

AUGUST AND JULY Starring Alexa de Wiel and Sharon Smith, Producer-Director Murray Markowitz, Executive Producer F. R. Crawley, Associate Producer Findlay J. Quinn, Editor André Herman, Director of Photography James P. Lewis, Sound Recordist Tony Hall, Art Director Anson Holmes, Music and Sound Effects by Bruce Nyznik, Recording by Bob LeClair and Gary Bourgeois, Continuity by Francesca Kruschen, Still Photography by Michel Emré, Laboratory work by Quinn Laboratories, Toronto; Titles and Optical by Film Optical Canada Ltd. Produced with the assistance of the Canadian Film Development Corporation. With additional assistance from the Canada Council and the Ontario Council for the Arts. Color, 90 minutes, shot in 16mm.

be. You know, you see a film a year and a half later, and you say, "Wow! If I could only do this film again!" But Jim Lewis is more than a cameraman, he's an artist. There's part of his soul in the film, too. He was part of the experience. I think he did a great job on the camera.

Did you shoot the film in Super-16?

No, just 16. But you can't really tell whether it's 16 or 35. People who have seen the film thought it was 35.

Just the graininess of it throughout. The exterior shots were a lot better technically. You say you overshot by a lot. Was this a serious problem financially?

The whole intrigue of that, was that I had made an original agreement with a lab to process a certain amount of footage, and then I would pay them. I made this arrangement with

Murray Markowitz

interview

Who worked on the editing with you?

Oh, a great guy. André Herman. He's Polish, and he was a friend of Polanski's. They went to school together, then he went to the Academy in France. Working with him was a very intense period, because he was not only an editor, he was an artist. I had certain ideas, and at times they conflicted with his. He was very strong, and we'd have battles where I'd say, "I'm going to get rid of this guy." But in the long run, I really respected that, because it produced some ideas that were good. I spent the first two or three months on the film alone, while we were synching the rushes. I had gone over the material myself, and I knew the parts that I wanted, and the parts I felt were the nucleus of the film. Some of the structural aspects he was instrumental in, and I give him a lot of credit for that.

The reason I'm asking about the editing is because technically, there are a lot of flaws in terms of camerawork. You left in things like the cameraman adjusting focus, foggy frames which were obviously the beginning or end of a roll, some jerky zooms. Did you do that on purpose — did you think the scene was worth those technical faults being left in?

Well, I hope there aren't too many technical faults. In fact, I saw this film the other day — *Wednesday's Child* — and there was a period of about ten minutes with scratches, a damaged negative. Just repulsive, especially for someone who works in film. But at the end of the film, technical things don't mean a damn. A film works, or it doesn't. There are certain things that I feel are minor. You put something in for the emotional impact it has, and if it has a certain flaw, you take a chance because you think it's the soul of the film.

There's one shot — travelling in the car — shot through the windshield, that's really ghastly green. Then he pans back inside the car, and it's nice inside. Obviously, it was exposed for inside, not outside.

Well, we had a lot of problems with that sequence in the lab. That's the scene where Sharon and Alexa were talking in the car, and a woman walks by with a baby carriage. I asked lay people who had seen the film particularly about that. They said they didn't notice it. So, that didn't bother me. If it did, I would have probably gone back to the lab and maybe gone to an optical printer.

So essentially, you're satisfied with the quality. Is that what you wanted there?

Well, you're never satisfied totally, and I hope I never will

Kodak, too. But we just didn't have the money. What we had to do was manipulate, so that we could at least shoot and process all the film. We were sneaking film into the lab so that the owner wouldn't know how much we were shooting. If we were to print 30,000 feet and we ended up shooting 80,000 — that's a big difference. There's a dishonesty about that in a way. But you go beyond that. You have a vision, and what's most important is to make sure it happens.

Is that how Findlay Quinn got a credit as a producer — by owning part of the film as a result of all the unpaid lab-work?

Yeah, but he's a funny guy. He believed in me. He was involved in *More Than One* in an indirect way, and we became friends. He didn't really know what the idea was at first, but I explained it to him, and he took a chance. There was a chance of losing a lot of money, but he had sort of blind faith, and that's how he became involved. After he saw the rough cut, he was sold on the idea. He really liked it.

