

FRANCIS MANKIEWICZ

Twenty-eight year old Quebec director, Francis Mankiewicz, visited Gerald Pratley's Ontario Film Theatre recently for the premiere of his first feature film *The Time of the Hunt* (*Le Temps d'une Chasse*). This was the picture that caused so much excitement at the 1972 Canadian Film Awards, where it won three Etrogs, for Best Cinematography (Michel Brault), Best Sound Recording (Claude Hazanavicius), and the Special Jury Award for Best First Feature Film.

After the successful showing at the Film Theatre, however, the feature was practically slaughtered in Toronto. It opened on a Thursday evening in Cinecity, received a good write-up in the *Globe and Mail* that weekend; another positive interview/review the following week in the *Toronto Star*; and yet it was pulled after only one week. The numerous questions again arise as to how this could happen. Why wasn't the film given a longer run after it had received good coverage? Why was there such a minimal promotion done (not even capitalizing on the three Awards)? Why couldn't the *Star* review the film in time for the weekend crowds? And why did Cinecity only allow it one week, after good reviews? Many Torontonians were disappointed to learn that they could not see *Le Temps d'une Chasse*; and we were simply again frustrated at seeing another Canadian feature being handled so poorly.

Le Temps d'une Chasse written and directed by Francis Mankiewicz; produced by Pierre Gauvreau NFB; Director of Photography – Michel Brault; Sound – Claude Hazanavicius; Editor – Werner Nold; with Guy L'Ecuyer, Marcel Sabourin, Pierre Dufresne, Olivier, L'Ecuyer, Luce Guilbeault and Frederique Collin. 35mm color feature film. Winner of 1972 Canadian Film Awards for Best Cinematography – Michel Brault, Best Sound Recording – Claude Hazanavicius, and Special Jury Prize for Best First Feature Film – Francis Mankiewicz. (All photographs by Jean-Paul Bernier.)

Besides the fact that *Sleuth's* director, Joseph Mankiewicz is a distant relative; Francis Mankiewicz's personal background is also quite fascinating. His parents were originally from Poland. They lived in France before escaping from the war to China – where Francis was born. On their way back to France, they stopped in Montréal, where they've lived since 1946. Mankiewicz has been Québécois since he was a year old.

(Interviewed by Kiss/Koller, edited by Lilith Adams)

I went to both French and English schools and universities. I studied geology and philosophy, and I used to write a lot. I finished geology and I'd been writing for quite a long time. Then, at some point, I felt geology was a little dry. I was interested in people, and from writing I got into script-writing, and then I wanted to make a film. I wrote a script and went to the Film Board and they said, "Yes, but you don't know anything about filmmaking." So I went to the London Film School and I came back, and I said, "I went to a school. Now give me a job." "Well, we're not hiring now..." So... (laughter)



What did you study at the Film School?

I did mainly camerawork, because I knew nothing about filmmaking. I had done some photography, but I wanted to learn the insides of filmmaking, how it worked. I did camera to get a feeling of what filmmaking was. I felt that I wouldn't learn to direct at school, but I'd like to learn how to work a camera. At the same time, I worked in an actors' studio in London. I did a little bit of acting (which I hated) but I did it to find out what acting was about.

Why did you hate it?

I feel very uneasy acting. I'm not an actor, I don't have the inclination at all. I find it very difficult, so I did very little. Enough to understand the language of acting – how an actor gets into a character and a part. It's very important to understand how an actor thinks to have a dialogue between the actor and director. I did some directing in the actors' studio, and that was extremely helpful. The camerawork was also. When you're directing, you see the whole thing; but when you're behind the camera you see precisely what's going on.

So, when I came back they didn't have any jobs for me at the Film Board. I spent most of my time unemployed. Working here and there. Assistant cameraman, cameraman, assistant director... Then one day I heard Cinépix was making a film (they were preparing *L'Initiation*) so I went to ask for a job. They offered me a part in the film, but I turned it down because I wasn't interested in acting, and they had already hired an assistant director. But when they came to doing *Love in a Four-Letter World*, I started as an A.D. I worked for two, three years...

How did you get affiliated with the Film Board?

