



CHANTAL AKERMAN: ADVENTURES IN PERCEPTION

Nuit et jour

Nuit et jour (Night and Day)

Director: Chantal Akerman

Production Companies: Pierre Grise Productions, Canal+, CNC - Centre national de la cinématographie, Sofinergie 2, Paradise Films, George Reinhart Productions, Ministère de la Culture de la Communauté Française

Executive Producers: Martine Marignac, Maurice Tinchant

Screenplay: Chantal Akerman

Director of Photography:

Jean-Claude Neckelbrouck

Camera Operator: Pierre Gordower

Editors: Francine Sandberg,

Camille Bordes-Resnais

Art Directors: Michel Vandestien, Dominique Douret

Costumes: Brigitte Nierhaus

Make-up: Nicole Mora

Music: Marc Herouet

Sound: Alix Comte, Pierre Tucac

Cast:

Guilaine Londez (*Julie*)

Thomas Langmann (*Jack*)

François Negret (*Joseph*)

Nicole Colchat, Pierre Laroche (*the parents*)

Belgium-France-Switzerland 1991

90 mins

35mm

The screening on Fri 7 Mar will be introduced by Laura Carreira, director of *On Falling*

Nuit et jour confirms the themes and ideas that have concerned Chantal Akerman over almost 20 years of filmmaking. Yet, in some ways, it can be seen as a capitulation to commercialism, a turning away from sexual politics and feminism in favour of a celebration of love and passion. The film is a playful idyll, almost poetic, the dialogue over-romanticised to the point of cliché, presenting difficulties of credibility, more so as it is attached to a narrative which hinges on the youthfulness of Julie and her two lovers Jack and Joseph. Provincial and naïve as they may be, they are all three remarkably removed from any of the cultural tags of youth except for their physical beauty and obsessive sexual vitality.

There is a suggestion that Julie will later extend her horizons in work or in study, but for now she is content to devote all her time and energy to sex and love. Much of the film's imagery is given over to sex scenes – lyrical, convulsive, erotic and finally uncertain and confused. When the camera is not tracing the contours of sweat and skin, it seems to enter some other, suspended realm, with shots of the city and Julie's emboldened and sexually confident presence as she strides about Paris, fearless in love. Indoors, sexual intensity pervades domestic rituals, rendering them subordinate and unimportant. A parental visit is hastily brought to an end as Jack caresses Julie's knees while his father makes conversation.

The cinematic complement to sexual enthrallment in *Nuit et jour* is the visual beauty of Akerman's images. The grainy walls of the cheap apartment, the muted blues and warm reds, create a series of stunning tableaux through which the striking and unconventionally beautiful Julie and the excessively pretty and feminine Jack both move.

Nuit et jour abandons the anger and intensity of much of Akerman's earlier work. She has never created strongly focused narrative films but neither has her work sat comfortably with either the avant-garde or the theoretically led feminist film practice of the 70s and 80s. Hers is an instinctive, emotional and sexually ambiguous cinema. While both its form and content are deeply intertwined with the concerns of feminists working in film, there is also a distance, an auteurist insistence on an individual voice and vision. Akerman's concerns are elusive and unresolved, making her films a pleasure to watch, and their reappearance in *Nuit et jour* is what elevates it above mere love story.

At one level, *Nuit et jour* is romantic to the point of banality, but the androgyny and femininity of the boys, who look exactly like each other, and Julie's guiltless exploration of her sexuality (a real 60s heroine), subvert the film at just that point. Similarly, when Julie gets up and walks away, without having suffered, without having been victimised and without even having had to justify her duplicity, the film's real character is apparent.

Angela McRobbie, *Sight and Sound*, September 1992

Chantal Akerman on 'Nuit et jour'

Chantal Akerman's view of herself is not the same as our view of her. I realised that when we talked about her latest feature, *Nuit et jour*. For many of us, her more recent work – be it the musical *Golden Eighties* or this engaging new drama – seems to belong to a different genre of filmmaking from that marathon minimalist look at a woman's life, *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*. But if you suggest that, despite remaining highly personal, she has nevertheless made a switch from minority cinema to the mainstream, she finds the idea surprising. Perhaps it's because she was so close to the film that brought her fame that she never thought of it as avant-garde in the first place.

