

La Ligne de chaleur: On the road Quebec-style

The setting is a blue motel-room interior. One of several such stops that Robert Filion (Gabriel Arcand) and his young son Maxim (Simon Gonzales) share on a three-day car trip from Florida to Montreal. Robert's father has passed away in his Florida condo and the job of identifying the body and reclaiming the car has fallen to Robert who borrows his son from his estranged wife for the trip.

Robert's relationship with Maxim is far from harmonious and parallels, in many ways, that of Robert and his own father, whose influence still haunts him. As the 35 year-old-Robert — a loser going nowhere fast — strives to deal with the dismal prospects of his own life, the relationship between him and his son suffers.

A paragon of fatherhood Robert isn't. Maxim would like nothing but to bolt from the motel-room down into which we find ourselves peering while balanced precariously on the lighting technician's ladder.

After one month of shooting, including two weeks on the road, the work-weary cast and crew of *La Ligne de chaleur* look like they have seen one motel-room too many. They are tired; it is late in the shooting schedule and they face one last interior scene before calling it a wrap.

The motel-room location is in Montreal's Panavision studio. Producer Marc Daigle whose name, by now, is synonymous with Association co-operative de productions audio-visuelles (ACPAV) productions is not on the set today. It's the last shot before lunch-break.

Director Hubert-Yves Rose, who co-wrote the feature's script with fellow director and actress Micheline Lanctôt, coaches Gonzales on how to run for the locked door, turn and run back straight in to the arms of his drunken father who is in close pursuit across the motel-room floor. Arcand rolls with Gonzales in a finely choreographed struggle —



photos: Paul-Emile Rioux

• No paragon of fatherhood: *La Ligne de chaleur's* Gabriel Arcand, above, and with Simon Gonzales, right



hand on wrist, hand cupping mouth, arm around waist. The child is finally pacified and placed into bed. Father staggers and collapses in an adjacent bed. It must be time for lunch.

Indeed, Rose lead cast and crew out of the motel-room and into the darker space of the studio where they disperse for food and, if they're lucky, a few winks.

Rose makes it clear that this film is not a road film. Rather, he says, it is a "chamber film," though there is no unusual length of screentime given over to motel-room scenes. Neither, he says, are there expansive shots of the countryside that surround such locations, as Yorktown, Va., Leesburg, Va., Chesapeake Bay, Va., Virginia Beach, Va., and Fort Lauderdale, Fla. The road trip was made essentially to capture the differences in natural lighting between north and south for, according to Rose, we inhabitants of the great North American

hinterland do not find road scenery exceptionally stimulating...except on film perhaps.

The chamber film, Rose explains, confines itself to closed and constricting spaces with the constant use of 24mm and 32mm lenses and few close-ups. ("Occasionally we take a risk and use a 50mm lens," says Assistant Director Lise Abastado.)

"This story is about an internal journey at the psychological level. It has a very burdensome climate," says Rose.

Climate, in one sense or another, has a lot to do with the title of the film which does not translate easily into English. (It is not 'The Hot Line'). *La Ligne de chaleur* is a figurative name for a place where like Robert and son, one notices a change in temperature while travelling on a north/south axis. On a psychological level, this journey from the south to the north is a "regression" for Robert, Rose explains.

"Robert finds himself in a hot situation" he says, as the passive pink shades of the southern motel rooms are replaced by darkening shades of blue in the north.

A third character by the name of Norman J. Simpson (Gerald Parks), a photographer dying of cancer, has a strong cathartic influence on Robert, throwing an additional twist into the storyline.

There is no definitive resolution to the story, says Rose. *La Ligne de chaleur* is a thinker's film in which the subtleties of the filmmakers' craft in rendering a complex script lead to one's own conclusion.

Now the cast and crew gather again: lunchbreak is finished. Time to re-enter the blue motel room at the Drama Motel...somewhere in South Carolina.

John Timmins •

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Exit The psychopathology of everyday life

Exit, the latest feature production of Montreal-based Les Productions Video-films Limitée, (which shot in Montreal April 14 – to May 23 when it wrapped "on time and on budget") is Monique H. Messier's second experience combining the roles of scriptwriter/co-producer. Her first was the controversial feature on incest, *Rien qu'un jeu*, chosen for the Directors' Fortnight at Cannes in 1983, but which, Messier says, proved "too raw for French audiences, and was disliked by Quebecois critics."

Messier describes *Exit*, which stars Louise Marleau, Louise Portal, John Wildman, Michel Côté, Pierre Curzi and young Gabriel Panaccio, as a very different kind of film. The synopsis was first written four years ago, and since then, Messier says, "many, many drafts have been written." Much of the work in the past four years was done in collaboration with Messier's co-producer and the director of *Exit*, Robert Ménard. It is important to her explains Messier, both as a writer and as a producer, to be able to work with someone she trusts.

