of the largest countries in the world and therefore fully able to potentially support its own film and TV industries. The Voice of America, however, would have us think otherwise.

## David Cronenberg's **The Fly**

They were giving away T-shirts at the premiere of *The Fly*, Toronto filmmaker David Cronenberg's contribution to the *Fly* cycle of horror pics in this remake of the 1958 version. An excellent idea, too. Because it gives you something to throw up on as you watch the film, instead of barfing all over yourself.

There are, of course, several currents in modern cultural nausea. For Sartrean existentialism, nausea was produced by a surfeit of being. In the nihilism of post-existentialism, however, nausea results from an absence of being. But in the technological transformations of absent being into mutated forms, nausea regurgitates upon itself to become neither surfeit nor absence, but norm. Techno-culture is, in this sense, deeply nauseating. And while Canadian filmmaking is not without its nauseasts (Arthur Lipsett, for instance, or in his dizzy way Bruce Elder), David Cronenberg surely leads the pack by virtue of having attained a certain level of critical esteem at home and, as well, a certain level of distributive clout abroad among the mass-mechanisms of puke-culture — with what Bill Beard has called his “regurgitative versions”

With *The Fly*, however, Cronenberg surpasses himself in the sheer intensity of his revulsion. *The Fly* is Cronenberg-plus: all the obsessions of the previous films raised to a quivering pitch of relentless gagging not only before the helpless corruptibility of the flesh itself, but because of the human impossibility to do anything other than love even its most monstrous creations. As James Twitchell writes in his anatomical study of the horror film, “What is truly terrible in the story of the transformation monster is incomplete transformation.” And *The Fly* is a truly terrible film.

For one, because it's so unbelievably improbable: Seth Brundle (Jeff Goldblum) is to scientists, real or demented, what Veronica (co-star Geena Davis) is to journalists or what Stathis Borans (third lead John Getz) is to magazine publishers. In short, it's a cartoon, from Seth Brundle's lab-loft (“Designer phone-booths?” inquires Ronnie as he's showing her the telepods) to such gems of dialogue as:

Ronnie: “It's really big”

Stathis: “What is? His cock?”

Cartoon characters, cartoon setting (Toronto with American currency), and cartoon emotions. As one of the wits in the audience yelled out during the first (for a director as into ‘flesh’ as Cronenberg) astonishingly coy sex-scene between Brundle and Ronnie, “Don't touch his fly!”

Except that in the wonderful world of Cronenbergian animation, the cartoons bleed. Suddenly. And they not only bleed, they ooze, they pustulate, they decompose, they crack open, they split

apart, they are rent asunder — turning into quivering, fibrillating, spattering hunks of processed meat.

Modern media systems, McLuhan taught, in reprocessing human beings into “the sex organs of the machine” turn the human inside-out, exteriorizing the nervous system. Cronenberg's earlier films, especially *Videodrome* (1982), are literal explorations of technological reprocessing, and *The Fly* is perhaps the most literal of Cronenberg's films. As Brundle detachedly explains, puzzling over the quivering yecch of a baboon that his telepod (or media) reprocessing system has turned inside-out, that's, so to speak, the fly in the process. As Brundle literally discovers.

Even so, after Brundle has been turned into Brundlefly, life goes on: hideous, mishapen mutant that he has become, he continues problem-solving at his computer, even as his fingers decompose onto the keys and his teeth or ears fall off. Life goes on, as Veronica finds she is pregnant with the mutant seed of Brundlefly, and has a hideous nightmare about giving birth to a huge, obscene, wriggling larva.

As *The Cramps* sing in their popular song, “Insect Love,” “I took a chance on

interspecies romance.” So Brundlefly too loves. Why do you want to kill what's left of my humanity? he asks Ronnie after rescuing her from the doctor's office where she had gone for an abortion.

And if insect-man is capable of love, he is also lovable. As an anguished Brundlefly overhears Ronnie tell Stathis she couldn't tell Brundle about the ‘baby,’ one feels for the monster — as one feels for Frankenstein's creature or Charles Laughton's hunchback or Lon Chaney's phantom of the opera.

It's in probing this nexus of monstrous sympathy that Cronenberg, with this film, really reaches the depths of his regurgitative vision. And, again, with the most appalling literalness.

Not only does Brundlefly vomit on Stathis (who's, by the way, trying to blow him away with a shotgun), but the upchuck is corrosive and eats through flesh and bone, fusing one of Stathis' hands into a molten stump and severing one of his feet. Cronenberg then turns his regurgitative vision on Brundlefly (who's locked Ronnie into the telepod intending to mutate himself, her and the ‘baby’ into one recombined body) in the stomach-churning climax of the film.

Even then — that is, after Brundlefly has experienced two further incomplete transformations that are monumental moments of horror, and monuments to special effects' ability to realize McLuhan's nightmares of mediatized humanity as vicious crustaceans — even then, as the thing has put the shotgun to its head, pleading with Veronica to terminate its ‘life,’ she is still capable of love.