What bothers me about August and July is that although it's not an exploitative film, a lot of people looking at the poster will expect it to be. I mean, it's phenomenal how you managed to keep away from making a leering, voyeuristic film. . . .

Well, there's some of that, too. . . .

But it's not an exploitation film, yet a lot of people will expect it to be because of the publicity. How conscious are you of that?

Well, I don't have that much control over how it's going to be billed. I have some control because I still own a part of the film. I'm one of the producers, but I'm not the distributor. I'm just another whore in a stable trying to do my thing. It's like a bawdy-house, you get the customer and you try to do the best job you can. That's the way I feel a lot.

But you could still sit down with Budge Crawley and talk about it.

Oh, I do, and I make my presence felt, but film is a business. My main thing is to get as many people as possible to see the film, to make my point, and make money on it. I don't think there's anything wrong with making money. I hope it does. It's at the point where in one sense, I'm divorced from that creative aspect of it because the film is finished. To try to control the way people will relate to it is impossible. None of the filmmakers have that much control over the way their

films are promoted and written up; but I'm sure it won't be billed as a skin-flic.

How did you get involved in making *August and July*?

I happened to meet Sharon and Alexa by accident. They were living together on an isolated farm in Alliston. It was a beautiful time of year, summer, and I went up with a mutual friend of theirs. I didn't know them. I found them very beautiful. In fact, I think I fell in love with Alexa. It was sort of a jealousy, because Sharon had Alexa. But I think in any film there has to be an emotional attachment to the people to make the film work, and if there isn't that human aspect involved, you can tell because it's missing. The film is sterile, and there's no soul.

I was fascinated by them, and the fact that they're great together, too. There's a certain charisma they have when they're together. They make each other respond in a very sensuous, dramatic, emotional way. I found myself staring, because you hear all the fallacies about lesbians, and you conceive of two butch chicks with leather jackets, stuff like that. And you see Sharon and Alexa, and they're individually girls who I, as a male, would like to relate to. Whether it be physically or otherwise; and they have this relationship. . . . It's similar to a man-woman relationship, except that they're two women. It was surreal. I've never seen it before.

When I left, I thought about it and it dazzled me. I approached them about a week later and said I want to make a film. Sharon's brother knew my work and really liked it. so

AUGUST & JULY

Alexa de Wiel, Murray Markowitz, Sharon Smith.



All photographs by Michel Emre

they had heard of me and knew that the work I had done was legitimate, I guess. But they were afraid to expose themselves. It's a weird position to put yourself in. *Miss American Lesbian*. That's the way some people will look at them. The exposure could be very detrimental in the long run, so they didn't want to do it, I left. But they phoned me up about a week later, and we decided to go ahead. You take a chance if you believe that what you're doing is honest.

I worked on the preliminary things and the basic concept of how the film would be structured. Millions of technical things had to be done — hiring a cameraman and a soundman, the lab-work, set design, getting an electrician. . . . We started filming; and the filming aspect of it was so, so strange. Here we were, five guys in the wilderness, poking around with a camera at the relationship of these two women. Probing into life with electronic instruments. It was hard to keep our balance. It's just, I don't want to use the word 'perverted'; but you come from a society where it's a man and a woman, and this was almost like a dream. The centre of the universe revolved around these two women, and all your energy and intellect went into thinking — how are we going to make this situation more intense, more interesting in terms of film? We all had a common purpose — to make as good and meaningful a film as possible, and to express the situation as honestly as possible.

You said that a lot of people ask you about who played the male role in the relationship, and who played the female. How do you answer that question?

It just happened to be two women, and two souls that came together. The fact that they are two women makes it sort of bizarre. But, you know, a lot of times when you're involved with a woman for a long time, you get to a point where you want her to be the man, the aggressor; and you just want to be the passive, delicate, little woman. It's so subjective, because what you think is masculine or feminine is much different than the way you see it. For me, one of the most important aspects of Sharon and Alexa's relationship was the innocence of it. I don't think it's as simple as which was the male, which was the female. If there is such a thing, it changed all the time. Every day it was kind of different.

It seems to really freak you out — two women who are lovers. Why do you find it so hard to accept that reality?

