SYMPATHETIC UNDERSTANDING IN
TU AS CRÎÉ LET ME GO

Résumé: Le documentaire sur le deuil d’Anne Claire Poirier, qui retrace les événements qui ont mené à la mort de sa fille droguée et prostituée, utilise l’émotion et la compassion pour encourager une prise de conscience politique face au problème de la drogue. L’auteur analyse le film à partir de la théorie du sentiment moral et suggère que l’engagement par la compassion devant la douleur des autres—une stratégie employée par Poirier dans tous ses films—peut mener à une prise de position critique et politique.

The many films of Anne Claire Poirier are distinguished by their exploration of women’s pain. Her films are unique for the way they use facts, interviews and poetic narrative to consider childbirth and rearing, prostitution, war, rape, and most recently drug addiction. Many critics have commented on the emotional aspects of her work, which combine the conventions of the melodrama with “counter-cinema” politics, as André Loiselle has put it.1 Certainly, Poirier’s films are striking for their engagement with female suffering, an engagement that often uses the properties of the film medium to elicit physical responses from audiences.

The most remarked upon example of this is the rape scene that opens Mourir à tue-tête (1979). Shot in subjective camera from the point of view of the victim, the scene is highly realistic. It is emotionally charged and shocking in the way it forces viewers to identify with a woman being raped in the back of a van. Ron Burnett’s insightful account of this scene has highlighted the manner in which the film creates multiple subject positions.2 Through the filmmaker-character in the film, Poirier spends much time considering the politics of this representation and the kinds of identification it allows. The film, rightly, brought her international acclaim and set her apart from other feminist documentary filmmakers working at the National Film Board of Canada. Poirier’s documentaries are visceral, beautiful, didactic and committed to social change.
"Tu as crié Le Me Go" (1997) is the starkest, most restrained, and perhaps even least inventive of all her films. It is a film about the murder of her daughter, Yanne, a heroin addict and a prostitute. The film seeks to understand heroin addiction from the point of view of a parent who has lost a child to it. It is also, arguably, Poirier’s most powerful film. I must confess that I cannot watch the film without crying. My starting point for wanting to write about it is in part my own response to it and my interest in the relation between art, emotion and ethics. As a filmmaker who has sought to make very emotional films, Poirier provides fertile ground for thinking about affective structures in relation to documentary and fiction. Moreover, as a politically committed feminist filmmaker, she provides a unique ground for thinking about the political and aesthetic value of emotion. Over the course of this essay, I consider not only the emotional structure of the film but the ethical ramifications of soliciting emotional responses in order to both raise consciousness and create politics. I argue that "Tu as crié" is unique for the way it allows spectators to experience and gain knowledge from Poirier’s expressed pain. In so doing, the film utilizes a double structure which does not conflate emotion and reason but makes them contiguous.

Before discussing the film, let me briefly review some of the work being carried out on emotion in film studies.

**EMOTION AND FILM STUDIES**

To use one’s feelings as the basis for interpreting the effects and value of a work of art is a practice that is common to traditional forms of textual hermeneutics in film studies. For over three decades, this approach has often been characterized disparagingly as impressionistic criticism. Changes in methodology made the discipline of film studies less solipsistic, more scientific and theoretically sophisticated. One of the repercussions of the theoretical turn, which came to Canada from the British journal *Screen* in the mid-1970s, was that work on the text and work on spectatorship were divided into separate kinds of projects. Much of the theory coming from *Screen* was deeply informed by Althusser’s model of ideology, seeing human experience as uniform and ideology as working on an unconscious level. Using this model, theories of spectatorship and textual meaning could not account for the connection between specific texts and the particular emotional experiences of spectators.

Althusser’s anti-humanist Marxism had a profound influence on another important intellectual enterprise in England, the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). Writers like Stuart Hall rejected
the expressive humanism of earlier versions of cultural studies, which, not unlike the humanist strand in film criticism, sought to interpret culture as experience. Raymond Williams famously defined culture as a “whole way of life” that linked context with spectatorship, focusing in particular on working-class culture to understand community. While Hall was critical of this earlier approach, which he saw as under-theorized, he was also critical of Screen’s lack of specificity. The over-determination of textual meanings and spectatorial responses relied upon a concept of culture as static; that is, devoid of history and people. Hall’s famous encoding/decoding model as well as his theory of articulation, while not without problems, offered more flexible possibilities for common understandings and differentiated interpretations. It is precisely this stress on context and audiences, in many instances an ethnographic and sociological emphasis, that has always differentiated cultural studies from film studies. Yet what is often missing in cultural studies accounts of film culture is the text—that is, the encoding.

