

## *Chronicle of a Summer* (1960) as Autocritique (1959): A Transition in the French Left

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A longhaired woman nervously bites her lips, smokes and hesitates in painfully long pauses. When she does talk, it is about her sense of alienation. This image of confession sums up cinema vérité's unique modernity, its split between document and drama. Magnified through the close proximity of the camera, this long take bespeaks an unflinching attention halfway between trial and compassionate hearing.

*Chronicle of a Summer* (Edgar Morin, Jean Rouch, 1960) is, in fact, charged with a project of self-revision as no other film. The film was to be “an experiment lived by its authors and its actors, a sort of psychodrama carried out collectively among authors and actors” (Morin, “Chronicle” 6). At the end of our research” states Edgar Morin in his proposal for the film, “we will gather our characters and . . . will show them what has been filmed so far, and in doing so attempt the ultimate . . . explication. Did each of them learn something about him/herself? . . . Did our faces remain masks?” (“Chronicle” 6). Morin and Rouch's experiment with the consciousness-awakening potential of the medium, the projection of the scene and the debate among the participants, reveals instead a profound collective embarrassment. The probing camera is blamed for only getting the “tiniest spark of truth when the subject is on the verge of a nervous breakdown,” and the vérité method is reproached for eliciting “scenes that are either artificial or indecent.” Confirming that this film approach invites questions of performance and authenticity, Jean-Pierre provocatively suggests that Marceline's dramatic dialogue works only *because* she was acting.

The film's excessive concern with authenticity is my concern here. *Chronicle of a Summer* is often referred as a special moment in the technical development of light cameras and sync sound (Rouch, “Chronicle” 34; Eaton “Chronicle” 14–15), and the consequent ease in registering speech. Inspired by the improvised, non-scripted conversations in *Come Back Africa* (Lionel Rogosin 1959), Morin was mostly interested in “the means of dialogue, the word that this new talking cinema would bring” (“Entretien” 133). From the start, his project aimed at providing a visual evidence of emerging speech. “Until then the documentary was not truly a talkie: it was vaguely sonorous, . . . but it had never been the expression of a speech, of an individual's thought” (133). This attentiveness to the moment in which thought becomes expression leads the filmmakers to interesting editing choices. Rather than cut following the relaying of new information, the filmmakers respect a scene's internal integrity by preserving profilmic pauses and expressive stutters. The focus on empty time lends the film a puzzling mixture of intensity—in its search for truth—and vagueness—in the questions it asks and answers it gives. Hence, despite, or because of the extensive apparatus mobilized to access truth—from the Nagra

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synched to a person's speech to the belief in the ultimate value of a revealing, screening mirror—the film is beset by an intriguing reticence, generating as it speaks, the need for more statements.

The Algerian war is the main, but not the sole referent for the vagueness. The film's stated purpose was to broach economic, moral and psychological problems at the end of the war. The broad question posed to Parisians—"How do you live?" ("Not only one's way of life, housing, work, leisure, but the attitude people have toward themselves and toward others," (Morin, "Chronicle" 6) would serve as the guiding scenario for the film. The authors believed that "*Summer 1960*" could be "a chronicle of a capital moment in history" given the recent events in Congo as well as the Melun peace conversations (Rouch, "Chronicle" 10).

The discrepancy between the film's original rushes and its final cut is extensively documented in interviews and in Morin's "Chronicle of a Film," to which Rouch wrote the footnotes. Technical and political reasons are brought up to justify the cuts and indeed constraints of censorship as well as filmmaking length are plausible alibis for such significant omissions. Instead of holding the filmmakers up to the claim to be "the only ones in filmmaking to question the war in Algeria and to thus attack the central political problem of the hour" (28), I want to consider the film's very vagueness. The hesitancy that pervades the film is not a disingenuous evasion of politics on the filmmakers' part but an indicator of the film's real find: In its reticence to spell out its political allegiances, and in its posited interest in the private sphere of everyday life, the film enacts a transition from party politics to an alternate micro-politics. I further suggest that this move is motivated by Morin's parallel trajectory as a left thinker and critic.

In his text "Post-Chronique" included in "Chronicle of a Film," Morin mentions that the film is "infra-political" leaving a whole zone of issues unexplored. They did not want, "for example, to present the worker problem at the level of political or union affiliations or of salary claims, because conditions of industrial work should be questioned at a deeper more radical level." These statements as well as the film's apparent contradictions—its obsession with truth on a private level and vagueness about the participants' involvement with Algeria—can only be understood if we take it as evidence of a problematic moment in the Left's intellectual engagement.

