

Brigitte Sauriol's

Rien qu'un jeu

Brigitte Sauriol could not have chosen a more difficult subject to tackle than incest. Neither could she have treated the topic with more insight or sensitivity.

Rien qu'un jeu is a fiction film supported with research which would almost qualify it as a documentary. The original concept was based on an actual account of incest. Sauriol was searching for a subject related directly to female roles in society, when a woman she knew well, came to her to tell her tale of personal agony. After that, she talked to many victims who told the same story. She says "I kept hearing the same thing!"

The story is this: a middle to upper-middle-class family where the mother is financially dependent on the father; the communication between the parents has broken down, although the facade of a secure marriage remains intact. The parent's sexual relationship has degenerated: the father turns to the daughter who does not know how to refuse the only man in her life. The daughter has been taught to believe in, and obey her parents. She succumbs, bearing the burden in silence. When the mother finds out, she reacts in horror, but eventually blames the daughter for being a seductress. The daughter is completely alone; totally accused. She is sent away to a private girl's school, emotionally shattered.

This provides the basic storyline in *Rien qu'un jeu*. And even though the film begins on a light note, winding ever-so-delicately into the heart of the matter, Sauriol offers no solution. The film ends with a freeze frame close-up of the daughter, Catherine, broken into pieces. And thus it is only through the careful depiction of characters and their interaction, that one gains a sense of enlightenment, and possible hope for such a situation.

Sauriol pays attention to visual details which make the emotional state of all the characters quite obvious. There is very little dialogue, which exemplifies the lack of communication in the family, and points to the resulting silence of the victim. The story is told through the eyes of that victim, the eldest daughter, Catherine (which means Sauriol avoids a voyeuristic perspective). The opening shot depicts the typical summer holiday, complete with windsurfers and flirtatious sexual energy between teenagers. Catherine is one of the gang, at least until "Dad" arrives to pick her up and drive her back to the cottage. She falls silent and gloomy upon sighting him. She makes a stab at being independent, claiming she can find another way home. She argues with him, which informs us that there is something very wrong in their relationship. On the way home, he offers her a present which she rejects. He pulls off the road, stops the car, loosens his pants, and insists that she masturbate him. She explodes and runs from the car, down the beach with him in pursuit. Once caught, she threatens to tell her mother. He claims it's "only a game" (*rien qu'un jeu*). She runs away, frightened and confused.



● Struggling with the problem of incest: Marie Tifo and Raymond Clouthier as the parents in *Rien qu'un jeu*

Everywhere she goes, she is confronted with sex: at the disco her girlfriend is loosening up for a night of dancing with the guys, and encourages Catherine to do the same. Catherine, unable to talk, goes through the motions (puts on make-up; goes braless) all to be accepted as one of the crowd. Unconvinced that she is having fun, she wanders home to face a silent father, and an enraged mother.

The only physical contact between the mother and daughter is aggressive, alternating, and sometimes violent. When the daughter arrives home late, the mother explodes, demanding an explanation, slapping her, grabbing her sweater where there is usually a bra. Catherine makes a meagre defense for herself, and is obviously unable to explain to the mother where the source of the problem lies. And thus it is established early in the film that Catherine has no ally, no-one to turn to for understanding or support.

The mother is so preoccupied with her own problems, that she hasn't the ability to reach out to Catherine who is silently bearing the burden of a crumbling family. She is often seen preening herself, slathering on suntan lotion, and checking her image in a mirror. She is a middle-aged woman who doubts her sexual stature. It is no surprise when she has a brief affair with a complete stranger. All factors point to a person who is filled with fear and insecurity.

And the mother/father relationship is wavering: they argue and fight without reconciliation. And once the mother has recovered from her initial explosion (after discovering the incest situation), she resorts to mothering her husband,

physically, to secure their marriage.

Sauriol claims that the mother usually does side with the father, accusing the daughter directly or indirectly. The women she spoke to told her plainly that they felt they had no alternative but to forgive their husbands, because they plan to live out their lives with them. The daughter will grow up and leave home, so it is easier to blame her and send her away like an unwanted disease than it is to accuse the father. Essentially, they ignore the problem because they are dependent on their husbands, and they believe they cannot afford to lose them.

It was due to the characterization of the mother that Sauriol had disagreements with her feminist colleagues. They felt she should depict the mother as a stronger, more independent character, who would either leave the husband or deal directly with the problem (thus providing the daughter with a future). But Sauriol insisted that the mother character, as well as the father, be realistic representations of the average family struggling with the problem of incest. So the mother is not portrayed as either a villain or a saint: she is a problematic element of the situation, as any other character.

The complete picture is clear by the end of the film, with the marriage situation left to the imagination of the viewer. The perspective has been Catherine's throughout, and remains so to the end of the film, to the end of Catherine. She has avoided suicide, but she has not escaped all the emotional reverberations.

One is left with a much better understanding of the situation, and a great

deal of sympathy for the victim. Sauriol has had positive feedback from social workers who believe such a realistic portrait will serve as a presentative tool for all who see it. It is a film that would certainly make one think twice.

Suzan Ayscough ●

Rien qu'un jeu d. Brigitte Sauriol sc. Sauriol. Monique Messier, based on an idea by Messier res. Monique Maranda. Muriel Lize-Pothier d.o.p. Paul Van Der Linden ed. Marcel Pothier art.d. Gaudeline Sauriol mus. Yves Laferriere. Robert Lachapelle line p. Claude Bonin p. Monique Messier. Yves Michon, Jacques Pettigrew exec. p. Jacques Pettigrew p.c. Cine-Groupe Inc. with financial part. from l'Institut Quebecois du Cinema. Cine II (1982) Ltee. la Societe de Developpement de l'Industrie Cinematographique Canadienne Famous Players Ltd p.man. Daniel Louis mixer Andre-Gilles Gagne a.d. Rene Pothier cont. Therese Berube p. coord. Mario Nadeau cast. (children) Francine Langlois tutor Yolaine Bouleau asst. cam. Christopher Raucamp sd. Alain Corneau boom Yvon Benoit stills Warren Lipton gaffer Jean-Marc Hebert best boy Gilles Fortier. Jean-Paul Houle key grip Francois Dupere grip Michel Periard set des. Serge Bureau props Patrice Bengle asst. props. Ian Lavoie cost. des. Gaudeline Sauriol cost. Marianne Carter make-up Diane Simard p. assts. Michel Veillette. Marcellyne Charpentier. Vincent Methot. Denise Lemieux. asst. ed. Dominique Parent asst. sd. ed. Jocelyn Caron post. sync. Diane Boucher p. acct. Muriel Lize-Pothier. Daniel Demers p. sec. Suzanne Comtois asst. p. sec. Louise Dupre musicians Richard Perrotte. Robert Stanley. Mario Collin. Julie Laferriere mus. rec. Serge Gaudet re-rec. Paul Gagnon titles Paul Harris. Wayne Kimble promo. Francine Allaire. Jan Rofekamp. Paul Harris post. p. dir. Yves Michon p. coord. Suzanne Comtois blow-up Les Films Docteur du Quebec lab. Sonolab, Bellevue-Pathe int'l. dist. Films Transit Inc. (514) 527-9781 colour 35 mm running time: 101 mins. lp. Marie Tifo, Raymond Cloutier, Jennifer Grenier, Julie Mongeau, Julie Desjardins, Jimmy Bond, Madeleine Arsenault, Jean-Pierre Saulnier, Lothaire Bluteau, Marisol Sarrazin, Toenke Berkelbach.