Several new books devoted to studying film and emotion have appeared over the past five years, reinvigorating work on cinematic identification and emotions through the insights of cognitive psychology and philosophy. Some of this new work is useful for the way it brings emotions back into the picture of screen studies. The shift from psychoanalysis to
psychology allows many of these scholars to explore a nuanced and precise understanding of emotional responses to specific kinds of films. These accounts go beyond the more general categories of “pleasure” and “desire” which have in the past been somewhat limited by a psychoanalytic taxonomy. A cognitive approach to analyzing emotions breaks down the opposition between emotions and reason, to show that emotions are intricately tied to, if not based in, reason. Film cognitivists reject much of 1970s Screen theory, arguing that when we are watching a film, we are not simply passive dupes but are very much in control of the emotions and pleasures we are experiencing. Carl Plantinga and Greg Smith have summarized the cognitive perspective in the introduction to their anthology *Passionate Views*:

Instead of conceptualizing emotions as formless, a cognitive scholar emphasizes the structure of emotions. They are processes that may be broken down into component processes, thus revealing their underlying structures. These structures might include scripts or a set of distinguishing characteristics or descriptions of typical goals and behaviors. This close analysis, we believe, will be invaluable in gaining a more precise understanding of how films cue emotions.

Thus, cognitivist approaches to film analysis tend to confine their interpretation of specific texts to physiological or cognitive processes. Films are more often than not generalized in order to make statements about “how films cue emotions.” For this reason, much research is focused on “the paradox of fiction,” on the way that a fiction film can elicit emotions about characters that we know are not real. While this is a fascinating problem, it is certainly not new. As with much 1970s and 1980s film theory, the examples are drawn from formulaic Hollywood films whose standardized forms enable scholars to describe in more precise ways how spectators respond to certain cinematic conventions.

While cognitivist approaches stand in direct opposition to the context-based study of reception that we find characteristic of cultural studies, they suffer from some of the same limitations. Whether it is the social character of a community of spectators or their physiological processes that drive the study of reception, it is all too often the distinctive quality of the text as a work of art and/or description which is left unaccounted for. Even though, as all good propagandists know, the best way to the head is through the heart, very little work in cognitive film studies has focused
on non-fiction films. I would speculate that this is so because non-fiction films are less formulaic and emotional cues are more difficult to discern.

What follows is not a new model for a cognitive description of non-fiction films, but rather some ideas that might help us to better understand the need for a methodology to study the emotional dimensions of documentary films. Thus, my remarks around the complexity of the emotional structure in *Tu as crié* are intended to underscore the important role that interpretive paradigms centered on affect may play in our understanding of non-fiction films.

**TU AS CRÎÉ**

While most of Poirier’s films have some autobiographical component, *Tu as crié* is entirely autobiographical. How do we identify with Poirier who narrates the film and who has lost a daughter? How are our emotions and sympathies intensified when the person before us and the events recounted are real? How does the film invite us to make judgments about the world it is representing? My analysis will focus for the most part on the first five minutes of the film, as these set up the emotional structure of the entire work.

*Tu as crié* opens with high contrast black and white shots of an iceberg. It is photographed from water-level and slowed down so that we experience the iceberg out of time just slightly. It appears devoid of human presence. On the soundtrack we hear violins, women’s chants, and the sound of seagulls mixed together in a dissonance that foregrounds intervals of silence. Poirier’s voice follows. This voice-over, exquisitely written by Poirier and Marie-Clair Blais, will guide us through the film. At times it speaks to us directly of facts that meld into poetry and sorrow: “Eighteenth October 1992. Sunday morning of the end of the world. A young woman is dead, strangled in an apartment full of disorder. She was working as a prostitute; she was a heroin addict; she was pretty; she was my daughter.”

After a pause, Poirier continues. She is no longer addressing the viewer, she is speaking to herself and to her dead daughter: “Yanne la forte, Yanne la fragile, Yanne, ma difficile.” As the descriptions of her daughter unfold, she moves from “la” to “ma,” from an objective description (“the strong”) to a possessive noun (“my difficult one”) that makes the description her own. It is a description of her own self, her identity so intricately—physically, emotionally, psychically—tied to her child.