Most critical considerations of the film replay Morin and Rouch's excitement with the technical and methodological experimentation surrounding the film. But the question of why the *vérité* mode is enlisted at this particular historical conjuncture is often overlooked. Exactly what depends on such overt display (the screening and its filming for us) of an ultimate confession and self-analysis? What does this extreme concern with authenticity tell us about France in 1960? Granting incontestable verbal signatures, visual guarantees that speech coincides and originates from the person one sees, the film seems to have a special claim to the revelation of truth. Each of its speech acts is charged with testimonial value. Nevertheless "testimony is called for when the facts upon which justice must pronounce its verdict are not clear," and as Shoshana Felman points out, "the model of the trial dramatizes in this way a contained and culturally channeled crisis of truth" (Felman and Laub 6). The film's deployment of sync sound combined with its difficulty to say it all, invites us to read it as a symptom of a crisis in the very production of truth in late fifties France. What kind of truth matters at this point is also in question.

This essay maps the cultural and political coordinates of this peculiar conjunction of self-scrutiny and judgement in *Chronicle of a Summer*. Although the film is co-authored by Morin and Rouch I dislocate my main focus from the filmmaker to the sociologist for I can best explore the film's share in the left intellectual discourse by seeing this primarily as a Morin's experiment. It was Morin who invited Rouch to collaborate in the

film, and their respective statements define him as the enunciator of the film's agenda: its interest in psychodrama and in using cinema as a medium for confession. The added bonus of this use of cinema as a social mirror would be the formation of a new sense of brotherhood, as one social actor recognizes himself in another.

### Sync Sound and *Autocritique* (1959)

The film was inspired by ethnographic documentaries "on Westerners" (Karel Reisz's *We are the Lambeth Boys* (1959) and *Come Back Africa* screened at the First Ethnographic Film Festival in 1959 in Florence where both Morin and Jean Rouch were both jurors. (Morin, "Entretien"133) The synopsis presented to the film's producer, the *Centre National de la Cinématographie* suggests a strong intellectual reorientation (Morin, "Chronicle" 6). And in the essay "For a New Cinema Vérité" Morin states their desire "to make a film, not in Africa this time but in France" ("Chronicle" 4). There is a clear move to probe deeper into urban realities closer to home. If vérité brings out the ethnographic film's "honesty" revealing our common humanity it can equally turn out "films about workers, the petty bourgeois, the petty bureaucrats . . . the men and women of our enormous cities." ("Chronicle" 5) Morin adds rhetorically: "Must these people remain more foreign to us than Nanook the Esquimo, the fisherman of Aran, or the Bushman hunter?" (5).

Morin seems to enunciate here the principles of a change in ethnographic object he perceived as aligned to Jean Rouch's experiments. Since the mid fifties Rouch had started to layer his images with his own commentaries as well as that of his protagonists so as to undo the pseudo-objectivity of former ethnographies (Eaton 45, 48–49). He openly shares his subjects' spotlight, and he is interested in various forms of subjective intervention, so it comes as no surprise to find him coupled with Morin to make the self reflexive *Chronicle*. His main interest is on the visible and audible clash of cultures. Scenes such as the one in which Marceline shows her concentration camp number to Landry while the camera watches intently for his reactions is an example of Rouch's rhetorical approach.

Morin's attraction to psychodrama has additional motivations besides reversing the focus from colonized to colonizer. It is as a sociologist, but also as a thinker in the forefront of the left's self-revision, that we can understand Morin's desire to make a film in which confession and critical reflection are so intertwined. *Chronicle's* methodology and content are part of a larger trend in French thought, one that Morin is fully qualified for. The fifties are a moment of intense development of the social sciences in France. The massive urban changes and modernization that took place in this period in France generate a wave of sociological inquiries that are increasingly translated into popular forms of empirical research. Endless magazine questionnaires and statistics (of the kind present in Godard's *Masculine Feminine* and *Two of Three things I Know about her*) appeared to offer a comprehensive and direct way of grasping current developments in contemporary society (Ross 81).

The film's empiricism shows up in the inordinate attention given to selected and random interviews as well as collective discussions. Three main documentary strategies are employed. The first involves a record of everyday actions. The scene of Angelo's day starts with him being awakened with stark (filming) lights as his mother brings him a cup of coffee and a toast. The camera follows him till he goes into the factory. After a few shots of their work and break, the camera picks him up at the exit of the factory and follows him in the street, on the bus, at home . . . until nightfall. The suburban streets change from urban to rustic and we see where Angelo lives, and how he spends his time doing judo, playing guitar, and reading (a life of Danton). Angelo's performance stands

out in the film for he is the only worker introduced as such in a group consisting mostly of intellectuals (though not the only worker to speak in the film). Meant to illustrate the conditions of the daily life of a working man, this sequence, the longest without dialogue, is stranded amidst the film's major stake in enacting its truth through long interviews. Placing the silent reenactment of a "worker's quotidian" within an overall picture where the spoken has absolute priority, the filmmakers effectively, if not intentionally, tokenize the proletariat.