I had also worked there as assistant director. I had written this script which I presented to Jean-Pierre Lefebvre who was running production at the time. It was to be a 35mm black and white low-budget film. But when we came to the budget,

Marcel Sabourin as Richard



Olivier and Guy L'Ecuyer



Pierre Dufresne as Lionel

we found that it exceeded the framework of that programme. It was too expensive. It got very complicated. Then Jacques Godbout became head of the fiction studio. He read the script, liked it, and said, "O.K. We'll do it in the regular feature department." He asked me if I was willing to do it in color, and then he conceived of a more commercial film. They didn't want us to spend too much money, so we kept cutting down the budget left and right. It was becoming more and more of a strait-jacket. But the film was made anyway.

How much did it finally cost?

I think it's \$200,000 with the final print. The shooting was something like \$175,000.

Did you have complete control over the casting?

Complete control. I spent three months casting the film. Because of the difficulties, it was shot a year after I was supposed to do it. It was shot in '71, and it was supposed to be shot in the fall of '70. Maybe it was a good thing, because the hotel I had in mind burned down in the period I was supposed to be shooting in.

Where did you find Guy L'Ecuyer? He's a beautiful actor!

He's acted professionally for years and years. He played some theatre, did a lot of films, and used to have a show for children. He's been around a lot.

How did you write the script? It really is incredible how it carries you through because it's so understated and believable.

This was the main problem with the film. The acting had to be good because otherwise the story wouldn't be supported. It's certainly not a strong story line. The film is centred on the characters. The casting took a long time because we had to find three actors who would make a whole. A complete entity, and equilibrium. Sort of like a pyramid. The same with the girls. For the young waitress I had to find somebody who would fit with the father, and for the other waitress, I had to find somebody who would fit Lionel, the stronger man. You build it very gradually.

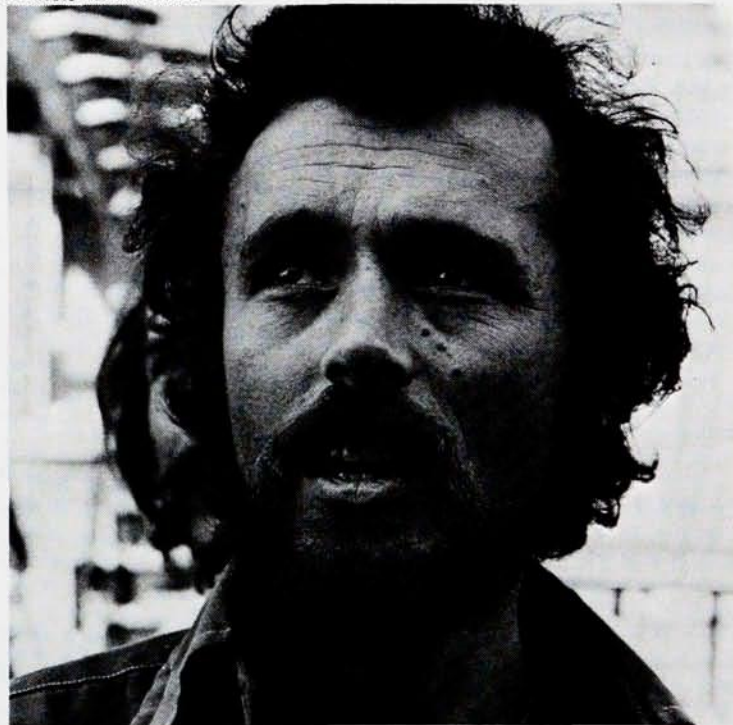
Did you have a very clear delineation of the characters?

It's very important for the director and actors to feel the characters strongly. I spent a day with each of the actors, and one day with the three together. The time I spent with each individually was for defining the character with the actor, and with all three to define the relationship. The actors brought a lot themselves. But it was because they felt the limits and totality, that they were able to work within the character to give him dimension. They brought a lot to the role. When I was casting, I was looking for people who corresponded a little bit to the characters and we each went halfway. It's sort of a fusion between the actor and the character he's playing that makes it one. It sometimes becomes hard to differentiate between the two. That's what a good actor is. When you watch him play, you wonder if he's playing himself or the part. The game of the actor is, of course, not to let you know.

Did the whole crew work as closely?