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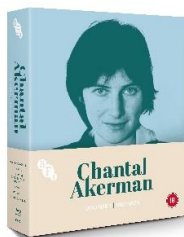
Season generously supported by
Philippe & Stephanie Camu.

Supported by the General Representation of
Wallonia-Brussels in the United Kingdom.

With thanks to Céline Brouwez, Fondation Chantal Akerman; Joanna Hogg and Adam Roberts, A Nos Amours.

Chantal Akerman Collection Vol.1: 1967-1978 (Limited Edition 5-Disc Blu-ray Box Set)

Spanning the period 1967 to 1978, and representing the first significant release of Chantal Akerman's work in the UK, this 5-Blu-ray set includes her most famous film, *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*. Available from BFI Shop from 24 February.



Sight and Sound presents the auteurs series: Chantal Akerman

Revisiting material from the *Sight and Sound* and *Monthly Film Bulletin* archive and also publishing exclusive texts and images from the Fondation Chantal Akerman archive, *Sight and Sound* presents the auteurs series: *Chantal Akerman*. Available now from BFI Shop.



'I know that at the time *Jeanne Dielman* was a big shock for people. The point was that I found my style very quickly, but that I don't want to repeat, so I always try to change. For example, I hope that *Nuit et jour* is more accessible – because nobody wants to see anything anymore if it's not accessible. But, when I did *Jeanne Dielman* in '75, it was a time when people were much more curious. I have the feeling that when it comes to interest, to curiosity, and to people's approach to new styles, everything is going backwards. As for the avant-garde, that has in a way disappeared now. They experimented so far that they could go no further.'

But, if it was Godard's work which excited Chantal Akerman in the '60s, is it not Truffaut's *Jules et Jim* which is recalled by the romantic triangle in *Nuit et jour*?

'In a way, yes. It's true, except that when *Jules et Jim* was done it was very provocative, with Jeanne Moreau's Catherine doing exactly what she felt. No morality. But in the '90s I think it can be provocative to deal with a girl with morals. I chose Guilaine Londez to play the girl in *Nuit et jour* because she came from a small village in the south of France, and you could believe in her sincerity. I saw other girls at auditions, but, when they said the words, you felt that in their minds they had other ideas; they knew too much about life, and something in them had been polluted.'

Having the necessary innocence to convince as a girl who genuinely seeks to keep two lovers happy was clearly the factor which drew Chantal Akerman to Guilaine Londez for this part. She had equally definite ideas about the roles of the two lovers, Jack and Joseph, the former going to Thomas Langmann and the latter to François Negret, an actor who strikes me as having an unexpectedly androgynous look.

'I wanted the two men to be a bit alike. I didn't want people just to think that one is blond and one is dark. In fact, both are dark and small and, because he's a kind of tough little guy, I didn't think of François as androgynous. But maybe both are. A newspaper made a collage of their faces, Thomas and François mixed together, and I was surprised that they looked a bit like me. The eyes are of the same family type. I hadn't been aware of it, but perhaps it wasn't a coincidence.'

Where a film like Catherine Breillat's *Virgin* was grittily realistic about sex, *Nuit et jour* strikes me as more romantic, but not offering the kind of romanticism that is escapist. For, even if there is hope at the end, the story shows people who end up taking the wrong course. Certain lines echo in the mind: 'Being happy is unusual'; 'Fear is the thing that lasts.' Yet Chantal Akerman wrote quickly and instinctively.

'When I start to write, I don't say, "Well I'm a woman, and I will give another perspective"; I just write what I feel for the moment, knowing that Agnès Varda, say, would have done something quite different. When I wrote *Nuit et jour*, it just came one day: I had the idea and wrote it in a single flow. For me, the film is like a parable about people who make mistakes, because the romantic view – that, if you're in love, one plus one equals one – cannot work. But, at the end, when the girl goes away with a smile, I think she's understood. In life, if you want to be with someone, you have to be two. It has to be like that; it's never one plus one equals one. And I think that's what the film expresses. I have a sympathy for my characters, not for what they do but because they are wrong. But I can still like them, and I think you can feel it.'

Mansel Stimpson, *What's On in London*, 4 August 1993