

Originally, I had planned to write about the portrayal of women in four of the films shown at the Canadian Film Awards this year: *La Vraie Nature de Bernadette*, *Wedding In White*, *Françoise Durocher*, *Waitress* and *La Vie Revée*. It could have been a good article, but it got side-tracked. Mainly, because three of these films weren't really about women.

La Vraie Nature de Bernadette is Gilles Carle's masterpiece about the true nature of Québec, not of a woman. Bernadette's saga is the story of a people deeply-rooted in Catholicism, surrounded by an alien 'progress', and searching for new answers to survival. Bernadette's search ends, or begins, with a gun.

In the beginning of the film, Bernadette leaves her husband and the life she knows, to attempt to live by her dreams. She is idealistic, all-giving, all-loving, and all-embracing. She fights with a Christ-like love. Her little-girl-dream appears to be coming true, and it seems that she is succeeding. Her dreams are bearing fruit, her love is blooming, and 'miracles' are blossoming forth from the well of her immense energy and belief. But her love is betrayed. It is abused by the doubting Thomas (also the name of the lead male character) in all of us. Nobody is naïve enough to still believe in love as a viable force for change. Thus, Bernadette has to adopt a new way of fighting for the same visions. Her story is very like a parable. It succeeds masterfully. The film is very powerful, but is only vaguely the story of a woman's search for personal freedom.

Wedding In White explores the intricacies and restrictions of our societal roles. It is foremost a humanist film. The social structures prove to be constricting to men and women alike. What is crystallized in the film is our basic human fault of not being able to transcend, through love and empathy; all that, which is accepted and expected.

By definition, tragedy is inevitable. In *Wedding In White*, the depth of tragedy reached is possible only by the realization that none of the characters could have changed the basic flow of their lives. They had to act as they did. There was no choice.

Bill Fruet etched into his story a lovely character, strongly reminiscent of Laura in Tennessee Williams' *Glass Menagerie*.

'Jeannie' is sensitively depicted and marvelously portrayed by Carol Kane, as a young girl totally helpless and incapable of influencing the events that become her fate. It would be outside of Jeannie's character to even attempt to take her life into her own hands. Thus, she loses out to forces stronger than herself, and has to accept the life these forces mold. Her parents are caught in this same inevitability. Neither is capable of loving her, or each other, as they would want to. Their love, therefore, becomes almost irrelevant by virtue of its impotence.

Wedding In White is carefully and painstakingly structured to provide a bitter look at the webs we have spun out of fear ultimately becoming our emotional death-traps.

On a very different level, *Françoise Durocher*, *Waitress* is also a study of our social values. The half-hour film takes a socio-political look at waitresses and their particular place in the class-structure. Although it brilliantly focuses on the exploitation of women, it doesn't attempt to delve into the women themselves. Each woman is introduced as Françoise Durocher. They have no names of their own, and no identities other than 'waitress'. Nor were they meant to, that was the point of the film. We treat waitresses as nameless commodities, creatures only a step above being whores — women who are meant to be used without thought or feeling.

The infuriating monotony of the daily routine of these women's lives is captured by the intercutting of sequences in red, blue, yellow, and green tints; where the waitresses are



Bernadette

WOMEN

in

Jeannie





Françoise Durocher, *Waitress*

Canadian

shatters the invisible veil between Inside and Outside? When thoughts manifest themselves physically? When the line between subconscious and conscious totally disappears? I don't know.

What I *do* know is that the first film I have ever seen where the characters are women, not insane, yet completely believable is *La Vie Revée* by a 28-year-old Québécoise – Mireille

Dansereau. Her film is simply the story of two women who become friends. What the film captures in its prismic light is the metaphysical reality of women.

La Vie Revée subtly catches the myriad ways in which women communicate – through feelings, glances, movements, and moods. The film shows a feminine reality interspersed with dreams and fantasies, which are as much part of that reality as 'actual' occurrences.

Seeing *La Vie Revée* is like reading Anaïs Nin – or looking into a mirroring pool of water.