I'm brought up in a culture that doesn't openly relate that way. As much as I can empathize intellectually, emotionally

it's very hard. But it changed. After living together for a month or so, it was normal. But three months after the shooting, looking back, you shake your head and it's just an illusion. One of the things that makes me wonder – someone was talking to me about the film and said, "You're such a goddamned masochist. Some men want to be whipped . . . and put through situations that are dead-end." That's the words they used. Maybe, there is some truth in that if you see two women who are in love with each other, and if you have a capacity to love either of them, and are forced back to just watch. . . . Because, after all, that was one of the strong forces involving me in the film – that I really did love Alexa at one time. That jealousy was one of the creative forces. This other woman was taking someone I wanted very much.

One of the things which annoyed me throughout the film, was the great amount of verbalization. It seemed that nothing was said, or allowed to be said, in a non-verbal way. Every feeling and emotion had to be spoken. Why did you choose to have so much talking in the film?

If you watch it closely, they'll say one thing and then their actions would contradict what they said. That's what I was trying to bring out – not so much the words. I don't have much confidence in words. Just watching Sharon and Alexa is the impact of the film.

But if that's true, then why include all the verbalization?

I don't really know why I did anything. It's just history now. It's done a certain way, and most of the things I'm saying now are mostly lies anyway, or impressions of what I did. I really don't know why I did things in the past, I don't really think anybody knows why. . . .

I just wonder if there couldn't have been another game of Sharon and Alexa playing characters for the sake of the camera only?

Well, of course. Definitely. That's the whole nature of the exercise – to make love to it. There was another thing, too. When we started shooting, there was an intense hatred between myself and Sharon and Alexa. Physically, we couldn't look at each other for the first three, four days. I could only spend a few hours there, and this hatred would be in the air. You could feel it. Touch it almost. It was just violent. I think in many ways this film is very violent because it has a façade of being passive, pastoral, idyllic; but if you look very closely, there's an intense hatred or desperation in any incident.

I'm fascinated by certain things that happen. . . . It's almost like I'm a goddamned sociologist or psychologist, recording instincts, and the amounts of love, hate, frustration. Like you've got a graph, and are saying, "How high an emotional level is this? That's not high enough! I've got to turn it up another 300 decibels. Turn the voltage up!" That's what I was doing at times. When we were filming, and I thought something had to be more intense, I let my presence be felt. We got into very violent confrontations where I demanded more intense interaction, and we'd almost tear the set apart and throw things, literally throw things, at each other. They were afraid to show their emotions as openly as that in the beginning.

How much of the film was actually scripted, and how much was shot in a purely cinéma vérité fashion?

I can't really answer that. I was more interested in creating a mood and getting dialogue from that, than in scripting it. But in a way, it was scripted, because I was interested in capturing the gut feelings about love, and hate, and jealousy.

What I mean is, how much of the film is your reading into the situation what you thought a woman-to-woman relationship would be, and how much of it is real?

That's something I can't answer. At times, it was very much the way I saw it from my own centre of the universe, and at times they were totally involved in their own relationship, in themselves. So, let's say there was something going on between them and you could sense it and you want to bring it out. Well, life is basically a conflict and the way I see film is as a chronicle of conflict. You try to capture it and reproduce it.



Sharon and Murray.

But did you tell Sharon and Alexa what you wanted to film on any particular day, what scenes you wanted? Or did you ask them what they were going to do that day, and then film them while they were doing it?

I see what you mean. Well, for example, when we did the helicopter sequence, the day before I'd talk it over with the people I worked with, and tell them, "I think we're going to do this today". Because you have to prepare for these things. One day we would need a crane, and I had to phone a day or two ahead, you know what I mean? There's a lot of different things that had to be planned, and I was kind of worried, so I overshot.

How did the actual shooting go?

We'd start off at the beginning of the day, and I'd have three or four different things that I wanted to film that day, and after that – the rest we got was more. We worked very long hours – 15 to 20 hours a day – from nine to one or two the next morning. It's more in terms of my concept of making films – like a piece of sculpture where you have a lot of raw material and you mold it into something. When you finish shooting, you have to interpret from what you've collected: a series of emotions and impressions of a film about love.

I didn't limit myself in terms of footage. I ended up shooting twice or three times as much as I originally planned. We ran out of money about the second week of shooting – it was literally like robbing a bank – and the cameraman and the soundman and the assistant cameraman were working for nothing. It was a certain love that we had – an adventure. A few times we wanted to kill each other, but that's good because there's a lot of creative energy involved. It was like watching two women under a magnifying glass; watching them react, and trying to discover new things.