The second form of retracing an event is exemplified by Marceline's verbal reenactment. A long travelling shot follows her as she moves away from the camera and "privately" acts out, i.e. voices, her childhood feelings to the Nagra. Her lone silhouette disappearing into the distance coupled with her imaginary dialogue with her loved ones as she left in a deportation train with her father and returned without him, create an unusual emotional intensity. The monologue is immediately associated with the holocaust and the charged voice over aesthetics that goes with emptied out spaces and images of parting (an influence no doubt of Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog*, 1955). As Marceline acts out her memories far from the camera but for the Nagra the film seems to achieve a perfect equilibrium in cinema vérité's defining task—to provoke the emergence of privacy without disturbing a potential intimacy.

The third modality of revelation—that of on camera confession—epitomizes the film's stated program of self-analysis. Marilou's scene combines evasiveness and relentless probing exemplifying the film's general tactics. Long takes lingering on elliptical answers, interspersed with long tremulous pauses, register a difficulty of articulation. When first addressed by Morin, Marilou says confirming the film's confessional set up, "Yes, my father . . .". Morin briefly describes who she is, an Italian bourgeois of 27 years who had come to Paris three years ago (in 1957). Marilou explains that it did her good to feel uncomfortable in Paris, since at the time she was overwhelmed by a bad conscience. Now, she says, "I'm sick of being cold in the winter, of being in the subway in the rush hour. I don't communicate at all with others . . .". Gradually she shows herself to be more and more tortured as she admits she now feels her behavior is self-destructive. Her sense of isolation and solipsism is critical. She reduces everything to herself: "I have not even the right to kill myself, you know it would be false . . . absolutely false . . .". A long, painful close up of Marilou who is silent, and on the verge of tears, follows. Marilou's stated difficulty of communication is replicated by her delivery, comments interrupted by long unnerving silences. At this point, the camera assumes the insistent questioning function that Morin himself avoids by remaining silent. Rouch describes the relation between filming and subject matter invoking "proximity" and "simultaneity": "She was talking so nervously that I had to react. So I took those big close ups to try to get inside her" (Rouch, "The Politics" 19).

In cinema vérité, each and every word or hesitation is telling. Its hermeneutics are aligned to that of psychoanalysis implying a symptomatic reading of reality. Part of the same epistemic attention to the minor as trustee of truth, pauses and gaps verify the *v?rit?* sought and created by *Chronicle of a Summer*. The stakes of an essentialist belief in truth are weighed more forcefully where discourse is in suspense. If truth becomes coterminous with the filming moment, it is because sync sound grants an absolute value to emerging speech regardless of what is said. Ellipses in the profilmic become, in fact, a more authentic form of truth. Her speech breakdowns become the utmost sign of authenticity, the reverse in fact of the effects of Marceline's dramatic monologue.

In its probing manner, the film is shaped both as confessional and trial. Structurally it implicates every speaker. The spelling out of faults remains however conspicuously absent. There are no explicit or implicit indictments like the collaborationist sentiment

denounced in Marcel Ophuls's *The Sorrow and the Pity* (1971) or even the errors of judgement apparent in simpler morality tales such as Antonioni's *Attempted Suicide* or Zavattini and Maselli's *Love of a Mother (Love in the City)*, 1953). If, as Peter Brooks suggests, "confessions no doubt speak of guilt, but don't necessarily speak the guilt" (55) the film's extreme focus on its subjects' speech acts, deserves double attention, since it seems oversignified in relation to the interviews' actual content. Moreover, if so much attention is devoted to a small number of individual voices, to their enunciation, rather than to what they say, their identity becomes more of a question for it is their opinions that eventually shape Morin's vision of a "cinema of brotherhood" (Morin, "Chronicle" 5).

The fact is that *Chronicle*, conceived by Morin as "an experiment in cinematic interrogation," ("Chronicle" 6) takes the notion of questioning oneself almost *à la lettre*. For the name "cinema of brotherhood" (in French *fraternité*) becomes ironically incestuous once your cast of characters is mainly composed of friends. *Chronicle* cheats on the basic issue of the film's sample population ("The Politics" 17–18). Instead of the general survey of Parisian mood in 1960 conducted with "individuals who are quite different from each other" the film interviews Morin or Rouch's friends. Marceline, Jacques Mothet, Marilou, Jacques Gabillon and his wife Simone, and Jean Pierre, Marceline's boyfriend were Morin's contacts. (*Chronicle*, 7–8) Landry and Nadine had appeared in Rouch's *La Pyramide Humaine* (1959). The rest of the interviewees are friends of friends: Régis Debray, a friend of Jean-Pierre, Angelo, and a worker at Renault introduced by Jacques.