Halfway through the film, I found myself silently repeating, "Please, don't tell them everything, don't reveal too much. Let men have only a tiny understanding of us." I felt as threatened as if it were *me* being revealed so intimately on the screen. It was an ecstatically unique and exhilarating experience to see this film about *real* women. A film that actually 'sees' and not just 'looks at'. Wonderful.

Meeting Mireille Dansereau and Danielle Gagné a few days later was like a reunion of friends, sisters – not at all like an interview. We spent hours talking excitedly: so much to say, so much in common. There was a lot of joy and love flowing freely.

At one point, we were talking about never having seen a film quite as honest and fair to men, as *La Vie Revée* is to women. And Mireille said, "You know, so many men have been saying to me now – Why don't you make a film about men like that? – And I say, You have to make it yourselves!"

chanting in unison "... two cheeseburgers-hold the onions, one coke, one orange, one seven-up, one liver on rye, three hamburgers-no mustard..." and on and on. These repetitive scenes become reminiscent of a religious chant – a working-class litany. They are provoking, and powerful.

Françoise Durocher, *Waitress* is a very important film precisely because it manages to critically question existing social values in such a unique, and artistically excellent, way.

All three of these films had been strongly influenced by the Feminist Movement. I'm not disputing that. So what more did I want? Why the dissatisfaction? Because none of these films attempted to explore the basic question of *what are women all about, anyway?*

Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, was reputed to have admitted in his later years that he never could answer the question, "What does a woman want?"

I wanted to see a film exploring woman as a totality. I wanted to see a film in which I could believe every movement, every glance, every word as something that a woman would actually do or say. A woman whom I, as a woman, could accept as being real. To be able to think to myself, "Yes, I would be the *same* in that situation if I were that woman."

I have seen only two films made by men which succeeded in capturing such a totality. The first was Roman Polanski's *Repulsion*, and the second Istvan Gaál's *Holt Vidék (The Dead Landscape)*. What fascinates me is not that the films were

made by East-European masters of the cinema, but that both centered around a woman going insane. I could get paranoid, and deduce that I must be half-crazed and thus, only identify with women in a similar situation. But can any woman be 'sane' by standards not set by women at all? Is it possible, that men only understand women when the female inner-world

Films

Some utterly subjective thoughts from
a feminist.

Isabelle



LA VIE REVÉE with Lilianne Lemaître-Auger and Véronique Le Flaguais, directed by Mireille Dansereau. Assistant Director Patrick Auzépy, written by Mireille Dansereau and Patrick Auzépy. Camera by François Gill assisted by Richard Rodrigue and Louis de Ernsted. Sound by Jean Rival assisted by Claude Beaugrand and Hugues Migneault. Editing by Danielle Gagné. Music by Emmanuel Charpentier. Mixing by Paul Coombe. Film House. Script assistant Brigitte Sauriol. Production assistants: André Bouchard, André Robichaud, Francine Larivée, Michel Peters, Jean-Claude Burger and René Gueissaz. Sets by Michèle Cournoyer. Art-work by Claude Marchand. Photographic sequence by Daniel Kieffer. Produced by l'Association Coopérative des Productions Audio-Visuelles with the participation of the Canadian Film Development Corporation. Executive Producer Guy Bergeron. Shot in Super-16, distributed by Faroun Films in 35mm color. Budgeted at \$105,000.

Winner of Le Prix Wendy Michener, Special Jury Award in recognition of high artistic achievement; and Best Editing in a Feature Film - 1972 Canadian Film Awards.

Mireille Dansereau

CC: Was there any suspicion or distrust among Quebecois filmmakers concerning the Film Awards?

Mireille: I think there was a distrust in the way of saying, "Oh, it's so far away, and it's not our own festival." As if it were happening in a foreign country, only not as great or as glamorous as Cannes. But the only reason everybody decided to go was because of Jutra's prizes last year and how much it helped the film.

CC: Would it be different if they held it in Montreal next year?

Mireille: Then it would be very exciting! But not because there would be more films from Quebec - they all went. It's the distributor who decides whether to send a film or not to a festival, and for them it's very good if it gets a prize - that means money.

CC: Did you feel intimidated at the Awards Presentations? You were the only Quebecoise filmmaker who made an acceptance speech.

