

FILM REVIEWS

45 + 28 = 1260 + .02 = 25.20

Daryl Duke's THE SILENT PARTNER

d. Daryl Duke, sc. Curtis Lee Hanson, ph. Billy Williams, bsc, ed. George Appleby, cfe, sd. David Lee, m. Oscar Peterson, l.p. Elliott Gould, Christopher Plummer, Susannah York, Céline Lomez, John Candy, exec. p. Garth H. Drabinsky, p. Joel B. Michaels, Stephen Young, p.c. Silent Partner Film Production Ltd (1977), col. 35mm, running time 102 minutes.



Christopher Plummer as Santa, director Daryl Duke and Elliot Gould

Sometimes the film world plays nasty, and sometimes pleasureable tricks on those of us who by necessity or inclination write about it. A reviewer may find himself at loose ends one evening and walk into a movie house to see a film he has had no advance information on and be pleasantly surprised to discover a delightful gem all by himself. At other times, one can look forward to a new film, savoring the glowing accounts of its virtues by respected colleagues and come away reeling with the disappointment of shattered expectations.

The latter example is unfortunately the case with **The Silent Partner**, which despite a successful box office and the accolade of receiving six Etrogs, was unsatisfactory and disappointing.

The story involves a bank heist which is turned around when the would-be victim, Miles Cullen played by Elliott Gould, becomes aware of the impending robbery and on impulse prepares to turn it to his own advantage. Gould gives a credible performance as the milque-toastish bank teller who seizes the once in a lifetime opportunity to break out from the set pattern of his narrowly defined world of cheque cashing and goldfish feeding. However, Gould is forced to work with a script that gives him nothing to say or do beyond "B" movie clichés, though he is not the only victim. Christopher Plummer, as the psy-

chopathic bank robber, Harry Reikle, is forced to bear his own burden of hammed phrases that are supposed to suggest malevolence, but result only in making the character seem mealy-mouthed.

The story line comes from a suspense novel **Think of A Number** by Anders Bodelson which screenwriter Curtis Hanson optioned, reworked into a screenplay, and showed to producers Stephen Young and Joel Michaels, who in turn brought it to executive producer Garth Drabinsky.

The idea of a man confronted with a crisis point in his life, who opts for a radical departure from the norm, could have resulted in an intriguing character study which, in the context of **The Silent Partner**, should have grown into an intricate cat and mouse game between Cullen, who discovers unsuspected resources in himself and the psychopathic Reikle, who seeks revenge for being stymied in his plans. This is the point at which Hanson and director Daryl Duke have let us down, by turning the material into simple melodrama with its hollow dialogue and its failure to provide proper motivation for the characters, as they move through the film.

All this is more than somewhat surprising since Duke's previous directorial efforts, most notably the film **Payday**,

have dealt quite sensitively with characters who undergo personal crises. But the script for **The Silent Partner** defeats him, and he seems unable to conjure up a real tension between Plummer and Gould which would have lifted the material into art. Instead Cullen is forced to muddle along, reacting without conviction to Reikle's scheming in a moral vacuum where no one bothers to reflect on what they are doing.

In fact, the film descends into a mean spiritedness when the hero's (rather, protagonist's) bumbblings lead to an ending that affirms the grubbiness of everyone concerned. The bank teller is in no way better than the murderer, and the sympathies that have been forced from us throughout the film all cry false. Even the love interest is not sustained and leaves a bad taste in the mouth.

The delightful Céline Lomez who more than anyone injects some vitality into the film is summarily dispatched, with nary a tear shed by Miles, who, one thought, had formed a strong attachment to her. No regrets, only expedience governs the film and Plummer's character no longer seems as macabre when we compare him to Miles whose reactions and new found strengths seem to exist outside of morality.

And can we ever forgive the director for the cheap and gratuitous way in which he dispatched the lovely Ms.

Lomez in one of the film's lower moments? This scene, with its distinct lack of subtlety, pretends to terror, but ends by being merely an inferior substitute — gross excess.

