

either have an architect's formation, or design, music or literary training. You have to know technical aspects, you have to know human beings, you have to know acting, you have to know light, photography, design, architecture, you have to know everything to be a good director. You are determining every single shot you make and if you don't have these qualities, if you're not visual, if you are not graphic, if you don't have taste and culture, you can't do that and you can't rely on everybody else to do it for you. You can hire good people, but the decision's yours. And the vision is yours, if your vision is not really a sum total of all these parts, it's lacking something. It's not as whole as it should be and I guess that's why I became a director.

It's not so much that I wanted it, but because it was such a logical step from all my training. Because my training didn't serve me in anything I did. My training as a musician didn't serve me, my training as an animator didn't serve me as an actress, my training as an actress didn't serve me as a musician. I don't use the skills and I had to find something when I use everything I can do, and more. And in directing there's place for more.

It's very satisfying. It's certainly the most satisfying thing I've ever done. I still prefer animation as an art, it's still to me the golden art of Art, but there are a lot of things that I couldn't put to profit as an animator and that are better used in making films as a director.

Cinema Canada: *One last question. When one starts documenting your career, it's pretty impressive: animating both at the Film Board and on an Oscar-nominated feature, being awarded the Canadian Film Award for Best Actress in '72 and then getting nominated again a few years later; being given an Award for Excellence from the Academy in '81 and having films at the Directors Fortnight at Cannes and now at Venice. What more do you need to convince you that, in fact, you do communicate with people and they they do appreciate what you do?*

Micheline Lanctôt: I don't know. I guess more and more of the same. An artist cannot be satisfied. If he is, it's the end of his work. I keep doubting, I keep thinking I'm going to be out of a job any minute. This is my one driving obsession. And there is something in me that has to... that comes from my mother. I was an anorexic child. Only one person saw that in the film - a psychoanalyst. He said, this is an anorexic film. The girls eat their deaths. They eat the pills and they drink the milk; everything is anorexic. The paradox of the anorexic is that he has to prove to people he exists by dying and that's exactly what the two girls do. They have to prove they are there by killing themselves. And I never thought of the film that way, of course, because it's too close to me, I don't delve into these things, when I heard that, I thought, my God, that's absolutely true.

I suffered a lot when I was young because my mother felt I had too much facility for everything and she kept saying, if you worked you could have done better. So I'm persuaded that everything I do is just a tenth of what I can do and that I have to do better.

Cinema Canada: *So you're still working to do better?*

Micheline Lanctôt: I have to. To please my mother.

Micheline Lanctôt's **Sonatine**

In the final scene of Micheline Lanctôt's 1980 first feature, *L'Homme à tout faire*, a drunken Armand (Jocelyn Bérubé) has climbed onto one of the overhead spans of Montreal's Jacques Cartier bridge and innocently fallen asleep there while the traffic below rumbles ceaselessly into the city. With steel above and steel beneath, "l'homme à tout faire" has become "l'homme qui ne fait plus rien"; in short, an impediment to the smooth dance of iron rationality. As the end-credits roll, police squadcars, electronic bullhorns, and firemen's hooks and ladders are all reaching mediatively in an attempt to rouse the sleeping good-for-nothing.

The fatal entrapment of human nature within media's second nature is the theme of Lanctôt's second feature, *Sonatine*, which after a brief sortie last spring is scheduled for re-release this fall. Two adolescent girls Chantal (Pascale Bussièrès) and Louise (Marcia Pilote), at the crossroads between childhood and womanhood, each separately undertake an exploratory foray into the adult world. Both are disappointed by the petty realities they encounter; together they plan a third, desperate breakout in an attempt to challenge the world to communicate to them on their own terms. The resulting catastrophe is the tragedy of human, imaginative experience in a mediated world of instant communications. Despite the lightness of its title, *Sonatine* is a dark masterpiece of ellipsis, a film haunted by the impossibility of communication that nevertheless manages via film to demonstrate that impossibility. For the fate of technological man (and technological art) is to sacrifice life to what the poet Rupert Brooke called "the keen impassioned beauty of a great machine." (Whether or not art justifies the sacrifice is, of course, the bitter pill that art itself must swallow.)