Mireille: That's because I am very shy, and I put that as a test. I said to myself, "You have to do that because it is difficult and that means that you have to try." But no, it was because I had something to say, especially since it's a film made by a cooperative. *La Vie Revée* was produced by l'Association Coopérative des Productions Audio-Visuelles in Montreal which has been financed by the C.F.D.C. The idea of the cooperative was to try to have people who had never been given the chance to prove themselves in film make their first one. It was almost a condition for making the film. So everybody was doing his first feature. And another way in which we were a cooperative was that everybody invested half their salaries, Danielle/Gagné, editor/ and I, our complete salaries in the last three months. But as Claude Godbout said, it's more a cooperative way of doing things, not just cooperative. The company he is with, Prisma, helped us a lot by letting us use their editing tables at very low prices. It's the *spirit* which is cooperative.

CC: Who are the filmmakers in the co-op?

Mireille: There are 40 members. Young filmmakers. All unknown, I guess. All people who wanted to change the way films were produced in Quebec, and who didn't want to work for a big company like Carle-Lamy. Really co-opérative filmmaking, in my idea, would be everybody writing the script together, everybody participating in the film; but it was not possible at this point. I think in Quebec we are not ready yet for collective experiences in creation, or in life. Communes are very difficult because we are just starting to know who we are. You can't get that with people who are not secure in themselves. The most difficult thing for me was with my assistant, Patrick Auzépy. He had no ego trip. On the contrary, he was helping. But I was *so afraid* that he would take over, I had to say, "It's my film, not yours." I had to take over the visions. But it was my film in that it's very personal - with the fantasies and all. Nobody could tell me how to do them. So when somebody suggested something, because I wasn't secure enough, I was afraid of being influenced. Before shooting, we thought we might be able to work together in a creative way communally. But it wasn't possible. As long as you make films where, as a director, you are not secure - you can't work collectively. But the ego says yes, we are there and we exist and we create. I do it as a woman. The search of women to create and to exist is the same process as what is happening in Quebec. It is the same pattern for any sort of colonized/colonizer relationship. The same problems exist for women as exist for Quebec in relation to the rest of Canada. It is very difficult for a woman in Quebec.

La Vie Revée

CC: But in English Canada there seem to be far fewer women involved in film.

Mireille: That might be because we look more towards what is happening in France. Editing - for a woman - was a very respected position in France. When I went there, I met a very great woman editor, but they're always working withmenthey admire. But I said to myself, I guess unconsciously, that one day I can become a director because of Agnès Varda.

CC: Seeing your film was such an incredible experience for me, because so many of the dreams and fantasies are my dreams and fantasies, too. And that memory sequence of when she was just a little girl - I was so glad to see that in a film! It seems to be a communal memory for myself and so many women.

Mireille: I am very glad, because someone in Montreal told me that if I show fantasies that are only mine, I shouldn't make any films. It's true. I don't want to make things only for myself, like I said in the film. Dusan Makavejev told me something marvelous - he said that we see in this film a lot of things that are part of the way people live, and that we never see on the screen; and that cinema is a lot about that. I think we should try to put on the screen many things like that. - everyday things. That's why I feel very close to what Cassavetes does. My ideal and ambition is to work like that. I haven't found the crew and all that, that he has. He always works with people he knows, and all the people are very involved. I think in a few years I will work like that - with

people very involved and who believe in what they are doing. With Cassavetes, it's really life that you see in his pictures. That way of relating to cinema is very appealing to me, even though it's not what you would call spectacular or entertaining.

CC: But your film seems to have gone beyond that, in that his films have a lot of crudity which is depicting the male world. Your film is. . . .

Mireille: Yes, but I'm a woman! That's the difference I wanted to show. I am very glad that you see that.

I went to Rimouski in northern Quebec and a few girls told me that they never thought women could get along like that. They felt *La Vie Revée* wasn't honest and true because of that. So I told them that if it exists on the screen, that means they can make it into a reality – and they agreed. It's great. They believe in it now, and for me that is the best thing.

CC: Your film is on such a subtle level – with the nuances of so many feelings and relationships. It's so beautifully subtle. Just as in life – so many important things happen on that level.

