

FILM AT REDCAT PRESENTS

Mon Dec 9 | 8:30 pm |

Jack H. Skirball Series

Nicolas Rey ***autrement, la Molussie*** ***(differently, Molussia)***

Based on fragments from Günther Anders' novel *The Molussian Catacomb*, written between 1932 and 1936, Nicolas Rey's captivating nine-part film presents allegorical stories and musings by political prisoners sitting in the pits of an imaginary fascist state called Molussia. Shown in random order whenever it is screened, the film's sections ruminate on capitalism, imperialism and resistance—accompanied by gritty, unsettling self-processed images of undefined landscapes. A haunting and moving meditation on brutality and control, *autrement, la Molussie* has galvanized audiences at festivals throughout the world. Since 1993 Rey has been making films that hover between photography, documentaries and the avant-garde. He is the founder of the Paris-based artist film lab L'Abominable.

Grand Prix, Cinéma du Réel, 2012

In person: Nicolas Rey

"Nine reels of unbelievably gorgeous 16mm, eight of which feature allegories drawn from philosopher Günther Anders' posthumously published 1931 novel *The Molussian Catacomb* which exposes the Fascism inside Capitalism and vice versa. The sequencing of the reels—i.e. the stories and the way certain motifs, aesthetic strategies, and cinematic devices are introduced and worked through—is interchangeable; what carries over from reel to reel are the colors and textures. Few works so perfectly combine cinesensuality and Marxist dialectics: here, beauty is praxis and agitation becomes thought. – Olaf Möller, *Film Comment*

"A film in nine chapters, shown in random order. Prisoners sitting in the pits of an imaginary fascist state, Molussia, transmit one another stories about the outside world like a series of political and philosophical fables. The shooting was done between 2007 and 2011

on outdated Gevaert 722 and 732 16 mm stock. The processing of the original material and the printing of 16 mm prints were self-made at L'Abominable, an artist-run film lab based in La Courneuve on the outskirts of Paris, France. <<http://www.l-abominable.org>>

As there are 362,880 possibilities to arrange the 9 reels, one can reasonably consider that every screening will be a world premiere." - Nicolas Rey

"But Differently How?

Nicolas Rey has built a pun into the title of his latest film. But at the same time, he has not. This could be construed as a dialectical manoeuvre, although whether or not to read it as such involves a decision based on history and linguistic heritage. Since *The Molussian Catacomb* was written by Günther Anders, the original German title of Rey's film is little more than an authorial designation: "*Anders, Molussian*." It's a code of sorts, taking the title of the original while signifying a relationship with it, rather than a conventional adaptation. Ironically, it seems that sometimes calling on the author can signal an attenuated approach between the source text and the newer one—*Fortini/Cani* (1977) or *Effi Briest* (1974), for example—and that's certainly the case here...

However, "Anders" was the author's assumed name. He knew that in German it meant "differently" or "otherwise," and so Rey's title "pun" is not even built into the original text, *The Molussian Catacomb*, but into the very name of the author, a true Derridian conundrum. So, the English title really is (or could be), *differently, Molussia*. But of course, Rey had every right—in the strongest sense of that word, every legal right, the very name of the author—to retain the name "Anders" without translation, to avoid the chiasmus. So how is *differently, Molussia* "differently?" How does it signify differently? Even if we postpone the question of how the film itself signifies differently, it seems clear that it adapts differently, that it treats its text of instigation with an almost sculptural sense of play beyond that seen even in Fassbinder or Straub-Huillet."

– Michael Sicinski, *Cinemascope*

This presentation of *autrement, la Molussie* is part of a touring exhibition of critically acclaimed French experimental filmmaker Nicolas Rey, with 10 other universities and media centers in the United States, supported in part by a grant from Cine2000, a program of FACE.

<http://www.facecouncil.org/cine2000/index.html>

In Los Angeles, Los Angeles Filmforum will present another film by

Nicolas Rey at the Velaslavasay Panorama with Nicolas Rey in person
on **Sunday December 8 at 6:30 PM**

Soviets plus electricity
(2001, color 16mm, 175')
Los Angeles premiere

A cinetrip to a defunct country.
FIPRESCI Prize Berlin 2002

Velaslavasay Panorama
1122 W 24th St. Los Angeles, CA 90007
(213)746-2166

More information to come at www.lafilmforum.org.

Nicolas Rey (born France, 1968) wasn't named after the famous American director, and he's not even the son of the French experimental filmmaker Georges Rey. He has been making films since 1993, productions hovering somewhere between photography, documentaries and experimental films. His films have been shown in major international festivals as the Berlinale, Toronto International and Melbourne International Film Festivals as well as in numerous alternative film screenings. He is a co-founder of L'Abominable, an artist-run film lab near Paris and is currently in charge of coordinating the technical side of the lab and teaching filmmakers self-sufficient techniques of post production for films shot on celluloid (as opposed to digital)

FILMOGRAPHY

Postier de nuit (1995, BETA SP, 78')
Terminus for you (1996, black and white 16mm, 10')
opera mundi (1999, triple black and white 16mm, 60')
Soviets plus electricity (2001, color 16mm, 175')
Schuss ! (2005, color 16 mm, 123')

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I wanted to make a film based on a novel that I hadn't read. Or, to be more precise, a novel that I could not read as it was written in a

language foreign to me and without translation. I know it sounds like a strange idea. It was a matter of trust – and a matter of intuition – but more so, a matter of trust. Today I can tell that I wasn't wrong; that *The Catacomb of Molussia* is profoundly of our times.