How do you answer critics who say you're exploiting the situation?

Of course I am. Don't be foolish. You exploit it when you want to do something the way you want to do it. It's all relative, because someone has a certain vision and so do you. Any time you come into interaction with that other vision, it's exploitation. You can't ever reduce things to a mere good and bad. It's so ridiculous. There are only grey areas.

Did Sharon and Alexa have any control over the film and how they were portrayed in it? Did they have any control over the editing?

They just saw the finished product.

How did they feel about that?

They were really pissed off at me. I didn't even show them rushes, because I don't believe that's the way it should be done. So they didn't see any of the material until the film was basically finished. I had a lot of conflict because I put in a few sequences that they really wanted to sue me about.

The sequences involving their families?

Well, I guess, yeah. You get into a very moral situation when you're dealing with people's lives and their right to privacy. But I just tried to make a good film with the material available, and tried to make no compromises in terms of artistic content. I was once on a radio programme, and I said (it was sort of a slip) that I think art is more important than people's lives. And all of a sudden, I listened to myself say that and I seemed like a monster with no conscience. But I think the first responsibility is to the film. I was concerned with relating to the honesty of the film. What I had on celluloid, that was my reality. They were looking at it from a more personal, subjective view. . . .

Don't you think that is exploitative? I mean, you weren't putting your personal life on the line, you were playing with theirs.

Well, we reached a point where we decided that there was something out there that was independent of everyone. We just accepted the fact that the most important thing was to get a film of that. In our own ways, we all want a piece of immortality. Sharon, Alexa, myself, Jim Lewis, André Herman, all the people involved in the film. That's what makes it, when you submit yourself to that totally, you can come up with something that is beyond your self, your ego. You believe in that more than you believe in yourself.

A lot of the best scenes were when we got to a point where things became automatic. They knew what I expected and what they felt, and tried to have a marriage and work for other people; just as I had to adjust to their way of life. Setting yourself up as the director of the film is like a general and an army. Like a child who's got these toys, and this family set-up. There's a certain manipulation of feeling and emotion. You enjoy it because you're doing it for art or for love or you don't really know why. . . .

Do you consider yourself part of the cinéma vérité school?

I don't like the words 'cinéma vérité' especially for this film, because I don't think it's a vérité film. There are parts that are involved more with imagination in terms of love explored through fantasies. Most of the critics who had seen the film asked me about the script. That's good. If they think there's a script, then it's fairly tight. The dialogue had a flow in it.

But there's a dichotomy there. Can you accept it as reality, or just as someone's version of reality?

That's done intentionally. In my life, I find that I don't really know what's real because that concept is changing. Just as I'm sitting here and putting on a performance – saying things that I expect you will like and print in your magazine, you know what I mean? Maybe subconsciously I'm trying to fit your format. Interaction dictates the content.

But hasn't Allan King's work influenced you greatly? After he made Warrendale, you made More than One; and after The Married Couple, you made August and July. Is that just coincidence?

I think Allan King influenced all of the Canadian industry because he was a powerful man. He took chances, and although his films weren't successful commercially, they were artistically successful. He was doing things which were years ahead of his time, and he has an international reputation. So of course, if you're a filmmaker and you study other people's films, they influence you. I mean, Paul Almond influenced me, but I guess the guy who influenced me the most was Bergman.

I was going to mention Persona next. . . .

Bergman is like a minister with a sermon, but he does it through film. It's so righteous, and religious, and the whole cathartic thing comes through. I admired him the most because he was very simple, direct, and honest. It was almost like hero-worshipping. . . .

Did you have Persona in mind during shooting? Is that why you had the two women completely isolated in the countryside?

That's very interesting, because after the first week with the editor we were becoming close, and we talked about Persona for a few hours. At the time it was made, the thought of two women relating to each other in legitimate cinema was, in a sense, outrageous. But August and July is more explicit, because our ethos and our culture is different. A woman is no longer the passive, neutral object. Sharon can relate to another woman in the same sexual, emotional way that I can. In many ways, it's a very big threat to my existence, because I'm the one with the penis, and I'm supposed to be the centre of the woman's sexual existence. On one level, the sexual thing is the most important thing you have. This film has been a very traumatic experience for me. Psychologically, it's turned my world upside down. It was very difficult to cope with, at times.

