



## I Like the FID and the FID Likes Me

By Celluloid Liberation Front

*We have to set people free from all this culture and education...they're just ways of trapping the middle class and making them docile... Our perverse entertainment landscape*

*JG Ballard*

**Despite the uncompromising nature of the city, Marseille immediately feels like a familiar place, the way it voluptuously unfolds in all its exaggerated beauty in front of the new visitor is a welcoming experience that words could not convey. Its acquainted gestures, its cohort smiles and its colloquial faces preside over the disinterested hospitality of a city cherishing the transcultural scents of the Mediterranean whose ageless charm is treasured by the penetrating looks of its women. A truly multicultural place, Marseille sagely refuses to buy into the violent sanctimony of capitalist integration and through the defection of the western model entertains its inhabitants through the relational exchange of its quotidian and emotional bazaar.**

Poles apart from the city's moving reciprocity stands the International Documentary Film Festival of Marseille (FID) self-evidently fitting the trend of 'alternative' pseudo-events whose facades melt under the acid frost of institutional(ized) ambitions, polite arrogance, retrograde pretences and psychomythology. Sleepwalking audiences pathetically fumbling from film to film looking for commoditized knowledge and snobbish entertainment, journalists enslaved by the sad logic of prescriptive and normative criticism and/or pandering admiration, communicative spaces semiotically militarized by the *ivresse du pouvoir*, dialogical confrontations banned by pathological mannerism and neurotic elitism. No wonder that from such castrating milieu the vast majority of the films proposed in the international competition oscillated between plain aimlessness and embalmed formalism while the few shining exceptions were hardly visible in the toxic haze of cinematic waste.

Specially mentioned for reasons we refused to enquire is the first film by Donia Bovet-Wolteche, *Les Racines du Brouillards* (Belgium, 2009); the super-8 black and white was meant to convey a sense of nostalgia as well as an atemporal essentiality, an archetypical vision; all this according to the director explaining the aesthetics moves animating her work. If the grainy range of grey was somehow reminiscent of Pontecorvo's panoramic empathy, it surely lacked its participating fervor, the discursive layers of memory evoked the existential wimples of Resnais without ever reaching their conscious eloquence for what felt like an hagiography of guilt. The hardly explored disillusionment that followed the liberation struggle is never historically reconducted to the psycho-economic wounds of the colonial violation. Memory is astringently imparted on the younger generations through the cold readings of a guilt-driven woman whose spirit, one hopes, is not the one dreamed by the dying freedom fighter (Ali). An accommodating *mea culpa* that, of course, does not even vaguely hints at the current injustices inflicted by (post)colonial France on the Algerian population such as the reintroduction of the visa, the ghettoization in the ill-famed *banlieus* (suburbs) where apparently there is no such thing as *besoin d'information* (need for information) since the festival safely kept its intellectual swank far from those uncultured and noisome neighborhoods. And it is not a matter of infrastructures...

Ghassan Salhab proved with his film *1958* (Lebanon, 2009) that looking back at history does not necessarily mean “wallowing in nostalgia”, on the contrary the exploration of his own (hi)story never surrenders to intimate self-referencing but through the lyrical invocation of the ghosts of history the director exposes the ontological implication of a collective (or national, if you prefer) fate within every personal narration. Surgically dosing the archive footages – whose evocativeness is at some point further enhanced by the mesmerizing notes of Giacinto Scelsi – with original material, the film offers itself as a fertile text for exegesis whereby historical delineation (e)merges with individual reconstruction and diaspora emblemizes an emotional as well as a geographical displacement. Without didactically illustrating the historical facts behind (t)his story, Ghassan Salhab created a participating visual text where the spectator is induced to reflect, research, to some extent, take part to the film. A film that for its archeology of (hi)stories is reminiscent of Black Audio Film Collective's *Handsworth Song* with which it vocationally shares the same sort of ghostly ethnography informed by inner as much as political unrests.



Picture 2 - 1958. The elaborated formalism of *Facs of Life* (Silvia Maglioni & Graeme Thomson, 2009) does not suffice in concealing the mono-dimensional plateau this film ultimately is, unable to aggress its own superficial considerations – the most embarrassing being: “this situation is pretty Deleuzian” – the filmmakers assemble copious atonal recollections that fail to ripple the surface of things even when bluntly explicative. The spectres of Vincennes are turned into auratic matter, Deleuze and Guattari remembered as exceptional figures with no current matches, their lectures acquire mythical status thus losing all their unhinging potential. The immanence of Coil's music finds its trivial counterpoint in the denigrating comparison between prostitutes and the crème of French thought which inadvertently exposes the hypocritical assumption that has the commoditization of thought as a somewhat more dignified activity than its bodily specularly. The regressive matrix of this approach is finally demonstrated by a discussion amongst students taking place in what is now Paris 8, where the question raised is how to *protect* the French *exception* rather than how to spread its dialogical virus to new and expanded transnational textures. Well, I believe that this film itself is the perfect answer to such conservatory need. A dead weight amidst what once was signifying mist, the burial of constant questioning in favour of the rhetoric of nostalgia inhibiting the expressive circulation of the filmic form within a profoundly reactionary work.

