

Claiming Transformation/Transformation for/derm

Interview with Camilo Restrepo by Vivien Buchhorn

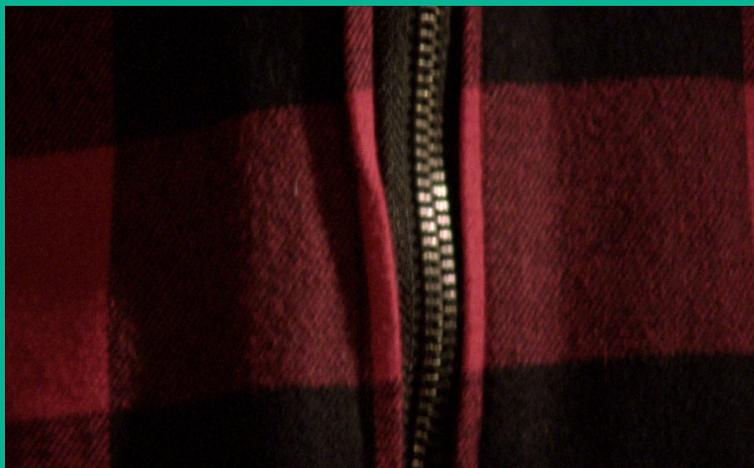
Camilo, you're part of the collective ›L'Abominable‹, what does it mean to make films in this special surrounding?

The collective has been there for more than 20 years. It's a big place where we can work with 16mm, 35mm and Super 8. No one from the collective comes from cinema, we have a lot of different profiles: we have engineers, artists, or just people who didn't study anything. We share our knowledge, but the industry had to disappear, to let us appear. I think I'm able to make films because I'm friends with a lot of people, Guillaume, the DP, for example, and people in Colombia, my home country, are also helping me. When people are involved in filmmaking for reasons of friendship, they are more creative, they can give you advice and share their ideas. They have an active role in the process.

Is there a strong element of spontaneity in your way of working?

For example, I don't use a monitor while filming. I don't want to see what's going to happen. So, I'm completely blind. I'm directing but I don't care about the image. I care about the situation: the thing as a whole performance, which happens in front of the camera. That's a way of not being behind the screen, but into the screen.

That's why I think there is a good energy in the performance [of ›La Bouche‹]. Guillaume Mazloun knows what to do with the camera, the actors know how to perform. My role is that of a conductor: to have them all doing their best at the right moment.



You work with very concrete objects, that are recognizable and that are charged with haptic sensuality.

It's intuition – I want to collect ideas. It's my way of thinking: I need concrete things, real objects and then I can have ideas. I need the real ceramic and when I have the ceramic, which is broken, I can have an idea. And the film develops itself like that: going from one concrete thing to an idea. A tree that has been cut in the forest is another idea. You have to take steps and then you are able to imagine – it's like jumping. It's about creating imagination. It opens the space for the audience to jump from my own images to their own imagination and therefore interpretations. I'm not only creating one concrete image, I'm trying to create a resonated image in the brain of the other person.

Language plays a central role in ›La Bouche‹: tell us about the choice and experience of shooting your film in Susu.

Language is home. When I hang out with friends from Colombia, we speak Spanish, we share memories, and suddenly we're in Colombia. Places are made in your mind. When I directed the film, I didn't know what the actors were saying, because I don't know their language. But I was guided by the sound. I had the feeling of being in the sound rather than in the sense.

In this kind of mixture – mixing what is European, what is from Africa and what is from Colombia – I thought that the most concrete place, like a real space, was the language of the community. We all live in France, we speak French together, but it's not our language. When they were by themselves they spoke Susu, so I considered that the real space for them is their own language. And I think we are losing these kinds of spaces, because we are becoming more and more occidental and I don't want my films to be like that, I want them to be more universal.

Universal means playing with diversity, and when you play with diversity, with richness, then you connect different points. ›La Bouche‹ tells a very simple story, but in the way that I try to tell it – with the sound, the music, the musicians, and the words – it becomes almost a Greek tragedy. An African tragedy, a Latin American tragedy... You reach different times and spaces in the world.

›La Bouche‹ tells the story of a man who is speechless after the murder of his daughter. The camera follows the performance of his family members, who try to wake him. The images reveal a certain power that feels like a materialization of life.

That's why I work with 16mm: the image and the light are materials. There is a lot of transformation in it. I think the first transformation is from the social body and the individual body. You have all these characters in the film talking to the father. They try to make him go from one state to another and to transform him into an image of revenge. He is unable to speak or even eat. But in the end, he is able to hit, to consider force in a material way. He explains his pain through his hands. The second transformation is linked to life, because Mohamed Bangoura saw himself as strong again [when he was playing the drums]. The film was able to change something inside his self.

And then there is the transformation of cultures, a sort of transnational memory of images that poses questions pertaining to identity.

It's about identity and also about my own identity: it's a Colombian film in a way. We are eclectic and I want to consider the fact that there is no ›original‹, no fixed identity. Instead, one has the possibility of being a lot of things at the same time. Music is a perfect way to be in different places, different countries, different cultures.

The difference between realism and reality is also an important element in the film. I have to tell you about Astor Piazzola, who was an Argentinian composer from the 20th century. He made a record called *57 Minutes With Reality*. I was listening to it recently. It's very contemporary music, together with an Argentinian accordion – it makes for a strange melting pot, in a way. I was thinking: what does reality mean in this case, when you are talking about art? I realized my films have a lot to do with reality and very little to do with realism. Reality is probably not the convention of what we expect to be the ›reality‹.

When it comes to national filmographies, and the divisions between them, there are still superficial images linked to specific nationalities that seem to be far removed from cultural aesthetic transformations.

If you look at which Latin American films are selected by some festivals, what kind of images they want to have about Latin America: it's all about topics and clichés. If you want to fight clichés you have to get away from conventions.

Like political images of reality: when you work in a realist mode, you are bringing up the poverty and misery of the people, and this is what we conceive as real lives. I don't want to be there at all. I want to be where the strength and the magic lies in your hands. This is what I conceive as a viewer's reality: your strength and your capacity to transform yourself. That's what I expect from Latin America: to have the capacity to not be the image that they expect of you.

