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74 Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Encounters

DIRECTOR'S CUT



ACQUINO

A FILM BY GUILLAUME CAILLEAU + BEN RUSSELL

CASKFILMS IN COPRODUCTION WITH VOLTE FILM / PRODUCED BY GUILLAUME CAILLEAU / COPRODUCED BY MICHEL BALAGUE
IMAGE BEN RUSSELL / EDIT GUILLAUME CAILLEAU + BEN RUSSELL / SOUND RECORDING BRUNO AUZET
SOUND DESIGN ROB WALKER + NICOLAS BECKER / SOUND MIX ROB WALKER / COLOR GRADING SERGI SANCHEZ
WITH THE SUPPORT OF CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINEMA ET DE L'IMAGE ANIMEE / JEONJU INT'L FILM FESTIVAL
JEONJU CINEMA PROJECT / MEDIENBOARD BERLIN-BRANDENBURG GMBH / LA REGION PROVENCE-ALPES-COTE D'AZUR
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shellac

VOYTE

DIRECT ACTION
(2024, 216 min. French and Arabic with English subtitles)
Wednesday October 9 at 18h30, 2024. Vester Vov Vov,
Absalonsgade 5, KBH V.



Terrassen presents the Danish premiere of *Direct Action* (2024) by Guillaume Cailleau and Ben Russell.
Supported by the Danish Arts Foundation

Taking its title from the tactical protest strategy *Direct Action* is a singular portrait of a militant activist community in France – a 150-person strong rural collective that survived multiple violent eviction attempts by the French state, successfully resisted an international airport expansion project, created an autonomous zone from 2012-18 and after the struggle that brought it together, is now sketching out the contours of another possible world. Through a collaborative and radically immersive observational approach, *Direct Action* documents the everyday of a diverse constellation of activists, squatters, anarchists, farmers and government-labeled “eco-terrorists” – a singular movement where it’s still possible to dream of a “tomorrow that sings”.

EXCERPT FROM ERIKA BALSOM’S FORTHCOMING ESSAY
‘OBSERVING OTHERWISE’

Early in Guillaume Cailleau and Ben Russell’s *Direct Action*, a blue-haired woman sits in a field of wildflowers, reading aloud from the book *Comment la police interroge et comment s’en défendre* (*How the Police Interrogate and How to Defend Oneself*). She is an inhabitant of the zone à défendre at Notre-Dame-des-Landes. This pastoral image, a continuous long take, at once signals the frictions between the zadistes and the authorities and recalls a trope familiar from late 1960s films by Jean-Luc Godard such as *La Chinoise* (1967) and *One Plus One* (1968): the militant who recites a tract for the camera. Its purpose seems to be clear enough. Yet after roughly seven minutes, Cailleau and Russell reframe the scene, revealing that the addressee of this speech is none other than a pig rolling in the dirt. From defending oneself against the pigs to the punny presence of a porcine companion, a modest panning movement has significantly transformed the tone and multiplied the meanings of the image. Never forget, the shot seems to say, that the blocks of space-time presented in this film have an outside that you will never see. Its thirty-five long takes will present only partial glimpses, held with careful intention but avowedly partial nevertheless. Looking at something always means not looking somewhere else.

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Direct Action, direct cinema? Almost, but not quite. If “direct action” as a form of political struggle is defined by the removal of mediation, *Direct Action* knows that such a thing is impossible in filmmaking. Immediacy is a dangerous chimera; any approach to reality will be but asymptotic, haunted by absence. Cailleau and Russell’s camera often remains fixed in a prolonged stare. On the one hand, this is a strong assertion of processual continuity, one that emphasizes image’s capacity for indexical documentation; the film asks its viewer to feel the weight of time involved in, for instance, the laborious and miraculous transformation of flour, water, salt, and yeast into dough. Yet at the same time, the film underscores how the frame and the 400-foot reel of 16mm respectively impose spatial and temporal limits on what is shown. More indebted to the legacy of the structural avant-gardes than to the handheld spontaneity associated with the direct cinema of the 1960s, *Direct Action* makes no pretence to comprehensiveness, no arrogant claim to fully envelop the real.

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Before the blue-haired reader, there is a tower set against a sky dotted with clouds and streaked with faint contrails; after her, there is the joy-

ful demolition of a wall by several other people, a subject the Lumière brothers filmed already in 1895. Each of these shots has no causal or conceptual relation to its neighbours, save that they all emanate from the same territory. Cailleau and Russell let the long take stand as a quasi-autonomous element, refusing interscene editing so that every cut comes in hard to mark a departure to a new site of interest. The witnessed action retains its integrity, untouched as it is by the plasticity of montage. This compositional logic recalls Noël Burch’s description of pre-classical cinema: each shot is “complete unto itself and never ‘communicates’ with any other. In other words, the successive spaces depicted are presumed to occupy a common diegetic framework, but that is all: their spatio-temporal connections remain fundamentally unspecified.”¹ In its revival of this “autarchy of the shot” and its reinvention of the actualité genre, *Direct Action* extends the affinity many experimental filmmakers have long felt for the earliest years of cinema as a time of utopian possibility, before the dominance of individualist storytelling and continuity editing took hold. Yet simultaneously, the notion that shot each stands alone even as all thirty-five stand together has an allegorical resonance: it is a formal echo of the political composition of the ZAD, which rests on no pre-existing ideological or identitarian ground, but which is rather characterized by a shared space and objective. In cinema as in struggle, unity need not preclude difference.

