

# CAFÉ EX: THE FILMS OF LOUISE BOURQUE

“All the experimental techniques I use are about finding ways to imbue the materiality of film with a metaphorical quality in direct relation to the film’s content.”

*Louise Bourque*

“Bourque's films are exacting in their construction, but unrelenting in their willingness to argue their case on the basis of mystery and presence, anxious to vibrate before you like tuning forks for the unconscious.”

*Michael Sicinski, Impossible Trips Back Home: The Films of Louise Bourque, Images Festival catalogue, 2009*

“Films about memory are overtly subjective in form and content. Louise Bourque’s achievement is to have made subjective films about memory that connect spectators with their own remembered experiences, at a structural level. She has discovered a universal language in which to represent the processes of remembering: images of the past that can only be seen as experiences of the present.”

*Gerda Johanna Cammaer, Curator, “Changing Times, Time Changes: Canadian Experimental Films & Videos from the 1990s”, Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, Halifax, 2002.*

**Just Words 16mm, color, sound, 10 minutes, Canada, 1991**

“[...] a 10 minute *tour de force* [...]. In *Just Words*, Bourque intercuts footage of her mother and her sisters with a performance by actress Patricia MacGeachy of Samuel Beckett's *Not I*; the result is unnerving (as all Beckett is) yet touching (as some Beckett is not).”

*Jay Scott, The Globe and Mail, Toronto, 1992*

**Fissures 16mm, color, sound, 2.5 minutes, Canada, 1999**

“A film about forgetting and remembering, about past presences and the traces they leave. In making this piece, I literally manipulated and distorted the film plane through experimentation in doing my own contact printing of personal home movie images. The point of contact is continuously shifted so that the film plane appears warped and the images fluctuate, creating a distorted space of fleeting apparitions, like resurfacing memories. The footage was hand-processed and colorized as well as colored by hand through toning before a final print was made at the lab. *Louise Bourque*

**The People In The House 16mm, color, sound, 22 minutes, Canada, 1994**

“The film explores the dynamics of a family in crisis situation and questions the role of religious devotion in the perpetuation of dysfunction by the refuge it provides. The different elements in the film are used in an expressive and stylized way and work poetically together to create an artificial yet convincing claustrophobic universe, a fragile space between memory, fantasy and dream, a place of tension between harmony and chaos. The various scenes of the film unfold as poetic moments in a fractured narrative structure. The voice-over inspired from the Catholic catechism and the other sounds in the film are used in a repetitive way to suggest the notion of obsession and function in counterpoint with the images to give the piece its rhythm. In the process, some of the myths surrounding the traditional nuclear family and the notions of redemption and salvation through religious practice are challenged.” *Louise Bourque*

**Going Back Home 35mm, color, sound, 2 x 30 seconds, Canada, 2000**

“Turmoil of unsheltered childhood: the dwelling as self.” *Louise Bourque*

**Imprint 16mm, color, sound, 14 minutes, Canada, 1997**

“An obsession, a fleeting image, a longing: the concept of the home as a romanticized, idealized place of intimacy, inhabiting the most private sphere, the territory of memory, dream and fantasy. Using as source imagery personal home-movie footage of a family house reproduced multiple times, the process involves a formal and lyrical exploration in which the film image of the home is literally and symbolically treated as a material, a surface, a membrane that is manipulated directly in an attempt at reclaiming and demystifying, at finding and revealing, at capturing and letting go. The original home-movie images are affected, without the use of optical effects, through a variety of hand manipulations and chemical processes such as toning, tinting, ripping, perforating, bleaching, scratching, collaging, deterioration and lifting of the emulsion, as well as through manipulations in the contact printing and developing process. The music at the end is “A Dream”, sung by Enrico Caruso and is from a 78 recorded in 1903.” *Louise Bourque*

