

Fragile film under attack – a comparison between filmic disappearances under massacres (specific case study on Cambodia and Iran) shown at this year's edition of Berlin International Film Festival 2012.

FIRST FEATURE FILM: Le Sommeil D'or / Golden Slumbers

Director, Script: DAVY CHOU

Camera: Thomas Favel

Production: Jacky Goldberg, Vycky Films, Paris, France.

Co-Production: Araucania Films, Paris and Bophana Production, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Berlinale Section: FORUM

Catalogue Page: 199.

SHORT FILM: FALGOOSH (Blames and Flames)

DIRECTOR: MOHAMMADREZA FARZAD

Production: Iran, 2011.

SECTION: Forum Expanded Program B.

Catalogue Page: 252.

RESEARCH:

Golden Slumbers -

1. <http://webasies.com/le-sommeil-dor-a-la-recherche-du-cinema-khmer-disparu/>
2. <http://goldenslumbersfilm.wordpress.com/2012/02/22/les-incorcks-berlinale-2012-une-edition-sous-le-signe-du-ravissement-feb-20-2012/>

Blames and Lames –

1. http://www.berlinale.de/en/programm/berlinale_programm/datenblatt.php?film_id=20127386
2. <http://www.arsenal-berlin.de/en/berlinale-forum/program/artists-expanded/mohammadreza-farzad.html>

Two particular films have stood out at this year's edition of Forum and Forum Expanded, during the Berlinale. Although different in terms of length, style, approach or tone – these films discuss the issue of mediation, film's unique power to address historical representation, medium specificity, historiography and cinephilia. What is striking about the membrane and structure of both films is precisely this ability to re-state historical moments and portrayals of revolutions, massacres and genocides in the absence of evidence or the actual historical material per se. The only evidence is a broken image, a post factum interpretation of events. In both cases, the films discussed have been either burnt or severely damaged. They no longer stand as vehicles for documentation, not in a proper sense of the word. Both films play beautifully with the idea of fictionalized storytelling and prefer to take a more analytical or interpretative stance vis-à-vis the events depicted. In this sense, they are closer to the conception of film-essay than to the requirements of documentary filmmaking.

For Mohammadreza Farzad, histories coincide in his beautifully arresting short: *Blames and Flames* (Falgoosh) and they coincide in this locus or ground zero whereby death becomes the image or rather death takes over cinema or fiction. At the core of his film lies a belief in the actual historicity of events, in the power of filmic manipulation per se and in the orchestration of a revolution in and for the people who make it. By the same token, cinema and the revolution become two facets of the same coin and their game is to be constantly flipped from one side to the other. The once passive spectators are shown to take over the screen; they blow up the image with their faces, expressions, and bodies but mostly with their determination to pursue social change. What links the advent of cinema with the imminent manifestation of a cultural revolution is the aspect of mobility and dynamic performance. It is through movement that these conditions are met; that men can enable themselves to be(come) resistant, to oppose force and the violent oppression of the regime.

The film enhances this malleable transition between cinema and revolution seemingly unnoticeably. The voice over commentary is somewhat consequent and almost repetitive. Yet, the resonance of the words spoken is altogether different than that of an actual, more common enunciation of facts. This process, though disheartening, is terribly exciting and freeing for the viewer. There is a strong participatory element here or perhaps an impression of presence and immediacy. The film itself becomes a sort of human catalyst for change, for the possibility of ruptures, for a rebalancing of power dynamics.

Obviously, this rendering of a particular sense of immediacy and spectatorial involvement is due to the intelligent use of montage and sound manipulation throughout the film. Not ultimately, the film's employ of archive material and static images is also well conceived and successfully highlights the redeeming force of cinema in general. The transition between history and fiction, between life and death, between cinema of the people and cinema for the people is done smoothly and naturally. Farzad is definitely a voice to keep in mind for future projects and a promising name in the international market.

In his first feature, *Golden Slumbers*, Davy Chou addresses the issue of a long term and bloodied Cambodian genocide by simply not dealing with the subject directly. This film presents itself as a self-conscious exploration and re-creation of a past, which risks to escape memory, in a most literal way possible. Mainly composed by interviews, which are then juxtaposed with very creative moments of magic realism, the film explores the idea of an active cinemateque to account for all the lost Cambodian films from the 60s until this present. Effectively, the film could be read as the cinematic equivalent of a *bildungsroman*, where more than the actual result one begins to value the (backwards or forwards) journey and the possibilities of self-fulfillment, self-discovery and self-knowledge one gains on the way. Such a particular kind of exploration beholds ideas about healing the wounds of the nation and a n effort of reclaiming a purer national identity especially for the young generation of Cambodians, our contemporaries.

The film is perhaps too long and slightly non rhythmical; occasionally in-love with itself, but it is truly made with a passion and conviction that are both moving and believable. The sincere love and energy for cinema are omnipresent as well as the talent to surprise and intrigue the viewer. The function or the possibilities of cinema are treated with an outmost respect and veneration. Everything can happen, time laps, reduction or super imposition of spaces etc. The fundamental precepts stay the same: a claim for an actual account of such horrific events is non existent since it would be physically impossible to recreate life on screen inasmuch as it would be

presumptuously erroneous to try and give back the lives to those who have lost it during the massacres.

In turn, what fuels the film, rather, is this belief in the possibility of re-experiencing history through various testimonials and the command that by reclaiming or debating that history, the events themselves won't be lost forever. In other words, by lowering the pressure of the aim, this film succeeds in seducing us both in relation to the pre-existence of Cambodian cinema from the past 50 years but also in relation to us as viewers participating in this viewing riddle. The film is also very moving and compelling in the way it shows the Cambodian archive as 'alive' and kicking, mostly through the eyes of its viewers, the (Cambodian) film buffs. Quite a few characters, in the film, are shown to describe scenes that they loved in past films. Their recollection is so strong, detailed and vivid that it becomes the agitating motor for the film itself. Such need for immortalization and remembrance becomes the main thread of the film in a vast search of what can and cannot be rendered on screen. This film can also be seen as an exercise of endurance, of refusing to be wiped out in the grand scheme of political interventions. Davy Chou will surely inspire other young Cambodian filmmakers to come to the fore in the near future and design a new history from scratch for the benefit of Cambodian film.