The most important aspect of the film is this – I present a very floral, pastoral, idyllic situation in a simplified and obvious way. Here and well. That's that. But I think about it. And anybody who sees the film and isn't disturbed or confronted on an emotional level afterwards. . . . Wow! They are really closing off a part of their minds.

In the press release, you said that the two women were afraid of you. Why do you think they were?

I don't know, I could just guess at it. You have a certain concept of reality and. . . . Well, one of the things that most influenced me was Ibsen – his layers of reality. Rip away the layers of the onion to find out, get to the core – and there's nothing there. Our lives are so synthetic, and if you stop sometimes, when you realize the void that your life is really in, that's scary. Everybody wants to make their life as meaningful as possible. And you're disillusioned when you realize, "My God! I planned this to be very meaningful, and it ends up not going anywhere. There's just a void out there!" Hesse talks about the point in your life when you reach a plateau and you realize, this is where I am, this is where I'm going. It doesn't go any further than this. It just freaks you out. The Clarke Institute is filled with people who can't cope with that. I feel that in all people, there's a basic raw notion. If it's touched the right way. . . . People are all basically insane.

Sharon and Alexa's dialogue has become so real to me, that sometimes I'm out with a woman I'm involved with, and I'm saying things like, "I love you, but you know, I love myself, too. And I want to be alone, I can't be with you all the time." And all of a sudden, all my thoughts are becoming tape recordings. This is Emotion 39, Scene 2, Take 3. It was almost as if this was a manifesto of love. Whether it be two women, or two men, or a man and a woman. It's universal.

On location for "August and July".



Were you afraid of Murray?

Alexa – I think I was, during the first two weeks before the film was made.

Sharon – I'm always afraid of people who poke. Even though that is the understanding with anyone that I get to know, or want to know. That's what it is – reaching some point where it's very close and very exposed and sort of trembling. . . . But I was always scared. I became scared of even Alexa.

Murray seems like a very guarded person, very hard to get to know. Is he really like that?

Alexa – Murray's one of my favorite people, you know. That's just the way he relates, because he can always see two sides to everything. He's a perfectly just man, but he's also. . . . He has his bad points, too.

Sharon – I think he's hard to know, because he isn't very verbal. As a director, he gets other people to say what he thinks, how he sees things. So he finds people who can act out the things he maybe acts out in his life. He doesn't talk about it. He couldn't get himself to talk in front of the camera about his mother. That's how he's a director. All the time I've known him – maybe once or twice he really talked about himself, and how he got where he got, who his love is. . . . Usually, he's just focussed on film. That's about all I talked to him about.

Alexa – I don't know, I've talked to him about a lot of things. I think he's funnier and funnier all the time. I like him.

How did you feel about having so little control over a film that is basically about you? For example, not being able to have the sequences about your families edited out?

Alexa – By that time, we had discussed all that extensively. We had gone through so much on such a personal and private scale with Murray; that at the end, after all the footage was in the can, we either had to trust Murray, or not trust Murray. And we both preferred to trust him and make it a complete venture. We used some examples from our own lives, in an exaggerated version. Not too much, though. Information from our lives is really a trippy thing to go through. . . . But the way I see it now, is that it's done. My background is just as much of a background as anybody else's. In that way, it's universal. But I kind of like the movie, and I think that without those scenes, it would lack something. I don't think it's ultimately harmful to my family or anyone else. Or myself. That's the way I see it. It's sort of hard, but I don't feel *hard* about it.

Will your family see the film?

Alexa – I have no idea. . . .

How much of the film was written by Murray, and how much was improvised by the two of you?

Alexa – There was *no* written word in the film, and I want that very clear. All the dialogue was ours. It was *not* written.

Was there a story line?

Alexa – Not until the end. Except that we were supposed to concentrate on each other.

We felt kind of strange going to see the film, because all we knew about it, was that some people said it was a skin-flic about two lesbians. So we had no idea whether we were going to see a skin-flic or what?

