

LES FILMS D'ICI présentent

LE PAYS DES UN FILM DE NICOLAS PHILIBERT SOURDS



JEAN-MAIRE COURETTE PHOTOS ANTOINE DE MONTA



IN THE LAND OF THE DEAF

INTERVIEW WITH NICOLAS PHILIBERT

How did the idea for the film come about?

It's an old dream that goes back ten years. In September, 1983, I was contacted by a group of psychiatrists to participate in putting together some educational films about sign language. At the time, I was totally unaware of the world of the deaf and so I went and registered for a class in sign language given by a young teacher, himself profoundly deaf. It was fascinating! All of a sudden I was no longer in front of a handicapped person but rather someone with an incredibly rich capacity of expression, a sort of born actor capable of conveying all the nuances of his thinking just with the movements of his hands and his facial expressions. For reasons unknown to me, the project with the psychiatrists didn't go anywhere, but I started meeting more and more deaf people and getting interested in their way of communicating. As I discovered the beauty of sign language, its incredible range of possibilities, and especially as I got to know the importance of sight for deaf people, the acuity of their glances and their highly developed visual memory,



Pour écouter, je regarde !

"I look so I can hear..."

WHAT THE PRESS HAS TO SAY...

"Having left with no baggage but with a lot of love and curiosity for those who cannot hear, the filmmaker came back richer an extraordinary story".

Libération

"You will laugh ; you will cry, between gags and tears ; you will leave dazzled, as if you had seen a beautiful lovestory".

L'Express

"One of the funniest and most relevant films now showing".

Première

"In the Land of the Deaf plunges us into a world where image is king and cinema omnipresent".

Télérama

"Suddenly, the world, our world, is jolted. The almighty word begins to tremble. We dream for an instant of a universal gestural Esperanto".

Le Monde

"During the entire screening, you swing between emotion and laughter. Must not be missed".

Le Point

"Go see this film, leave your pity behind. You will enter a whirlwind of energy, optimism, purity, tenderness, and moral

and intellectual finesse which we all have a lot to learn from. Thrilling".

Le Figaro

"A progressively captivating journey through the world of deaf people [...] it would be hard to find a more appealing child than little Florent...".

The Evening Standard

"A brilliantly perceptive view of deaf people's lives".

The Telegraph

"My family has been deaf for five generations..."



Chez nous,
on est sourds depuis 5 générations.

I realized that filming them could be a way to work the essential substance of film. Immediately, I started writing a fictional screenplay but after several attempts I was unable to find funding and eventually I went on to other things. Then about two years ago the idea resurfaced, but this time as a documentary rather than fiction, or in other words, as a film that tells true stories about real characters.

What were the choices that guided your work at the beginning ?

My idea was to make a film that would plunge the viewer into the world of the deaf, a film whose mother tongue would be sign language. I wanted to give a voice to these people whom we know nothing about and whose system of communication is totally different from ours, to try to see the world through their eyes. Beyond the question of the "handicapped", what the film emphasizes is the existence of a true deaf culture, which has its own roots, codes, models and customs. This is the culture that I wanted to expose the viewer to, and not in an abstract or theoretical way



but by means of emotions, as a result of the different characters the camera follows and the several stories the film tells. All the characters without exception have been profoundly deaf since birth or very soon thereafter, i.e. before they learned to speak. I chose not to include those with milder hearing loss, although they are the majority. But the film is not a statistical study ! My ambition was in crossing over to the other side, discovering that distant land where sight has such great significance.

How did you go about meeting the people who were to be in the film ?

I started by getting back into the study sign language, which I had left aside for years. My assistant began it as well, just



"I had dreamt of having a deaf child..."

as eagerly as I. This approach was indispensable because I wanted as much as possible to have direct contact with people rather than to go through an interpreter. We're not really good "signers" but I'd say we get by. And it's what helped us to be accepted everywhere. But when the shoot started I was far from having all the characters ! For example the idea of filming a wedding came late ; it took me two months to find the couple. Little by little, I chose the characters as the film was being shot. So, some were there from the start, like Jean-Claude Poulain and the school children, and others, like the newlyweds, were found after looking for a long time. And others, like the group of young Americans, were included in the film almost by chance.