A piece of the iceberg, white against black waters and a dark gray sky, breaks off in a moment of drama and emotional intensity with, “Yanne, ma difficile.” It is an image of nature as sublime. In an instant it signals chance
and our inability to control the life-world. For as Kant maintained, the sublime is “an outrage on the imagination” insofar as it exceeds the human capacity to imagine nature by means of reason. The iceberg is both outside human history and bears witness to its finality. According to Kant, it is this nature that speaks to the limits of the law and of “a higher finality.” In Tu as crié it is an image of mourning, a metaphoric gravestone, from which the filmmaker will attempt to imagine, and make sense of, her daughter’s death.

From the spectacular image of the iceberg, we descend into a back alley. Banal and generic, it could be in any city in North America. While there is a striking contrast between nature and cityscape, the camera movement and the black and white film stock fuse them together. We are in front of a garage, an address scrawled on a post reads “3614.” A band of sunlight crosses the pavement and Poirier remembers this light from the police photographs: “You were there in the morning light, I was not.” There is no body now; there is only the morning light. The scene is deserted. The camera floats unnaturally above the ground as it moves down the alley. We hear footsteps on the pavement, but they are not located in any image, giving the sequence a ghostly quality. Poirier’s voice-over speaks forcefully and with sadness to her daughter. For the moment, she has forgotten the audience; she remembers her daughter in childhood, standing on the railway tracks stretching to infinity, playing in the ocean swell, flying a kite: “Let it go, maman.” She remembers Yanne’s new boyfriend, a heroin addict she wanted to save: “Let me go, maman.” This spoken memory over the scene of the death creates a space of mourning, a liminal space between past and present, which I will address in more detail shortly. Poirier cues us to this liminality towards the end of the sequence when she says, “Since your death I live in black and white. I live in the night…. In the cinema, black and white often signifies the past. Fine for me, time has stopped with you, ma fulgurante”

In this sequence, we are in an imaginary space, lost in time. From here we will travel back to night, to the apartment where Yanne was murdered. Through the empty hallways, Poirier searches for signs, traces, messages from her daughter left behind during her last hours. Poirier imagines Yanne’s last words, her scream: “Let me go!” We come to understand the double meaning of the film’s title, which references both the daughter’s drive for independence and her final words as Poirier imagines them. The mother’s trauma is in arriving too late, in not being there for her daughter and thus, in her daughter’s subsequent silence, her not being here to speak. This traumatic and eternal separation is enacted in the film’s deceptively simple sound and image relations.
Fritz Lang represented this kind of violent separation so masterfully in his early sound film *M* (Germany, 1930). Recall the power of that opening scene when a mother calls out the window to her daughter, “Ilse,” who has not returned home from school. The mother’s cry is heard over a series of empty urban spaces, streets, alleyways, garages. She is too late; the sequence comes just after we know that a serial killer has abducted the child. I often show this sequence in my film classes to illustrate early uses of off-screen space and the power relations of voice and image. In *M* the voice is unable to control or to affect the visual spaces which contain the child’s body because it is located elsewhere.

In Poirier’s film, however, the voice is both inside and outside the screen. It is separated from the child’s body by the frame and by time. The narration is what Michel Chion calls an “acousmêtre” which has “the ability to be everywhere, to see all, to know all, and to have complete power. In other words ubiquity, panopticism, omniscience and omnipotence….”\(^1\)

Of course, Chion tells us, “the sound cinema did not invent the acousmêtre; the greatest acousmêtre is God—and even farther back, for every one of us, the Mother.”\(^2\) Yet the acousmêtre in *Tu as crié* fails in its maternal function to be everywhere all seeing. It presents an exception in the history of cinema in that it cannot see all. In this instance “we find the panoptic theme in its negative form.”\(^3\)

When the camera stands outside the door of the apartment where Yanne was murdered, the focus is on a door handle that cannot be turned. In fact, this sense of being separated from and outside the space where the death took place permeates large sections of the film. As we move along hallways and barren walls in the apartment building, doors and windows are closed to us, just as later we will move down streets into different neighborhoods that are vacant and seemingly empty. Finally at the end of the sequence, the camera leads us into the morgue. Its brightly lit halls and sterile walls shine into the lens with a piercing rationality that contrasts painfully with Poirier’s voice as it catches in her throat. Poirier agonizes over her daughter lying in this place for five days alone. She pictures her daughter’s fresh body, alive. She consoles herself by imagining that she will see her again, “I wait for you my child who is very much alive.”