**Self Portrait Post Mortem 35mm, color, sound, 2.5 minutes, Canada, 2002**

“An unearthed time capsule consisting of footage of my youthful self – an “exquisite corpse” with nature as collaborator. I buried random out-takes from her first three films (all staged productions dealing with my family) in the backyard of my ancestral home (adjoining the grounds of a former

cemetery) with the ambivalent intentions of both safe-keeping and unloading them (I was relocating). Upon examining the footage five years later I found that the material contained images of myself captured during the making of my first film. That discovery seemed handed over like a gift and prompted the making of this film, a metaphysical pas-de-deux in which decay undermines the image and in the process engenders a transmutation." *Louise Bourque*

**Jours en fleurs 35mm, color, sound, 4.5 minutes, Canada, 2003**

"*Jours en fleurs* is a reclamation of flower-power in which images of trees in springtime bloom are subjected to the floriferous ravages of menarcheal substance in a gestation of decay. The title is based on an expression from my coming of age in Acadian French Canada where girls would refer to having their menstrual periods as "être dans ses fleurs". As a result of incubation in menstrual blood for several months, the original images inscribed on the emulsion undergo violent alterations. The shedding of the unfertilized womb depredates the fertilized blossoms and substitutes its own dark beauty." *Louise Bourque*

**a little prayer (H-E-L-P) 35mm, color, sound, 8 minutes, Canada, 2011**

"The images of a chained Houdini attempting to free himself; the stuttering stop-and-start (interruption-repetition) of his actions; the high-contrast of the images; the stroboscopic effect created by the open-close rhythm of the shutter; the gashes in the emulsion from the hand-processing — all combined with the multi-layered soundtrack, evoke the violence of a tortured soul in search of escape." *Louise Bourque*

**HELP 35mm hand-processed camera original, b/w, silent, 1 minute, Canada, 2009**

"*HELP* is comprised of the original 35mm footage generated and used as the source material for a *little prayer (H-E-L-P)*, and is meant to be exclusively presented as such (splices and all) as a companion piece to that work when I am present at screenings." *Louise Bourque*

**Remains video, color, sound, 5 minutes, Canada, 2011**

"The mother figure revisited—a recurring theme in my work. A celluloid deterioration that addresses the ephemeral quality of the captured moment (the present) while revealing the insistent power of human presence in even the most deteriorated of states. The image of the mother is like a ghost that we won't let go. A lament for the inevitable loss of legibility." *Louise Bourque*

**The Visitation video, color, sound, 3 minutes, Canada, 2011**

"A statue of the Madonna from a shrine in the house where I grew up takes on an uncanny appearance as if in response to an incantation (an oft-recited prayer from my childhood)." *Louise Bourque*

**L'éclat du mal/The Bleeding Heart of It 35 mm, color, sound, 8 minutes, Canada, 2005**

“The house that bursts; the scene of the crime; the nucleus. A universe collapses on itself: all hell breaks loose. In making the film I proceeded to transform original 8mm home movie footage of the house where I grew up through various kinds of manipulations executed with low-tech means and hybrid formats: blowing up the regular 8mm footage to 16mm on an optical printer, using various chemical and organic processes to directly alter the film emulsion, doing my own contact printing of the altered footage, re-shooting the film off a 16mm editing machine monitor on video, editing on the computer, and retransferring the edited piece back to film on 35mm for presentation.”

*Louise Bourque*

“L'éclat du mal / The Bleeding Heart of It by Louise Bourque accesses a psychic terrain from her own childhood yet the film is much more than simply personal. Her voice-over tells us, 'In my dream there's a war going on. It's Christmas time. I'm running and I'm carrying myself as a child. It's dark in the tunnel and I'm heading towards the light, the daylight.' Her film draws upon the archives of her unconscious, images that are both personal and archetypal. Images of home abound, unspoken catastrophes, pain and loss. There is something deeply disturbing and haunting in Bourque's film. She is working at the level of those fears that lay buried in that problematic and yet compelling idea of a collective unconscious, a space that only art can truly mediate.”

*Phil Hoffman, “Extrapolations of the Real”, Fringe Film at the Drive-In, Fabulous Festival of Fringe Film, Hanover, Ontario, August 2006.*