Susannah York is largely wasted as a bank manager's mistress who is attracted to Miles as he becomes increasingly obsessed with outwitting the killer who torments him. The inadequacies of the script prevent York from being a fleshed-out character, as it does the other principal actors, and we are never sure what she wants from the relationship with Miles. The ending, where Miles has finally outwitted the robber and escaped from the bank, is unsatisfying because in this world devoid of ethics and morality, we doubt the bond that exists between the characters played by York and Gould. Are we witness to the triumph of love over adversity or the beginning of another con?

Minor characters such as those played by Gail Dahms and John Candy are wasted in superfluous roles because again the writer has not been inspired to create the density of background detail, though to say, "Look there's Canada in needs.

One other false note, or rather an observation, that is disturbing about the film (although *The Silent Partner* has had successful runs all across Canada) is that Canadian films are becoming distressingly militant in their Canadianism.

In *The Silent Partner*, we are told in no uncertain terms that we are watching a Canadian film (in fact, a Toronto film) by means of lingering pans over one downtown shopping mall recognizable to Torontonians as well as by the odd way in which the CN Tower appears in the background of so many shots as though to say "Look there's Canada in the background!" Such trifling with the audience's interest (the voyeuristic tendency to say, "Hey, I stood in that same spot where Elliott Gould is walking") has a way of backfiring because, while recognizing the Eaton Centre and the "First Bank of Toronto" may elicit a murmur of approval from Toronto audiences, it'll leave the boys and girls in Moose Jaw or Montreal pretty cold.

Most American films that rely on a sense of place have the grace to do a

quick pan of (say) the New York skyline during the opening credits and then forget about the locale for the rest of the film unless it plays an important part in the development of the plot. *The Silent Partner* doesn't need the allusions to Toronto because Toronto is meaningless to the story. Thus to see Canada written in such a way all over the film strikes one as cheap and naive and ultimately pointless outside the immediate community.

The Silent Partner is a forgettable film that delivers much less than its potential given the people involved in its making. What is irritating is that somewhere along the line, too many wrong decisions were allowed to creep into a production that could have been a Grade A thriller in the Hitchcockian vein. This irritates because one can see dimly that inside this turkey of a film, there are the bones of a damn good story.

Günter Ott



Talk about conspicuous consumption! A victim of the Bronswik TV

SHORT FILM REVIEWS

L'AFFAIRE BRONSWIK

d. Robert Awad, André Leduc, sc. Awad, Leduc, animation Awad, Leduc, and Jean-Michel Labrousse, ph. Richard Moras, Jacques Avoine, Raymond Dumas, Simon Leblanc, electronic sd. Alain Clavier, ed. Awad, mixing. Michel Descombes assisted by Adrian Croll, sd. ed and music. Gilles Quintal assisted by Rita N. Roy, music advisor. Karl du Plessis, Don Douglas, narrator. Michel Mongeau, voices. Jacques Beaulieu, Claire Bourbonnais, p. René Jodin, p.c. National Film Board of Canada, 1976, col. 16mm, running time. 23 min, 24 sec. dist. NFB.

45415 = 675 x .02 = 13.50

Talk about subliminal seduction. It almost seems inevitable that when a man without a car buys dozens of tires, when a woman who detests dogs stocks up on cases of dog food, or when countless other such tales of excessive consumerism come to light — well, these days, sophisticated suspicion would probably lead us straight to out television sets. Alas, we were not so wise in 1964. Not, at least, according to writer/directors Robert Awad and André Leduc, whose delightfully tongue-in-cheek "docu-drama" traces the development of the Bronswik Affair from its roots to its culmination, leaving no stone unturned and brilliantly parodying the documentary genre as it goes.