The credits list the participants along loose categories such as workers (Jacques, Jean); students (Régis, Celine, Jean Marc, Nadine Landry Raymond); employees (Jacques, Simone), Artists (Henri, Maddie, Catherine) and a cover girl (Sophie). The credits leave Marceline, Marilou, Angelo and Jean Pierre unmarked. The cast comes close to a ciphered representation of aspects of Edgar Morin's life and intellectual trajectory. Several of the characters in *Chronicle* were part of the anti-Algerian war movement and of various left groups; Marilou mentions she has met Morin during her leftist phase, in a debate on Stalinism; Jacques Mothet, a P2 at Renault is affiliated with *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, (Socialism or Barbarism) a dissident group from the Communist party; Marceline was deported to a Nazi concentration camp as a child and has now introduced Jean Pierre to a disillusioned group of leftist intellectuals; Angelo is involved in the Renault unions. Jacques Gabillon is a long time employee of the SNCF, the national railroad, and someone who Morin knew when he was the editor of the *Patriot Résistant*, the journal of the Federation of Résistant and Patriotic Deportees and Internees. Régis Debray, Jean Pierre are students participating in anti-Algerian War movements.

One of Morin's main claims for the singularity of the film was that it had been the first to tackle the Algerian War. Still, with the exception of one central discussion, treated as a general French problem, the protagonists make no mention of taking part in any dissident movement. There is in fact an extreme complicity between actors and filmmakers in terms of what is implicitly voiced on the one hand and clearly avoided on the other. Profilmic pauses, or extremely vague commentaries epitomize the ways in which *vérité's* extreme valorization of speech serves to evade authorial voice. In addition to the editing out of the participants' activism in the Algerian cause, the films' allegiances are also masked for none of the interviewees is formally linked to any of the others as fellow activist for Left causes. Without identifying its characters, the film flirts with key issues for the French political consciousness. It becomes thus imperative to examine the thrust of a film that grafts a surface of political anonymity onto its politically engaged group of characters.

In an important critique of the film, sociologist Lucien Goldmann notes the film's failure to adequately balance levels of abstraction and concreteness, Goldman measures

the stakes of realist representation against a traditional social sciences approach (65). Particularities and generalities are present but at the wrong moments and in inappropriate proportions. And the interviews, which advance necessary details for any sociological inquiry, are too sparse and confined to a limited sample of the population. Although the attempt to remedy these difficulties “by replacing the characters of the habitual sociological inquiry chosen at random, with people they knew more or less,” is recognized, Goldmann notes that this foreknowledge of the characters’ “global coordinates” by interviewers is not shared with the spectators (65–66). Indeed, in a scene that did not make the final cut, Marilou tells how exhilarated she was when she came to Paris, how she learned French in political surroundings, how she met Morin in a debate about Poland and Stalinism. Missing the exchange where she recounts her prior engagement with Italian and French left politics, the spectator cannot fathom the nature of her relation to Morin, even though hints of a prior history between them abound. Actually it is the excess of facts known to interviewers but unknown to audience that lends an abstraction to the film as a whole.

That the group was made of acquaintances is significant. It ensured that the film would be a more focused inquest and consequently elicit a more predictable response than the general “How do you live” directed to anonymous individuals promised in the film’s synopsis. It also creates a deeper complicity between interviewer and interviewee, an interesting inflection in a film that purportedly aimed at being a “confessional but without a confessor” (Morin, “Chronicle” 7). In view of the *Chronicle*’s particular cast of characters the question of what it means to critically revisit one’s own steps—the self-analysis implicit in the film’s proposed final screening and discussion, becomes especially relevant. Even more to the point, the film’s date, 1960, a moment of intense fragility in intellectuals’ certainties as to how to be politically engaged, makes this self-investigation timely. What comes definitely across, in the film’s general evasiveness, is Morin’s struggle “to interpret [his] own past as part of history” (Poster, 215). It is *his* share in the confessional that informs *Chronicle*’s hesitant staging of truth. Taking in account the political malaise of French intellectuals during the Algerian War, and, before that, with the disclosure of Stalin’s purges, one finds in *Chronicle of a Summer* a natural segue to the confessional tone of Morin’s book *Autocritique* published in 1958. There he recounts his engagement in, and progressive disenchantment with, the Communist Party (from 1943 to 1951).