For Cronenberg's ability to move the film from cartoon to the limits of despair approached early in this century by Kafka in *Metamorphosis*, *The Fly* is surely one of the masterpieces of modern film horror.

Unfortunately, by the standards of horror of the 20th century, whether that's at all a meaningful achievement today (that is, outside the no-place of a movie theatre) is open to question. If the Narcissus of antiquity sought his self-reflection in a pool of water, that technological Narcissus seeks his in a celluloid pool of vomit says much about the retchedness of this culture that no film, however effective or corrosive, can change, only exploit.

So enjoy *The Fly* if you can. I recommend a hearty meal beforehand. That way you'll have a real souvenir to bring home afterwards.

Michael Dorland •



• A terrifying transformation for Seth Brundle (Jeff Goldblum)

**THE FLY** d. David Cronenberg p. Stuart Cornfeld sc. Charles Edward Pogue, David Cronenberg orig. story George Langelaan d.o.p. Mark Irwin. C.S.C. prod. des. Carol Spier ed. Ronald Sanders music Howard Shore co-p. Marc-Ami Boyman, Kip Ohman cast. Deirdre Bowen des./creation The Fly Chris Walas, Inc. unit prod. man. David Coatsworth 1st asst. d. John Board 2nd asst. d. Kim Winther 3rd asst. Patricia Rozema, Thomas P. Quinn prod. coord. Debbie Cooke visual cons. Harold Michaelson a.d. Rolf Harvey set dec. Elinor Rose Galbraith set des. James McAteer 1st asst. a.d. Nancey Pankiw set dresser Gary Jack, Danielle Fleury asst. set dresser Ian Wheatley props Marc Corriveau asst. props Paul Hotte sc. spv. Gillian Richardson cost. des. Denise Cronenberg ward. Trysha Bakker 1st asst. cam. Marvin Midwick 2nd asst. cam. Donna Mobbs cam. appr. Charlotte Disher addt. cam. Kenneth Post, C.S.C., Robin Miller unit pub. Prudence Emery stills Attila Dory const. Joseph Curtin scenic artist Nick Kosonic carp. Ian Fraser set des. Kirk Cheney asst. p. Rick Schmidlin, Susan Kinney asst. to the p. Barbara Mainguy prod. acct. Doreen Davis assem. ed. Steven Weslak 1st asst. ed. Michael Rea 2nd asst. ed. Susan Shipton, Cherie MacNeill asst. ed. (London) Kant Pan post-prod. coor. Carol McBride sd. eds. David Evans, Wayne Griffin dialogue ed. Richard Cadger a.d.r. ed. Robin Leigh sd. efx. ed. Jane Tattersall Foley Terry Burke asst. sd. ed. Steven Munro, David Giammarco, Sandra Moffat, Susan Maggi, Michael Followes, Pat Calvert prod. sd. Bryan Day, Michael Lacroix gaffer Douglas Scotty Allan best boy elec. David Willetts 1st elec. Ian Scott 2nd elec. Sam Bojin key grip Mark Manchester dolly grip David Hynes asst. grip Ron Paulauskas grip Don Payne sp. efx. Louis Craig, Ted Ross stunt coord. Dwayne McLean efx. spv. Lee Wilson trans. coor. Matthew Wolchock loc. man. Howard Rothschild make-up Shonagh Jabour hair Ivan Lynch negs. Jack Hooper music orch. Homer Dennison music ed. Jim Weidman music rec. Keith Grant re-rec. Gerry Humphreys “FLY” Creature Effects Peter Albrecht, Peter Babakitas, Brent Baker, Jon Berg, Margaret Beserra, Donald Bies, Robert Burman, Blair Clark, Stephan Dupuis, Keith Edmier, Bob Hall, Jonathan Horton, Sir Guy of Hudson, Conrak Itchener, Jim Smash Isaac, Michael Jobe, Marie-Louise Kingery, Patricia Kowchak, Anthony Laudoti, Kelly Lepkowsky, Michelle Linder, Donald Mowat, Jerrold Neidig, Gregg Olsson, Michael Owens, Zandra Platzeck, Robin Ralston, Michael Smithson, William Stoneham, Valerie Sofranko, Debra Tomel, Wim Jan Van Thillo, Carol Kaefer Walas, Mark Walas, Harold Weed, Mark Williams, I.p. Jeff Goldblum, Geena Davis, John Getz, Joy Boushel, Les Carlson, George Chuvalo, Michael Copeman, David Cronenberg, Carol Lazare, Shawn Hewitt, Brent Meyers, Doron Kernerman, Romuald Vervin p.c. Brookfilms Production dist. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation. Colour, 35mm running time: 100 mins.

David Cronenberg's  
**The Fly**

With everyone from Andrew Sarris on down to Bruce Kirkland heaping laurel wreaths on David Cronenberg and calling *The Fly* a masterpiece, it seems a little mean-spirited to sit here and say no, it isn't, it isn't a masterpiece — particularly since I'm one of those who, ever since *The Brood*, has been flinging his own laurel wreaths and trying to get the big boys to take notice. But *The Fly* is not a masterpiece.