Mireille: I am sure they didn't pick up on the subtleties and nuances of the dreams. In Montreal the people who liked the film are people who are visual, not linear. Because of the atmospheres. I am a bit disturbed by that – should you *not* make films that are so subtle? The films that work have no subtleties at all. On the contrary, you give everything to the public. It is disturbing because I know that the film hasn't really done well. Yet for me, it is nearly commercial by my idea of films. It is not as experimental as what I would like to do.

The world I am in is one of subtleties and atmospheres, and many times I am afraid that it's very European, you know? At least, there are only a few people who can get into that. So in a way I know that I am going more and more towards making films that only a few, an elite, will get into.

La Vie Revée played in a very small theatre for six weeks in Montreal, but it didn't pay because the whole system of distribution for cinema is horrible. It made \$15,000, I guess, for the man who *owns* the theatre – but all of us who worked on it – nobody got any money. I think if I continue to make very low-budget films I may be able to go on. That is the problem for filmmakers, not knowing if you can go on and make more films. That's why I'm happy about the prize.

CC: Was it at all frightening to make your first feature?

Mireille: I wasn't frightened. I felt responsible to the cooperative and the C.F.D.C. The C.F.D.C. had just financed a film before mine (a guys' film) which was shot, and all the money was out at the end of the shooting. That was the first co-op production, so it was very bad for all the young filmmakers. The C.F.D.C. thought that we could not make features. Michael Spencer told me just yesterday, "You know, it is a big enterprise to make a feature film. I knew it would be difficult." But I told him that I knew if he gave me the money, I would go to the end. That's exactly what we did – we had no money left but we finished it. There was no other way. So there was this feeling that I was almost representing all young filmmakers, and if this film was not financially successful, it could almost be the end for a few years in Montreal for young people, because of that first bad experience. The proof is that now they are starting two features at the cooperative.

They didn't want me to make this first film. The men thought that if I made a film on women, it should be militant. A sociological-Marxist analysis, or something like that. A very political film. But you see, that is a *man's* idea of what is revolutionary about women. They think that we should get together and form a political party and fight, and give intellectual ideas about the problem of women as related to

our society and to Quebec. Men thought, that what would bring a change in the status of women is a clear analysis of women: sociologically, politically, and financially. They couldn't accept my intuitive, very emotional and personal approach.



CC: I was very surprised at seeing a man's name on the credits, as having written the script with you. I didn't feel his influence at all. How much of it did Patrick Auzépy write?

Mireille: That is very hard to say. I had written *La Vie Revée* four or five years ago. All the sequences and the spirit were there. In a way, it's great that you feel that way, because Patrick wanted to let me do my own film and he assisted in really every way. It's very seldom that you see that in a man. He completely tried to understand the film I wanted to make. For two years, I was living with him. At first we were supposed to do it with Paul Almond and people like that. It didn't work, so I was quite discouraged. And he helped me because he felt that if I didn't make this film, I couldn't go on as an individual. From so long ago, this was a very strong thing I had to do. Four years. I believed in this film because of the friendship between the girls and because I was *sure* if the images and dreams, so I stuck with it. I really hope that my next film I can make at the moment that I want to – maybe a few months' difference, but not four years.

CC: The editing of *La Vie Revée* must have been especially difficult because of the slow-motion sequences and the fantasies. But it all blended in so smoothly. It must have been very hard to get that. . . .

Mireille: Yes, that's true. At the beginning of the editing I was very unsure and we wound up making many tests. We were always wondering – is it too long or too short by a foot? I always wanted to have it longer, and Danielle kept saying no, no, no. Throughout the whole film, she kept saying, "Shorter!" and I was saying "A bit more" – so it probably came out just right.

CC: And the camerawork was so sensitive and not at all self-conscious.

Mireille: I think that is intuitive. I decided every frame and the atmosphere of lighting, because I wanted it to be a very realistic film so people could look at it and really be sure that that's life. Even if there are a lot of dream-sequences – the dreams are true – and as real as reality. That was the main quality.