For the French left intelligentsia the mid-to-late fifties is a time of heated debate about the future of Marxism, or the viability of the communist party. The revelations of Stalinist atrocities, from concentration camps to show trials (in Bulgaria in 1947, in Hungary from 1947–49 in Czechoslovakia from 1950–52 and in Romania up to 1954) reached such a critical mass in 1956, with the invasion of Hungary, that it demanded some response on the part of left intellectuals. During and especially after WWII communism becomes the essential reference point for committed intellectuals, whether they were members of the communist party or not. Although the Moscow trials of the mid-thirties were common knowledge given the urgency of the fight against fascism in which Stalin was an ally they could comfortably be ignored during the war itself. Once the war was over, the Cold war replaced the fight with fascism as the main excuse for the French Communist Party’s justification of Stalinism (Judt, *Past Imperfect* 101–156). Morin asks guiltily in his *Autocritique* how he could “leave the party in the middle of the Cold War . . . wasn’t it like leaving the ship threatened by the atomic bomb, like a rat! We do not leave the party when it is persecuted. But precisely” he adds pensively “. . . I wanted to quit because it [the party] was persecutor” (156). Morin was expelled from the communist party in 1951 for his lack of militancy and his contention with the party’s Marxist vulgate. The

expulsion was prompted by his essay for the journal *L'Observateur* considered to be an organ of the Secret Intelligence (*Autocritique* 161–172). The procedures of exclusion from the French Communist Party partially echoed those of the Stalinist purges. Even more interestingly, the forced confessions of communists tried in the Soviet block were matched by spontaneous revelations on the part of French intellectuals. As Mark Poster notes “with the mass exodus of intellectuals from the CP in the 1950’s, confession became a new genre in the pilgrim’s progress from Stalinist mystification to intellectual liberation” (215). A number of such “self studies” were written later in order to analyze and exculpate the intellectuals’ partisan statements made at the time of the Stalinist atrocities. Among these Judt cites Julien Benda’s *Les Cahiers d’un clerc, 1936–1949* (1950); Jean Cassou, *La Memoire courte* (1953) and Vercors (*For the Time Being*, 1960 [Paris, 1957, *Pour Prendre congé*]) (*Past Imperfect* 332–33). Morin’s relatively early self-criticism in *Autocritique* is one of the most trenchant of such self-studies and his attempts to “empty” himself, to “cleanse” himself, to render himself “transparent, so that he may see clearly . . .” are pursued under a lively prose that returns again and again to the issue of guilt:

“Once I understood that something in me always found itself guilty (inside the communist party, all the executions that I was the accomplice of, outside the party, all the crimes of the capitalist society), the problem was not to avoid this culpability, but . . . to say what corresponded to my feeling, to all my truth . . . I decided to practice the “self-ethic” . . . to be nothing besides a vouchsayer of my own words, but decided to always say my truth, . . . as much as possible in its totality.” (180)

A similar wish for total truth guides *Chronicle of a Summer*. While the content of the book *Autocritique* is quite distinct from that of *Chronicle*’s, the fact that the works were created so close together as well as their similar emphasis on solipsistic self-analysis are deeply revealing. The film expands, through a selected company, in this case Morin and Rouch’s friends, a work of self-analysis with film as the very instrument for self-evaluation and improvement.

Morin’s critical writing and editing in the period also matches *Chronicle* in its clear attempt to enunciate an “infra-political” area of study. After his exclusion from the communist Party Morin was part of a group clustered around the journal *Arguments* that he directed from 1957 to 1963. This group “strove enthusiastically to construct a decontaminated Marxist politics capable of dealing directly with contemporary moral issues” (Judt, *Marxism and the French Left* 189). In that respect the Algerian War’s relevance, as a signifier of political commitment cannot be underestimated. As the left gets disillusioned with the Communist party, it dislocates its “matrix of interpretation and intervention from the pair proletariat/bourgeoisie to the binomy Third World/Imperialism” (Sirinelli, 19). Moreover, the Algerian War raised clear-cut ethical issues concerning the French army’s violent tactics of torture thus offering a welcome platform for intellectuals who had stifled their impulse to engage in ethical critique after years of rationalizing Stalinist terror. Sartre’s statement that “we may be indignant or horrified at the existence of the camps . . . but why should they embarrass us?” is but one example of an absurd denial of obvious facts. In 1952, Claude Bourdet expressly states his intention to give the crusade against France’s colonial wars priority over any investigation into Soviet crimes (Judt, *Past Imperfect* 115). The Algerian War becomes the catalyst of a new leftist engagement. Its progress as an issue in the French intellectual consciousness can be mapped in the various manifestos (the 121 manifesto demanding French soldiers’

defection in March 1960) (Rieffel, 191–217) as well as in the more and more frequent mention of the “French crisis” in the journal *Arguments*.