Yes, it's Cronenberg's best direction to date. He could always do the scary stuff, but now he can do the rest of it just as well. It's funny when Jeff Goldblum sits down to play the piano. It's sexy when Geena Davis lends her stockings for an experiment. It's realistic and hot when they make love. It's exhilarating when he goes into his gymnastic routine and it's real-life rotten when she breaks down over her pregnancy.

Yes, it's Cronenberg's most handsomely-mounted production by far. Mark Irwin's camerawork is flawless, moody, claustrophobic and the source of a lot of tension. Carol Spier's art direction fleshes out the characters with tons of terrific details. The monsters and gore, by California's Chris Walas, are every bit as classy as those in *Aliens*. In all, this is the film that should, once and for all, lay to rest anybody's lingering qualms about the capability of Canadian crews.

Yes, the performances are dandy. Even the smallest role — the bar-girl pick-up (Joy Boushel) — is perfectly cast and played with a full measure of intelligence and intensity. John Getz, as Stathis Borans the heroine's editor and ex-lover, does good work in a crummy art. It's not his fault that Borans is Mr. Slime, but Getz tries to compensate anyway, making sure we know that he is, in his own sweaty way, in love. Borans-as-creep serves two functions: he denies us the traditional happy-ending escape route of the worthy second banana who puts the heroine's shattered life together at the end and he keeps our sympathy focussed on the doomed lovers. Who repay us in full. Jeff Goldblum is a perfect Seth Brundle (Where does Cronenberg get these names?), intelligent enough to be the genius he's supposed to be and carrying a physical and emotional intensity and a low-key self-confidence that only needs the slightest push to slip from charming to frightening. Goldblum knows how to give it that push and how to let Brundle's dignity and humor (on which he's got a perfect handle) shine through without ever lapsing into sentimentality. Geena Davis as Veronica has less to work with, but she still creates a rounded, believable character whose intelligence, humor, hardness and vulnerability all function together, coloring one another.

And, yes, the subtexts they're all rav-



• *The Fly* — a masterpiece of modern film horror

ing about are there and they're deliberate. We have the Monster As Metaphor For Disease: Guy gets cancer (genetic fusion with fly) and turns very ugly, inside and out, but the girl who loves him hangs on, trying to help, refusing to turn away as long as a trace of her beloved remains. In the end, she performs a mercy killing, proof of love and a demonstration that, in life, there ain't no happy endings. We have The Monster As Metaphor for Neurotic Lover: Guy falls in love, becomes jealous and turns himself into a monster (It's his own fault that the fly is in the telepod with him. If he'd been calm and sober, none of this need have happened.) Girl reassures guy of her love, but it's too late. All he wants now is to assimilate her completely, but she'd like to retain her sense of self. Girl kills guy and so much for Love The Redeemer. The two subtexts even fuse when Brundlefly sees assimilation as the cure for his condition.

This is Cronenberg's view of love and mortality. In an interview in *The Village Voice* (Aug. 19, 1986, p. 50), he states, "...somebody dies, somebody gets old, somebody gets sick. One of the key people in a romance becomes a monster sooner or later," and, later on says, "It's like looking on someone you love dying. It's unthinkable, but would you turn away? ...But you'll never conceive of these things unless you watch. If I did it offscreen, you wouldn't get it."

He does it onscreen. You get it and it works. Unless you're heartdead, you'll feel the pity and the terror for both the Brundlefly and Veronica that Cronenberg wants you to feel.

So what is there to prevent this from being a masterpiece? What could possibly be wrong with a movie that has all this going for it?

Well, actually, it's the text itself. It does provide a wonderful vehicle for the subtexts, but it doesn't really do very much else, like resonate, for instance. In the works that have taken centuries to earn their masterpiece status, *Hamlet*, say, or *Oedipus*, every time the text raises those issues that set you to musing on your own life, it simul-

taneously pulls you back into the story, focussing you, with heightened understanding and empathy, on the hero's very specific story.

This doesn't happen in *The Fly* for three reasons. First, the text keeps pointing you back at the subtexts. "I won't be another tumorous bore," says Brundle and, later on trying to convince Veronica to accept assimilation, "We'll be the perfect nuclear family," pushing you to remember that this is metaphor, pushing you to consider how this relates to you. Which, on a literal level, is not true.

This is a minor point (reason two, here), but not, I think, a negligible one: *The Fly*, on a literal level, has nothing to do with you and me. *Videodrome* is about watching TV and what it might do to you. We all watch the box. *The Brood* is about outer-limits therapy and child abuse and many of us have had experience of both. *The Fly* is about mutating into an insect and there's just no connection, not on the literal, story-telling level. Of course, you may not find much to connect you with the Greek king or the Danish prince, but their stories do a good deal more than function as metaphor.

This, as I said, is a minor point and if you decide I'm just plain wrong, I'm not gonna be heartbroken and I don't think the strength of my argument will be materially affected, because the real problem with *The Fly* is not its lack of connection with us, but its lack of connection between text and subtext.