Sharon – I don't know. . . . Because that's the way I felt. It's not a skin-flic, but it certainly is. (pause)

Alexa – I don't think so. . . . It's very focussed. It's so focussed on love and sex and hate and possibilities between the relationship; and it's not focussed on the rest of our lives very much, at all. I was kind of worried about that at first. But then, it's Murray's perspective of the relationship. It's not two character studies. It's a love story between two women. And as far as that goes, it's good. I think Murray was making excellent use of the medium. Film is plastic because it's celluloid, but it's so intimate. So I think he was focussing his attention on the intimate.



ALEXA DE WIEL



august ~ july



SHARON SMITH



We had heard that there was a very basic disagreement between Murray and the two of you, which almost halted the film entirely. What was the basic disagreement, what was this rift based on?

Sharon – I think the rift developed because his interest was in conflict and stress, and bringing out exaggerations of emotions – rather than the subtleties, or picking up atmospheres emotions create, unspoken things like eye-contact between two women, and the subtleties that go down. Which was more of what we were interested in doing. He required all his emotions dramatized and exaggerated and channeled into. . . . Trying to bring out anger, frustrations. . . .

What about the extreme verbalization in the film. Was that natural to both of you?

Alexa – Many, many scenes were shot that weren't talking scenes. We didn't talk all the time. Although, after the film was made I went to Europe and God! I felt I had talked so much and I had nothing, nothing new to say.

Sharon – I find it natural to verbalize, but not repeat ground that I've already covered with someone. To repeat it and repeat it when there is nothing more to say. . . .

Alexa – Sometimes, when we would feel that we had done something to death, we went for a walk or something. And sometimes, the crew would think there was more to say, because they had more to say, I guess.

Sharon – That was one of the difficulties of the acting. The kind of acting required was verbal. That's what everybody wanted.

Alexa – We'd get bored. . . . I mean, we were very happy being there for hours, but how long can you do the same shit?

Sharon – Also, that was the way we agreed to make the movie, although it took us a while to really agree to it, because it was a discipline. It was to not allow anyone else on the set for eight weeks.

Alexa – Not to go into the city. . . .

Sharon – And to cut off all our relationships. And since we thought in the beginning, that we were going to make character studies more or less, as well as a study of a couple

Alexa – We had all these great plans. . . .

Sharon – We thought we could go on with our lives and bring in the other people who we were involved with. And we didn't do that. So there was no-one else to verbalize with. I see these all in retrospect as the disciplines of acting, of trying to make something that's not real. You have to cut off a lot. I would have made a different story, slightly different, so that there would be more to talk about.

What would have been some of the differences?

Sharon – I would have explored my character with other people as well as just with one person. Sort of drawn the thing out to show, really, how two people live together – not just two people completely isolated. . . . But the story became that more and more – two people completely isolated.

But do you feel that the film is basically your story? Or were you improvising characters?

Alexa – Oh, yeah. We were improvising. We were improvising on our own characters, basically. It was a very concentrated shoot. It kind of built up a lot that wasn't really happening until we built it up to make it come out.

Sharon – Every day was an improvisation on an idea we had agreed on together, before we began the movie. We agreed it would be a story of love. Murray said love was equal to hate, so it will be a story of love and hate. . . . And hate was not in the atmosphere, conflict was not in the atmosphere. We had to build up conflicts. . . . So it was improvised every day.

Alexa – It was a really good lesson in acting. Often, I would get quite angry with Murray – furious, not angry. And I kept saying, "I'm not angry with her!" and he would say, "You're angry now! Sure you're angry!" And I'd say, "It's not directed at Sharon. . . it's directed at you!" So he said, "O.K. now, just turn that anger around and direct it at her." That's the way he would direct, and in that way – he was a good director.



Alexa and Sharon

Did you also feel hatred for Murray?

Sharon – No, there was a lot of disagreement. We disagree a lot in what we believe in. He believes in a more aggressive style of making films and of getting to know people. Although I'm quite aggressive – I'm not as aggressive as he is.

What was the emotion that sort of characterized the whole shooting period?

Sharon – Oh, cooperative. The thing would be over and we would be relieved that we had gone through a scene and had not quit halfway (which we did sometimes). You know, "This is not the right tack" or "We're doing a poor job". I could tell when I was really not acting. And then sometimes, I would forget I was acting and then it was quite good. Sometimes, we didn't speak. We had long periods of silence and conflict between some takes. . . . Other takes – we would sit down and sort of go over it. . . .