The premise that multinational corporations would conspire to short-circuit the consumer's ability to resist

televised sales pitches is far from outlandish. And it is certainly plausible that the inventor of a particular line of TVs could be bribed by those same corporations to include such a short-circuiting "device" in his design. It is on this credible foundation that **L'Affaire Bronswick** builds its case, "documenting" the histories of unfortunate consumers whose psyches were invaded by waves from their Bronswick television sets. Indeed, the credibility factor accounts for much of the film's success and a good deal of its wit; what we are ultimately laughing at are the seductive powers of both the medium and the format. The topical nature of subliminal advertising has been beautifully exploited here, but so has the documentary genre. Interviews with victims of the conspiracy are shot and performed with absolute fidelity to the mimicked style, and the narrative track perfectly replicates the doomsday voice so essential to this type of "report." But the broadest swipe has been taken at those inimitable "reconstruction-of-event" sequences that are all too familiar; here, Monty Python-like animation has been substituted for live action, and with lovely results. Awad and Leduc, together with Jean-Michel Labrosse have created a moving collage of photographs that are as delightful as they are informative. Attention to detail is immaculate: arrows and instant replay help indicate precisely how several dozen bottles of salad oil tumbled from a victim's hands onto the floor one story below, to graphically illustrate the story or both the victim herself and the janitor, who narrowly missed decapitation by Mazola. An added assortment of official-looking charts and graphs give the animation a wonderfully silly legitimacy.

A return to "straight" satire is made near the end of the film, through a series of "public service commercials" supposedly aired by the government to assure a fearful public that the Bronswick Affair has been brought under control. Just how television stylistics have been beautifully captured is nowhere better illustrated than here: the ads feature (among others) a hockey player skating up to the camera to announce that "L'affaire Bronswick; c'est

reglé!" and there's no better proof that these filmmakers know their target.

It is the accuracy of the send-up that accounts for its impact, because there is relatively little (outside of the animation) to separate it from "legitimate" documentary. It seems as though "look-like" parodies have come into new popularity now, what with television's "Saturday Night Live" specializing in takeoffs on TV advertisements and such. But these spoofs are a golden opportunity for the viewer to reflect upon what one sees and what one believes. The swaying power of format is extraordinary and is certainly borne out by the National Film Board's experience with **L'Affaire Bronswick**. It appears that more than a few people were scandalized that such a story had not surfaced before '78 and demanded to know why they had not previously heard of the "conspiracy."

L'Affaire Bronswick is first and foremost delightful entertainment, but another quality may be attributed to it. Its affectionate "nose-thumbing" of familiar forms may make us more sensitive to our gullibility and warier of our tendency to believe what we see because it "looks right." If lessons continue to come in such delicious packages, the learning process won't be hard at all.

Barbara Samuels

DUNMOVIN

d. James B. Kelly, C.S.C., sc. James B. Kelly, ph. Florence Van Voast, Shirley Van Voast, Alexander Kelly, James B. Kelly, ed. James B. Kelly, sd. ed. Len Abbott, sd. rec. James B. Kelly, p. James B. Kelly, p.c. Mountain, Giraffe Films in Motion, Ltd., Toronto, col. black & white 16mm, 1970, running time 58 min. dist. James B. Kelly, C.S.C., 1 Brule Terrace, Toronto, M6S 1M2.

$45 \times 15 = 675 \times .02 = 13.50$

"For some years now the activity of the artist in our society has been

trending more toward the function of the ecologist: one who deals with environmental relationships. Ecology is defined as the totality or pattern of relations between organisms and their environment. Thus, the act of creation for the new artist is not so much the invention of new objects as the revelation of previously unrecognized relationships between existing phenomena, both physical and meta-physical."

— Gene Youngblood,
"Expanded Cinema"

Of the many functions of cinema, it is perhaps the "ecological" function as described by Youngblood which comes closest to characterizing **Dunmovin**, the very personal film recently completed by Jim Kelly. The work is an exploration of both linear and cyclical time, memory, and the recurring patterns within the fabric of life. It is also an examination of personal engagement with history, a revelation of the ways in which the lives of ordinary people are intricately connected with the larger workings of historical change. In the filmmaker's words, **Dunmovin** explores "the underside of history."