Try this simple test: Imagine *The Brood* is about hypotherapy rather than the physical-manifestation therapy of psychoplasms. What you get is Samantha Eggar killing people and what you lose is the mind-body aspect of the film and the visual correlation between the brood and her natural child, which in turn loses you a whole lot of subtext about child abuse. Now try it as a movie about spouse abuse with a brood of murderous Art Hindles. Changes everything. How about *Videodrome* as a movie about radio. Okay, now let's try *The Fly* without the fly. Let's try it with

another creature — no, better yet, let's try it with just Brundle, the telepod and the computer. Remember, Brundle's experiment works because he taught the computer to love the flesh. But what if he taught it wrong, or too well and in transporting him, the computer changed him, scrambled his genes to agree with its faulty program. Change the design of the monster a little, drop a couple of specific references to insects and you can do virtually the same text with the same subtexts. You can swap telepods for a gene scanner and a radiation leak or any number of other things. You can chuck out science altogether and do it as a misfired magic ritual. You can almost do it as a werewolf story — haul genetic fusion back in for the climax. You can skip the genre elements completely and go for naturalism — cancer, a brain tumor, porphyria — there are lots of diseases that warp both body and mind. In short: *The Fly* isn't about the fly. In jargon: the text has been reduced to the status of pretext for the subtext. In effect: the picture heads toward flatness. Once you've "got it" there's nothing else to get. In a masterpiece, one of the things you find is a three-way resonance involving the tale, the perceptions of the audience member and the intended meaning(s) of the tale. Here, one side of that triangle just doesn't vibrate.

Which is why *The Fly* is not a masterpiece (Which may also be why it's being called a masterpiece: this is the first Cronenberg movie you can "get" without having to get right down eyeball to oozing eyeball with the weird, lunatic, gory bits. You can get the message without really enduring the fright and that makes it very safe, clean and respectable. Read Sarris or Jay Scott in the *Globe & Mail* — the way they talk in spots they could almost be discussing someone like good, grey Norman Jewison.)

If *The Fly* isn't a masterpiece, it's still a very good movie, head, shoulders and belly-button above most of the brainless, heartless drivel that passes for horror and science fiction on the screen these days. Cronenberg's accomplishment is not to be denied and the recognition is long overdue.

Finally, to reverse the field completely: there is a sense in which *The Fly* may be considered a masterpiece. Years ago in an art history course, I stayed awake long enough to learn that "masterpiece" originally referred to the work the student did that summed up all he had learned from his master and signalled that he was now going to strike out on his own. Cronenberg has no master in that sense. He is, like most post-studio-era-directors, largely self-taught. Still, he has said he learned a lot about the human elements in storytelling from producers Stuart Cornfeld and Mel Brooks, and *The Fly*, despite a weaker story than *The Brood* and less excitement than *Videodrome*, is arguably his best work. His ongoing thematic elements are present, clear and fully explored. His command of the medium is assured and his work with actors is well above his previous standard. It is possible then that he can and will take what he knows and use it to begin building an entirely different kind of David Cronenberg film.

Andrew Dowler •

Leon Marr's

## Dancing in the Dark

Critics at Cannes, in Toronto and Montreal have quite correctly confirmed Leon Marr's **Dancing in the Dark** as English Canada's European film of the year. In the best tradition of the Masters, the various new waves and new national cinemas, Marr has turned his back on the California formulae. His cinema-as-opposed-to-movies work values minutely detailed characterization, inhumanly restrained action, non-linear narrative, and, above all, talk.

Marr's choice of Joan Barfoot's novel as the source of his work was his first step in crossing the Atlantic. **Dancing in the Dark** is, approximately, **Diary of A Mad Housewife**, written as if both madness and housewifery were issues worthy of serious concern. Edna Cormick, on the eve of her 40th birthday, is growing dangerously compulsive about the manner in which she cleans the little things around the house — all the little things. Her husband Harry is cheerfully mundane in his pursuit of the more conventional compulsions of the business world. Harry rewards Edna's extra efforts in so far as he can see them as being relevant. Then he pretty much ignores her.

Like the Europeans, Marr may be applauded for taking on the exploration of a female psyche. Bergman, Godard, Rohmer and now Marr seem to be telling us that the gains made by feminists will be best consolidated when men are invited to participate in a cooperative understanding. **Dancing in the Dark** stands as evidence of the mutual respect with which a male director and female writer may approach each other's talents.

Like Quebec's European film of the year, **The Decline of the American Empire**, **Dancing in the Dark** speaks to this year's headline topic on the international cinematic agenda: the care and feeding of mid-life crises. To Marr, Arcand and the other Canadian directors who have spent the first half of their creative careers waiting for the emergence of a national cinema, the creative crises of mid-life must take on an urgency beyond that endured by their more prolific European colleagues.

