



CHANTAL AKERMAN: ADVENTURES IN PERCEPTION

Toute une nuit

Rue Mallet-Stevens

Director: Chantal Akerman
Photography: Claire Atherton, Luc Benhamou
Editing: Claire Atherton
Sound: Alix Comte
Belgium 1986
8 mins
Digital

Toute une nuit (All Night Long)

Director: Chantal Akerman
Production Companies: Avidia Films, Paradise Films, Gerick Films, Lyric International, Partner's Production, Centre bruxellois de l'audiovisuel, Film International, Cine 360
Executive Producer: Marilyn Watelet
Production Managers: Stéphane Dykman, Séverine Vermersch
Production Supervisor: Nicole Flipo
Assistant Directors: Lyria Begega, Ignacio Carranza, Jean-Philippe Laroche, Pierre de Heusch
Screenplay: Chantal Akerman
Director of Photography: Caroline Champetier
Assistant Photographers: François Hernandez, Matthieu Schiffman
Editor: Luc Barnier
Assistant Editor: Véronique Auricoste
Production Designer: Michele Blondeel
Costume Designer: Michele Blondeel
Make-up: Thérèse Gilbert, Nicole Mora
Sound Recording: Ricardo Castro, Miguel Rejas, Henri Morelle, Daniel Deshays
Sound Re-recording: Jean-Paul Loublier
Sound Effects: Jacky Dufour
Cast:
Angelo Abazoglou
Frank Aendenboom
Natalia Akerman
Véronique Alain
Paul Allio
Jacques Bauduin
François Beukelaers
Michele Blondeel
Philippe Bombled
Ignacio Carranza
Gabrielle Claes
Aurore Clément
Christiane Cohendy
Nicole Colchat
Edith de Barcy
Dirk de Batiste
Laurent de Buyl
Jan Declair
Jan Decorte
Ingrid de Vos
Alix Dugauquier
Marie-Ange Dutheil
Luc Koning
Philippe Ekkers
Benedicte Erken
David Errera
Pierre Forget
Herman Gillis
Catherine Graindorge
Brigid Grauman
Lucy Grauman
Michel Karchevsky
Tchéky Karyo
Belgium-France 1982
91 mins Digital (restoration)
Restored by Royal Film Archive of Belgium (CINEMATEK), Fondation Chantal Akerman and Amazing Digital Studios, Paris

Toute une nuit is made up entirely of a series of fragments. While apparently unconnected, they are all similar in tone. These amorous comings and goings, some happy, some unhappy, are all marked by a sense of urgency and emotional tension. Love, to invoke the cliché, may be eternal, but the stress in this film is on the immediate present – a present made precarious by the storm, the heat, the leaden atmosphere, the threatened arrival of morning. As one would expect from Chantal Akerman, the labyrinth that is spun out of these fragments is precisely organised in space and time. The film is divided into three sections of varying length – night, dawn and morning, marked by changing light and atmosphere – and into three locations, comprising a poor area near the centre of town with bars and Oriental music, a suburban street which might be reminiscent of a Hitchcock movie, and a square in the more venerable part of town with a distinguished old apartment house. While Akerman uses reallocations for all the exteriors and most of the interiors, the film looks as if it were shot in a studio. It is as if she were working towards (and beyond) the stylised non-naturalistic look of Coppola's *One from the Heart*, with the movements of characters choreographed in and out of the sets in myriad different ways.

There are precedents for *Toute une nuit*. In the 1920s, the Surrealists made their own delighted discovery of what cinema was 'really' about by popping in and out of many cinemas and seeing bits of films, but never staying from beginning to end. The American artist and filmmaker Joseph Cornell once took a louche Hollywood melodrama set in the South Seas, edited it down to its climactic high points, laid some sultry Hawaiian-type music over it, and called the result *Rose Hobart*. With *Toute une nuit*, Akerman has recreated the Surrealists' kaleidoscopic experience by juxtaposing numerous emotional tableaux, and in the process has reduced the love story to its bare melodramatic bones. As couples meet and separate, arrive and depart, fall in and out of each other's arms, it is like seeing about 30 films, one after the other, without all the conventional elaboration of plot and character to detract from their cumulative effect.

The film's structure also bears some resemblance to that of the pornographic film in its lack of context. It is as if we always arrive at the point of pre- or post-coital emotion: he looks excitedly at her; she dresses; they lie in bed, together but separate. Melodrama rarely shows consummation; the interest lies in the mounting tension. Akerman understands this perfectly, and in this homage to melodrama she dispenses not only with context, but in large measure with dialogue as well. Like the action, the dialogue is reduced to the essential: 'I had to see you', 'I love you', 'Not tonight', 'I don't love you anymore'. The real soundtrack is meanwhile provided by the moody sounds of the city at night: cars, planes, footsteps and the music of the café jukeboxes promising love in different languages.