Appropriately, the film sustains several emotional levels during its hour's duration; at times it is splendidly quiet and low-key, then filled with exuberant energy. Its subjects are the filmmaker's grand-parents: their daily rituals, surroundings, their memories which span the century. Kelly wanted the film to "grow out of their rhythms" and at the same time preserve some sense of his relationship to them. Yet he was also concerned to challenge his own theoretical constructs about filmmaking. In this sense, the project breaks new ground for Kelly, who has been involved with nearly 200 films throughout his career, which includes his work as cinematographer in such recent feature-films as **Outrageous** and **Power Play**. Here, he purposely works against the grain of cinematic spectacle, as well as challenging the conventions of the traditional documentary. Fascinated by film's complex relationship to reality and time, Kelly explores these areas through a self-reflexive style appropriate to such a personal film. One of its most intriguing aspects is the use of inter-titles combined with simultaneous voice-over readings, a technique which paradoxical-

ly creates both a sense of intimacy with the audience through direct address, and a sense of distancing the audience from engagement within a flow of narrative. The complex blending of intimacy and dispassionate analysis is the tension within *Dunmovin*, creating slightly disturbing variations of pace and mood that give a fine edge to the experience of viewing the film.



Shirley and Zeal Van Voast: 1908

There are several recurring themes and motifs within *Dunmovin*, including that referred to by the title itself: motion and stasis. The orchestration of moving and still camera-work, and life-death symbologies, subtly conveys a tone of urgency underlying the surface level of ordinary rhythms and patterns explored, an urgency connected with the inexorable passing of time. It is as though the filmmaker's exploration of the familial, cyclic nature of time cannot avoid the knowledge that time is also linear, and all things must pass. This urgency is carefully echoed in the filmmaker's own self-questioning about his role, his intervening presence, his somehow arbitrary selection of what to shoot and how, his concerns about "getting a performance" or not being able to convey the feel of this milieu or these unique individuals. Like a variation on a theme, these concerns are again echoed by the revelation of Kelly's great-grand-

mother's photographic interests and role in preserving local history through this medium. At times *Dunmovin* becomes a celebration or "homage" to photographic reproduction itself, including a film-within-the-film and hundreds of old stills from the great-grand-mother's work. This attention to photographic reproduction is a perceptive and intriguing irony in a film addressed to and made "for you children yet unborn, and for yours." It is an irony which Kelly elaborates and plays with throughout the film, and it is, for me, one of the most interesting elements in the work.

The larger historical framework referred to in the film is the influence of the railroad on society, which we see reflected in microcosm in the lives of this family. A train is a lovely metaphor for the passage of linear time, and Kelly uses it in this way, associating changes in the larger community because of the rise and decline of the railway, with the familial rhythms of birth, growth, maturation, and old age. "I longed to make a film expressing personal concerns to specific, knowable people. I wanted to deal with ordinariness privately," says Kelly. *Dunmovin* has already been shown at the Art Gallery of Ontario as part of a series of "autobiographical" films. It's a work which reminds us of the beauty and pain in family history, and of the possibilities for using film as a tool of personal revelation.

Joyce Nelson

PAINTING WITH LIGHT

d. David Leach, ph. Philip Eavnshaw, Robin Miller, ed. David Leach, m. Robert Armes, Kit Johnson, Narr. Robert Jerkyl, stained glass: Robert Jerkyl, p. David Leach, p.c. Black Elk Films, Toronto, (year) 1978, running time 14 minutes, 35 seconds, dist. Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre, Available in both French & English version.

David Leach's *Painting with Light* celebrates the art and craftsmanship of stained glass making, and the stained glass artist, through the works and personage of Robert Jerkyl. The opening image of a whimsical profile of a face in one of Jerkyl's stained glass designs slowly filling with light, encapsulates Jerkyl's philosophy of using the art of stained glass to manipulate light, a natural source of energy.