How can you proceed when you can't read the script? Simply – always keep things simple... I knew what the plot was: prisoners, sitting in the darkness of a pit in an imaginary fascist state called Molussia, telling each other stories about the outside world like a series of philosophical fables. How to proceed...?

We began by filming that imaginary country. There was no need to go very far. My friend Nathalie and I wandered through urban and industrialized landscapes. We would stop here and there and film. But what was remarkable was that, in such a process, what deserved to be filmed appeared so clearly without any project writings to determine it. We started to build machines with my friend Christophe to make the business more complex and the results less predictable, not forgetting to film a few human beings in their most common activity: work – a country is never completely deserted.

My friend Stefan, gave me a sizable amount of out-of-date film stock. At first, it was so difficult to obtain an interesting image with it that I considered dropping the idea of using it. But after a year of experimentation, I ended up finding an appropriate process and printing procedure: A grainy, rough, timeless image as fascinating as paintings of Caspar David Friedrich. I persevered. Without an artist-run film lab like L'Abominable and the possibilities it offers, I don't believe it would have been possible...

Shooting periods followed one another. I learned a bit of German. Months passed; then years. By then I had quite a lot of images and sounds. Molussia started to take shape. I asked my friend Peter to read the book for me. In 2001, my friend Jutta had read a copy acquired in Germany, and later my Berlin friend, Carole, had also read it. The novel was written between 1932 and 1936 by Günther Stern, known by the pseudonym Anders (which is German for "differently")...

Shortly before Hitler seized power, Anders finished a version of the *Catacomb* and entrusted the manuscript to Brecht's publisher. The latter, out of precaution, wrapped it in a cover representing a map of Indonesia where he adds an island named "Molussia" to disguise the book as a travelogue. He just finished before the Gestapo arrived and confiscated all the manuscripts in his possession. By luck, the censors fell for the trap and returned *The Catacomb* without having read it. In March 1933, just after the Reichstag fire and the fatal chain of events it unleashed, Günther Anders and his wife, Hannah Arendt, left for Paris. Now an exile, Anders feverishly completed the book, that tripled

in volume. He unsuccessfully tried to get it published before leaving for the United States in 1938. By the end of the war, he considered publication was no longer timely. We had wait to until 1992, the year of Anders's death, for Becks to publish its German edition. Today, the book is out of print without having been translated, although the later philosophical and political works of Anders are widely circulated.

Peter finished reading the *Catacomb* and I asked him to choose a number of chapters that he thought would be interesting for the film. Peter knows me well, having translated my previous film, *Schuss!*, into German. Trust. He sent me his selection and I added a number of chapters whose titles I had found attractive. With my friend Nathalie, we deciphered all this and roughly translated it so that I could work it out. Then Peter came to Paris, and after discussing it with him, I shortened the selection and we recorded him reading what I have kept. Now I could go to the editing stage. How should I proceed? Simply...

I started by associating the texts with the sound recordings I had. I focused on the recordings that lasted a bit, developing in time, almost musically. And at the same time, but in a separate operation, I began to compose successions of images: hypothetical progressions in the imaginary country. Sketches started to appear. The moment of truth came when the soundtrack had to be confronted with the images. Curious combinations were born. Sound and image had to "chafe", without destroying each other. Curiously, there didn't seem to be many possibilities. Little by little, however, the number of parts and the images that were to remain became evident. From the beginning, I believed that each part could be placed anywhere in the film. But that constraint of a random order rendered the task of editing a bit particular. Eventually it became clear that only one excerpt from the book would be present in each part. A visual course, a sound atmosphere, and a text: an unlikely classicism. Then, "differently," along with the name of that strange country, proved to be the right title for the film.

Then L'Abominable was threatened with eviction from its location in Asnières. We began to take everything away except for the 16 mm editing table. Eviction took place, and, to finish the editing, we had to walk through the walls and get locked up in the lab just like the prisoners in the novel..." (September 2011)

Funded in part with generous support from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Curated by Steve Anker and Bérénice Reynaud

<http://nicorey.perso.neuf.fr/anders/anders-EN.html>

<http://mubi.com/notebook/posts/a-land-imagined-a-conversation-with-nicolas-rey>

<http://cinema-scope.com/features/burrus-abominable-dialectic-nicolas-reys-autrement-la-molussie/>

<http://sensesofcinema.com/2012/feature-articles/a-conversation-with-nicolas-rey/>

<http://www.l-abominable.org>