

In his latest, Wenders loses his ability to tell a story

by Podram and Anthony

The arrival of Wim Wenders' much awaited film *Until the End of the World* may be a surprise, especially for those accustomed to Wenders' unique visual tales.

The way Wenders develops the film's themes and messages has left a number of his admirers somewhat disappointed. And understandably so.

The film begins with Claire (Solveig Dommartin) in the aftermath of a chic party. Formally speaking, the scene's editing owes much to Jean Luc Godard's *Breathless*, using jump cuts as a method to describe the dislocation and alienation of the modern world.

Claire gets involved with two bank robbers, stolen cash and a "mysterious" man (William Hurt) trekking his way around the world, leading eventually to his father in the outback of Australia. He is pursued by agents of the American government, who want a device he possesses.

As the story unfolds, we get a glimpse of what the world might look like in the near future. It's a world where visual technology, in the form of holograms in advertising, video-phones, and advanced television is pervasive. It's also a world where credit cards are favoured over cash, making people more and more dependent upon computers in their everyday lives.

The screening of *Until the End*, arranged by the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television, featured a discussion with Wenders. The event was hosted by Canadian director Atom Egoyan.

Wenders, who spoke slowly and articulately, did not seem to be enthusiastic about attending the event. He was there to present a huge film: a trip around the world and then into the minds of human beings.

In *Until the End*, Wenders collaborates with several icons of European cinema: Max von Sydow (who worked with Bergman on 11 films), Jeanne Moreau (who worked with several New Wave directors, as well as Antonioni and Bunuel) and producer Anatole Dauman (producer of such indisputable classics as *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*, *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* and films by Bresson and Oshima). From such a team, one expects more.

The film begins with a journey around the world that lasts about two hours. The universal concept of space is diminished by the transition from country to country, which is presented as something easily traversed (partly with help of Godardian jump cuts).

The journey seems somewhat pointless. It does not directly affect the characters, it simply justifies their objective.

But the acting, cinematography, editing or anything else so concrete are not what makes the film fail. These technical devices are executed quite well. Rather, it's the epic story



Solveig Dommartin and William Hurt confront...something in German director Wim Wenders' latest film, *Until the End of the World*. The first two hours of the film are an international road movie; it is only in the last hour that Wenders actually confronts his subject, the way technology is changing how people live their lives. By then, it's too late. Nice HDTV, though.

Wenders tries to tell. *Until the End* is, at heart, an adventure film made of three "mini" stories. Ironically, Wenders is a director better known for subtle films like *Wings of Desire* and *Paris, Texas*. *Until the End* is the kind of film Ridley Scott (*Blade Runner*) would make, not Wim Wenders.

The other problem is that the story tries to say too much. It begins as a "road movie" motivated by love, then turns into a two-part science fiction concept film (complete with a mad scientist and hidden laboratory). *Until the End* is burdened with so many ideas, told in such an uneconomical way, that it crumbles under its own weight.

Rather than narrow the scope for the sake of a successful film, however, Wenders, Dommartin and Peter Carey expand the story with a few different plot twists. This made the film long-winded. Just as you think it's about to end, the narrator says: "But the story has just begun."

The narrative, something that Wenders has masterfully handled in his previous films, poses a major problem.

Claire's boyfriend Eugene (Sam Neill) serves as a narrator in the film. He adds to its irony by telling the audience what will happen. Thus, the film becomes self-conscious (not self-referential).

This self-conscious narrative takes a new course once the characters arrive in the outback. The physical journey suddenly turns into a psychological odyssey, making the first two hours pointless.

Here, High Definition Television becomes a major element of the narrative. *Until the End* is the second film this year (after the unreleased *Prospero's Books*) to use this kind of

FILM

Until the End of the World
directed by Wim Wenders
starring William Hurt and Solveig Dommartin
distributed by Warner Brothers



Wim Wenders directs his actors in a scene from *Until the End of the World*. Wenders, who has also directed *Paris, Texas* and *Wings of Desire*, tries to say too much in an uneconomical way.

imagery (itself a frightening truth).

HDTV images appear in the early parts of the film. In the Australian sequence, however, they are used intensively by Dr Farber (von Sydow) to electronically reproduce dreams.

Although heavily emphasized in the last part, television is shown as an omnipotent and omnipresent phenomena in the entire picture. This may seem to be redundant, since tv has been dominant in many classical

Films of fantasy and the imagination at the Bloor

by Garine Torossian

The *Festival of Grand Illusions* contains six films of fantasy and imagination. They will be shown at the Bloor cinema between January 24 and 30. Here are some highlights.

The Jester and the Queen, which was made in Czechoslovakia in 1987 by Vera Chytilova, is about Slach (Polivka Boleslav), a guardian to a castle where visitors come to see the splendid parks and forests. Slach imagines that he is a medieval jester entertaining the Queen. One day, he notices Regina (Chantal Povlainova), a visitor who is the double of the Queen.

Slach's imagination intensifies — are the Queen and Regina the same person? When he finally comes back to reality, he discovers a relationship developing between Regina and himself similar to his relationship with the Queen.