Did you feel very close to the crew?

Sharon – It was together. It was tense because we weren't quite sure what we were together on. We were making a movie, and we had a certain time to do it. We had to shoot a lot: every day, two or three times a day, for eight weeks. We stuck to that almost entirely. We took off a few days while we re-lit the whole house (laughter) And we – not me, I don't know what I did during those few days – sort of changed the set slightly.

Was it strange – the acting?

Alexa – Very strange. Well, because it was showing a day-to-day relationship without anything day-to-day familiar around. . . . 1,000-watt bulbs, microphones, and four guys sitting around waiting for you to do something.

Sharon – I'm intrigued by acting, although I'm not a good actress at all. I like being in front of the camera. . . . I like it when the cameras are on much more than when they're not.

Alexa – Yeah, because there's a relief from the tension. The works are on again! Something is indeed happening! (laughter)

How were the love scenes shot?

Alexa – It was really precarious. . . . because of expectations. Most of the time, there was a soundman in the room – sometimes Murray – and it was hard. . . . really hard. I mean, there the line between acting and not acting is – It was difficult.

Watching the film I had a strange feeling that the camera was really afraid of filming the love-scenes. You can almost feel it pulling away from the two of you. . . . And another strange thing – the idyllic scenes were so completely separate from the rest of the film. Like, you would have a heavy confrontation, and then cut to the two of you having a beautiful time in a field of flowers. . . .

Sharon – I think that's good, that that comes across. There was a dual reality, I think – an emotional reality and a physical reality. And one was close-up and one was long-shot (laughter)

But they were really divorced from each other, it didn't flow. One thing didn't flow up to the other. . . . so the erotic quality to it is quite abrupt, I find. . . . Although there is quite a physical communication all the way through in all scenes – through the psychological dramas – there's a quick cut to the outdoors. . . .

Alexa – I feel the same way. . . . The transition between the heavy raps and the lovemaking scenes was a bit abrupt. . . . But that was the way it was filmed.

What are some of your favorite scenes in the film?

Sharon – I like the scene down by the river when the storm comes up. It's just a small scene in the film. . . . But you know, there's such an order in the country. It's sort of a simple film about living in the country, too. (pause) Although, I don't know if that comes across. It's a quiet life, in tune with everything that goes on around. So – I like that scene. . . . and living in the country is not staring at people all day long and trying to communicate and find out things and learn things and solve problems and agree to do things. . . . It's very personal. . . . and pleasurable.

Who originated the idyllic scenes?

Alexa – Jim a lot. . . .

That's interesting, that a cameraman would originate those scenes, because they were really cameraman's scenes – composed with the visuals in mind. . . .

Sharon – He was very happy. . . . We originated a lot of them, too – by just escaping from the house to go outside. Which is how that scene by the river happened. We rarely agreed on doing a scene outside – we'd just go, and sometimes they'd follow; and sometimes they wouldn't.

Alexa – The most fun I had with Sharon, really, was in those scenes. . . . And Jim and I would have long discussions about the light coming through the leaves. . . .

How did you ready yourselves for a shoot?

Sharon – Concentration. . . . and disbelief that I'm being watched or observed. Sometimes, it worked the other around – I'd imagine it. . . .

Alexa – You get to a certain point where you have to do it. Jump in. You have to really believe in the moment, because anything you do can be completely eradicated by the next moment. If I say something I really feel at this moment, I know that maybe next week or next month it's not how I'll feel. But at that moment I felt it. So it takes a complete belief, and in this case – in that I wanted to say one thing to Sharon, and I believed. Despite the fact that we were making a film. . . . I just concentrated and believed in that moment and I jumped towards what I believed.

Do you like the film?

Sharon – I like it. I think it's a first effort. . . . to really explain something in some detail – in a feature film. There was so much to explore in that theme, I think, stretching miles out. . . .

Alexa – It's almost an essay in a way.

Sharon – But it's only an hour and a half... and probably, if you do stretch things out over time, you would have to use so many symbolic references. You can't cover distances in that point of time... The people you see, the complexity of your life... I wanted to explore that a lot more. And we didn't really get into that.