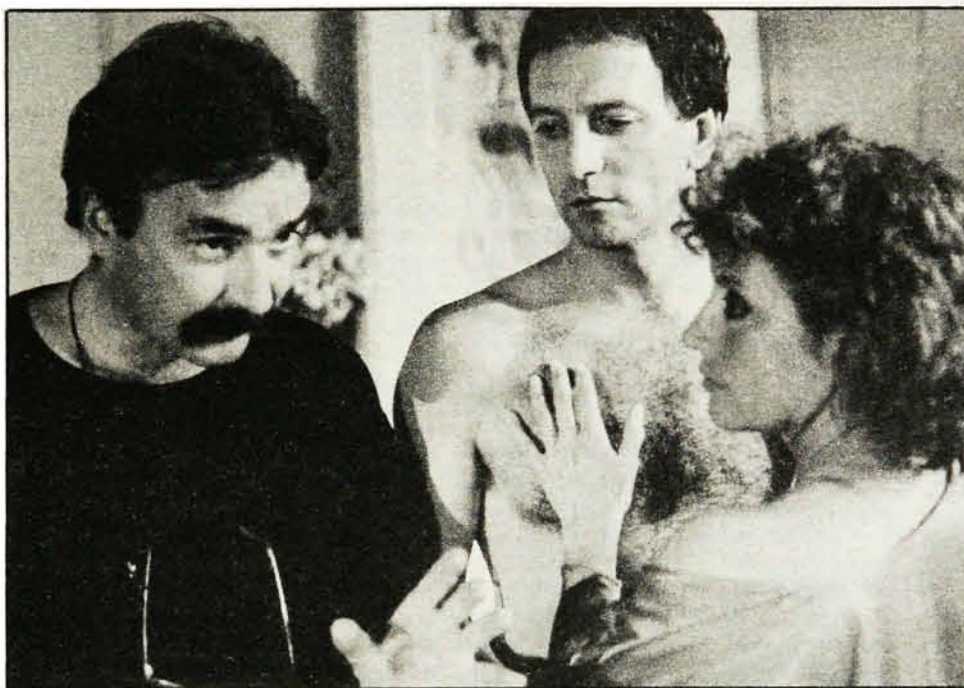
However, the writing did not end when the shoot began; it continued throughout the five-week schedule and, like many writers, Messier admits she feels that a script is never really completed. As both producer and writer, she had certain privileges to rewrite and adapt the script as it evolved throughout the shoot.

Several major changes were made, in response to creative as well as production demands. One example Messier mentions is the way Louise Marleau interpreted Marie, the woman she plays – very differently from Messier's conception of her. But mainly, it was John Wildman's character, initially named Roberto, that was completely transformed. Wildman instilled such a strong persona into the role that Messier felt compelled to rewrite certain elements, even changing the character's name to John.

Two days of production also had to be dropped, which challenged Messier both as producer and writer, but her familiarity with the script allowed her to choose which elements could be eliminated. As a writer, Messier admits to no pretensions – hesitating to even call herself a scriptwriter. "It would be impossible to write a script for someone else – to take another person's idea and write it," she says. Her ideas come from very personal concerns and, once she has an idea, prefers to develop it and then produce it in association with someone.

Messier does not keep an office (the demands of running one would be too distracting) but, as a producer, Messier stresses the importance of having a strong crew. Almost everyone working on *Exit* was known from previous productions. Messier speaks of their professionalism and dedication to this shoot in strongly positive terms. *Exit*, she

● On the *Exit* set: Director Robert Ménard, seated left, and d.o.p. Pierre Mignot



● Robert Ménard instructs leads Louise Marleau and Michel Côté

says, is a very special production and everyone who worked on the film, cast and crew alike, have sensed that too. Working with Ménard as director was an important factor, because of his input into the script and also because of previous collaborations that have developed this valuable quality of trust.

Although *Exit* is not as personal a script as *Rien qu'un jeu* was, it has a basis in some strong personal attitudes and beliefs, and Messier is very precise in delineating how much they intruded into the writing.

The story revolves around Marie (Louise Marleau), a successful career woman who comes to a point of crisis in her life because of an element from her past that she has never completely confronted or dealt with. While it is described in the press releases as a "gripping drama with psychic overtones," Messier explains there is much more to it than that.

There is, first of all, the level of suspense – the story of a woman haunted by someone from her past. This is the level which Messier feels will appeal to "those who love seeing a thriller." The second level is the psychological, a product of Messier's concern with daily life and how one's psychological make-

up manifests itself in the events, the choices and the emotions of daily life. The third level arises from Messier's interest in supernatural and psychic possibilities, which she describes as "that which we don't see in everyday life, but is responsible for our psychological make-up."

It was this, in fact, that prompted Messier to write *Exit*, but her awareness of the female personality determined the story. The psychology of woman, she says, rests in a sense of guilt, a "culpability" that somehow "is more developed, or more evident in the female character than the male." But if she conceives this as a universal characteristic of the female personality, she remains a writer inherently more interested in the individual – "we are all different, our motives, actions and responses are determined because of those supernatural forces."

Exit is very much an "interior film" (acting taking place in the realm of the psychological and emotional) – it was shot almost completely indoors, and almost all at night. Except for two or three other locations, the production took place at Quebec composer Luc Plamondon's house in quiet, residential Outremont. Messier learned that indoor

shoots usually turn out to be as costly as outdoor locations, "But it is exciting to work with Pierre Mignot, to see the things he does with lighting."

Both Ménard and Messier have invested their salaries as co-producers/scriptwriter/director. The \$1.7 million budget was put together with the participation of Telefilm Canada, and the Société générale du cinéma du Québec. And, for the first time ever, Quebec broadcaster Télémetropole has invested in a francophone production – buying the broadcast rights (to be picked up in two years once the film has run through the theatrical circuit). Distributor for *Exit*, Vivafilm Ltée has also contributed advance payments-unusual Messier believes in the relationship between producer and distributor.

"But four years is a long time to spend on one project," and Messier is anxious to move on to her next project – a sci-fi film, *Star Wars*-style. Although the writing portion of her job is now over, with *Exit* scheduled for an October release, Messier still has several demanding months as a producer ahead of her.