But there is a better reason to see **Dancing in the Dark** as a peculiarly



• One woman's descent into madness — a solid contemporary Canadian work

English Canadian version of European cinema rather than a slavish copy of the original. Roughly, it is the politeness with which Marr challenges his audience. Joan Barfoot's novel is in the form of notebooks written by Edna after she has been institutionalized for bringing things to a head. One might expect Marr's adaptation of this quintessentially literary form to take the shape of a wall to wall verbalization, a Godardesque recitation of the text. Or — à la Chantal Ackermann — the director could have forced us to catalogue the visual minutiae adding up to a desperate act.

Marr is nice enough to do both. Martha Henry's voiceover, lasting the length of the film, enhances the pleasantly unbalanced whimsy of the novel. Like a well-done NFB documentary narration, this talking book version of **Dancing in the Dark** treats the image with a carefully balanced web of illustration, commentary and counterpoint.

Given the power of the recited word, Henry's performance as Edna is constantly in danger of degenerating into pantomime. It doesn't. Her restrained rendition of compulsive anality, deep hurt, catatonia and rebirth is finally reminiscent of the best performances in silent cinema itself.

On his part, Marr never lets us forget the manner in which the fragmentation of sound and image parallels Edna's fragmented mental state. Her self-gen-

erated cure is kept in step with signs of audio/visual integration. Harry's face finally emerges from the shadows as she describes him. Harry comes to talk and act like anyone else, only more so. As Edna continues to talk, we begin to recognize the narration on pages of the diary. And, ultimately, in very small doses, Martha Henry as Edna is allowed to speak in synch.

The orderly, somewhat pedantic, progression of Edna's recovery is further underlined by Vic Sarin's cinematography. **Dancing in the Dark** presents us with a world of colour schemes rather than colours, compositions rather than shots, statements as opposed to visual information. Everything we see seems flatly rendered so as to never let us forget its place in *the visual subtext*.

What is true of **Dancing in the Dark**'s cinematography might also be said for the flagrant codification of its costuming and sets. Like Edna's too perfectly decorated house, the "look" of Marr's film seems to be setting us up for some climactic rebellion, an affirmation of an idiosyncratic self that will define the entire structure as self-conscious affectation.

That rebellion never comes. A solid contemporary Canadian work, the film is intelligent and well-crafted. It brings out the best in Martha Henry and generally assures us that our feature film industry has come a long way. The film

even speaks to something like a social concern. But, finally, the difference between **Dancing in the Dark** as a somewhat successful homage to intellectual narrative cinema and the film as a work of genius is Marr's commitment to playing by his own rules. Unfortunately, it is this self-strangulation by structure that is the work's most Canadian aspect.

Seth Feldman •

**DANCING IN THE DARK** d. Leon Marr p. Anthony Kramreither co-p. John Ryan exec. p. foot p. Anthony Kramreither co-p. John Ryan exec. p. Don Haig sc. Leon Marr based on the novel *Dancing in the Dark* by Joan Barfoot d.o.p. Vic Sarin prod. des. Lillian Sarafinchan ed. Tom Berner cast. Stuart Aikins Casting 1st asst. d. Roman Buchok 2nd asst. d. Jack Clements 3rd asst. d. Wendy Petrozzi 1st asst. cam. Steve Deme 2nd asst. cam. John Davidson. Martin McNally steadycam Julian Chojnacki gaffer David McNichol best boy Hugh McLean key grip Mitchell Holmes assistant grip Cynthia Barlow sd. rec. Urmas Rosin boom Chris Leech cont. Dug Rotstein set dresser Luanna Bayer asst. set dresser Mark Van Alstyne props Jesse Cohoon make-up/hair Irma Parkkonen wardrobe Nada Healy asst. prod. des. Dave Manion prod. coord. Heather Hyslop prod. acct. Nathalie Laporte prod. asst. Rene Livingstone. Michaela Morris stills Susan Shaw, John Herzog cam. equip. William F. White equip. Canadian Motion Picture & Lighting addt. cast Allsorts psych. cons. Mark Teplitsky, M.D. C.M. F.R.C.P. (C) thanks to Credit Valley Hospital asst. film ed. Anita St Denis sd. ed. Tom Berner. Kelly Hall, Anita St Denis, Teresa Hannigan, Darryl Cornford foley Kelly Hall re-rec. Tony Van Den Akker, Phil Sheridan mus. cons. Gary Gilfillan post. prod. Film Arts, The Film House Group negs. Erika Wolff titles Film Effects l.p. Martha Henry, Neil Munro, Rosemary Dunsmore, Richard Monette p.c. Brightstar Films, Film House Group, Film Arts in association with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation dist. Norstar Releasing Inc. Colour, 35mm running time: 98 mins.

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John Smith's  
**Sitting  
in Limbo**

The reggae/rap score in John Smith's **Sitting in Limbo**, a new National Film Board docudrama about teenagers in Montreal's Caribbean community, is the rawest element in an otherwise slick concoction. Jimmy Cliff's music communicates with such depth and passion that his pain, loneliness and struggles become ours. His classic songs from the early seventies, ('Struggling Man,' 'Sitting in Limbo,' 'Many Rivers to Cross' and others) are meant to set the mood and highlight the protagonists' emotions. Instead, they beg comparison with the film. For all of John N. Smith's considerable skill, the songs have a greater scope and are more understanding of what being black is like than **Limbo**.