**LET ME GO**

In an eloquent review of the film, Peter Harcourt points out that the film’s narrational technique, using voice-over on top of present-day spaces of past traumas is a familiar technique in Poirier’s films. We find it in her earlier film
They Called Us “Les Filles du Roy” (1974) and in Mourir à tue-tête. It was famously employed by Alain Resnais in Nuit et brouillard (France, 1955) to speak to historical trauma. “Resnais’ investigation of the Nazi extermination camps,” writes Harcourt, “provides a locus classicus for the exploration of horror by creating images of emptiness while verbally evoking the atrocities that once took place there.” Indeed, what is often remarked upon in Resnais’ film is its discursive distance from the Holocaust, stressing not only our incapacity to go back in time, to change the past, but also to fully understand it. The present-day images of the concentration camp are in colour and give us little access to the past atrocities whose material geographies have been transformed by time. The trauma is that space between the present and the black and white photographs and films of the past. The film is about the trauma of remembrance and frames its investigation of the Holocaust as a reflection upon the limits of cinematic representation.

The representation of bereavement and loss is a central problematic in Tu as criés aesthetic structure as well. In the case of Poirier’s film, the past exists only as memory spoken on the soundtrack. Poirier does not show us photographs of her daughter, there is no image whatsoever of the past—a point to which I shall return. In effect, the stark empty spaces that Poirier constructs and that Jacques Leduc photographs are outside history, yet stuck in time. Neither fully imaginary yet not entirely real, this is a space of mourning.

This sense of being stuck in time that the film conveys from the very first mediated images of the iceberg is perfectly commensurate with Freud’s description of mourning. In “Mourning and Melancholia” he describes “the work which mourning performs” in terms of a forceful resistance to “the reality principle,” a resistance to the very reality of the death of a loved one. Immersed in grief and sadness, the individual in mourning continues to cling to the lost person through the “medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis.” The mourner will turn away from the outside world “in so far as it does not recall” the lost object. While little is actually known about the economics of mourning, Freud attempts a conjecture:

Each single one of the memories and situations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hypercathected, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it. Why this compromise by which the command of reality is carried out piecemeal should be so extraordinarily painful is not at all easy to explain in terms of economics. It is remarkable that this painful unpleasure is taken as a
Mourning is extreme and solitary pain. It is one of the least rational yet most common of emotional experiences. Freud tells us the mourner will simply pass through it; eventually for some unknown reason, reality wins out and the mourner rejoins the world.

_Tu as crié_ can be read as a documentary about the act of mourning. Poirier constructs an emotional trajectory that will bring her back out into the world, a journey that will move towards connecting emotion to cognition. She tells us that she is looking for “sense” not “certitude.” The question she asks is not why her daughter was a drug addict—this would lead to a very different kind of film involving family history. Instead, she asks why being a drug addict condemned her daughter to a life of shame and danger, “a life with few alternatives.”

A figure in a white lab coat is the first body we see in the film. The camera follows him into the morgue, he slides a cadaver out of a cabinet; a white sheet covers it. The inclusion of this body is a surprise. We know that it is not Yanne who was murdered in 1993. It could be anyone’s daughter. It is at this point in the film that the first interview begins. Shot in a straightforward manner in black and white, a father, who similarly lost a daughter to “the war on drugs,” speaks almost directly into the camera of his experiences. The double structure of the film is introduced: on the one hand there is the space of mourning described above, and on the other there are Poirier’s interviews with young women who were heroin addicts and with parents whose children are dead because of their addiction. There is, as Peter Harcourt points out, a balance in Poirier’s film between the general and the particular which never conflates the two. On a formal level this is represented as a movement back and forth between the space of mourning and the space of the world, the reality principle which will eventually win out.

As the film unfolds, we experience what Chion calls a “de-accousmatization” as the _accousmêtre_, Poirier’s voice, is increasingly located in the film. In the second half of the film, we begin to see Poirier on screen as she conducts the interviews. Her voice is given a place, a mortal body, a limit and a connection to others. As noted above, Poirier chooses not to give us an image of her daughter. She refuses the cinematographic qualities of Freud’s “medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis,” and instead presents us with vacant and silent spaces. We have no face, no voice, no trace of this
young woman except through her mother’s recollection. In this way, Poirier records an absence (Yanne’s) and she expresses the unrepresentable (Yanne’s murder) in a manner that is devastating and uncompromising.

