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By Mónica Delgado

A few days ago the 67th edition of the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen culminated, which was held in a dual edition, and whose programming covered several recent short films, some of them experimental. Among them, I highlight the recent work **Son Chant** (2020) by the American filmmaker and curator Vivian Ostrovsky, who was born in New York, grew up in Rio de Janeiro and currently resides in Paris.

Ostrovsky's work has been marked from his position and vision as a filmmaker in male environments, but also from his activism to contribute to improving the conditions of women in film and audiovisual, such as the founding in the mid-1970s of the *Ciné-Femmes International*, an entity dedicated to the promotion, distribution and exhibition of films made by women. Also in 1975, she promoted the creation of the *Femmes / Films festival*, which included an international symposium, thanks to the support of UNESCO, and which was attended by Susan Sontag, Agnès Varda, Valie Export, Chantal Akerman, Márta Mészáros or María Luisa Bemberg, among others. After this work to promote women's cinema, Ostrovsky launched into the creation of experimental films, especially in Super-8, such as **Top Ten Designers in Paris** (1980), **Copacabana Beach** (1983), **Eat** (1988), **Public Domain** (1996), **Telepattes** (2007), **But elsewhere is always better** (2016) or **Unsound** (2019). She already has more than 30 short films and installations to date. *Son Chant* is her latest work.

In the twelve minutes of it, Ostrovsky performs in *Son Chant* a tribute to the cinematographic relationship between the Belgian filmmaker Chantal Akerman and the French-American composer and cellist Sonia Wieder-Atherton. Both worked together on more than twenty films, installations and video performances, and this short in some way rekindles the vital impulse that emerges from the limbo that emerges between images and sounds. Ostrovsky has indicated in the synopsis of the short that "Reviewing my mini DVs recorded over the last decade, I rediscovered a forgotten nightly sequence of Chantal Akerman and Sonia Wieder-Atherton leaving a brasserie where we had dined together in Montparnasse. The extract stayed with me for a while (...) And, since New York, Paris and Moscow were places that the three of us had in common, I intertwined some of my images with those of their films ". From the intimate and friendly, Ostrovsky adds another component to this relationship, his gaze from the memory and absence of Chantal, and on this undervalued sound aspect.



I remember that in March of last year, before the pandemic, at the closing of the Ficunam, in Mexico City, I attended *Chantal*, a performance work where Wieder-Atherton played the cello, while the short film **Saute ma ville** (1968) by Akerman was superimposed on the stage and a text taken from **Une Famille à Bruxelles** (1998), also by Akerman, was read by an actor. In this way, Wieder-Atherton captured, from three acts and repetitions, which required a patient and attentive listener and spectator, a type of invocation, like a mantra, from a single short that appeared in a loop, creating an atmosphere of insistence and possibility of reunion. The question of the title of the performance loomed tremulously, while the images confirmed something that time cannot erase. In the Ostrovsky's short, some moments of similar presentations by *Chantal* are recovered to be included in this montage that weaves scenes from films by both Vivian and Chantal, under the influence of Wieder-Atherton's arrangements on a work by Rachmaninov. Scenes from **Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles**¹², **Les Rendez-vous d'Anna**, **Toute une nuit**, **D'Est** or **Là-bas**, among other films, appear under the influence of anachronism, in a renewal of time, to bring back

creative ties, as well as correspondences, from the creative figure of the Belgian filmmaker.

As a film essay, Ostrovsky elaborates her montage from motifs, such as scenes where characters prevail in passageways, through marked and dry steps, dance scenes under fashionable rhythms, or where Chantal evokes the sensations that the interpretations aroused in her of Sonia, and, from this, the position of the music in her works: "In a film of words, the cello becomes another voice", Chantal is heard saying. And it is thus, that Ostrovsky is adding other reasons: bi or tripartite screens to put some scenes in dialogue or consonance with their reflection or musical mimesis, analogies or metaphors caused by these montages of images and sounds (usually *foley* effects, which creates another sense of reality). And also from the memory of him, from his voice-over, that he leaves specific impressions on some encounters with both women (or on the tragic news of Chantal's death).

The short **Son Chant** -or Son (ia) Chant (al), as it appears in the initial title- also includes scenes from **From the East** in Music, another Wieder-Atherton project based on Chantal's film, already as an example of the symbiotic creative relationship, and the extension of a work to other media. At some point in this short sense, Sonia indicates that both works, hers and Chantal, the musical and the film, merged, that her universes were intertwined. And it is this relationship that Ostrovsky explores, with closeness, familiarity, hand in hand with the two characters explored, in these gestures or traces that they leave visible in his works, and that survive time.

International competition

Direction: Vivian Ostrovsky

Editing: Ruti Gadish

Sound design and mixing: Sharon Shama

Post-production assistant: Severine Moreau

USA, 2020, 12 min

