



HALFWAY REVOLUTION? A DEFIANT PIECE OF RADICAL DOCUDRAMA BY TWO QUEBEC FILMMAKERS

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THE EUROPEAN DOCUMENTARY MAGAZINE



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MODERN TIMES REVIEW

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The new magazine

In your hands you are holding the first printed edition of the Modern Times Review (MTR) – the new European documentary magazine. Based in Berlin, we will feature selected reviews in the ongoing cycle of documentary filmmaking, as screened at festivals, on TV and online. We are many within the documentary community who believe that there is a genuine need for an independent, critical European documentary publication.

MTR now boasts one of the largest documentary archives, partly thanks to 15 years' worth of articles from the now-defunct DOX magazine (of which I was editor, 2009–2013). We purchased the old DOX archives from the European Documentary Network (EDN) and have published these online, so that these great articles can be enjoyed by old and new readers. MTR also features film articles from the monthly Norwegian newspaper NY TID (Modern Times), meaning that our website (www.moderntimes.review) now contains about 800 articles on documentaries: reviews, interviews and different views.

But, what of the content selection of this bi-annual magazine and its weekly online presence? The Modern Times Review has chosen to be selective. We only write about films that matter to us. The focus of this publication is three-fold, all of which, I suspect, will be keenly felt in the magazine over the coming years. The main areas of selection can be defined as **CCE**: Conflicts/politics/peace matters; the whole new fear-driven Control society (including surveillance, finance, state suppression, terror, security); and Ecological/existential topics – not far from today's neo-anarchist view of a lesser State, lesser Capitalism and lesser Militarism, defending minorities, outsiders and civil society. Precisely the view many among the current crop of brave documentary filmmakers have.

Of course, our emphasis is also on *visual culture*, as seen in the magazine you are currently reading.

The main bulk of our magazine will be documentary reviews as our logo name suggests. Different comments, views, interviews and essays also make up a part of the magazine – and some current issues on new technology and political matters.

Economically, MTR has very limited financial resources. We are essentially a really low budget non-profit organisation/network consisting of supporters and volunteers. So, please bear with us if some things are not 100 percent. MTR is currently supported by the Norwegian monthly newspaper NY TID, of which I am editor-in-chief.

MTR will continue to develop, and I would be grateful for any feedback you may have. We strongly recommend you sign up to our monthly newsletter to keep abreast of new reviews and insights. If you would like unlimited access to all our brilliant articles, and receive a printed Modern Times Review publication in your postbox twice a year – please sign up for a yearly subscription (24€). The subscription will also enable you free viewing access to some of the film documentaries we review.

Then, there is only for me to say: Welcome to Modern Times Review and enjoy!

Truls Lie, editor-in-chief

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Greece: Downfall of a European country

This year, the Berlinale presented a case study of crisis and impoverishment.

COMBAT AU BOUT DE LA NUIT. Director: Sylvain L'Espérance. Canada (Québec). 2016. 285 mins

GREECE

DIETER WIECZOREK

One of the main problems with a democratic system is that the ongoing public political discussion is based not on the importance of facts, but on their veracity. The media undermines a culture of context, history and conscious development. Today, Greece's plight no longer appears in international news coverage despite the country's precarious situation. An economic collapse is a realistic prospect if money is not injected into the country. Furthermore, political demands to reduce Greece's debts are few and far between. In this nebulous context, Sylvain L'Espérance's long-term observational documentary, *Combat au bout de la nuit* (*Fighting through the Night*) offers a clear portrayal of a complicated reality.

L'Espérance's film observes the lives of men and women, all of them archetypes of Greece's reality today. Importance is given to their statements as well as the need to capture, in long takes, their individual feelings, expressions and gestures. The director takes his time, 285 minutes to be precise, to chip away at the surface. He follows political refugees, illegal immigrants, dockworkers, protesters and highly committed citizens. In addition to the harsh, social context, he captures sources of resistance and survival. His camera follows the flight of a seagull at dawn accompanied by the songs (not slogans) of labourers. He gives space to poetic recitals from the off, as in a YouTube capture of a grotesque parliamentary law-making process in the presence of only three people, two of them silent and one protesting.