Alexa – That was kind of the frustrating part... But Murray made the kind of film he wanted to make, and I think that's great! Because the miles he had to go, from the film's conception to the screen – and those miles are so phenomenal to me, now that I understand them – I think that's just wonderful. It really is!

Now that the film is finished, and your identities are going to be thrust up on the big screen – do you feel exploited?

Sharon – No, I don't feel exploited. I feel it's someone else's point of view. I did all those things... The way they're cut to make a story is an exploitation. I mean, if you take something and cut it up and use it for your own, and chew on it yourself – then that's exploiting. That's what it is... The film doesn't show rhythms that actually occurred while it was being made – and I think that's sort of exploitative (pause) But it's not exploitative – it's creative. To make Murray's view come across.

One of the things we discussed with Murray, is the problem with the publicity, and the posters... The poster seems to be hinting at a kind of film that this one isn't, really. With the words "Two young women in love... with each other". That kind of teasing, leering thing. It just seems that it will attract a lot of people for the wrong reasons –

Alexa – I'm sure it will. I'm sure it will... But the film is not sensational. It's quite boring in some parts, you know. And I think everything about the film will get around and then people can pick and choose to see if they would like it... Like, with *2001*, it was word-of-mouth that made everyone go see that film, not the publicity.

You know, there are so many painful things that went into making this movie, to make all that just meaningless... Sometimes, I wish I could go to sleep for 90 years; other times – I'm really happy. I want to do more films, I really want to explore... I'd like to be in a western once.

Sharon – I think you have to keep some distance to do things. Parts of your life – you have to see them as things you did. They're going to be received apart from you. But you keep your life separate somehow, and you do these things and let them wash away... and you do something else – and it washes away... I hope I'm not overly affected by the response or feedback...

How did you feel about doing this interview?

Sharon – Oh, I felt good about it. I wanted to see what you wanted to know... We're just doing an interview... I mean, we'll probably learn something from it, so it's worth talking. Maybe. I don't know.

No matter what you say, people are going to receive the film the way they receive an interview. Sometimes, you might feel that you weren't treated justly, or that you want to explain something... I guess that's what we're doing. But we're also all interested in filmmaking, and creating something (pause) or hacking up something that we've done...

I don't have much of an objective view of what came across and what didn't. To me, it was the making of the movie, and now it's talking about it and thinking about it... But really, the effort was in the satisfaction of making the film. I can't really see it anymore, I take it all far too seriously. I think of all these experiences as investigations that we are undergoing. Probably, many films have this same kind of experience – they're rugged, and emotional, and tense, and all about love...

I think we need more and more exposure to get off these days, to learn something, to really feel something. That's how we got into this kind of filmmaking. There's so much improvisation, and stripping away defenses. I tried to act a lot

of things out that fell completely flat because I was using too much dramatization, too many visuals, too much acting out something that I thought was my character... rather than letting go. The director was always saying, "Strip away the onion peel! Let it go... Forget what you look like! Forget your image, forget your image..." That's what it was... the style of making the film... to probe and probe...

Alexa – That's why I'm interested in Bergman. Especially now.

Sharon – But he sets up things –

Alexa – I know, but that's what I'm interested in. I don't know what it is exactly, but Liv Ullmann was saying that she doesn't have to *externalize* a whole lot of things. It's just by her subtleties that he's able to make her into a real character in a film...

Now that this chapter of your lives is finishing, nearing an end... What are your plans? Would you like to be in more films?

Sharon – I'd like to be in a different kind of film. With more bizarre people who are on a different emotional level. Who don't explain things to each other, but who interact and bounce off and do crazy things all the time. Trying to survive... I guess it's more of a city existence. I really like Warhol. And from what I understand, the freedom that his characters have to just act out – is almost complete. He's not really a director in that sense...

Alexa – I'd like to do a more physical thing. That's why I'd like to be in a western. I'm a writer, you know. And just in the last six months or so, I got back into fiction writing. So right now, I'm interested in characters. I'd like to act out a role.

But isn't that false somehow? After the kind of film that *August and July* is? To act out a character not yourself?

Alexa – I don't know about that...

Sharon – You can find a role... and find how you can be that, too. There are many sides of you that aren't expressed...

What are your realistic chances of getting roles like that?

Alexa – My realistic chances are purely magical... ●