I wanted to show two feminine characters being lively and honest, as you would see them in life and not as objects. I purposely didn't want a psychological analysis of two characters. I wanted to have life just bursting out of them!

CC: Was it shot in Super-16?



Mireille: That was hard. I had to fight for it. Nobody in Montreal believed in that – I had to come to Toronto. All the lab-work was done here. Bob Crone and Film House invested in the film, they even tried a new technique for it.

CC: Did you work very closely with François Gill, the cameraman?

Mireille: There was a big conflict between us. In Quebec, the cameraman is the hero. I was making a woman's film and he wanted to be the star. Incredible conflicts. But I think that it is out of conflicts that you get something of value. The conflict with François Gill was the most interesting. He was a man who wanted his ego, but you can see why this is ridiculous; who has the real vision of things? The director.

But we still don't have the ability to submit. We think submitting is feminine, and inferior. But in a film, there is one person who wants to impose his vision, which is nearly an aggression. Or not an aggression – a creation. The people around are there to help that person make the best film possible. That is a new realization for me, that submitting is not inferior. There shouldn't have to be a battle between the one who is making and the one who is helping to make. The next day it can be the reverse! But there is always a lot of ego-tripping, and the most difficult is the director – who is doing his own ego trip. (laughter)

CC: Do you find it easier to work with a woman creatively than with a man?

Mireille: Danielle and I had no ego trips between us. Insecurity – yes; but not at all the same thing. We were working together, and we were very insecure and not confident, because we were talking about women. I admit that for a good time of my life, and even now, I always admired what men did. So when we were working and thinking about women, we felt that somehow that was not as good as men's work. We didn't feel good about it.

For the past ten years, I have been trying to forget that I'm a woman. I always said to men, "I'm a woman, yes. But I'm quite different from other women. I'm better – I'm almost a man!" That's why I always felt bad about the films I was

making. A horrible malaise. Always thinking that people won't like what I'm doing as much as if I were a man doing them.

That is why working at the Film Board on a project about women is so great, because now I can say that I'm a woman and I'm really glad that I am. And the things I have to say are as important as if I were a man.

A lot is changing. When you change as an individual, the things you do change as well. I don't think that I will become aggressive. Men seem to be afraid now. They tell me that I must be a Women's Liberationist because I am questioning marriage and all that. And in their heads, Women's Lib is aggressive. So they see me and I'm not that way – so what kind of Women's Lib am I? I'm a woman trying to find out what I really am, and that's all. The Women's Liberation Movement is very difficult to assume because it is very intellectual, and very badly communicated by the mass media.

The revolution we won as women was in stopping that competition thing, the ego. That is what is so fantastic for me in the group at the Film Board. We are all women working together.

When I started at the Film Board eight years ago, no-one was saying too much about their films because they were afraid that someone would steal their ideas or be influenced by them. It was all very sneaky. With the women's group now, in The Challenge for Change series, it's so great! We read an article, and we bring it in, "Did you see that?" And the other women know I'm making a film about marriage, and if they have a book or anything that deals with it, they give it to me or tell me about it.

My plans are not to work only with women, or even to make films only about women; but I think this series will bring in a new kind of feeling. Already, at the Film Board – you look at it, and we are having fun. We laugh a lot, and the atmosphere is this kind of relaxation. The men are really wondering what's happening.

It's strange, you know. For the first time I don't feel ashamed or competitive at all. I feel that the next film I make is going to be much more relaxed. First of all, it's not as big as this one was; in that it isn't dramatic with actresses and all that. But also, I'm very involved.

The way it's done, it's getting very close to the cooperative way of making films. I'm putting myself in the film – so I'm really involved. I am making one film in the series. There should be six. I'm very glad that they realized the importance of a series like that. The executive producer, who is a woman, would like it to be nearly permanent. It's for Challenge for Change and it's to go on television. So already, that is a very specific thing. I was called about six months ago to make the film I want to make – just a film by Mireille Dansereau. We did research with women through video for two months, women of all ages and social classes. We did three-hour sessions for three, four days a week. But I was very anguished. I felt that I found things that I knew already. The women were all talking about children, their men, sexual relationships, all fundamental questions that men probably wouldn't talk about so openly. It was marvelous for them. But at the end of two months, I had no thought of making a film about any of that. So I went and really searched. I felt the responsibility of finding out what was most important about women now – what was most important for women? I researched, and more and more I realized that women centre their whole lives in relationship to marriage. Whether or not to marry at eighteen. At least, for my generation it was that – marriage or career? Marriage meant prison. Career meant freedom, adventure, risk – all of which are very masculine. Career also meant sexual freedom, and that sexuality didn't mean anything. Because

