

Interview w/Valerie Smith

Valerie Smith: Let us begin. How did the idea of pursuing the legend of Daniel Ruzo and his followers come to you? And what is the relation to this film and *La Nuit de L'Homme*? Or, should I be asking the question the other way around?

François Bucher: Yes, it is the other way around, the order is reversed. But it is a good place to start. I had a dream the day before I showed *La Nuit de L'Homme* at Haus der Kulturen der Welt where I was driving a car in full speed, reverse, amongst heavy traffic, at night and was nevertheless able to turn a sharp corner and enter the narrowest alleyway without scratching the vehicle. This is how I feel about the whole chain of events that led to the film and to the small group of works that are exhibited next to the film, which is sequential; an ongoing sequence. Part of this sequence is actually narrated inside of the film itself. A train of thought, in some sense, but my personality #2 would tend to think otherwise. I borrow this term from a book I was reading today where Carl Jung expresses the split he felt between two sides of himself which he endured as a young man: one which experienced the magical world of synchronicities - the *so called* personality #2 - which personality #1 could only tangentially speak about through intricate detours; because personality #2 could only remain hidden, inextricably bound to experience.

I never decided I would tell a story about a group of Polish people saving the world and getting money and excavation permits in Egypt in their quest to find the mummy of Cheops, in order to activate the Great Pyramid before the end of the world in 2012. I jumped onto a train. The train started in another room in this hotel where I am writing this now. I came here to the North of Sweden, as I have done for the last seven years, but then I came at a painful moment of my life. A student of mine had been in contact with mediums and I was relentlessly in the business of dissuading her, out of my own fear of that very idea...of *that* which populates the invisible. But at that time of intense conflict I decided rather to ask her to give me a name. She gave me the name and telephone number of Aina. Aina gave me an appointment on the phone and I called her at the set hour. Quite a few things happened in the session that gave me a real sensation of vertigo. One of the things she said, or *they* said, was that the script I had been writing, that very Sunday afternoon, was useless. The useless script was a kind of *à la recherche du temp perdu* of my teenage years in Cali, Colombia: love in the time of the rise of the Cali Cocaine Cartel - Proust and the violent earthquake of social mobility in a pseudo feudal town. The rest of that conversation was so overwhelming that I followed her/their advice and threw my script away. I then went to Cali with cameras and tripods and with no direction...but for one appointment at a country house in the outskirts of the city to drink *yagé* with Isaias, a shaman from the Amazon jungle. I like to say that a new operative system was installed in me that night; when morning arrived, I was sure, that this night, which I later jokingly called *La Nuit de L'Homme* after a new fragrance of Yves Saint Laurent, had given me the kind of knowledge that you don't forget (of course the title is also a play on words with the "night of mankind", since the film is about the end of the world). After that night I was very able to drive in reverse, drunk and at full speed led by the new principle of "acting before thinking". Soon after, I ended up in a living room in Wroclaw, talking to a medium who channels a Sumerian God. Not because I had decided it, but because I had hooked my vehicle onto a fast speed, winding track and I was sure it was taking me somewhere. Then came Cairo, my first trip, Hawara and Giza. Then came

Peru where I had to go looking for a man that the medium had mentioned in her channelings, some keeper of a mountain who needed to remember something about the construction of the Great Pyramid in a past incarnation. I found him. His name was Severiano Olivares and he turned out to be the son of Daniel Ruzo's assistant, Manuel Olivares. Don Manuel helped Ruzo in photographing the Marcahuasi Plateau during the entire 1950's. He was the one who gave me the book "The Fantastic Story of a Discovery". So I went on to read it and soon decided that I couldn't ignore this outgrowth of my story, this forking path of the garden. So I started the parallel path towards the installation entitled *The Second and a Half Dimension, an Expedition to the Photographic Plateau*. It took another trip to the Plateau of Marcahuasi to complete my idea for that piece.

The shorter answer is that both pieces negotiate the idea of a *proto* History, I mean the legend of Atlantis, the idea of a recurring cycle of destruction which humanity recurrently forgets. But there are elements of great synchronicity in this fact, it was not calculated. No one in the Polish group could have ever read Ruzo. So both pieces have an underlying idea, and it is an idea that I didn't decide upon.