At the cost of the lives of its protagonists, *Sonatine* fully unveils the impassioned beauty of a great machine. Much of the film is a delicate dance of large machinery: buses, tugboats, ships, subways swirl about in a frenzy of purposive movement against the backgrounds of

the technological landscape (roads, garages, harbors, tube stations) or an always distant, cold and inhuman nature.

Against technology's primary beauty is contrasted the physical and emotional beauty of the two girls: Pascale Bussièrès as Chantal is utterly breathtaking. But the beautiful is all-too fleeting: with the exception of the bus-driver (Pierre Fauteux) with whom Chantal falls in love, *Sonatine's* other human characters are ugly. If the hirsute Bulgarian sailor (Kliment Dentchev) Louise encounters is not much to look at (and talks far too much Bulgarian) at least his Slavic soul is beautiful to the adolescent girl.

The adult world, however, wears the mask of death. Chantal's or Louise's parents either scream at one another or pass each other by indifferently; the people on the subways are cadaverous; those on the buses worn out by their lives. The weary silence of the human world is filled by media; everywhere the two girls go is littered with blaring radios, chattering TVs, crackling intercoms. Louise in her fugue sneaks through a warehouse in Montreal harbor occupied only by an unwatched television which tellingly is broadcasting a news item about the murder of a young girl. Chantal and Louise both seek refuge from the noises of the world to the mediated sounds of their Walkmen.

For all is not well in the enchanted land of technology. Media-borne violence sweeps through the airwaves; the mediated workforce (organized in labor-unions) is locked in conflict with the invisible owners of the means of communication - *Sonatine* is set and filmed during one of Montreal's numerous urban transport flareups. Chantal's bus-driver fights on board the bus with his estranged wife over a divorce. While Chantal is on the bus he is roughed up by his union colleagues. Cars and courier vans collide on highways; buses are set ablaze by wildcatting drivers. It is a world one wishes only to escape from by any means of transportation, mechanical, electronic or chemical; a world whose inhabitants ironically can only turn to more and more equipment in an attempt to break out of the vicious cycle of entrapment. Chantal and Louise, Walkman on their ears, roller-skates on their feet, circle aimlessly through homogenized middle-class

suburbs seeking a way to the "real" world their emotions, their music and poetry have led them to believe is somewhere out there. In one (of many) wonderful scene(s), Chantal records her bus-driver telling her, after she has said she hurt her back and is on her way to physiotherapy, "Tu es belle pareille." When she plays back his words again and again, however, the phrase comes out as "Tu es *bien* belle pareille."

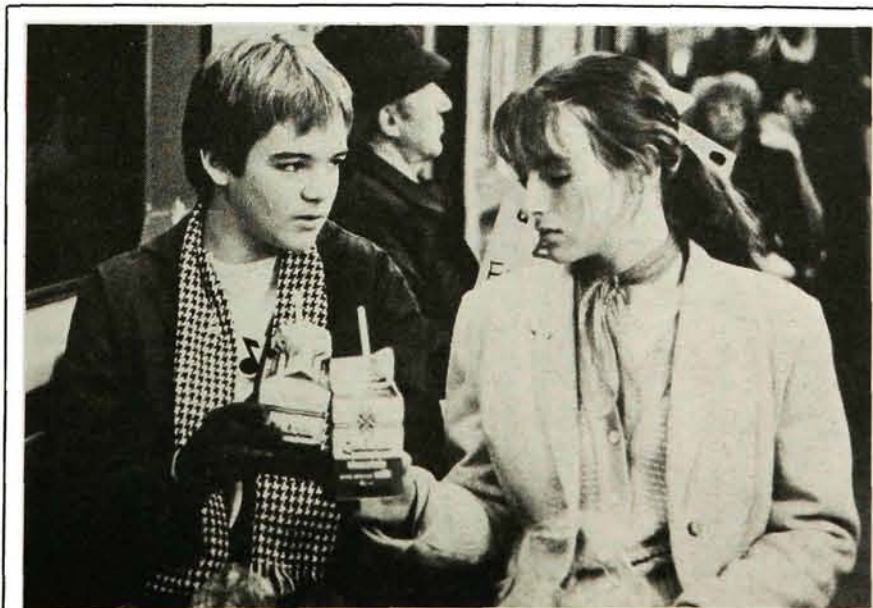
But that "real" world is denied them: Chantal's bus-driver is transferred to another route; Louise's sailor returns the young stowaway to shore while the sound-track echoes with squealing car-tires, human screams and smashing glass. There is no way out: home is a full fridge, a TV set that is always on and absent parents; the girl's high-school is a concrete prison of empty classrooms filled with the green-glowing screens of computer terminals; the subway station tunnels are engorged with anonymous consumers rushing lemming-like here or there, while the subway's overhead intercom system orders the drivers to "Communicate."