Another important sign (and many others deserve study) that the film’s inquiry into everyday life is in fact a form of leftist self-critique is the presence in the film of Jacques Mothet. This is the character that brings Angelo aboard and Morin describes him as “the only one since Navel to describe what goes on in a factory in an illuminating way.” Mothet is invited to participate in the film, but his links to *Socialism or Barbarism* are not mentioned in the film. This oblique affiliation that goes unmentioned is significant given the important role the group had in a revision of the French left. *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (*Socialism or Barbarism*, the journal founded in 1949 by Cornelius Castoriadis and Claude Lefort) was, along with *Arguments*, the main voice of dissidence within the French Left. Although Morin was not a member of the group itself by 1968 he had strong affinities with Lefort and Castoriadis, jointly publishing essays that reflected on the events of May in *Mai 1968: La Brèche* (Morin, Lefort and Coudray). Even earlier than Morin, Castoriadis had perceived and denounced the petrification of social relations under Stalinist dictatorship. To the left of the Trotskyist Fourth International, the group and the journal were engaged in an intransigent critique of Stalinism that eventually led to a theoretical reevaluation of Marxism. Moreover, the group’s political engagement went beyond their theoretical writing as attested by Jean-François Lyotard, who, prefacing the republication of his political essays on the Algerian Question, reaffirms his debt to the group’s continual critical spirit: “it was my lot, as it was of many others . . . to lend practical ‘support’ to the militants of the FLN [National Liberation Front] in France at the very same time that I was making theoretical criticisms of the organization in the journal. It was just for the Algerians to enforce the proclamation of their name upon the world; it was indispensable to criticize the class nature of the independent society that their struggle was preparing to bring about” (Lyotard 166–67). The group’s radical attack on the notion of power through delegation remains its principal legacy.

Even more illuminating than the *Socialism or Barbarism* agenda is Morin’s own editorship of *Arguments*, which also dealt with cultural questions bypassed by the Communist Party. In an essay on “*La question micro-sociale*” Morin and Georges Lapassade make reference to the field of research and action called psycho-sociology. What seems to attract Morin and Lapassade to J.L. Moreno’s sociometric revolution (Moreno was the main theoretician and practitioner of psychodrama) or to Kurt Lewin’s studies on group dynamics was the possibility of a form of “clandestine socialism.” (*Arguments* 1956–62, 25–6). What interests Morin in such formulations of experimental psychology is the notion of an informal group which can, because of its flexibility, escape the system’s bureaucracy, be it one of the left or right.

In *Chronicle of a Summer* the issue of political representation, of who speaks for whom, a question central to left intellectuals in their relations to the communist Party but also to the workers, is not explicitly addressed. And yet, the film’s project of self-analysis is fully infused with a similar effort to dissolve authority and authorial control. The film’s excessive reliance on the interview mode, which so clearly enacts the opening up of oneself to another’s opinions, becomes an important strategy in this regard. The technical development of sync sound is, along with the interview instrumental in this distribution of authority.

### **Interview and Transference: The Generation Passage**

One of the most striking features of *Chronicle*’s reflexive project is the lack of interviews with either Jean Rouch or Edgar Morin. Who Morin or Rouch are, how they live their

lives, are obvious questions for a project which calls itself reflexive. The film focuses instead on a younger generation. Although we listen to the statements by men of Morin and Rouch's generation, the bulk of the interviews are conducted with a group of people in their twenties. In fact when Rouch addresses a group at the table he places the burden of thinking through the Algerian question onto them, the generation which is directly threatened by conscription. Jean Pierre reacts by saying that he has an idealized vision of the youth.

Earlier on, Jean Pierre separates himself from Morin directly by confronting the issue of Left generations: "I've seen those of your [Morin] generation . . . I've seen what their political involvement produced . . . their powerlessness. . . . I've seen too many people like that . . . reduced to the point of tears by all that, to the point of not knowing what to do any more. You are almost all like that." Marceline excuses herself for having introduced Jean Pierre to "all these people who were brought to tears as a result of their political experiences . . .". In his twenties, Jean Pierre inherits an already discredited left. That Rouch and Morin may be actually learning from their interviewees is also a possibility. In fact Morin has declared that the film taught him an increased "faith in adolescent virtues:<sup>1</sup> denial, struggle and seeking. Marceline, Marilou Jean Pierre and Angelo have" he claims "inspired [him] to resist the bourgeois life" (Morin "Chronicle" 28).

*Chronicle's* dependence on interviews for producing truth can be likened to the emphasis on the process of initiation in ethnography. In historicizing Marcel Griaule's practices (Rouch's main ethnography master), James Clifford describes how the moment of revelation enables the fiction of an encounter where the ethnographer plays the role of an initiate. It is only the progressive experience of being instructed by qualified members of the community that empowers the ethnographer to speak on behalf of the community's truth or reality. An intricate choreography is necessary to carefully tune the ethnographer's participation to the authority of another (Clifford 83–4). The image of a shared intimacy in the conducted interviews is borrowed from an ethnographic paradigm of initiation, and in a different way from the psychoanalytic model of transference. As Clifford also makes clear this "view of the emergence of truth may be contrasted with a conception of ethnography as a dialogical enterprise in which both researchers and natives are active creators, or to stretch a term, authors of cultural representations." And he concludes by defining the stakes here: "Dialogical paradigms tend to disperse ethnographic authority while narratives of initiation confirm the researcher's special competence" (84).

