

Expand the experience – a plea for a visionary culture of moving images

After four years of working for the project “festivalonline.ch”, dedicated entirely to the main Swiss film festivals, we have combined our artistic background in images and video making (Ruth Baettig), our theoretical background in aesthetics (Giuseppe Di Salvatore), and our common direct experience in the Swiss field of film in an attempt to better understand what is going on in the world of moving images.

Analysis

The landscape of producing and receiving moving images has lived through many dramatic changes in recent decades: cinemas are closing while the private reception of movies continues to boom; digitalization pushes filmmakers towards interactive forms; the white cube (galleries and museums) seems to take a greater place than the old black box, and transforms the way of projecting moving images; self-supporting movie productions are increasingly possible for only the mainstream movie industry; the high-quality technology used for movie production seems to be easy for everyone to use; the great variety of video products makes it almost impossible for any unitary discourse to be had about what is expressed through the moving image; movie critics are dying out because of a more scattered community of competent people or enthusiasts; movie journalism is completely losing its independence, lowering itself to simply deliver informative descriptions and superficial entertainment; the event-logic of film festivals is emerging as the only way to continue to truly experience cinema. Yes, it is difficult to have a clear-cut picture of the situation and to understand how to make something useful or interesting with one’s own passion for moving images. So, our solution can be summed up in two words: *let’s see!* – literally. We stop analysing statistics and reading books, we stop monitoring the film world, and start committing ourselves to the effective experience of this world. Moreover, we return to see the movies again, to take them seriously, and to take the new forms of reception of moving images seriously as well. *Experience* has become our motto; so simple, so revolutionary. For if one allows the experience itself to work on oneself, one can gain a new consciousness and a real understanding of what is going on.

Our proposal

Key to our Manifesto are: *Experience*, *curiosity*, and *passion*. They mean first of all taking time to enjoy a movie, and deciding to embark upon a journey, or a trip: going to see the movies, travelling in and with the movies, letting the movies travel. They also mean being interested in *artistic* and *experimental* movies, and in all forms that can renovate and transform the filmic language through *contact with other arts and domains*. Transformation is also induced by the different *forms of reception* of moving images: a direct confrontation with the moving image becomes necessary, from the experience of interactive movies to the experience of new ways of projecting moving images in galleries or museums.

Having partaken in these experiences, our commitment is to *take a position* and formulate a choice, even a judgment – as long as that remains open to discussion. Only in declaring one’s own position can a real *dialogue* begin. That is why we think that a *critical stance* has to be proposed, if we want to discuss and communicate with the common language of moving images. In this spirit, Filmexplorer proposes a

special *selection* of movies and events, drawing a unique cartography of the movies offered in Switzerland, *the cartography of the film as experience and as a form of art*. With interviews and critical texts, it opens up a discussion that also values the *linguistic variety* of Switzerland, using the German, French, Italian and English languages. The journey of Filmexplorer becomes an opportunity for anyone to discover the incredible resources of the Swiss film landscape, thanks to its renowned international *festivals* and the passionate work of *arthouse cinemas*. Through its *Logbook*, the specificity of Filmexplorer comes to light: independence, originality, and a professional integration of *audio and video material* within the classical textual communication.

Our Start

Since the beginning of 2016, Filmexplorer has been gathering experiences and collecting an extraordinary quantity of articles, with the intention of showing its standards and specific interests. The launching of this *prototype platform* will serve as a basis to start a collective discussion that aims to integrate more voices and collaborations.

Together with the interest for classical cinema (for example, *Au-delà des montagnes, Aferim!, Hard to be a God, Incident Light, Semana santa, Zvizdan*) – which doesn't exclude negative criticism (*The Revenant, Francofonia*) – and with some rarities from the past (*Love and Duty, Stereo, Il tempo si è fermato, Out 1, The Wild East*), we have focused on the fruitful interaction between film and theatre (*The Holycoaster S(Hit) Circus, Polder*), dance (*Sea without Shore*), literature (*Amour fou, Cinema #61, Jeux sérieux*), architecture (Architecture and Film), photography (Alexandra Navratil), graphic novel (Lorenzo Mattotti), and artistic experimentation (Max Philipp Schmid, Dada at the Nickelodeon, Rendering Time) or performance (Kidlat Tahimik, Ein Abend mit Peter Liechti, Aernout Mik). Our preference for documentaries that assume and stress the experiential aspect (*Above and Below, N-Capace, Histoires maternelles, Mediterranea, The Other Side, Erbarme dich, Die Zeit vergeht wie ein brüllender Löwe, Longing for the Future, Innocence of Memories*, Audrius Stonys' films – to quote just a few titles) has put the festival Visions du réel in a privileged position, together with the Solothurner Filmtage and the Festival International de Films de Fribourg. In our *Logbook*, exceptional experiences of poetic films (*The Assassin, Song of Songs, Heart of a Dog, Kaili Blues*) go together with peculiar events like the projection of old Super8 Redux (Super8 Nacht), a programme of surf films (Nouvague Surf Film Nacht), or the discovery of a Wurlitzer organ in Geneva. In our series of interviews, we go deeper into a dialogue with exceptional personalities of the film world (Aya Domenig, Max Philipp Schmid, Nicolas Steiner, Pietro Marcello, Maurizio di Rienzo, Lorenzo Mattotti, Tobias Weber, Thierry Jobin, Tobias Nölle, Dennis Schwabenland and Sascha Engel, Alejandra Márquez Abella, Ariel Rotter, Audrius Stonys, Aernout Mik). Other important topics for us include the new potentialities of digitalization and the burning question of interactive movies and participation (*Late Shift*), which is bound to a broader theoretical reflection about the presence of moving images in exhibition spaces, *i.e.*, outside the *black box* (Film Implosion!, Bergfilmcollage).

Participation

With these focuses and interests, we want to launch an open discussion and establish enough elements to initiate future collaborations: Filmexplorer considers itself a magnet for those who are passionate about moving images.

As already stated in our Manifesto, Filmexplorer is not a commercial project, but a non-profit association. On one hand, investing the time to experience, and to be curious, implies effort and passion, and inherently narrows our target considerably. On the other hand, delivering a high-quality cultural product implies a huge quantity of work and comes with high expenses. We are consciously launching an exceptional project that cannot be financed within the framework of the usual consumerist model of entertainment market. However, we are strong advocates for the importance of culture as a long-term qualitative project: only a culture that is not only popular but also *visionary* can truly fuel the wellbeing and the wealth of society, and resist the corruption of democracy.

Ruth Baettig, Giuseppe Di Salvatore

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