

Sylvie Groulx's

Chronique d'Un Temps Flou

Whereas once the agents of higher learning stretched the perceived philosophic limitations of the minds of their students by recounting the parable of the monkey-astronaut, the typewriter and the duplicated Shakespeare text, nowadays, the argument for the objective work of art – separate as to artist, property owner, owner of the means of production and reproduction – faces strong resistance.

Feminists are but one group of political thinkers who collide with the issue of objectivity, because objectivity intrinsically denies process; where the product has come from, who has carried, nurtured and, in labour, has given birth to the supposedly objective work.

From the very outset, Sylvie Groulx's *Chronique d'un temps flou* states itself to be a woman's documentary – not necessarily a film which would earn the High Academic Feminism seal of approval – but a film spoken through a woman's language, through Groulx's perspective.

In the most literal sense, Sylvie Groulx is present in her film, not simply through her voice but in her visual presence on screen. Through this presence and the on-screen explanation of Groulx's focus – today's generation of Québécois/e youth – the masquerade of objectivity is negated. We see who is making this film and why.

Groulx claims that she is searching for the missing link between parent and child. In order to better understand the generation in between herself and that of her young son, this very particular quest is 'balanced' with a loosely sociological study of five main characters: Maryse and Jean, students at the Université de Montréal, Danièle and Robert, photographer and collage artist living in Montreal's bohemian ghetto, and Mario and the members of his heavy metal band.

As Groulx questions her interviewees, her specific choices of verbal and visual content in *Chronique d'un temps flou* become increasingly clear. Mario is interviewed at home with his parents who express reserved concern for their son and his future, as well as commenting on their own adolescent years. Maryse is filmed discussing her family's history, over photo album snapshots. Danièle and Robert discuss their relationship as romantic partners and as partners in the art trade.

Children as products of their parents, parents themselves being a product of a particular time, is as much of a concern for Groulx if not more so



PHOTO: ALAIN CHAGNON

The missing links? Robert and Danièle, residents of Montreal's bohemian ghetto

than a specific examination of Groulx's subjects' and the social context of Quebec in the '80s. Her inclusion of footage from the late '60s movement of social/youth rebellion (in Montreal and Paris) appears to be personal nostalgia extraneous to the film's focus. Simultaneously, it presents itself as another clue to Sylvie Groulx and her concerns as a young woman living in Quebec in the '60s.

Unfortunately, it is the more traditional, controlled, survey style sequences wherein the film is weakest; where Groulx and/or the traditional use of documentary form fail to bring out the personal, the self or the filmmaker behind the film. For either traditional documentary style confines by its need to find the objective answer or statistic e.g. this is what Québécois/e youth are like today, or Groulx, mistakenly, veers away from her confessed intention in making this film; attempting to cover too wide a base with too small a representation of subjects in too short a period of time.

This where Groulx's voice is most muffled. She allows herself to be cloaked in this guise of objectivity through a hesitancy in embarking on a documentary path which exposes herself as much as her interviewees – the understandable timidity of speaking a film language which, in making the filmmaker visible, also makes the filmmaker a more visible target.

But even allowing for a traditional approach, how could one possibly capture what is

distinctive about, in this case, Québécois/e youth, when youth culture is intrinsically a culture that has yet to define for itself a unique identity, still sampling and testing what has been handed down to it?

The clearest and most insightful segments of Groulx's film, on the other hand, are when Groulx stands closest to her own territory, to the answers she is most interested in exploring or evoking in *Chronique d'un temps flou*; the nature of parent/child relationships and the search for what separates Groulx's experiences as a young adult with what will be experienced by her son growing up in Quebec in the '90s.

Hence *Chronique d'un temps flou*, in its most honest moments, is not a documentary about Maryse, Jean, Daniele, Robert or Mario, but about Sylvie Groulx. In a frequently obvious comparative analysis, Groulx looks at the youth of Quebec in the 1980s vis-à-vis herself, her development from teenager and student to mature woman and mother.

Groulx's status as parent and/or mother, both biologically and symbolically, in *Chronique d'un temps flou* neatly closes the cycle of the film as the camera and film time reveal the favoritism, or more correctly, the adoption, by Groulx, of Maryse, the articulate Université de Montréal student, interested in feminist politics, social issues and the politics of family.

This 'maternal instinct' is not the sole indicator that Groulx's film is a woman's documentary – even allowing for the possibility

that women seem to be more comfortable expressing their emotions vis-à-vis parenting than men – but can be seen as an example of women's readiness to expose themselves in their work; to make themselves visible.

Where Groulx resorts to a more objective approach, either with fly-on-the-wall documentary camera work, or in talking head interview shots, we feel least connected to her film. And this problem of reverting to a 'male' documentary language, one that masks the gender and the intent of the filmmaker, if not the existence of human being as filmmaker, is not merely a task for women to overcome but something which contemporary male documentary filmmakers must deal with as well.

In an age where individuals know too well how the media operate and to whose advantage or disadvantage media function a filmmaker can no longer hope to fool with the use of the objective posture. Whether intentionally or not, this is one point that emerges from Groulx's film – one point of knowledge inherent to the culture of those brought up in the Western media-saturated milieu of the '60s, '70s and '80s.

Clea Notar •

CHRONIQUE D'UN TEMPS FLOU d. Sylvie Groulx. p. Lucille Veilleux, Yvon Provost cam. Michel LaVeaux sd. Claude Beaugrand, Diane Carrière, Esther Auger ed. Jean Saulnier. Produced by Vent d'Est Inc with the financial participation of SOGIC, Telefilm Canada, Radio-Quebec, the NFB and the Groupe d'interventions, de recherches et d'information jeunesse dist. Les Films du Cepuscul. 16 mm, colour running time 87 min.