Cinema vérité's relation to voice and authority hinges on its attempt to vest its search for truth (modeled on initiation) in dialogical intervention. Who speaks the film is what matters in *Chronicle* as had been made so flagrantly clear in Rouch's earlier ethnographic films. Much in the style of liberal ethnographers such as Griaule, Rouch had, in his earlier films, adopted irony as one of the solutions for the uncomfortable position of being an outsider who speaks about another's culture. Rouch's early work, filmed in Africa faced the crucial question underlying ethnographic practices: the issue of translation, in its broad as well as restricted sense. Few Europeans could understand the African dialects that comprised Rouch's ethnographic stories and depending on the target audience (Africans or Europeans) to let one speak in his own voice (language) meant alienating the rest of a potential audience (Eaton 49; Rouch *The Camera and Man* 58–59).

Rouch in *The Camera and Man* (58–59) acknowledges the complex issue of informing about, and mediating between different cultures. Rouch's voice over was used as a counterpoint to images offsetting the sense of illustrated background characteristic of 30's documentary. His commentary (at times in heavily accented English) asserted the need to be understood by non-French audience and also defined his role as observer.

In *Moi un Noir* (*I a Black Man*, 1958), and later in *Jaguar* (1967), Rouch has the participants narrate their own actions on screen, their accents designating the distance between a colonized and a colonizer's French. In *I a Black Man*, Oumarou Ganda's voice over allows Rouch to deflect his authorial voice, and thus truly create a reverse ethnography. (Eaton, "Chronicle," 8; Ganda 9). This approach generates a gap and analytical perspective much harder to get with synch sound.

One could say *Chronicle* is excessively earnest: its use of synch sound disallows irony and makes especially apparent the ethical quandary which always mars the politics of cinema vérité—the impossibility of speaking through another's mouth. *Chronicle's* overreliance on the spoken word designs a rite of transference. As in initiatory ethnography, what is at stake, as much as the content of the revelation, is the surrender of authorship from the native to the researcher (or interviewee to interviewer). Morin describes one of the film's scenes emphasizing precisely this point: "when they allow themselves to be caught up in the questions, they descend progressively and naturally into themselves. It is difficult to analyze what goes on. It is . . . the possibility of a confessional but without a confessor . . ." ("Chronicle" 7).

Sync sound allows *Chronicle* to stage a transitional politics. Even as we witness painfully cryptic revelations, it still matters that we witness this difficulty, which lies precisely in the filmmakers' refusal to talk over the tentative voice of the interviewees. Most significantly, while the figure of the listener grows in its validating function, the film performs a related shift in subject matter moving continually from grand political issues—the holocaust, Algeria, worker's conditions—towards an interest in recording the thought and way of life of a younger generation. The interview with Henri and Maddie, for instance, in which they mention their disregard for money, and how rich they feel surrounded by their library or record collection, is exemplary of this descriptive focus on work and leisure. The film had been seriously criticized for its superficial representation of major issues—the deportation of Jews in France, the Holocaust, and the Algerian War (Dadoun 10). And indeed the film's split between a light approach to the summer and personal experience—halfway into the film the characters go to St. Tropez—and grand issues hovering at the edge is marked. The unresolved differences in Morin and Rouch's approaches to the film, with Morin standing for the heavy hints and silences and Rouch for the tourist-as critic perspective, explain these variations in tone.

The film's gaps, possibly justified by the cuts needed to shape 25 hours of footage into the producer's requested 90 minutes, are an obvious compromise between filmmakers and producer. Self-censorship is also apparent and the filmmakers admitted they had to cut an entire sequence in which young students in an age to be conscripted (Jean Pierre, Rophé, the sound man and Régis Debray) air their views on the Algerian situation (Morin, "Chronicle" 25). In her book on the representation of history in postwar France, Lynn Higgins relates that "during 1960 and 1961 the Algerian conflict reached a turning point and an antiwar movement of decisive proportions developed in France" leading the government to actively banish information about antiwar sentiment and activities (98). This accounts for the film's skirting of explicit references to the Algerian question.

These elided mentions to antiwar sentiment are only the most patent erasures. A number of unsettled issues take shape in the film's vérité project. The wavering between general and particular exchanges noticed by Goldmann corresponds to the film's very real indecisiveness whether to paint a broad picture of the social sphere, or to privilege instead the everyday representation of personal identities. On the other hand the vagueness of the film could also be ascribed to the vérité's method dependence on the participant's speech for the articulation of ideas. The abstraction of the film, criticized by Goldmann and Dadoun, is finally the key to the vérité this film is after. The complicitous tone

of the interviews, one in which Morin appears as an understanding avuncular conduit for disclosure, ends up mattering more than what is said. The film's turns from inane generality to incomprehensible specificity, from saying everything and then nothing, are due in part to the self-censored speech of politicized personages. But these shifts also reflect the need to express an alternate, personal politics.