The **Masculine Mystique**, which Smith co-directed with Giles Walker, was a discussion of sexism. In **Limbo**, he tries to explore relations among black teenagers. Smith begins by introducing us to three young black women, Pat (Pat Dillon), Debbie (Debbie Grant) and Sylvie (Sylvie Clarke) who live together in a cramped apartment. Sylvie and Debbie are single mothers on welfare. A third of the way into the film, Pat, the heroine of **Limbo**, is a third of the way into welfare motherhood.

The three room-mates had difficult relationships with men: "Don't 'our son' me." Sylvie tells her baby's father, "The only thing you did was put it there. Typical!" In another scene, Pat, complaining about her boyfriend (Fabian Gibbs) neglecting her, sarcastically tells Sylvie that, "Fabian and his tape deck have a great future together." Fabian's attempts to take on the responsibilities of fatherhood are, however, at the center of **Limbo's** dramatic action.

Smith's screenplay, co-written with David Wilson, is based on interviews they conducted with the actors/subjects and other members of Montreal's Caribbean community. This may be why the slangy dialogue, as familiar to anyone who's ever walked through the West-end of Montreal as it has been rare on our screens, is so authentic and sharp. ("I wanted to give my body a rest," says Pat explaining why she hasn't been taking the pill. "A nine month rest?" retorts Fabian.) It may also be why the problems experienced by the people in **Limbo** seem so realistic - The critical but supportive inter-relationships between the three women are a good example. Their comments about families, money and men, seemingly off-the-cuff but cutting in their perspicacity, are very funny.

**Limbo** has wit, a fast, episodic structure and smart, cocky characters (The very cinematic Pat Dillon is especially likeable). All these characteristics usually appeal to teen audiences. But I bet **Limbo** won't. As in an after-school TV special, every problem raised is transformed into a cautionary tale: Pat gets pregnant so we may be warned about teenage pregnancy; Fabian drops out so we can be told not to; They get their



• Pat (Pat Dillon) and Fabian (Fabian Gibbs)

furniture repossessed to teach us the value of a budget. Smith's reduction of his protagonists to role-models-in-reverse is patronizing not only to the characters, whom the actors succeed in making us like, but also to many teenagers experiencing similar difficulties. This becomes particularly unpleasant with the realisation that, because some of the shots are documentary footage of people speaking about themselves, they may have unwittingly lent their lives to a comedy of errors.

Being seduced into an emotional involvement with the heroes only so that we can be lectured to is experienced as a rip-off. This is aggravated by Smith's skipping over the big emotional scenes just as they reach a crescendo. In Pat's revelation of her pregnancy to Fabian and her talk with her mother over how she's going to take care of her child, for example, we are set up for an emotional confrontation. But, before the characters have fully unburdened themselves, before feelings are fully articulated, the director has already cut to the next scene.

Smith depicts and denounces racism. In one scene, a job posted outside a grocery store is immediately made unavailable to Fabian. In another we are shown Sylvie's boyfriend, his broken body covered with blood, after being brutalized by racist policemen. In spite of this, and in spite of the fact that such characters and situations undoubtedly exist in real life, **Limbo** leaves itself perilously open to charges of racism.

Take Fabian, for example. He is depicted as a well-meaning but bored, lazy and irresponsible child. In his introductory scene his teacher details how he is chronically late for class. The principal then 'kindly' expels him from school. We are shown that Fabian wants an instant home and a car he can't afford but he can't maintain a relationship or keep a job. His is the only major male role in **Limbo**.

I find it disturbing that in a film which aims to describe the life of a young black couple, whites should be depicted with greater variety. In small roles, white people are seen as janitors, teachers, principals, employment counsellors, pharmacists, small business

owners and workers. Some of them, like the janitor are seen as racist. Others like the teacher, principal, and boss are shown to be justifiably stretched to the limits of their patience by Fabian's behaviour. There is no doubt that the scenario of blacks surrounded by white figures of authority is a reflection of reality but this is no excuse for the narrow range of black roles.

All the black characters in **Limbo**, except possibly a minister (literally a two-line part) share a similar socio-economic background. The blacks' personality traits are distinguishable mainly along gender lines. Men are well meaning but ultimately irresponsible. Women are matriarchal figures who'll somehow not only survive but get to the church on time. The major difference between Fabian and Sylvie's boyfriend is that the former has a larger role and the latter is taller. Pat, Debbie and Sylvie are easier to distinguish but that is due more to the different external events they come in contact with (and the personalities of the actresses) than to differences of ethics, morals or psychological make-up between roles.