VS: What is a bit uncanny in this story is that I remember dinner with you just before or after one of your trips to Egypt and you told me about your journey, which was just before or after my trip to the pyramids where I had entered or was about to enter the tombs...

Academics write about the necessity of having critical distance to the documentary subject. Watching the first cut of *La Nuit de L'Homme* I had the same feeling I had watching your film *Haute Surveillance* (2007). As the interviewer I didn't know where I was anymore. Moreover, I didn't know where you were. Your footing in reality seems to have changed in the second cut of *La Nuit de L'Homme* you have reasserted irony. Some people came up to me after having watched the film and said they were relieved that you had given it an ironic turn. I wonder. What do you think about that?

FB: The people who feel relieved that I gave it an ironic turn are revealing the most important part of the film, as far as I am concerned. Film is a form that thinks all on its own. A film, such as *La Nuit de L'Homme*, is in the business of creating as many sliding doors as possible into a core that is nowhere but in the forehead of the observer. I liked the idea that Manuel Delanda brought up the other day in a conference in Mexico. He suggested that the biological world hangs on the limit of chaos. Biological systems are always on the verge of tilting into an unknown reconfiguration. Cinema, or rather the thought that a *duration* holds (in not holding it) is also in the very limit of chaos: it is not grounded, not levitating, not vigilant, not in a dream, it swings back and forth. The people that feel this relief are holding onto that intellectual security which the film essentially refuses: the one that sees us smirking from the VIP lounge at the theater, as if we were the experts on the script, when of course we are in the play, at play, played by and playing (*the play which I am seeing, but I am the play, the play in which I am an actor, but I am the play*). There is no "speaking about" which will save us, no academic title to shield us, no social reality with objective conditions that we can consume, no sarcastic twist or paranormal debunking, no philosophical tradition that can give us firm footing. Thought is present tense action. And this relief from a certain kind of thought (or from a certain kind of frequency of thought, I should say) that you are speaking about is almost a definition of our Western enlightened world. So to be relieved that these lunatics are not taken seriously is a bit like the news I ran into yesterday about this very strange creature that was photographed in the ultra deep ocean bed and which brought about much speculation, *until* the

scientific community assuredly sentenced it to be a specimen of *deepstaria enigmatic*. Here the word enigmatic plays a beautiful game: the jellyfish is made of the matter reality is made of, where are the organs? Reality is a "body without organs", an unformed, unstable matter, a jellyfish, and each time we find one of these creatures in the deep sea of consciousness we try to curb its chaotic profile, so that we can rest assured that whatever is there, in the darkness has a Latin encyclopedic name. The Freudian grounding of all dream experience in this self-assured structure of the repressed runs parallel to this thought (Freud is to Jung what mechanic physics is to quantum, in my mind). Or, to say it in the precise words of Hölderlin, "Whatever his merits, poetically dwells man upon this earth".

There is no way to stop asking the questions, the same ones you were asking yourself when you were six, that is my ethos, that is why in that film I could only address my letters to my son who is turning that age. So the comment of these viewers that you are mentioning, the act of focusing on the irony, and feeling relieved that "one of our own" is not actually asking these questions, is the most perfect symptom of who we are. Since I am what you might call an educated man, aware of the codes of conduct of the Neo Marxist left wing elite from New York and on the other hand raised in a household enmeshed in French literature and Western philosophical tradition, there is great concern when I start to take this world seriously, the world of the clowns who activate pyramids and talk about astrology and recurring cycles of destruction. The humour has always been there, and there was no irony added. The comment I didn't want to receive anymore is one about a viewer not having been able to follow the core story, or for the story to have too many false endings (these, to me, are questions concerning the body, because storytelling has to do with the body).

With the help of a great advisor, Jeffrey Skoller, who helped me in making the transit from the 104 minute cut to the 80 minute cut; I focused on cutting some dead ends, creating a more understandable story so that the labyrinth was the very time-image labyrinth of the psyche, rather than the labyrinth of my own lacks in understanding the body, my lacks in tailoring a story. There was also the question of indulgence, there are things one can do that are excessive, traps one falls into (the metaphor of a buffet where you pile up food until you can't taste anything, which Mr. Skoller was constantly bringing to me). I cut information in order to be able to open a space, the morphogenetic thinking form of cinema, which dwells like a *deepstaria enigmatic* creature in the ellipsis, in the voids, in the negative spaces. I didn't practically add anything, but I did have to change the breathing pattern of that big animal that we were shepherding with the invaluable help of hands-on editor, Benjamin Beck.