Oh, yes! The first thing I did on arriving at the set in the morning would be to have a reading session. We'd read the scene we were doing that day with the actors. We read it together, talked about it a little, and then I'd ask them to just act it out whichever way they felt. Move, and do whatever they

Francis Mankiewicz



Le Temps d'une Chasse

felt like. While they were doing that, Michel Brault and I would look at it and decide on the angles. It was very close. Once we figured out an angle and the actors had rehearsed it, we might find that the action wasn't quite right for the camera. So we changed the action a bit to fit better with the camera position. It's sort of like a sculptor who starts with a block of rock and chips it down to get a general shape, chips it a little more to bring out different features, and finally polishes it. Every scene was built that way. The camera and the actors worked very closely.

It would have been very hard to choreograph it tightly, where would you put tape marks in the woods?

It was very important for the actors to feel a certain freedom in being these characters. It's not the kind of movie where deadpan expressions come through at all. They have to have a lot of freedom with the movement for it to be natural and real and believable. You can't say because my shot is this wide, you can't move there and if you pick up a cigarette don't lift it higher than your nose or whatever. You can't impose such a tight format on this kind of film.

How did it come about that Michel Brault was on camera?

I had asked Michel a long time before the film was shot whether he was interested. He read the script and liked it; and he was. But when I proposed his name to the Film Board, he had another project going, and since he was freelance they were reluctant to hire him. They wanted me to use a Film Board cameraman. After a week of shooting with an N.F.B. man, we found out there had been problems. Then I changed cameramen after the first week, and we had to start over.

How did you find the boy for the film? He was excellent!

That was very simple. Guy L'Ecuyer's son was the boy. He has two sons and one looked too much like Guy. The same kind of smile . . . Whereas Olivier was a very, very different type.

Were you thinking of the boy in Bergman's "Silence"?

It's funny, because that is the type of image I had of the boy when I was writing the script. The kind of face and expression I would think of . . . So when I saw him, it was like 'Bang' and that was it. It was really quite simple. He's also a very good actor. I worked with children before, and when I wrote the script I tried to keep the boy's part very simple because it's quite difficult to get good children actors. Then, during shooting, I regretted that I had kept it so simple, because Olivier could have done a lot more.

The boy's fantasy sequences were beautiful. Kids do that all the time, playing war. Was that mostly yours or did you work it out with Olivier?

It was written in the script, and what was wonderful about the actors, is that they read the script very closely and they knew it. Even if they didn't remember certain things they ended up doing them the same way it was written. Michel went behind Olivier and followed him with the camera, and I said, "O.K. Now you die . . ." and he died but he remembered what I had written in the script about the feeling of the scene and he played according to that feeling.

It was really strange to see him shooting at himself, especially

Willie (Guy L'Ecuyer) in "Le Temps d'Une Chasse"



Luce Guilbeault in "Le Temps d'Une Chasse"

when you were saying how the boy represents the future . . .

That was added in the editing by Werner Nold. He worked that out because originally it was a little bit more linear. But it added a dimension in the film of a game, the whole game, the imagination.

Did your father ever take you hunting when you were a kid? Is that how you were so familiar with that world?

No, no. I'd been hunting once when I was a child. But I worked as a geologist before, and I worked in the woods on geological crews. These are all characters I'm familiar with. I wrote the script about things I know. I don't think you can live in Montréal without living with these people. You don't have to go to a bar and drink and live like the characters you write necessarily. Every day you see them. You're walking down the street, taking a bus, anything you do . . . Québec is where I live and these are the characters I know.

The man-woman relationships were fascinating in the film. If a woman had written the script, they would have accused her of being a man-hater because of the way the characters inter-related. It was a very strong film from a feminist point of view.

I wasn't really thinking of feminism. I wanted to show the characters as they were. Perhaps if a feminist had made it, there would have been a lot of hate in it. To me, what is most important is that I love the characters and the people they represent. I would find it difficult to spend two years making a film if I didn't like these characters. But there's a reality which I feel I cannot interfere with as a director, or whatever. They had to be themselves, I wasn't going to try to change them to present another picture. The concern in making this film was to capture them as they were as individuals and entities, with the life that exists outside my own, and without necessarily criticising. The camera looks at the characters in this way, with a certain respect and distance. I wanted the audience to look at them and decide for themselves rather than deciding myself.

But it connects with the feminist outlook. What I wanted to suggest was the conditioning of these characters by outside influences, by colors, by magazines, by their city way of life. To what extent they are conditioned in their relationships with each other and the dialogue that takes place between them. They can never admit to weaknesses. They live very much with the image that society gives of the strong, male, North American.

