

TEXTE (supplément au Copie Zéro # 33)

de Saul Rubinek

Comédien dans plusieurs films réalisés  
par Claude Jutra à Toronto

The first time I met Claude Jutra, we were handcuffed together. I was a prisoner, he a jail guard. It was the summer of 1976 - the film was for the CBC, "LOVE ON THE NOSE", directed by George Bloomfield. Claude was in Toronto working on "ADA", he had some time off and as a lark he came in for half a day to play the guard in our film. It was the first time I had a leading role in a film - I was a little in awe of Claude, a bit star-struck. If he was aware of my deference to him, he didn't show it, but went out of his way to make me comfortable during the shooting of the scene. I didn't see Claude again till the following year.

Ralph Thomas was the producer at CBC who brought Claude in to work on English television. Lucky for me. In 1977, Claude was set to direct a film Thomas was producing - "SEER WAS HERE". Most of the time I had been cast as nice guys, the best-friend-of-the-hero parts. Or if the CBC had a role that was short, Jewish, under 30 with dark curly hair - they called me. Now, Seer was the leader of a bike gang, thrown into a federal penitentiary for stealing a case of dynamite used to fight a gang war. I was sure CBC wouldn't want me serving coffee on the set, let alone playing the lead. But Claude Jutra was directing and I begged to audition for any role. Maybe Claude remembered being handcuffed to me, I don't know. I do know that he became intrigued with casting the role of Seer against type, and I got the job.

During the filming of "SEER", our working relationship and friendship was formed. Claude loved to teach, and I was a hungry student. I stuck to him constantly, watching him rehearse and shoot scenes I wasn't in. I would sneak into production meetings, eavesdrop on conversations with the cinematographer, script assistant, other actors, the assistant directors. Claude would observe my glue-like presence with a kind of bemused tolerance but as he became aware of my eagerness to learn, he began to share his thoughts and working methods. In the evenings he would bounce ideas off me and show me how he prepared for the next-day's shooting.

One thing Claude would do when shooting a scene - and this was a consistent element of his working method - he would kick everyone off the set except for his actors. I was aware that he had prepared the scene quite carefully the night before, but Claude always would give the actors free reign. He would encourage us, without direction, to play the scene and work it out among

ourselves, only stepping in if there was a problem we couldn't solve on our own. Obviously, the man loved and trusted actors. Not a common trait. This trust was keenly felt by us all and I know it was why we risked more under his eye than we might have under another director's. Claude told me that he worked this way in order to explode his own pre-set ideas. Inevitably, actors working together would discover elements in the scene and in their characters that he hadn't dreamed of. Then Claude would expand on those new ideas, picking and choosing the ones that made sense to him in terms of his over-all concept for the piece. When he brought the crew in to watch what we'd come up with, he would, I noticed, collaborate with the cinematographer in much the same way he would with the actors. That is, he wouldn't tell the cinematographer what to watch for, how to shoot, where to place the camera. We'd perform the scene, and then he'd ask the cinematographer what was best. Then he'd expand on those ideas, and so the collaboration continued.

Claude also introduced me to a part of my craft as an actor that I knew nothing about. Most directors I had worked with, and many of the directors I've worked with since, strictly keep actors out of rushes, dailies. The argument these directors use is that actors will become self-conscious if they see their work during the course of filming and then will change their performances and become impossible to direct. Claude explained to me that he would bar an actor from rushes only if they proved incapable of watching them without self-destructing. As far as Claude was concerned, going to rushes was the actors' right, and as far as I was concerned he encouraged me to make it a responsibility. Then he taught me how to watch the rushes. Claude would sit beside me during rushes and show me how I could help a fellow actor by my behaviour off-camera; how my performance could, and sometimes should alter depending on whether it was a close-up, two-shot, master, and so on. During the filming day, only a small percentage of the time is spent in actually shooting the scene - the rest of the time is taken up with preparation. From day to day we shoot scenes out of order, out of context because of the rigorous demands of the production schedule. At best, it's a jigsaw puzzle. Claude explained that watching rushes could fix in the actor's mind the events of the scenes themselves, fix in the actor's memory what the character actually does or has done to him. You become able, as a character, to rid yourself of extraneous

experience, and a valuable weapon has been created for the actor's arsenal: continuity.

I went on to work with him in two other films: "THE WORDSMITH" and "BY DESIGN". My dream was to work with him in Quebec, in French, but that was not to be. He was a friend and a colleague. He taught me to be aware of my craft, but mostly he made me understand that to stop questioning, is to die.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Saul Rubinek". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Saul Rubinek

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