This might be an answer to another question, but here is some more footage.

When we understand consciousness, rather than the material world, as the foundation of reality, when we pronounce the taboo word *coherence*, then we approach the *no fly* area of the culture in which we live. Here comes religion, *re ligare* (to bind) *hier archy* (sacred rule, sacred arch, sacred principle) and the one thousand and one traps of the translations of the mind, where God is rationalized into a monarch up above, and an epistemological metaphysics *un-binds* us and separates

us from the present tense of the body, where it is all happening. Here is a point I would like to make clear. A medium, a person who channels, is a person who is able to walk the trapeze in the limit of chaos. Likewise a consciousness who visits the world "as writing", as Borges would say it, starts connecting, finds sequences, experiences synchronicity, witnesses non-locality (a principle from quantum physics that has changed our home from a gravitating globe into a universal hologram...and well within our very scientific nomenclature); this shift is full of risk. If a person is not able to go back and bridge what they have perceived, then there is pain, then we can talk about illness, psychosis and the rest of *deepstaria enigmatic* maladies that we have in our psychiatric pantheon. Likewise the work of an artist may be a voyage to the open sea, which has to be a real adventure, where they don't know the shore that they will attain, because it is in the very language that they will invent while in the ravaging tempest; this act of creation, the creation of the contingent raft of language (the work) will allow them to set foot in a new continent.

I am now more invested in the hyper dimensional seven planets, which include the Sun and the Moon - referenced in 12th century Europe and at the same time in Mesoamerica - than in the nine planets of modern astronomy, where the visa for Pluto can be denied as if it were an illegal alien, after all these years, because of some filing category. The seven planets of antiquity, the correspondence of the Universe and the body, the Zodiac body...I cannot see this as some feverish thought of a childish humanity anymore. I think we might realize, one of these days, that a solar eclipse, or the transit of Venus that takes place tomorrow, June 6, 2012, does mean something very real in our collective psyche, beyond our astronomical curiosity...and that there is a science which can describe it; one which involves necessarily self-discovery and which we need to differentiate from the one that we have acknowledged as the only science. This entails a human that is not a maker of symbols, but rather a symbolic being. The point is that I have allowed for these things only after my trip onto the open sea, with those clowns. And I am talking about it from here, from personality #1 who can answer questions in a catalogue.

VS: You did not quite answer my second question, or maybe I didn't ask it directly enough. How do you see *La Nuit de L'Homme* in relation to your earlier work, for instance *Haute Surveillance*? Is ambiguity and deception - the suspension of disbelief a subject you are redefining?

Also, where does the spiritual fit into all of this?

FB: I think that there is something which runs deep in me, a desire to confuse the world, to disturb this self-assured reality at its very core - this world projection which has become ossified through the centuries - to disturb it with the force of fiction, theater, theater within theater, image, mask, lie, deception, hallucination, dream, non-local, time paradox. It is like a desire to unhinge a solid principle of reality. Both *Haute Surveillance* and *La Nuit de L'Homme* have the same vortex at their center, a place that offers a thought about reality itself. *Haute Surveillance* is the performance of violence as theater; a violent act portraying violence itself, in Colombia of all places, a country that is a theater for a morphing, highly equivocal war; it is a game of shifting mirrors. *Haute Surveillance* speaks precisely about the distinction between violence and the image of violence. On the side of *La Nuit de L'Homme* is a story that is treated in a pseudo documentary fashion (documentary being one of the languages at play), but which is so essentially fictitious that it is able to question our own BBC stricken worldview. An act of fantasy pushed to the extreme reveals that all is fantasy, the ambiguous aroma of delusion, once the bottle is opened, contaminates the whole field, perfume and

spirit (Djinn), the genius in the lamp of Allah Djinn; delusion is in everyone and everything. I try to activate the trampoline that throws us off, to nowhere, that is where I want to play. "Not to be taken over by the dream of another, that is the story to me, if you are caught in the dream of the other you are fucked", as Deleuze so elegantly put it. The dream of linear time and passive consumption needs another dream. But I am not saying that it is about this other dream, it is precisely NOT about it. Thought is to be found in the ellipsis, the negative place that I was mentioning in the last answer. That *non-place*, which is infinite in nature and empty by definition (yet it is a place that can only be opened within a certain act of internal coherence, the opening of a game, *ARS*, a ceremony, myth in the present tense, the space of the sacred, theatre, mythology); that is where spirituality fits, because there are no terms for it, and it is allowed to have any size or form, like that perfume in the lamp, contained while the lamp is corked and boundless once you open it.