Willy refuses to grow old. He rejects the fact that he is fat. He refuses these things because they don't fit with the image of the North American male. He refuses the idea that he's not going to be able to keep up with the others, that he is probably never going to make more money than he is making now, that some day he's going to die. Because dying is a terrible thing. He refuses his own reality and what he is; because he wants so much to correspond to the image society would like him to take on. He wants to fit. Therefore, he has

to project the image that he is strong, young and virile. And that whether he is 50 or 30 makes no difference.

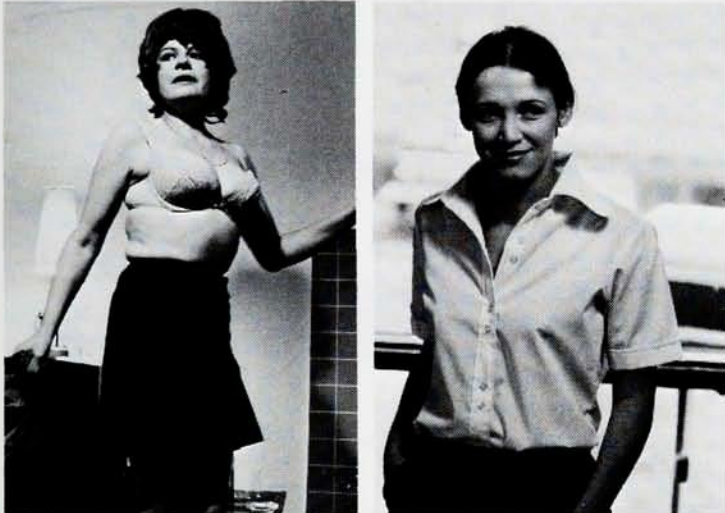
The same with Lionel. If you look at him closely, he isn't really what he pretends to be. He's a much more sensitive and gentle person, but again — that's a reality he refuses. To him, that would be a weakness to be tender . . . Even in the intimacy of the bedroom, he has to prove himself to be the dominating male with the woman.

Willy is, in a sense, more obvious. Everybody sees the discrepancy between the image and the reality. But even Richard is incapable of going according to what he really feels. He would rather stay at the hotel with the young waitress, but under pressure from the others he ends up going, to comply with his image of himself.

That's exactly what I meant when I referred to the feminist point of view. The three men were incapable of having a warm friendship. With each other, or with women. They couldn't let their masks down long enough.

If they could accept their reality and be themselves, they would probably have a terrific time together. But the masks are always interfering. They get up in the morning and say, to themselves "What a handsome guy I am!" and then they look in the mirror and they don't quite believe it. So they put the mirror away. It's sad, because you realize that if they could accept themselves for what they were, they would have a lot more to live for.

They are workers of modest means living under the spell of



Frederique Collin

the media, under the spell of what TV says that they should be. In their daily life they realize they are not going to get promoted to the position of boss. But they're living under the idea that you should behave like you were the boss . . .

So they all order steak . . .

It's like a big put-on. In a sense, the pattern that the North American male lives by is just as strong a pattern as what women's lib is talking about.

But I want to stress again that these are characters I love. It's very important to me. We're taking a very critical look at them and their structure, but I love them for what they are. I accept it, but I say it's too bad for them, it's sad for them that they can't . . . It's a difficult judgment to make. You can't say whether somebody is living in the right or the wrong way . . . That's the attitude of the film. Some people might say, "Maybe this is the way out — to adopt the image . . ." But to me, it's a lost generation. It's a generation trapped. We live so much under the idea of killing. The unreality of death; and by the same token the unreality of life. When the boy plays war, it's a game for him in the same way hunting is a game for the men. But by the end of the film, the reality of death comes through — and therefore, the reality of the life that came before it.

What are you working on now? Do you have another script in mind?

Well, I'm working on a difficult subject which is, in a sense,

Le Temps d'Une Chasse through the eyes of a girl. We were referring before to the pattern in which you're raised. If you're a boy, you can have dirty hands. A girl has a pattern through childhood of being clean and proper and conforming to images. What's happening to this character is that when she reaches the age of 25, she finds that the pattern doesn't correspond to what she really is. Whereas the characters of **Le Temps d'Une Chasse** don't refuse their roles, this character does. She tries to overcome the past, to destroy the pattern, to be herself and accept herself for what she is. But when you reject the pattern, you reject your past and everything that's part of you, even if you don't agree with it anymore. So at 25, when she rejects all this, she finds herself asking, "Who am I? What is my reality other than the pattern? What's left?" And there isn't very much left. So the next film I'd like to make is how you can still be something after having rejected your patterns. For me, the answer is rejecting for a time, but after a while coming to terms with it and accepting the reality of that system. Accepting that and constructing something else from there. Rather than a total rejection.