André Loiselle’s insistence on the melodramatic aspects of Poirier’s cinema seems particularly apt with regard to this film.\(^{19}\) The oppositions between black and white, presence and absence, life and death, good and bad (“les méchants”) is typical of Poirier’s films and perhaps more so in this mother/daughter story. While she has been criticized for universalizing women’s suffering by stressing gender differences, one must see her oppositions as rhetorical devices aimed at intensifying ethical forces. As Peter Brooks has defined it, the emotional excesses and expressive oppositions that we find in the de-sacralized world of the nineteenth century melodrama are intrinsic to its moral idiom: “Melodrama is indeed, typically, not only a moralistic drama but the drama of morality: it strives to find, to articulate, to demonstrate, to ‘prove’ the existence of a moral universe which, though put into question, masked by villainy and perversions of judgment, does exist and can be made to assert its presence and its categorical forces among men.”\(^{20}\)

Poirier strives not for certitude but to make sense of her daughter’s death. Her starting point for sense-making is not in facts but in sentiment, and it is from sentiment that she will come to a moral judgment. Yanne’s
absence from the film heightens our emotional involvement as well as our sense of profound loss. We are forced to fill in the absent images of the daughter with our own images. This process brings us into the film, augments our sympathetic identification with Poirier and through this sympathy we come to understand her political position.

Similarly, Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* (France, 1985) which is made up of interviews with surviving concentration camp prisoners, guards and passive on-lookers of the Jewish holocaust, refuses to represent the memories described in the interviews, allowing human testimony to stand as memory. Lanzmann's film is structured around witnessing and is concerned with the limits, not of cinema as with *Nuit et brouillard*, but of human testimony and the reality of experience. For this reason, he chooses to interview only those survivors who touched death, who stood at the edge of the abyss, who went as far as one could go into the horror without dying. Thomas Elsaesser writes of the way the film "make[s] one see things which are not on screen and listen to voices speaking from within oneself." As spectators we, like Lanzmann, become witnesses to the testimony of witnessing and as such we become connected to it. The trauma enacted by the film is not the impossibility of knowing what happened during the Holocaust but rather of knowing. Lanzmann has said that the film was made for the dead, and it is indeed a film for the dead because it aims to remember how and why they died.

It has always been Poirier's strength as a filmmaker to create sympathetic and empathetic structures of identification, utilizing formal strategies that entreat the imagination, precisely as Elsaesser describes it, to find "voices speaking from within oneself." Poirier's approach to telling her own story is all the more touching then, because of its pronounced absences. Unlike Lanzmann's work of political archeology, Poirier's film is made for the living. While she does attempt to reconstruct the last evening of her daughter's life, retracing steps and moving through passageways in her film, she seeks some form of reconciliation between past and present, between life and death. The absence of an image of Yanne works to create an empathetic bond between those—Poirier and other parents—who have suffered a devastating loss and the film's spectators.

At this point, I would like to return to the question of the different emotional registers of fiction and non-fiction films. The argument often made is that the division between the two is illusory. *Shoah*, for example, is a film that is full of fiction in its recollections and re-enactments. Likewise, *Tu as crié let me go* contains large segments of imagined moments through
the voice-over. Further, many narrative films are based on or incorporate actual events and real people. To a great degree then, and in the most textually rich films, the distinction is not straightforward. However, as spectators we do distinguish between films that are based on something that happened, and those based on something that did not. Clearly, our emotional response differs in the two instances. I would not go so far as to state that we respond to the non-fiction film as we do to events in real life heard through the news or in everyday conversation. This would be to deny film’s creative capacity to represent through sounds and images the internal dimension of emotional states. This specificity is arguably what enhances our ability to imagine the pain of others, to imagine ourselves in their place.

**SYMPATHETIC UNDERSTANDING**

In all her films, Poirier has used emotion to create a common basis for entry into politics. She creates what the eighteenth century philosopher David Hume called “sympathetic understanding,” which was the basis for the theory of “moral sentiment.” Hume, famous for pairing passion with morality, saw sympathy as occupying a special place in the realm of sentiments: “It is a feeling together” with another. It is a unifying force that binds individuals together in the life-world, allowing us to understand each other’s experiences and to create a common life. Sympathy involves ideas and imagination: “An idea of a sentim ent or passion may by this means be so enlivened as to become the very sentim ent or passion,” thus giving us more information through which to understand others.\(^{23}\) Sympathy allows us to recognize the basic resemblances between people so that “the minds of men are mirrors to one another.”\(^{24}\) It is expressly through sympathy, through our “connexion” to others, that we can come to make informed judgements. According to Hume, sympathy makes a moral sense possible and from this sense arises the need for justice.\(^{25}\)

