

The infinite echo of a prehistoric whistle

“One, it's crazy, two, it's humanity”...(1) I don't remember who said it but this phrase looped through my mind as I was watching *Architecture d'un Atome* by Juliacks.

I first met this American artist, born in Los Angeles, who then emigrated to Germany before returning to North America, while she was in Europe as a postgraduate at the National School of Fine Arts, Lyon. Both her work and personality intrigued me. Short films that use animation, a freedom of intention and movement from one medium to another that makes her a free spirit in an often formatted world.

The film *Architecture d'un Atome* seemed to be a curiosity on first view. We are told that we are going to see the adventures of a bunch of “weirdos” that we will end up liking. In the beginning, it brings to mind *Idiots*, the film by Lars von Trier. But rapidly, we allow ourselves to be carried along by the editing which is comparable to a process of weaving. The closed system of the minivan cedes its place to that of a swimming pool and then to an unlikely encampment in the forest, as we move from nature controlled by urban planning to a civilisation in ruins, one that must be rebuilt from these remains. The fact is, that heroes are those we have placed on the sidelines, the rejects who finish by becoming the founders of a new world.

The characters are played by a group of more or less amateur actors, who all have accents, representing the multiplicity of cultures that exist in France. Summoned by local authorities to a swimming practice with a view to improving their capacity for integration, they stumble into a wild adventure following a misunderstanding that makes them think that war is on the point of breaking out. Fleeing the battle they find themselves in an abandoned mountain swimming pool where they experiment with community life. Symbolically, we could see traditional, established patterns that evoke cycles of birth and rebirth: the passage in the tunnel, the dive into the pool, the immersion in the river... Liberated or powerless, the individuals who make up the small group begin to organise their social existence. Power games begin to appear: rituals, the sacrifice, and even murder, of a scapegoat as a foundational act of violence, are the ingredients that make up this fable. Formally, the use of different formats, corresponding to an economy that is both aesthetic and pragmatic, create a colourful film that brings to mind the films of Jack Smith (*Normal Love*, 1963), or more recently, of Nathaniel Mellors (*The Sophisticated Neanderthal Interview*, Hammer Museum, 2013).

The editing is vital, and contrary to the overlaid and baroque approach of the piece, it is done with a rigour whose structure is inversely proportional to the disintegration of order throughout the story. In other words the narration is maintained through dramatic tension, with the editing becoming tighter and tighter, even as the organisation of the community seems to descend into chaos.

Some of the actors have already appeared in the series *Sifflet Infini (Infinite Whistle)*, Sari TM Kivinen, Anna Barie, Kolbeinn Karlsson and Juliacks herself, while others were chosen during auditions in Lyon. They are both the characters that they play and the muses that inspired the writing of the scenario. This continued throughout the making of the film, according to a method of writing-shooting, that made a pen of the camera to a certain extent. Sometimes the camera even becomes a brush through the importance of the colours, and we find a certain colourful aesthetic similar to Smith or Pipilotti Rist. The manner in which the bodies are filmed, with great sensitivity, with flesh in movement, in a form of “aesthetic of fluids”, refers to a sensual formulation of the image.

The distribution of roles and tasks in a micro-society doesn't play out between the feminine/masculine, strong/weak, but rather seems to be the random fruit of childish discoveries: death, sexuality, trance...Here the adults are big kids that seem to completely rediscover the world. The film is to be read as a fable in the style of Montesquieu or Voltaire, a satire that uses a grotesque style to comment on our society. A bureaucratic absurdity that never stops inventing internships, instead of admitting new arrivals, the status of migrant finally being the most common on a planetary scale, are parodied. Thrown into the common pool as if into contemporary French society, our friends debate, seeming to

drown so as to finally resurface after a salvational dive. The team also evokes certain epic Italian films of the seventies by Marco Ferreri.

The objects used, even in the most banal manner, become extraordinary when they are employed according to different customs. The preparation of tea at the beginning, with the bunch of mint, the way an administrative letter is read, everything seems strange and new. Haven't we all had the experience of feeling powerless or in a permanent state of discovery, when as an adult, we learn another language, or when we spend time in another culture? Our reduced vocabulary forces us to deal with a reduced level of communication.

The accessories and the costumes in the film are found or reused materials, like with Jack Smith, in an economy of finances, but also in the sense of a measured relationship with a social reality. Barter and non monetary exchange, where value is not determined by the market but by necessity, show a world where hierarchies have been upended.

The existence of the atom shows that there is always something smaller than ourselves, its nuclear architecture indicating that matter always contains an internal movement. The world is the result of permanent movement, as is society.

As I write these lines, the remains of one of our most ancient ancestors has just been discovered in Ethiopia. A fragment of jawbone with a few teeth still attached, dating from 2.8 million years ago, having characteristics belonging at the same time to Australopithecus and the first Homos, shows the transition between the two groups. We already know that Mrs Neanderthal slept with Mr Australopithecus. LD 350-1 has become then, our most ancient ancestor, and with the Musée des Confluences opening in Lyon, we can see the oldest French human remains, also a fragment of jawbone: that of a 5-6 year old child, who lived in France around 36,000 years ago. Discovered in La Quina-Aval, in Charente, then acquired by a collector from Lyon (Claudius Côte, 1881-1956), this tiny object finds itself displayed in a glass museum, built by Austrian architects. As Phillippe Forest says in a beautiful text written about this object, *L'Enfant fossile*: "This is why saying that the fossilised child is the most ancient of the modern French (2), without being scientifically false, sounds egregious all the same, a monumental anachronism, attributing a nationality to this child that he couldn't have had the slightest idea of, and one that he would have had no idea what to do with. Even more so when, if we are to believe the most widespread theory today, this little Homo sapiens, similarly to the rest of his species, most likely came from Africa in reality, arriving here with others like him at the end of a thousand year long migration, driven by necessity to an unlikely corner of our continent, itself destined to receive later, and for far longer, the accumulated waves of new and perpetual invasions, through a mixture of genres, rendering any search for paternity very doubtful". We are thus all the children of these African, or Chinese immigrants to the extent that names have meaning when speaking of a time when continents did not exist.

*Architecture d'un Atome* thus becomes the anatomy of a composite humanity, where the thousands of accents correspond to thousands of colours, and where perpetual movement is the guarantee of a species in good health.

(1) We can find a similar idea with Erri de Luca, *Le contraire de un*, Paris, Gallimard, 2004. "Two is not the double of, but rather the opposite of, one, of its solitude. Two is alliance, a double thread that remains unbroken."

(2) Phillippe Forest, *L'Enfant fossile*, musée des Confluences, Editions Invenit, pg12/13.