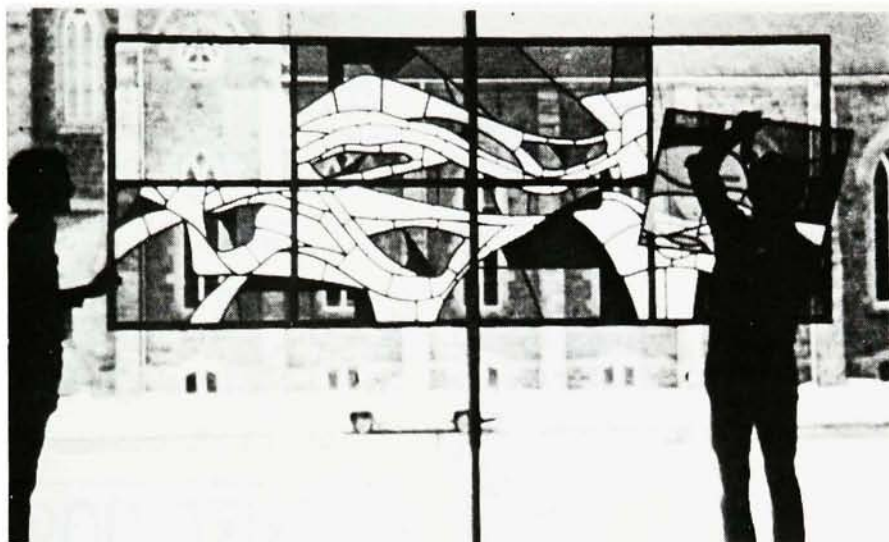
What is unique in Leach's *Painting with Light* is that the film circumvents the typical problems that arise when defining a three dimensional artform within a two dimensional medium. The film never falls prey to flattening out the artform, nor does it overwhelm the audience with continuous flashes of brightly colored finished products. Instead, Leach's film is a muted celebration of both the process and the product, a sensitive and highly sensory exploration into the textures of light, sound and colored glass.

By shooting extreme closeups and by layering images through a conscious arrangement of depth and space, Leach successfully explores the sense of touch as well as of sight and sound. Extreme closeups of sheets of slightly opaque colored glass with its air bubbles and imperfections or, for example, one outstanding soft image of fire, molten lead and glass mingling together, allows one to differentiate between and almost feel the various textures, colors, solids and liquids. One wants to reach out and touch the oozing, newly formed lead and the thick treacle used to cement the glass together.

Not only does the film explore the textures of glass, but of sound as well. The music fills and cements the cracks between the artist's voiceover and the silences. The percussive music blends with the rhythms, sounds and scraping of the craftsman cutting glass; the guitars and flute add the element of light to the glass and energy to the film.

Leach bridges the distance between the viewer and the finished product of a beautiful work of art, by demystifying and clarifying the process of the art of stained glass making, thus inviting one to participate in every layer of creation, from the workroom where

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Robert Jekyll assembling his panel "Homage to Soleri"

one chooses the sheets of textured glass and colors, to the conception of the design, and to the final technical craft of completing the work of art.

The film itself is structured in a style fitting the process of the art it describes. It begins bound within an almost classic documentary tradition of the narrative voiceover explaining that 'the workroom is where the art begins,' and yet it gradually develops on a freer, more personal level. One feels the freedom of the colors and of the inspired designs through the images of the stained glass bursting in a quick even rhythm. Linear camera movements follow the lines in the design. The skeletal architectural designs and plans are animated and clothed through a series of superimposed images of the various stages of the final work of art. As the finished stained glass design quickly takes form through the rhythmic fashioning of an expert familiar with his craft, so the images in the film are tightly edited towards the end; one is left with the same satisfaction of a well crafted work of art.

Of all textures and layers explored and developed in the film, the most important is that of light and shadow and its effect on colored glass. The artist begins by holding up the glass against a blank grey/white sky, and slowly throughout the film the glass constantly changes as the light varies through different times of the day and different seasons. The world moving

behind the glass becomes an integral part of the textures and colors of the work of art, humanized, as Jekyll explains, through the glass, much the same as it is through the lens of a camera. Life is shown meshing with art, breaking one's image of art as works to behold; the film instead invites participation as it emphasizes the accessibility of the artform by revealing the process.

Painting with Light reflects the excitement and imperfections of an editor cutting a tight fourteen or so minute film that is never boring yet may sometimes too quickly cut away from a beautiful image. This Canadian filmmaker has the sense to make the film available in both French and English; the film is being distributed by the Canadian Film Makers Distribution Centre.