*Tu as criés’s* great strength is in materializing sympathetic understanding, in showing how it connects people and creates community. We sympathize with Poirier, just as we see her sympathizing with the parents she interviews. Through the interviews we come to understand the war on drugs as an immoral government campaign that punishes the users and protects the suppliers. The only solution, Poirier tells us, is legalization. But what makes Poirier’s argument so compelling is that it is grounded in the painful repercussions of the criminalization of drug-use. It draws its emotional force from her sorrow. We come to understand the impact of criminalization
through the filmmaker’s mourning and through the testimonies of young women who, like Yanne, worked in the sex trades in order to support their addictions and often their boyfriends as well. We sympathize with them. It is in Yanne’s absence, that these women represent her not as a single victim, but as a community that has suffered similar circumstances.

_Tu as crié_ ends with a return to the iceberg. This time Poirier is on the screen, her back to us looking out at the iceberg. She tells us that the image of the iceberg was with her throughout the film; she wonders, was it the memory of her daughter “that conjured it up? Twelve thousand years of ice back into the sea….“ Sublime nature is not devoid of reason but provides a locus for the meeting of emotion and of rationality.26 Poirier is located in time rather than stuck in it, and we know that some form of reconciliation has been found—she will let her daughter go.

Hume had a decisive influence on the English Romantics and in particular on Wordsworth who believed that the expression of emotion in literature could allow for a shared language and a new common culture. In 1810 Wordsworth wrote “Essays on Epitaphs” where he argued that epitaphs were the original form of poetry. This sad writing was able to link a universal experience—grief—with language to create a common ground for sympathetic understanding. Poirier’s documentary is an epitaph along the lines that Wordsworth described almost two hundred years ago:

>[E]xposed to all—to the wise and the most ignorant; it is…perspicuous, and lovingly solicits regard; its story and admonitions are brief, that the thoughtless, the busy and indolent, may not be deterred, nor the impatient tired: the stooping old man cons the engraven record like a second horn-book; —the child is proud that he can read it,—the stranger is introduced through its mediation to the company of a friend: it is concerning all, and for all:… it is open to the day; the sun looks down upon the stone, and the rains of heaven beat against it.27

While Poirier’s film is, in its beautiful starkness, intelligible to all, it does not try to create the immortality that Wordsworth believed to be the ultimate function of all funeral monuments. It does, however, carry with it a certain permanence that is the record of an emotional experience that will no doubt endure. The film secures through the expression of perhaps the most elementary and universal of emotions, a ground for common experiences and with this the possibility for a shared sense of justice.
NOTES


7. The insight that thinking and feeling are not separate activities is something that has always been at the heart of feminist epistemologies and philosophy. It should be remembered that feminists turned to psychoanalysis as a theoretical tool for analyzing and specifying the emotional responses of spectators. Moreover, film spectatorship became an area of investigation expressly because gender difference was recognized as an important determination of emotional behavior both on the screen and in front of it.

8. Plantinga and Smith, 4.

9. The notion that documentary films need to be analyzed in terms of their emotional structures is not new. The relation between documentary film, epistemology and emotion has been the subject of Trinh Minh-ha’s films and writings, which for many years have sought to conceptualize new models of knowledge through documentary. Ron Burnett’s Cultures of Vision seeks to develop a model of spectatorship that relies on the psychoanalytic notion of “projection” to recognize a creative role for the viewer. Burnett analyzes how documentary images and the spectator’s imagination co-mingle to form meaning and identification. Catherine Russell’s study of the relation between autobiography and ethnography in personal films examines presentations of self as epistemological activity. Russell’s work draws out the central place of emotional experience rather than essence in contemporary experimental autobiographical films and videos. (Catherine Russell, Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age Video [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999]).

10. The translation of this text is mine. An English version of the film exists, but at the time of this writing, it was not in distribution.


17. Ibid, 265.
19. Loiselle, 21-43.
22. Claude Lanzmann, talk delivered at York University, Toronto, 1 November 2000. In conversation afterwards, Lanzmann was adamant that the film be understood as a document for the dead and not for the families of the living. This is why, unlike the “Spielberg Project,” he does not supply families of victims with videocassettes of his interviews. The interviews conducted over a decade form an archive (at Yale University), a history written for the dead, to uncover the truth (in the form of material details) of their deaths. In this sense, Shoah is not a film (like Tu as crié) that attempts some form of redemption or reconciliation.
24. Hume, II. II.v.

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