How far along are you on this?

It's a film I've had in mind for four years now. I'm trying to develop the script right now. I find it quite difficult. I would like to do it with a writer, to collaborate. I hope something will come of it. I'm very anxious . . . It's the next step in a sense. I wasn't sure whether one had the right to be so negative and leave all the doors closed. The wonderful thing about life is that things always start over. I'd like to show that this is cyclical. I said the age was 25, but it happens at 40, it happens every morning.

In one of his books, Sartre was speaking to a priest and he said, "You priests are very lucky because you have faith. Every day you get up and you have faith, and there's no problem. You know exactly where you're going. We existentialists have to put everything into question every morning, and wonder, and go through the anxiety of not knowing." And the priest answered, "You're quite wrong. Because every morning I get up and I have to rediscover my faith and I have to pray — 'Is God there?' It's not that different." That is a little bit more of what I'd like to touch in the next film. This feeling that things start over again . . . To see in the film how the character starts over, picks herself up, and goes on . . . ●



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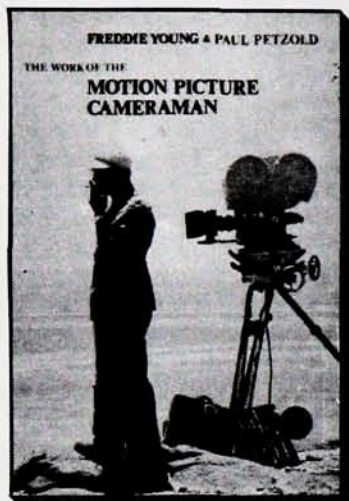
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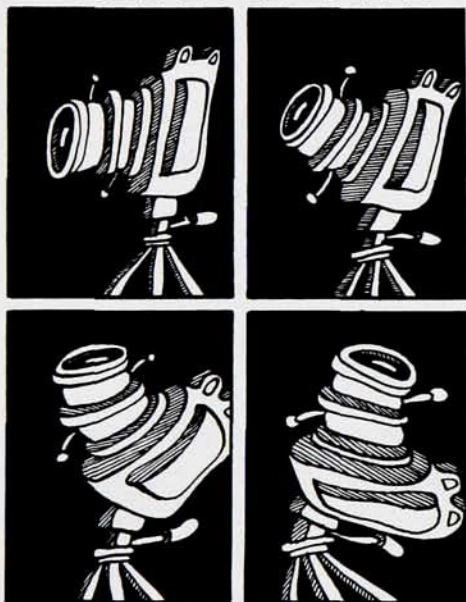
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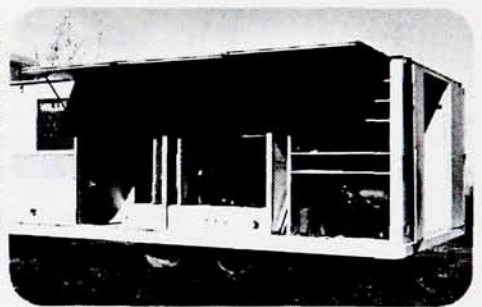
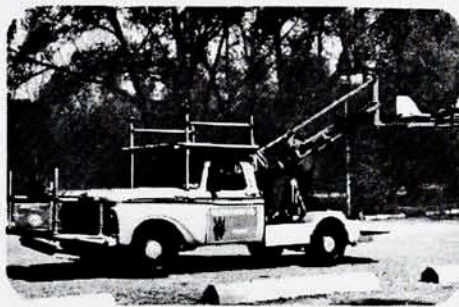
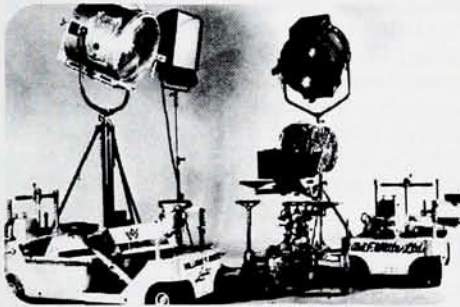
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