A true film of unpretentious genius is the Serbian feature *Little Red Riding Hood* (Serbia, 2009) by the bravest Zoran Todorovic. The film literalizes what Aime Cesaire, referring to a different context, termed as “neologistic” cultural politics – which is, a polyphonic tactic collage focusing on the “existence among fragments” conflating folkloric manifestations with alien forms and symbols. Subverting the classical fairytale of Little Red Hood the director draws a multi-linguistic psycho-genealogy of a people, the Roma (the only ones not to have had an army in the history of mankind!), constantly persecuted for their refusal to abide to the violent logic of feudal materialism that still rule our (un)civilised democracies. With the creative spontaneity of a true visionary work the film rescues the nomadic, hence subversive, and gypsiedelic narrative of a timeless (hi)story from the commonplaces and prejudices of dominant signification. The carnivalesque inversion of power structures informs a filmic text anthropophagically open to intertextual contaminations, disorientating analysis and life-like disorder. A film evoking the liberated Cinema Marginal and the inventive instinctuality of its masters Rogerio Sganzerla and Julio Bressane; the greatest of the year so far!



An interesting feature recurring throughout many of the films in the international competition is the focus on elderly, although seldom motivated, it symptomatically exposes a certain impasse whereby young filmmakers seem unable to achieve aesthetic representation of their own existential currency and thus look for elucidations into the final stages of the human (mis)adventure. *Maniquerville* (Pierre Creton, 2009) frames the elderly as *handicapped* subjects in need of affection or, as in this case, culture while nonchalantly ignoring the role they pre-industrially played (also) in western societies where, like it still is in the so called third world, they are socially respected and referred to as a source of experienced wisdom. While uncritically showing the cold cells of solitude in which they are confined - and although Proust can be preferable to soap operas, it is the very position of old people, in a society that isolate everything that is not productive (any more), that needs to be questioned and not the manufactured pastimes we charitably offer to them – the filmmaker exposes his own elocutionary void. One of the many films whose existence transcends any sort of creative or communicative urge, an eleemosynary waste of time, resources and energies.

Surely a more dignified vision of the third age emerges from the beautifully crafted frames of *Dilettante* by Kris Niklison (Argentina, 2008) depicting, in constant close-ups, the lively charisma of a 80 years old woman proving with her own existence and words that life not only is worth living until the end but that ageing can be an extremely enriching process both intellectually and physically. Yes, physically. Women, says Bela Jordan, start to be fully such after 60 when they stop to be perceived and desired in sexual terms by their male counterparts adumbrating thus an extremely interesting theory. All in all the film emanates the worn-out fragrances of complacency and the spelled-out morale is rather ambiguous in these shallow times, no wonder it was one of the most applauded film of the festival...

Courage and a finest touch were demonstrated by Cristian Leighton with his *Kawase San* (Chile, 2009) whose subject matter could never be possibly, let alone definitively, captured. Nonetheless, the images, words and landscapes edited together manage to go beyond their own appearances and, if not grasp, ethereally sketch the feather-like impalpability of human relations and the aching complications they inevitably imply. A rather difficult film to write about for it mainly relying upon the luminous glibness of cinema conceived in its least tutorial deployment.

Diametrically opposed to the aforementioned sensibility is the least cinematographic (not anti-cinematographic, mind you) film I ever had the unpleasant misfortune to watch, *Sur Place – 4 Revenants des Guerres Libanaises* (Monika Borgmann & Lokman Slim, 2009). The very fact that such films find an expositive platform should make us reflect upon the crooked nature of the cinema industry; the film is exclusively constituted by spoken words, the image and its cinematographic meaning is aspersed and abashed. Why do these people did not write a book? How can they be considered filmmakers? The conundrum of cinema seems to be bottomless, and so is people effrontery.