**How did the shooting go ?
What problems did you encounter ?**

During the shooting, which was spread over a period of about eight months, I kept on looking for locations and preparing. For the first few days I was completely lost. I was filming situations in which I didn't know what was going on. It was a disaster ! When a deaf person spoke to me it was all right because he would make an effort to sign slowly but I couldn't decipher the sign language fast enough when they were speaking among themselves. It went a hundred times too fast !

Filming deaf people, because they speak with signs, upsets all the conventions : you can't shoot close-ups or cutaways without the risk of losing the thread. We, the hearing, can communicate without seeing one another, from one room to another, on the phone, etc. But for deaf people, the voice-over doesn't exist, there is no "off-camera". So we had to learn a lot to figure out the methods of filming that worked, the framing, the angles, the right distances.

Did you know ahead of time how the film would be constructed ?

During the shooting, I accumulated a lot of material, more than forty hours of rushes, but it was actually in the editing that the film was precisely constructed. Of course I had established some narrative principles to start with. But at the same time I wanted to leave the door open, for improvisation, for spontaneity. I hate to feel hemmed in, constrained to imprison reality in a pre-established idea because reality is always richer than the way we summarize it. I like the course of the filming to be disrupted by real life. There are a number of sequences, all those in which the characters face the camera, that I decided to film while the editing was underway but at a standstill. So it was really in the editing that the film was written, that I found its final form. For editing is a bit like an act of mourning during which



iiii... ooo...

one has to detach oneself from most of what has been shot.

Did the sound undergo a particular kind of treatment ?

I've believed for a long time that the way the deaf perceive sounds can be recreated; because even for those with severe impairments, deafness is rarely total. Rather, the sounds they hear are distant and very distorted. I wanted to treat certain sequences in the school in this way, as if to reproduce the subjective point of view of the children when the teacher asks them to repeat a sentence after her. The spectator would understand immediately how difficult it is for the deaf to reproduce sounds, to control their voices, because it's so abs-

tract for them. The sound man, the editor and I went into the audiologist's booth to hear the sounds the way the deaf do. Then in the editing room we started to rework the sequences according to that perception. But that didn't work. Whatever we did seemed like a movie effect, not at all believable. Often, the background sound was lowered, slightly distanced, so as to focus attention on the gestures. Also, there is no additional music, just what was already in the scenes when we shot them : in the theatre, in the church during the wedding, after the wedding dinner when everyone dances, and in the school, when the hearing children start singing in a nearby classroom.

*Interview by
Georges-Henri Mauchant*

"I swear to you that I shall do everything to love you..."



Je te jure que je ferai tout
pour t'aimer...

NICOLAS PHILIBERT

Born in 1951. Studied philosophy at the University of Grenoble.

From 1973 to 1976 he was assistant to René Allio, Alain Tanner, and Production designer for Claude Goretta.

In 1978, he made a full-length documentary with Gérard Mordillat, His Master's voice, and three hours for television, Patrons / Télévision, which stages the words of fifteen directors of large french industrial groups. The film was censored at the time but later shown on TV channel La Sept, in 1991.

Between 1985 and 1988, Nicolas Philibert shot numerous adventure documentaries and several portraits, all shown on television : The North face of the Camembert, Christophe, No problem, Trilogy for one man, Vas-y Lapébie !, Baquet's comeback. These films won more than 25 prizes in international festivals. In the meantime, he published two books : These enlightened bosses who fear the light (with Gérard Mordillat) and Hélène Vernet, 39 rue Chaptal, Levallois-Perret (with Suzel Galliard).

In 1986, he made a long trip to China with Joris Ivens and Marceline Loidan for a shooting of Une histoire de vent.

In 1989, Philibert directed The Louvre City, which was shown on television and in film theaters.

In 1991-92, he concentrated on In the land of the Deaf, which appeared at the 1992 Festivals of Locarno, Belfort (where it won the Grand Prize of the Jury) and Florence.