VS: Where do you go from here?

FB: Well, the sequence is playing itself; it's on. But there was a moment when it wasn't on.

At the end of *La Nuit de L'Homme* there is a balloon descending to land on the dusty hills of the West Bank in Luxor. I must have given myself an unconscious cue there, because as the shooting of that film ended - a film which had taken all I had and everything I didn't have - I started to feel quite dry and deflated. And of course going back to editing a new version of the film was very sobering. The process had to be thought within the parameters of pure craft: fine carpentry, mechanic dexterity in disassembling and reassembling an automaton. So, in short, I felt dislodged from the frequency that had hosted me for a while. What happened is that some old thinking patterns came in, the kind of patterns that come when you relativize your experiences and yourself, and so you basically get disconnected from the source of what has driven you (like tilting a flawless boat to test it, and flooding it in doing so). This, I feel, also comes when you get the sense that you have attained something, and you forget that all there is is a constant *attaining*. The dry intellectual mind was ON and the level of the noise was very strong, especially strong since I had been in a different zone that is so much more conducive to *work* in the terms that I now understand it. In those moments, as one starts to strategize for a piece or for a show, one slowly gets lost, forgets about the meaning of that wonderful and humorous sentence of Robert Filiou: "No talent only genius". This brings us back, momentarily to the Djinn, Genius (same word); I fell in love with the explanation that Tobie Nathan gave on Djinn at the Animismus conference at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, it was incredibly multifaceted and poetic what this *ethnopsychiatrist* covered, but there were simple strands that I can invoke. Djinn: not the grape, but that which makes the grape full; not the wine, not even drunkenness, but that which brings about inebriation. It is like looking at your childhood and not focusing on what kinds of events were purportedly good or bad, but rather noticing what aspects *resonated*, and which *therefore* became amplified and travelled well into your adult consciousness. It is also equivalent to abandoning the idea that someone or something gives you pain or gives you love. They don't, they do help you mobilize the pain or the love that you already have in you, the one that is just there. Djinn/genius is like the frequency which makes your eardrum vibrate, the sound doesn't come from the outside, it is human *e-motion*, which produces sound, or color, or meaning... the machine, the receptor, the instrument makes everything from nothing. The world is interior. Outside, in the unnameable outside... only Djinn, a meshwork of perfume and frequency. I find this narrative more and more crucial, as the sacred books of life turn fully into *Facebook*, this harvester of consciousness, selling spirit and soul to the best bidder. Selling an automaton, a looped human

being that is actively being reduced to a thumbs-up/thumbs-down zombie, so that *it* can be graphed and consumed better by the system that needs it to log on again as a consumer. It is the latest asset in the market, nothing less than the collective soul offered as an IPO (Initial Public Offering) at Wall Street.

So...I am now entering, without prejudices, into the world of laboratory experiments. Not as an *end all*, ultimate truth, but as a part of the texture of a certain kind of thought. I am working with people in Mexico, people who were close to a Mexican scientist who disappeared in 1994, I am entertaining the idea of furthering these laboratory experiments in neurology, which deal with things like "the duration of the present" or the "transferred potential" (non conscious telepathy) or inter-hemispheric coherence and extra-ocular perception. All in all, everything has to do with a projection. It is about a radically different projection of what a human being is, one that is suggested by the experiments themselves, in their sequential coherence. And of course this new image, this resurrected image of a sleeping human with untold sensory potentials, also invokes a new society; and this is what the word *politics* has morphed into, in my own consciousness. To me that is what that Mexican neurologist, Jacobo Grinberg-Zylberbaum was about, the man who disappeared without a trace in 1994; the imagination of a mutation *into what we already are*, something that we have been trained to suppress through living with a lot of noise around us. That is yet another piece of the sequence that is in this exhibition, Labor Berlin. So I am on to a second and third chapter of that film which will be constructed in modular form.