Dressed in the latest fashion, Chantal and Louise set off for their final journey towards a communicative ideal stated by the placard they hold: "Ô monde indifférent, nous allons mourir, fais quelque chose pour nous empêcher." Their fate is, of course, not deliberate but the result of a "communications breakdown."

As the striking bus and subway drivers shut down the system, even the p.a. warning passengers to leave immediately is overcome by technical problems. In the empty subway car, the two girls, unconscious from the overdose of pills stolen from their high-school infirmary, are almost discovered by a driver who thinks he's spotted something unusual only to at that moment learn from his overjoyed *confères* that the strike is on. Chantal and Louise die, not by natural causes, since their suicide-pact was intended more as a means of publicizing their plight than as an conclusion to it, but befittingly perhaps for technological beings, as a result of technical failure. As the lights dim in the subway system, there is only the horrified media-eye of Lanctôt's camera left to record the last moments of these two sacrificial offerings to the impassioned beauty of the great machine.

But what remains, of course, is a brilliantly, subtle, profoundly filmic meditation by one of the most contemporary directors in current Canadian cinema.

Michael Dorland ●



● Farewell toast: Marcia Pilote and Pascale Bussièrès in *Sonatine*

Sonatine d./sc. Micheline Lanctôt **exec. p.** Rene Malo **p.** Pierre Gendron **d.o.p.** Guy Dufaux **cam.** Yves Drapeau, Michel Bernier, Michel Girard **sd.** Marcel Fraser **asst. sd.** Paul Dion, Michel Charron, Claude Langlois, Viateur Paiement **lighting** Kevin O'Connell, Jean-Marc Hebert, Pierre Davreux, Marc Henaut **grips** Yvon Boudrias, Jean-Pierre Lamarche **props** Pierre Fournier, Louis Gascon, Tim Walton, Luc Martineau, Jean-Vincent Fournier **make-up** Jocelyne Bellemare **cost.** Helene Schneider **ed.** Louise Surprenant, Lucette Bernier **mixers** Michel Descombes, Andre Gagnon **mus.** François Lanctôt **a.d.'s** Rene Chenier, Michelle Forest **cont.** Claudette Messier **p. man.** Suzanne Henaut **p. assts.** François Leclerc, Jean Demers, Paul Chartrand **p. sec.** Roseline Poulin **p. acct.** Johanne Choquette, Maryse Beauregard **p. admin.** Claude Bonin **p.c.** Corporation Image M&M Ltee **unit pub.** Publifilms '83 Inc. **Can. dist.** Les Films Rene Malo (514) 878-9181 **int'l. dist.** Films Transit (514) 526-0839 **colour** 35mm **running time** 91 min. **lp.** Pascale Bussièrès, Marcia Pilote, Pierre Fauteux, Kliment Dentchev, Pierre Giard, Therese Morange, Pauline Lapointe.