Along the same chaffy line were many other films that, for the reader's sake and respect, will not be listed here exception made for the most clamorous case, *Ne Change Rien* by, the otherwise extremely valid, Pedro Costa (Portugal/France, 2009). After having picked the most insignificantly nagging musicians one could ever find in a roadside café cd rack and having crassly ignored an illustrious tradition of music captured on celluloid that from Melies' *Le Melomane* goes to *L'Orchestra di Piazza Vittorio* passing through *A Joyful Noise* and the terror-documentaries of Don Letts who, with *Westway to the World*, signed the most passionate love letter to The Clash, this flatulent film amasses an unbearable succession of (e)motionless sequences possessing a rarest and nauseating mediocrity.

"The kingdom of understanding is in the heart and soul of every spectator" thus Vlado Skafar introduced his tiny gem *Nighttime with Mojca* (Slovenia, 2009), a work of a deepening and ruminative nature that proposes itself as a transcendental alterity beyond which each spectator is free to roam the kingdom of his/her own understanding. By slowing the film down at 18 frames per second the director finds the unreflective reflection of profound discursiveness and eloquent superficiality while on the background is passing by a philosophy of nonsensical images lovely captured on super-8 and attentively sequenced to a-synchronically hijack a radiophonic affair whose transmedial potential is directly experienced on celluloid matter.



Another film of stunning simplicity and audacious perspectives (to make films one needs an idea, not money or the right connection...) is *Phantoms of Nabua* by Apichatpong Weerasethakul (Thailand/UK, 2009). A football match is filmed in complete darkness. The ball is drenched into petrol and set fire to. We intermittently see the players' legs when lightened by the firing ball. A radical meditation on the binary nature of cinema, luminescence and obscurity, figures and shadows, visible and invisible. Evocatively magic.

The national competition awarded the bodiless meta-cine-cartography of *Videomappings: Aida, Palestine* by Till Roeskens (France, Palestinian Territories, 2008) where the victims of the occupation remain concealed while drawing their own barbed perimeters thus communicating via pure signs. Devoid of any bombastic lobbying this film explores the cinematic medium to transversally reach the spectator in an unexpectedly effective way that renounces to the conventional visual power of empathic identification.

*Gennariello Due Volte* (France, 2009) Elise Florenty, after having completely misunderstood Pasolini's "Lutheran Letters", attempts the impossible: to film (in) Naples, a city whose very topography is constituted by its language and a spirit that everybody can experience but fewest managed to pin down, be it with words, images or any other way. The result is an embarrassing horde of banal observations within a crass narration inevitably encumbering the wordless charm of a city made out of oneiric matter.

*L'Impossible – Pages Arrachees* by Sylvain George (France, 2009) is a film of imperfect fundamentality, the deafening silence of the first two chapters, almost intolerably moving, is the overwhelming document upon which our inhuman and violently hypocritical governments shall not only be remembered but righteously judged, condemned and destroyed. The profound injustices perpetrated by fortress Europe allows you "to arm yourself against justice" without being paradoxical, but where is the connection with the third chapter? The calculated sensitivity of the first two chapters is redundantly gashed by the unedited heftiness of a student demonstration possessing none of the previous urgency. The final episode, although mainly informed by the French context yet smartly tuned on transatlantic waves, is a naked rattle against the institutionalization of utopia, sheer rage against those who sold their soul to the bureau of feelings, those who organize festivals on the same exploitative frame they pretend to oppose, those who conventionally act concealing their miserable selves behind pseudo-revolutionary credentials. Those whom we persuade ourselves not to resemble...



Opened and closed by respectively Luc Moullet's *Land of Madness* and Pasolini's *La Rabbia*, the whole festival finds its fitting visual allegory in the magnificent theme-image of the film *Outlandish – Strange Foreign Bodies* by Phillip Warnell (UK, 2009)...



Fortunately, the 80 years old French director Luc Moullet showed us at the beginning of the festival that is still possible to imagine reality differently and while drawing a psycho-topography of crime, he exposed with witty detachment the pathologies of our fictitious lives. Grotesquely trying to resemble what is not, pathetically attempting to sound deeper than it actually is, the FID is closed by a pompous verbosity incautiously ushering Pasolini's *Rage* there, where the Italian director would have pitilessly dropped it. No casualties though. Even the most visceral feelings and conscious stances are neutralized by the nth ossified applause... And we all went in peace. Amen.

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Celluloid Liberation Front is a multi-use(r) name, an "open reputation" informally adopted and shared by a desiring multitude of insurgent cinephiles, transmedial terrorists, aesthetic dynamyters and random deviants. For reasons that remain unknown, the name was borrowed from a collective of anti-imperialist blind filmmakers from the Cayman Islands whose films have rarely been unseen.