

Gaston Ancelovici's

Récits d'une guerre quotidienne

If, as Ionesco wrote on Kafka, the Absurd is that which has no purpose or goal, General Pinochet's regime in Chile is not absurd. Its goal is clearly the consolidation, maintenance, and extension of power. The society which such a regime engenders is, however, illogical and unreasonable. It has no rational or orderly relationship to people's lives. Gaston Ancelovici's *Récits d'une guerre quotidienne* (loosely translated as *Stories of an Everyday War*), co-produced by the National Film Board with Les Amis de la cinémathèque Chilienne, depicts a country whose government is engaged in a war with the civil population, a society where people can be arrested and killed overnight for no reason, a society that spends its resources on arms while the people it's supposed to serve starve. Ancelovici, a Chilean exile living in Canada, shows that Chileans live their daily life in the midst of the absurd.

"Confronted with this reality, I can't remain silent," says a young man in the film. "We have to speak, we have to fight." *Récits* is the contribution of its cast and crew to that fight.

The film begins with grainy footage of helicopters, smoke, and the sound of firearms. *Carabinieri* are chasing after civilians. A woman is running, holding her child by the hand. A policeman overtakes them and they are led to the paddywagon where other policeman await. One is holding a huge Doberman. As mother and child are about to enter the vehicle, the beast lunges at the child. There's a freeze-frame of the dog's paw on the child's shoulder, the film's title appears and the scene is set for the stories of everyday war that are to follow.

A stanza from a poem that urges people to "Write your name on the walls of my city," is superimposed over the film's first images. The quote is appropriate — anonymous yet public, graffiti are often the only means by which those denied a voice can articulate and make known their oppression. *Récits* attempts both to contextualize the need for this wall and to be that wall, at the same time giving some people the opportunity to spray out their grievances.

In *Récits* Ancelovici exposes and subverts the regime. He continuously juxtaposes the pomp, grandiosity, symmetry and affluence of the state to the poverty, denigration and chaos that engulfs the populace. He even talks to an expert to give us the facts and figures necessary to understand the context in which people in Chile live. But it is the individuals with real names and unforgettable faces, not abstract ideas, who charge the film with emotion and conviction. It is they who make it a uniquely moving experience.

(In 1984, Ancelovici, with the Cine-Ojo collective, produced *Chile, I Don't Invoke your Name in Vain*, screened at the 1985 World Film Festi-

val in Montreal. It examines the structures of oppression and organized resistance to the state in greater detail than *Récits*.)

Ancelovi interviews priests, housewives, a professor, an actor, an ex-policeman, a member of the regime and others. For the most part they are simple people. But they get before the camera as if they had an overwhelming need to speak, to unburden themselves of what they know, to bear witness to the absurdity in which they live, to testify that it continues to exist and remains unacceptable.

Récits clearly articulates one of the major effects of life in the absurd — the



effect it has on language. The official discourse is an Orwellian mutation. "We represent the dictatorship of democracy," says Pinochet. "We are celebrating ten years of tranquility," "We are fighting a war — we are fighting for liberty." "The left has no morality... the state, education, religion, all is fair game to them." Pinochet's rantings are juxtaposed to scenes such as the one in which a French priest speaks in a room surrounded by photos of his initiate as he was found, shot through the back of his head by the police as he read, a clump of hair pierced by a bullet resting on a bloodied bible. The priest tells us that you don't have to draw blood to kill a man. Though his parishioners often engage in physical battle with the police in his sub-proletariat parish, the worst killers are hunger and cold.

The official discourse and social factors have debased language. Ana, a middle-aged woman, talking about her lover who has disappeared, fumbles with, "He was... He is," before telling us, "One can't even conjugate verbs anymore." Language has become ineffectual as a means of expression. Worse, words have been used to falsify, distort and invert so much that language has become something to be wary of.



•Stills from the smuggled opening footage of *Récits d'une guerre quotidienne*

Much of the power of the film comes from the realization that *Récits* is a record of people telling their truths. Since words can't be trusted, one has to see to believe. Thus, faces, gestures, surroundings, the conviction with which they speak, all reinforce the words to convey meaning. People may refuse to believe what is happening in Chile but they can't look anyone in the eye and say these people are liars.

For the interviewees even to get in front of the camera calls for great bravery. (Since the film was made, the priest was deported and the actor was killed.) For *Récits* even to exist is an affirmation of hope — people would not risk their lives appearing in the film if they did not have faith in a future that will be different. *Récit's* greatness lies in reaching into the chaos of Chile, and through the conviction of a few admirable individuals, articulating and embodying a simple, universal message of courage and hope.

José Arroyo •

RÉCITS D'UNE GUERRE QUOTIDIENNE

Co-produced by The National Film Board of Canada and Les Amis de la cinémathèque Chilienne a film by Gaston Ancelovici, Jaime Barrios, Rene Davila d. Gaston Ancelovici d.o.p. Peter Leblanc ed. Lorenzo del Vecchio add. footage Pablo Solas, Diego Charron sd. Michael Bronson sd. ed. Gilles Quintal sd. fx. Vital Millette asst. ed. rene Davila narration Cynthia Brown sd. mix Adrian Croll co-ord Edouard Davidovici admin Jacqueline Rivest asst admin. Gaetan Martel sec. Johanne Cappuccilli prod. Gaston Ancelovici, Jacques Vallee, Jaime Barrios, Dario Pulgar songs interp. by Lilia Santos "Je t'aime" by M. Benedetti, A. Favero, "Cambomba du questionneur" by M. Capella, "En chantant, tu reviendras" by M. Capella music. arrang. Rodrigo Villaseca music. themes "Je t'aime" by M. Benedetti, A. Favero "Je te nomme, Liberté" by P. Eluard, G. Pagliaro themes int. by Tim Moran, Luisa Bustamante, Diane Orson, Rodrigo Villaseca extract from theatre piece "Printemps avec un coin brisé" by M. Benedetti adapted and interpreted by Groupe Ictus French. trans. A.G. Lecorps French voices Manuel Aranguiz, Rejean Roy, Christiane Raymond, Jocelyn Berube, Monique Belisle, Gilbert Sicotte, Monique Mousseau, Guy Thauvette. The film was made possible thanks to, Comission Chilienne des droits de l'homme, Habitants de la Victoria, Association des familles de detenus-disparus, Maidon de la culture de La Legua, Groupe Ictus, Mouvement contre la torture Sebastian Acevedo Fasic, (Fondation d'aide sociale des églises chrétiennes Thanks to Association du 21 juin (France), Alternative Media Network (USA), Film Transit (Canada) color 16mm running time 59 min