¹ Noël Burch, “Primitivism and the Avant-Gardes: A Dialectical Approach,” *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (Columbia University Press, 1986), 486.



STATEMENTS FROM PEOPLE AROUND ZAD AND THE PRODUCTION OF *DIRECT ACTION*

“Depending on the circumstances we sometimes build our structure in one place and then transport it to another. Several of us come together to carry the house and put it in its place, it’s quite a strong movement. In building and being evicted, then rebuilding and being evicted again, I don’t know how many bits of timber have been carried through fields teeming with cops. In life here, there is something pivotal about the act of building. Building, and rebuilding.”
JULI

“I was there! It was crazy! We heard thunder claps, there were explosions all around us, the whole time! We couldn’t see them, we were engulfed in smoke, couldn’t see what was going on, we were suffocating in gases. We knew it was tricky. It erupted all around us. I remember us clinging to one another, saying “Let’s hope we don’t step on some explosive.”
ÉTIENNE

“The concert was an incredible adrenaline rush. Two chords were enough for it to turn wild. People lost their shoes – for a lot of people shoes were not exactly the most important thing at that moment! We wondered whether to continue playing or perhaps stop, that’s how hectic it was. For we got the impression that people were gonna hurt themselves. When we started out, when we were more festive, more into revelling, we had no problems with there being some pogoing with some heavy bustling and bruises. With time, we got fed up with pogo pogo and wanted more languorous pogo, swaying pogo, loving pogo.”
RENÉ BINAME

“Fighting against the airport meant fighting against the State and the public-private partnerships with companies and multinationals, it was being on the side of ecology. In the final stage of the airport project we saved agricultural land with a rich biodiversity. Today it is an environment for living and for agriculture where one can live differently and experiment with a lot of things.”
TANNE

“In the ZAD, we are committed to the fight against the reservoirs. Gradually this fight has risen up against what certain philosophers call a ‘ruinous ruin’. Supposedly something new, intended to tackle the ecological transition but which drives us even further into the red, which will create even more problems around water issues. It is a solution which puts us even more in trouble, and which hides the inequalities in access to natural resources.”
TIBO

“In the context of today’s global political and ecological mess, there is something reassuring about being here. There are lots of places where political actions are taken by proposing alternative solutions. But here, it is contained in a place where communication and exchange of information actually happens. There is a strong interaction between many different activities and people within the same territory. It is comforting to know that, collectively, we are sufficiently equipped to respond to crisis. What exists here cannot disappear overnight.”
CORENTIN

“I had the impression that people were performing politics for a small elite from the art world who had come to see some radical gestures – but that nothing much would change. It seemed as if art provided some kind of compensation for their frequent air travel. They experienced radical politics in an artistic contemplative bubble but as soon as they went back to everyday life they would continue to work in admin, in banks and multinational companies. All the art had done was to help them to feel a bit better about themselves. And then I discovered direct action. With hundreds of others I have thrown myself in front of bulldozers.”
JAY

“The 50 ha of the Rohanne Forest, right in the center of the ZAD, have been the most important site of the occupations against the airport: shacks have been sprouting up there since 2008, on the ground and in trees. In 2012, during the Operation César, numerous confrontations took place in this forest. Pins from tear gas grenades are found there regularly. It was decided that a section of the forest would be protected from logging in memory of 2012: the ‘sanctuary’ is a place steeped in history, where many confrontations have occurred, and with platforms connected by suspended walkways in the gigantic American red oaks which our fight has protected.”
SERVANE

“The power structures have always sought to tame us, to make us docile so as to avoid revolts, to instil in us this belief that living does not imply a permanent willingness to fight. The power structures have created this myth of peace being a stable, lasting, normal and self-evident state. Pacification is a necessary stage of any colonisation and subjugation by a state government. Of course, and luckily, life is not just a permanent struggle, war is something terrible, and peaceful relationships, attachments, relations of mutual aid and solidarity, of tenderness, seem to me much more present in life than the tensions, threats and distrust. But the idea that a normal state of life would be peaceful is a lie that has been instilled in us to disarm us, to make us harmless and take away our power. If the majority of civil society accepts its disarmament by the State, this works against its own protection by its army and its police and judicial institutions, giving the State a monopoly on the legal use of force. The limitation of this consideration is that the relationship between, on the one hand, civil society, and on the other, the State, is not only a mutually beneficial relationship but also includes a greater or lesser share of tensions, of conflicts between them. Especially when the various counter-powers are weak. So, a civil society stripped of any ability to fight and of any autonomy in relation to the state authorities, would be dramatically subjected to it and would always suffer the powers that be.”
MICHEL

Translated from French by Annette David