men at that time got married and had adventures with women. They looked at their mistresses, at their affairs, as a relationship that was not involving. So we, who wanted to be men, adopted these same patterns. We decided that sexuality was not involving — that we could have all kinds of experiences. Today, I realize that that is a male pattern; that sexual relationships *are* involving — for any individual who is whole and total.

I was really asking myself — what is marriage? Why have I refused it so strongly, so categorically, and so young? That is when the research on fantasies came into it. What I liked most in *La Vie Revée* were the fantasy sequences. What were the most specific fantasies of women related to marriage? Then, I found something really interesting, going back into religion. I saw how the first communion was the first idea of marriage, to Christ. I was starting to work on that, and submitted it to the producer. She said that it was very interesting, but not what we were doing in this series. The film was becoming very meditative and mystical. I still think it is very good, and I am sure that I will go at it again.

But the series is about social change and has to go on television. I went on the idea of what was marriage, and decided to make four portraits. Four different approaches of women in the same generation — twenty-eight to thirty. What kind of evolution have we done in the past ten years as women, and how we situate ourselves between the generation before ours and the younger generation. Those before us have accepted marriage — with maybe a few mistresses — they have made their own environment; and even when they get divorced, they want to start again. The same pattern always. And the younger generation, those who are eighteen to twenty — ten years away from us — are talking about the end of relationships between two people, and are trying collectives. They are trying to find new patterns. And we, who are between those two generations, are putting into question the institution of marriage, not actually the fundamental relationship of two people. There is no difference between two people living together and two who are married — the patterns are the same. That is what I am showing.

I take four women and I try to really get into their world, and their way of living every day. To show the rhythm of their lives and how they create their everyday lives. I want them to choose. with me. what is most revealing about them and how

to illustrate their lives. If they want to dance, or create in music, that is what we are looking at with each of them. I am not only putting my own idea of what these women are, I am helping them realize what they are, and to express themselves. They are going to do the same with me — to provoke me. In a way, I am there and will be asking questions. I'm somebody who is going to see people to know more about why they made choices. But at the same time, it is going to be a feed-back; with them asking me, "Who are you, coming to ask me questions? Do you really love me, or are you just here to make a film?"

I am trying, and I hope that the relationship between the interviewer and the one who is being interviewed is going to be completely changed. These four women are not caught in the usual patterns. One is married and has children, and she was a filmmaker who left everything after twenty-six to have children. Another woman is getting a divorce. She has no children but she has a career. Another is living with a guy and isn't married; and the fourth woman has a child of her own without a father, and a kind of occupation in which she is very involved — but not a career in itself. They are not ordinary women, for they have all questioned the roles of women, and it's interesting to see four women who have questioned and have chosen four different ways of living.

Making the film, and the film itself — neither is more important than the other. I don't like to separate things, I always want to put them all together. Because it is the same thing — the product of the film and the making of it. With *La Vie Revée*, I was so anxious, that most of the time the product was much better than the life I had while making it. People say — it looks so nice, it must have been great to film it. It was not great! It was anguishing and suffering! In our generation, you always have to be cool and have fun and all that . . . But everything you do has suffering in it. A woman giving birth to a child — that's the most suffering thing there is. For me, making films is like having children.

But now, I won't be as stressed, I am more secure. You know, I've read about some filmmakers in Quebec and they say, "It was great! Everybody loved each other and *Tatatamm!*" and I think, how lucky they are ●



La Vie Revée



Virginie and Isabelle

A. Ibrányi-Kiss has dropped out of seven women's liberation groups. She is the daughter of two political idealists, sister to a violinist and a Sufi dancer, and lives amongst cats, plants, books, and filmmakers.