Quoi a tiré sur nos histoires d'amour?

"Si j'étais restée à la maison cuisiner, j'aurais pu donner des recettes."

"Had I stayed at home and cooked, I might at least have been able to give you some recipes."

(Madeline to her daughter)

G
iven the fragmentary and haphazard development of Quebec cinema, what ends up on-screen is often the result of a narrow selectivity. In other words, huge chunks of collective existence are completely by-passed. It's thus been one of the tasks of a certain feminist cinema (so far) to fill in the gaps in narrative ignored by more mainstream/mastream films.

Louise Carré's second feature (five years in the making), Quoi a tiré sur nos histoires d'amour, identifies two such crucial oversights in Quebec cinema: the bourgeoisie de province as valid dramatis personae, and the (single, middle-aged) woman as artistic hero. Despite a superficial similarity to Anne-Claire Poirier's La Quarantaine (1986), a theatricalized transposition of the mid-life crises of urban intellectuals during an emotional country-weekend reunion, Carré's microcosm is that of a regional milieu, the Sorel-Tracy area, some 40 kilometres downstream from Montreal. Drawing on elements of the documentary (social consciousness, aerial photography of industrial landscapes, newsreel flashbacks), and on the movement of the French 19th-century naturalist novel from Balzac on (in which the author advances from the provinces to Rastignac's famed assault on Paris), Carré has framed an area of contemporary Quebec whose contradictions Quoi a tiré probes with gentile ruthlessness.

Outside the extremes of urban or rural deprivation, Quebec's middle-class dwell within the comfortable middle-class suburban lifestyle: nice homes, new Japanese cars, pastel fashions. From afar, TV brings in remote, brutal images of real conflicts elsewhere. Here in our pastoral Mercure) is that contradictory rebel, .

Quoi a tiré is a film about the Happy Ending. Renee decides not to sacrifice her life to the grand amour (that is just the first) and leaves for California. Madeline does finally get her script accepted by a Montreal producer — and a new love (for a while or longer, who knows?) in the technologically maho, yet poetic Fabien. But as Renee tells Madeline as she's leaving: when and if she ever returns, she doesn't want a pink room any more.

It's for its ability to say "goodbye to pink" that Quoi a tiré becomes a "post-feminist" film, as Carré describes it. But more than that perhaps, it's for articulating the courage to continue to advance, alone, that takes Quoi a tiré onto the cultural (postmodern) terrain where blind Oedipus is now all of us. If recent Quebec feminist cinema alternates between an emotional no-place (Anne Trister) and a documentary real-place (Le Film d'ariane), Quoi a tiré sur nos histoires d'amour suggests a third possibility, an emotional real-place that is a documentary no-place.

In short, a description of cinema itself; that is, of our cinema, courageous in its difference, simultaneously gassy and fragile in its real making (its search for an audience). Like Madeline or, better yet, her creators, Monique Mercure and Louise Carré. But it's in a Montreal cinema, on a Saturday night, that this difference emerges most clearly; in some recent trailers, among them one for Quoi a tiré sur nos histoires d'amour? First came the already too familiar crash-bang metaphors of Ridley Scott's Legend, then some equally familiar burping-farting inanity from France. Finally, opening with a leisurely aerial shot of Sorel and the St-Lawrence, the preview for Quoi a tiré, revealing an unfamiliar and foreign place. The place where we live: a real emotional place that's nowhere but in the guts of its artists.

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