Morin's *Autocritique* decision to be "nothing besides a vouchsayer of his own words" (Morin, *Autocritique* 180) provides a tentative response as to what this move towards a politics of the everyday and the personal experience means. The avoidance of speaking for others is prompted by his experience with the French Communist Party and his refusal to promulgate its Dogma any longer. As a symbolic reaction to this forced alignment cinema vérité seems a perfect vehicle for a forcefully novel and diverse expression of "total truth." Marking a distinct break from prior documentary uses of voice over commentary, synch sound and the interview format authenticate each person's words by registering it *visibly* in their own voice.

"Commensality" (the term used by Morin to describe how a climate of communication would be facilitated by crew and actors sharing "excellent meals washed down with good wines.") is the appropriate setting for Morin's truth distribution. The wish to do without authority is so pervasive as to make roundtable discussions or extended silences a viable substitute for, as well as evidence of, collective representation. Most importantly these discussions need to account precisely for those aspects that communist representations of collective actions had repressed. The participants' private lives (the more radical level of the "infrapolitical") become therefore, as much as their political opinions, the subject of the film. Confirming the fact that present is a problematic tense in redemptive projects the filmmakers had trouble ending the film. Time cannot evolve for the ethnographic object, for it is this "synchronic suspension," that distinguishes the object's time from the historical present that includes and situates the ethnographer, the other and the reader. This impasse, intrinsic to textualization, characterizes most acutely the "allegories of salvage" put forth by ethnography and cinema vérité (Clifford "On Ethnographic Allegory" 111, 112–18).

From neorealist reenactment in the 50's to the early 70's feminist documentaries modeled on consciousness raising, filmmakers' interventions are allegorized in different ways. Still, what recurs is the narrative trope of before and after. In *Chronicle* we find the usual figuration of change. Each character appears at least twice before the final collective screening, and they seem to have gained in awareness—after their contact with the filmmakers, that is. Moreover in subsequent interviews, as if foreseeing the interest in self-improvement suggested by the film's therapeutic project, both Morin and Rouch give out information about the characters. Hence we learn that Marilou's happiness is due to her meeting someone (Jacques Rivette), that Marceline married Joris Ivens, that Régis, alias Debray, went to Cuba, that Angelo was fired from Renault and attempted to organize a strike at Les Éditions du Seuil where he had been subsequently hired by Morin. We also learn that Morin and Rouch were interested in filming these same characters twenty years later.

While direct sound affords an unprecedented authenticity to the filming record, this earnestness is more than this project can accommodate. The surplus of present invoked by synch sound needs to be contained, narrativized. For the synchronicity of object and subject, within the same historical moment, means the ultimate demise of textual authority. This authority is clearly in question by early 60's (that of the Communist Party, that of France, that of intellectuals). What is at stake in this attempt at translating "mankind" through the restricted prism of intellectual life, of saying all that can be said while allowing the unsaid to stand for a political commitment that is never made clear,

is the intellectuals' problematic share in power. The film condenses painfully the quandaries of the intellectual's attempt to be the representative of collective consciousness.

The final screening of the film, at the Studio Publicis and the ensuing filmed discussion, had been meant as an instrument for collective self-recognition: "More than in social drama this psychoanalytic truth is played for the audience who emerges from its cinematographic catalepsy and awakens to a human message. It is then that we can feel for a moment that truth is that which is hidden within us beneath our petrified relationships" ("Chronicle" 5). Instead the participants blame the *vérité* method for its almost obscene probing of personal drama, and, confirm the strict relation between *vérité* and theatricality. The filmed discussion after the screening is the last stage of truth but not necessarily one in which all participants agree. Some are truly shocked with the emotional baring that takes place in the film, others state they would like to meet and befriend Marilou, for instance. Little, but relevant differences reveal Morin's preferred direction for the film. He states the scene between Angelo and Landry is his favorite because there we see a nascent friendship, while Marceline scoffs at the idea they may even have common concerns.

Endless confession becomes the moral correlate of *synch* sound. The issue becomes, at this point in the film whose confession this is. Rouch and Morin film themselves chatting and walking up and down the corridor of the *Musée de l'Homme* in an attempt to dispel the authority that, at the end of the day, underwrites their film work. They translate the prior discussion into a self-congratulatory proof of the film's pluralism. This final scene signals the desire to make the film cohere, to foreclose the difference of opinion that emerged earlier. The disseminatory economy of confession passing as reflexivity discloses, in this film, much of their common motives. The production of truth in *Chronicle* is presented as an embarrassment of those who detain power. Hence the obsessive *mise-en-scène* of shared discourse and of authentic speech. If *Chronicle* promotes as its sharpest image one of silent complicity it is because it does matter who speaks the film: Morin needs to have the last word but also share it with Rouch and us. Self-criticism, *autocritique*, is too private and anti collective an event to deserve absolution. Particularly if one has the added, discredited function of father confessor.

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