One could describe the importance of *Toute une nuit* in terms of experimentation with narrative. But that would neither be faithful to the spirit in which it was made, nor do justice to its very real pleasures. Akerman, for all that has been written about her, is not a formalist. It is true that stringing together a lot of self-contained extracts does create a new sort of narrative, and that the mood of tension and suffocation is created as much by the precise framing and static shots as by what takes place between the characters. But Akerman's real aim is to take her audience on a trip on Ophuls' roundabout, into the emotional fairyland of a hot summer night, which becomes a time apart from ordinary life, a time to dream, to feel, to react. 'The night is like a big studio' (Akerman), and it is the way this studio can reveal the essential melodrama of people's emotional encounters – particularly when they are set one beside the other, each similar yet unique – that fascinates her. *Toute une nuit* says more about the poignant repetitiveness of our emotional lives than one love story in the naturalist mode could ever do.

Susan Barrowclough, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, April 1984

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All restorations by Royal Film Archive of Belgium (CINEMATEK) and Fondation Chantal Akerman unless otherwise stated.

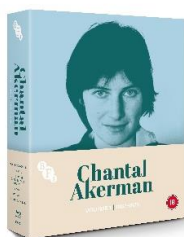
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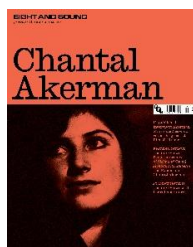
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Chantal Akerman on 'Toute une nuit'

Toute une nuit actually began as one story. After I had begun to write, I found that I had written four lines on one page of my notebook, four lines on the next, and so on. Each entry was a story in itself. When I saw them all together, there was a sort of shock between the different notes, which gave me the idea of breaking my story up and making a whole film out of fragments. But I think I give enough detail so that you can imagine the characters' lives, like what happened before the two people fall into each other's arms in the café. Or, in the scene where the girl is waiting in a café and the man comes in with a suitcase, you can think of all sorts of melodramatic explanations – perhaps he's just come out of prison after ten years. I really like that. It's all about melodrama. In a Hollywood film, the final climax would be those two people in each other's arms. I show only that and nothing else.

I really didn't know how this film would work while I was making it. But I think that while you are watching it, it's as if you are losing your sense of reality completely. A lot of people have told me that they felt it was a fantasy movie. To some extent, the morning scenes are realistic, because I think the night is very much like a set – it's black. You see a woman in a red dress, you see only outlines and everything else disappears, while in the morning you see all the details. I believe that life, too, works completely differently at night. The night is more unreal, more surreal; at night melodrama can come through, but in the morning, ordinary life starts again.

Interview by Susan Barrowclough, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, April 1984

Chantal Akerman chose the songs for her films very carefully. These are the lyrics translated from the songs *Ma révérence* (Véronique Sanson) and *L'amor perdonerà* (Michel Handson), featured in the film:

Ma révérence

When my son grows up
And no longer needs me;
When people who have loved me
All are gone;
I'll take my bow,
Take my bow.

And as my gently
My heart growing cold
Not knowing how even to panic
Becoming
Not unlike a clock in need of fixing.
The flame going out,
The flame gone out.
A woman no more.
Ay, true friends,
Are disappearing one by one,
They thought that I was lovely
And settled on the right path.
Yet now I'm ashamed of my touch,
Ashamed of my touch.

Now I've run out of time
To find again such courage.
It's taken twenty years
Just to see this as a mirage.
But in the depths of my soul I hear
A little voice, muffled and growling:
The world knows I'm alone

Lyrics by Véronique Sanson ©Warner/Chappell
Music, translation Adam Roberts

L'amor perdonerà

Love you know
Will forgive.
Today you remain here
But why did you leave?
Love, you know
Will forgive.
But will it heal
This wound?
Because life
Has no more meaning,
My last love,
And if you don't love
You must leave.
I will not be able to
Begin again.
Love you know
Will forgive,
And only you
Can save me
Ahhhh
Love you know
Will forgive.
Even for us
There is luck,
The sweet life
And you are it.
Without you
I didn't exist,
I was with you
...to love
Love you know
Will forgive
Will forgive
Will forgive
Will forgive

Words & music Michel Handson, Italian version
Jean-Yves Panayetidès – Editions Amplitude.
English translation Matteo Fargion, courtesy of
A Nos Amours

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