Florence Jacobowitz

OUR CULTURAL FABRIC

d. Kit Hood, sc. Soo Millar, ph. Bob New, Carl Harvey, ed. David Leach, Stephen Withrow, sd. Andy McBready, p. Linda Schuyler, p.c. Playing With Time Inc., (year) 1978, col. 16mm, running time 27 minutes, dist. Playing With Time Inc.

Over the past decade a wealth of material has emerged which has as its central focus cultural signs and symbols and their ideological role in society. However named, whether called semiology or cultural studies, works such as Roland Barthes' "Mythologies" or John Berger's book and film series "Ways of Seeing," have provided excellent examples of the kind of analysis possible for considering everyday social phenomena and their relationships with cultural perceptions. It is within the frame of such semiological endeavours that the film **Our Cultural Fabric** should be assessed, since it has set for itself the goal of "exploring the relationship of clothing with cultural and racial stereotyping" (to quote from its publicity folder). Yet, there is a striking naiveté about the film, as though its makers were unaware either of the historical precedents within their own line of attitudinal and cultural interrogation or of the inner workings of their own cinematic project.

"The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe," says John Berger. Since this is clearly the territory within which **Our Cultural Fabric** is operating, the film should withstand scrutiny on the same grounds. Produced for the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews, and partially funded by governmental sources, **Our Cultural Fabric** was obviously intended to be a film which demystifies "foreign" styles of dress in order to enhance our understanding of cultural mores and differences. Clearly, this kind of film can contribute to easing tensions within a country embodying such a multi-racial and multi-cultural mix as does Canada. However, this project's brilliant potential is fulfilled only in tiny moments throughout the film. We see an East Indian explaining the cultural and religious significance behind the wearing of a turban and we watch the process by which he puts it on. Two interviews with Black Canadians reveal the social and, in the case of the Rastafarian, the religious significance of wearing their hair unstraightened and natural. East European immigrants discuss the clothing of their original homelands and the ridicule they have received

45 x 19 = 855 x .02 = 17.10

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photo from Canadian Pacific Archives



High hopes in *Our Cultural Fabric*

ed when so attired in Canada, while the filmmakers reveal through the juxtaposition of magazine stills and live models the way in which high-fashion has co-opted “peasant” styles of dress. As well, the filmmakers interviewed a professor of anthropology who is able to explain the symbolic and practical rationales behind a wide variety of dresscodes. There are moments of subtle humour, irony and even bitterness which emerge throughout *Our Cultural Fabric*, as well as the few fascinating explanations of cultural customs like those mentioned earlier. But such moments are kept short, oddly enough. Instead, the filmmakers have structured their film around a bizarre intrusion which, for me, reveals their own unacknowledged perceptual bias.

Intending *Our Cultural Fabric* for the youth market, to be used in high schools and other educational settings such as churches, libraries and synagogues, the filmmakers shaped their material around the device of an intentionally obnoxious game-show panel which indulges in snide cultural slurs, inane babble and aimless energy. Evidently, the filmmakers felt that only by alluding to the glittering schlock of most television culture could their film appeal to this particular age group — an assumption which itself is simply another form of stereotyping. Even

more problematic, the inter-cutting of this panel with the other material creates, at times, the obviously unintended effect of crudely “commenting” on a previous interviewee. For instance, an immigrant discussing his native attire is punctuated, through editing, by the shriek of the game-show whistle, which serves to unintentionally send-up his remarks.

It seems to me that the filmmakers may have been confronted by the prevalent fear of boring a teenage audience. Not trusting the strength of their original subject to fascinate any age group, they undercut it through using a device — the game-show panel — which actually comes to occupy the privileged place in the film in terms of screen time allotted, verbal dominance, visual energy, and in being the editing “peg.” The resulting emphasis in the film is given over to scenes and remarks which are prejudicial in nature.

Our Cultural Fabric is only the first in a series of films exploring cultural differences and intended for a youthful audience. If the filmmakers trust in the strength of their original idea, as well as in their audience’s sincere interest in learning about cultural differences, they will no doubt turn this into a fascinating series.

Joyce Nelson

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