Alexandra Pavlou works in a social clinic in Athens. Following the collapse of the country's health system, she and a few colleagues provide basic medical and psycho-

logical care made possible through donations of expired medication. She summarizes some key facts: A 900 % increase in taxes over a three-year period, minimum income cut in half, confiscation and sale of flats and houses whose owners have debts, even if only 500 Euros. People are being pushed out onto the streets. They are disoriented, humiliated, frustrated and fearful of what the future has in store. Above all, they are full of hate for «the system».

This is a ripe time for fascist preaching, promising the «Golden Dawn», a complete break with the failing systems in place. Explanations on how and what will follow do not seem necessary. Some of the 600 dismissed cleaners demonstrate for weeks on the streets, resisting insults and police attacks. None of them believe in the current government anymore, and even less in the new one. The harsh reality of their situation only reaffirms their cynicism. On

July 5th 2015, going against all media pressure, some 61,3% of Greek voters rejected the bailout terms in a referendum proposed jointly by the European Commission, IMF and the European Central Bank. The majority of Greeks took this position to question not only the Euro, but also the debilitating and manipulative economic measures that favoured bank interests and global capital gain. However, only a few days after Greece's overwhelming «No» vote, «negotiations» with creditors resulted in a text, adopted and applied under Alexis Tsipras' new leadership. This outlined harsher austerity measures than those proposed in the original bailout. The People's voice was quashed.

Greek law was subordinate to the Troika's interests, even to the point that no law could enter or be discussed at the Greek Parliament without the Troika's prior approval. Now the selling of public property

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An intimate portrayal of Aleppo

Winner of the World Cinema Grand Jury Prize for Documentary at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival, *Last Men in Aleppo* will have its European premiere as the opening film of Copenhagen's CPH:DOX in March.

LAST MEN IN ALEPPO. Directors: Feras Fayyad and Steen Johannessen. Denmark, Syria. 2017. 104 mins

SYRIA

BY WILLEMIEN SANDERS

It is an intimate encounter with a group of *The White Helmets*: men who risk their lives trying to rescue victims – dead or alive – of airstrikes and other attacks on Aleppo

from rubble and debris. They often seem to be targets of the strikes themselves. We get to know their work as well as their private lives in the period from September 2015 till the autumn of 2016. Since the outbreak of civilian protests, and the subsequent turn to violence by both the Assad regime and foreign parties, we have seen a number of shorter and longer documentaries about the war. These include *Morning Fears*, *Night Chants*, *Silvered Water*, *Syria Self-Portrait* and *Return to Homs*, winner of the same Sundance award in 2014. They all confront us with the realities of war, destruction and devastation, and their effects on human beings, most notably ordinary citizens. And they are all filmed from within, which firmly removes them from journalism.

This film follows a group of White Helmets, most notably Khaled, Mahmoud and Nagieb, as they drive around the Aleppo, cope with substandard equipment, or stare at the sky in search of fighter jets.

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Surfing against the odds

This beautiful and heartfelt documentary takes us into the world of the Gaza Strip's surfing enthusiasts, and reveals a formidable resilience pulsating within a beleaguered population.

GAZA SURF CLUB. Directors: Philip Gnad and Mickey Yamine. Germany, 2016.



GAZA

BY WILLEMIEN SANDERS

Gaza Surf Club is a feel-good film about young people in a dire situation who try, against the odds, to follow their dream of surfing using proper equipment. The film opens with a geopolitical introduction of the territory: the Gaza Strip as a locked-in coastal enclave suffering from attacks and blockades from several sides, including the sea; backed by a soundtrack of bom-

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I am not your negro

We can all learn something about consideration and honesty from James Baldwin.

See our review of *I Am Not Your Negro* on page 2



MARTIN LUTHER KING JR., MALCOLM X AND MEDGAR EVERS. ALL KILLED FOR WHAT THEY BELIEVED IN.

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In-between the shapeshifters

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