**Limbo** describes events within the community without contextualizing them. John Smith shows us that Fabian has trouble getting up in the morning without really making us understand why. The director also chooses to depict all the women in the film as having had children as teenagers (Pat is the exception only because she miscarries.) Is it that black teenagers are sexually irresponsible or is it that more young black women decide to have and keep their babies? Is Fabian lazy or is it that the world is unbearable if you're a poor, unskilled, young father-to-be waking up to a long day at the textile factory and have to deal with racism on top of that. Since we are given no direction, audiences will draw conclusions mostly on the basis of their own predispositions.

**Limbo's** polish, swiftness and wit, gives a lot of pleasure. However, the verisimilitude of its characters and the lack of contextualization may reinforce negative stereotypes of a minority seldom portrayed in Canadian film and already very vulnerable to bigots. **Sitting in Limbo** has won awards at the Montreal and Toronto festivals and I'm glad the NFB's Alternative Drama Program and its low-budget features are receiving all this attention. All the same, **Sitting in Limbo** is one after-school special children shouldn't watch without adult supervision.

**José Arroyo •**

**SITTING IN LIMBO** d. John Smith p. David Wilson, John N. Smith sc. David Wilson, John N. Smith assoc. p. Elizabeth Klinck d.o.p. Barry Perles, Andreas Poulsson loc. sd. Richard Nichol, Hans Oomes ed. David Wilson research/cast. Elizabeth Klinck prod. man. Carol Jarry gaffer Arshd Shah, Denis Baril, Kevin O'Connell addt. photo Andrew Kitzanuk, Kent Nason, David de Volpr asst. cam. Al Morgan, Stefan Nitolski grip Michael Thomaseck, Esther Valiquette addt. sd. John Martin post prod. coord. Grace Avrith unit admin. Marie Tonto-Donati asst. prod. Ian Stewart sd. ed. Michel Bordeleau asst. sd. ed. Lise Wedlock music ed. Julian Olson music cons. Richard Gresko recording Louis Hone mix Jean-Pierre Joutel, Shelley Craig thanks to Milton Funwear Inc., Lasalle High School, Unity Boys and Girls Club, Kane's Super Drugmart, Trinity Memorial Anglican Church, Catherine Booth Hospital, Harold Cummings Ltd., Montréal Department Stores Ltd., Harvey's Restaurants, O & S Bronze and Metal Fabrications, A & S Home Furniture and Appliances Ltd., Lois Siegel, Hanna Acemian l.p. Pat Dillon, Fabian Gibbs, Sylvie Clarke, Debbie Grant p.c. National Film Board of Canada Colour, 35mm running time: 95 mins