CREDITS

“As we near the end of the century, the planet of the deaf makes up a community of more than 130 million people, of whom 3,5 million live in France alone. Constantly increasing in number, the deaf live among us as extra-terrestrials. Far from the sounds of our "society of communication", they constitute the globe's sixth continent. A mute continent, invisible. In its extreme diversity, the world of the deaf brings together adults as well as children, who were born deaf or hearing, from deaf or hearing parents, whose children are deaf or hearing... Whatever the origin of their hearing impairment, the age at which it occurred, whatever their sex or nationality, they all have the intimate feeling of belonging to one and the same community. Of those 130 million deaf people around us, 95 % of those who marry, do so among themselves !

“Contrary to what most believe, the deaf are not mute. Their vocal organs are intact. But because of their incapacity to hear, they cannot modulate their voices in an oral language. Indeed, they live cut off from the world of language which surrounds the hearing. For the oral languages that are not accessible to them, they have substituted gestural languages they can perceive visually. These visual languages have been developing since the beginning of time into numerous regional and national gestural languages. With their vocabulary of gestures, their syntaxes, their styles, their formalisms or slangs, these languages allow the deaf to cover the whole of their needs of expression. Numbering in the hundreds they constitute one of the living treasures of humanity's corporal culture.”

in *The Planet of the Deaf*
Jean Gremion
Presses Pocket Publication

Directed by **Nicolas PHILIBERT**
Camera **Frédéric LABOURASSE**
Sound **Henri MAIKOFF**
Film Editor **Guy LECORNE**
Assistant Film Editor **Anja LÜDCKE**
Dubbing Mixer **Julien CLOQUET**
Assistant Director **Valéry GAILLARD**
Production
Manager **Françoise BURAUX**
Executive Producer **Serge LALOU**
Produced by **Les Films d'Ici,**
La Sept-cinéma,
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Cinématographique Rhône-Alpes

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and BBC

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pour le Cinéma

Film Distributor **MKL Distribution**
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France - running time : 99 mn - color

Sélection officielle
Festival de Locarno,
Semaine de la Critique (august 1992)

Grand Prix du Festival de Belfort
(november 1992)

Grand Prix du Festival dei Popoli
Florence (december 1992)

Special thanks to those who were occasional actors in this film :

the sign language teacher
Jean-Claude POULAIN

the children
Aboubaker, Anh Tuan, Betty, Florent,
Frédéric, Jalal, Karen, Tomo

their teacher
Odile GHERMANI
and their instructor
Babette DEBOISSY
the school principal
Denis AZRA
the families

ABBAS, DESJARDINS, KHOULDI,
LADEVESA, LAMARCA, LE VAN, MULAT
et PUOVIC

the wedding couple
Hubert et Marie-Hélène PONCET
their families and friends

the American visitors
Amy HOSHINA, Todd G. MATNEY,
Fernando SILVESTRE,
Elisa Marie VELEZ, Carrie ZEPPERI

the actors
Levent BESKARDES, Victor ABBOU,
Chantal LIENNEL, Monica FLORY

Extracts from the play "The Stones"
after Gertrude Stein
Direction : Thierry Roisin
Music : François Marillier
Produced by : I.V.T. - Beaux Quartiers

and :
Karine COZE, Philippe GALANT,
Claire GARGUIER, Thierry JOLY, Sophie
MOUGENOT, Pascal PAWLKOWSKI,
Nadège ROLE, Jeanine VISENTIN.

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IN THE LAND OF A FILM BY NICOLAS PHILIBERT THE DEAF



Layout: J.M. COURREYE Printed by CELEFF

What is the world like for the thousands of people living in silence ?

Whoever ventures In the Land of the Deaf will be struck by the strangeness of the choreography of signs they use to express themselves. Since the beginning of time, these signs have constituted a true language in which each word, each idea, is translated into an image drawn in space. These signs, as precise and nuanced as words, lend themselves equally well to declarations of love as to highly detailed technical descriptions.

Jean-Claude, Abou, Claire, Philo, Hubert, Karine and all the rest, profoundly deaf since birth or early childhood, dream, think, and communicate in signs, and see the world differently. With them, we shall discover this distant land where looking and touching are so important.

This film tells their story and allows us to see the world through their eyes.