The Jester and the Queen is well written and acted; as a result, it's great fun to see. Boleslav delivers a clever performance as the double character; he is humorous and imaginative, as though the role was written for him. As for the beautiful Povlainova, she is perfectly cast as the villainess Queen.

Intimacy, by Dana Rotberg, was made in Mexico in 1989. It is a film which confronts the issues of desire, fantasy, and boredom.

Julio (Emilio Echeverria) is a 50-year-old teacher with a terrible marriage, a gay son and a job he hates. He tries to write a novel, but suffers from writer's block.

One day, he notices a hole in his wall which looks directly into a window where a beautiful young woman lives with her husband. Julio immediately falls in love, and sends her notes and flowers. When Tere (Lisa Owen) finally meets Julio, she returns his love. They begin to have steamy sexual encounters on rooftops, in cheap motels and at parks.

Their spouses become suspicious, eventually discovering the affair and kicking Tere and Julio out. The lovers are relieved, and try to live together; but it only seems to last for a day. Julio does not have a job or money, and Tere is a very materialistic person.

Intimacy's Soap Operaesque plot

sci-fi stories: *Nineteen Eighty-four*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *Death Watch*... *Until the End* does raise important issues about today's how today's advances in science are being used, though.

Fortunately, *Until the End* ignores the futuristic spectacularity typical of science fiction films. Wenders mentioned Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* as his favorite sci-fi film, from which he blatantly borrowed a scene.

Wenders' claim that he was interested in images and their future is dealt with in the last 45 minutes of the film. At that point, one is psychologically exhausted (if not confused) by the journey that Wenders takes his audience on.

Wenders' views on the electronic reproduction of dreams in the future is undoubtedly interesting. But Wenders doesn't establish it as a metaphor from the beginning of his picture. Rather, he offers his audience an odyssey that has a tendency to be boring.

A retrospective of the work of Wim Wenders will be playing at the Cinematheque this month. For more information, call 967-7371.

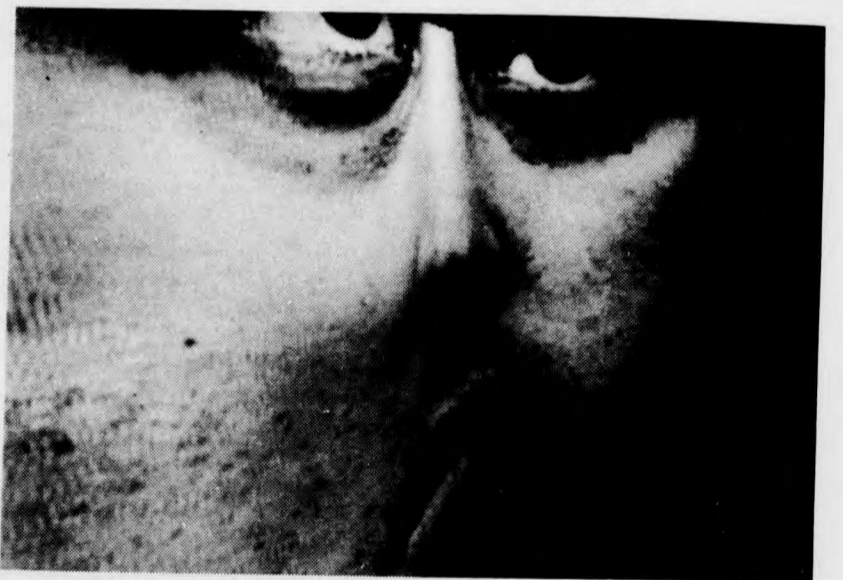
FILM

The *Festival of grand Illusions*
various directors
Bloor Cinema
January 24 to 30

herited from his grandfather. Through the bees, Jacob sees the death of the future.

The bees show Jacob how his grandfather died after he bought them. The bees also lead Jacob away from his home out to the desert, slowly revealing their world to him. In the bees' gigantic cave, Jacob travels both to the past and the future; he stops at Basra, Iraq, in the year 1991, where he meets a person he is destined to kill.

Wax, or The Discovery of Television Among the Bees, is a visual essay, artistically and technically daring. It is hypnotic and unusual, although it is difficult to sit through because of its constant repetition of images and voices. The plot of this film does not progress.



A scene from David Blair's *Wax, or The Discovery of Television Among the Bees*, from the *Festival of Grand Illusions*, playing at the Bloor Cinema from January 24 to 30. *Wax* is a visual essay, artistically and technically daring.

Cult Film Festival at York

Vanier College Council presents a Cult Film Festival every Wednesday until the middle of February in Nat Taylor Cinema. Each double feature starts at 7 pm; admission is free.

- January 22: *Brazil* and *Night of the Hunter*
- January 29: *Peeping Tom* and *The 5,000 Fingers of Dr. T*
- February 5: *Cheech and Chong's Up in Smoke* and tba
- February 12: *Clockwork Orange* and *If...*

Winters College Council is an associate sponsor of the Cult Film Festival. Programmes may be subject to change due to the availability of the films. For more information, contact Darryl Wiggers, festival coordinator, at 650-0254.