photo: Ron S. Diamond

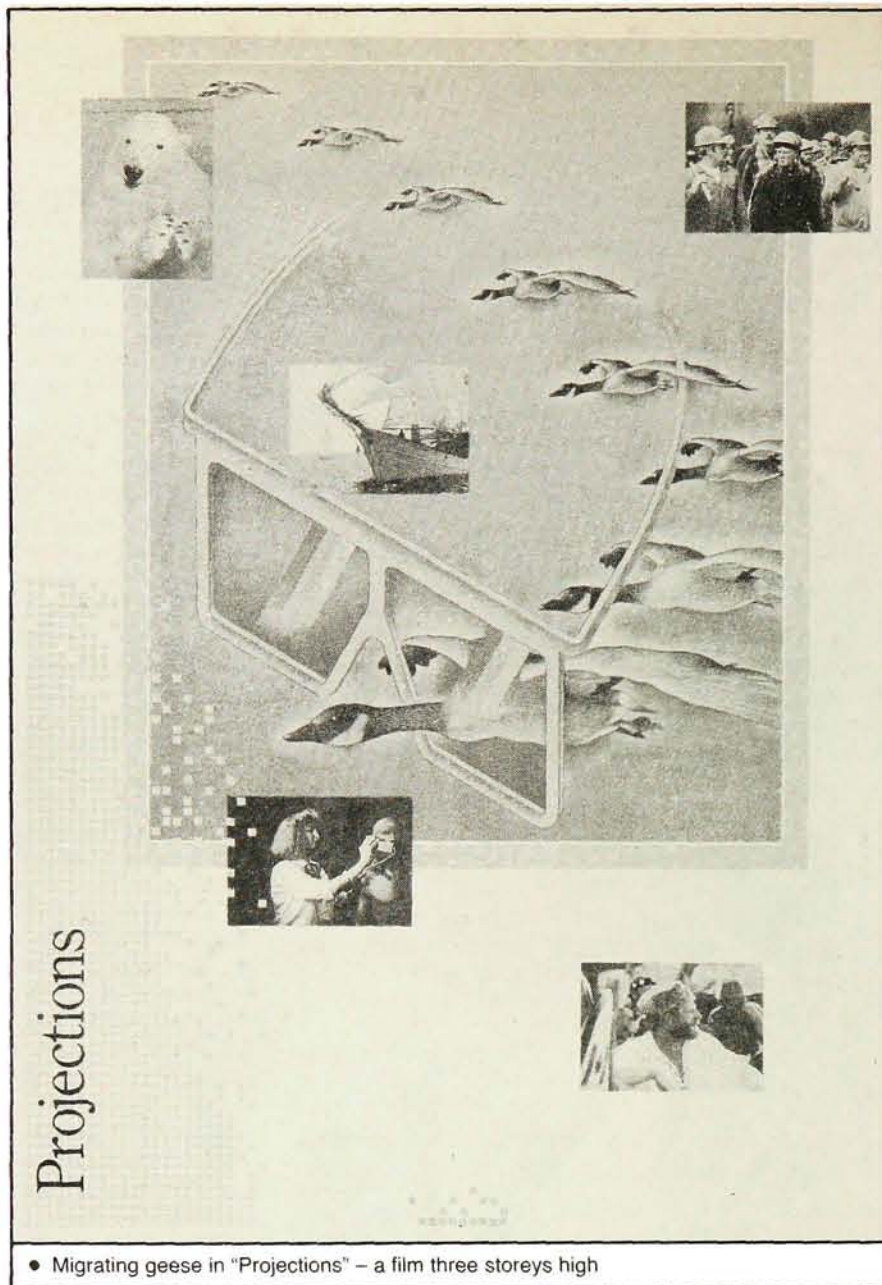
# The Big Picture Strikes Again

The Ontario Expo film appears to have been designed as an integrated wrap-up for the three-stage Ontario Pavilion tour. The tour areas are individually designated as "Inspirations," dealing primarily with the technology of transportation, "Reflections," a trip through 5,000 years of Ontario history (5,000 years?), and "Projections," described in the brochure as "The Big Picture: a film three storeys high."

100 minutes of film have been, through use of split-screen effects, condensed into a twenty minute staccato recapitulation of the previous two exhibits.

Multi-screen images present a catalogue of transportation, industry, tourism, archeology, sports fishing, forestry and silviculture, skiing, swimming, ballet, hang-gliders, ship-launching, river-rafting, country fairs, Mounties, Niagara Falls, hot air balloons, livestock, wildlife, sculpture, and skyscrapers. All this, plus 3-D "treated" archival stills, historical re-enactments, and a frog race contest flash across the screen with an alacrity usually reserved for soft-drink commercials and Sesame Street grammar lessons.

There is no story-line, and, mercifully, no narration. However, the music, which can be heard in better elevators across Canada, does its job. There is a lyric message, wooing viewers to reflect upon this rich tapestry of Ontario life and to perceive harbingers of that province's bright future. (Reflections, Inspirations and Projections...get it?)



Projections

• Migrating geese in "Projections" - a film three storeys high

For the greater part of this 20-minute onslaught, the effect is rather like that of a well-photographed, but unsorted,

holiday slide-show projected by an amphetamine addict.

BUT...the shot of the geese migrating,

allowed to run its full, graceful length, is unforgettable. The train, picking its way down snowy tracks, silent, hauntingly lovely, and the roller coaster, presented with such refreshing beauty of angle and form, demonstrate an equally refreshing absence of the vicarious physical thrills usually associated with 3D big screen presentations.

AND...the audience members, who had waited patiently in the two-hour lineup prerequisite for entry into most of the Expo pavilions, enjoyed themselves audibly and visibly. They laughed and gasped at the 3-D effects and some amusing editing connections. The little boy seated next to me wanted to stay and see the geese again. So did I.

Expo is loaded with big screen movies. Most of these are predictable tourism ads, committee-steered and government controlled. When Expo closes in October, and the pavilions disband, there will be a lot of expensive high-tech screening facilities and production tools scattered across the country. It will be interesting to see if, from the ashes of Expo, a more intelligent and innovative use of this cinematic technology will arise.

Haida Paul •

**ONTARIO PAVILION EXPO 86** d./p./des. David Mackay d.o.p. Ludek Bogner ed. Peter Dale sp. efx. James F Liles ASC cam. 2nd unit Mark Mackay manager Lynne M. Foster prod. man. Karl Konnry prod. asst. Trevor Haws, Judy Mackay sd. cons. Barry O Gordon asst. cam. Steven Andersen, Michael Givens 2nd asst. cam. Nicholas Hay digital sd. efx Christopher Leech lights Brian Savage. Douglas Marshall grip Robert Cochrane prod. asst. Peter Robertson negs. Brian Ralph lab. MGM Laboratories, Medallion Laboratories tech. coord. Scott McCrorie music Christopher Dedrick vocals Christopher Dedrick, Sandy Dedrick, Stephanie Dedrick, Dianne Forsyth musicians Adele Armin, Paul Armin, Richard Armin, Michael Francis, Erica Goodman, Fuyiko Imagishi, Brian Leonard, Robert Mann, Robert McLaren, Ray Parker, Lou Pomanti, Tom Szczesniak sd. efx. ed. Fred Brennan assoc. sd. efx. ed. Mance James sd. rec. Manta Sound Company sd. asst. Rich Starks, Mark Baldi tech. cons. Andy Condon.

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