

A Roll of the Dice will Never Eliminate Chance

No doubt it takes many long years to notice that what one films on a given day is not only what existed then but represents *what was possible at that very moment*. Thus, the art of documentary filmmaking is perhaps the art of filming the possible.

For centuries it was possible for the great majority of Paraguayans to live a modest but dignified life on a few acres of land wrested from the forest. I filmed that way of life in 1968. Just a few years later all those small farmers were chased off their land by Brazilian soybeans planters who sometimes own plantations as large as 200,000 hectares. Only the film remains as a lasting testimonial to a possible way of life.

In 1973-74 I filmed the epic struggle of workers at the LIP factory in Besançon. Such a struggle would be unimaginable let alone impossible today. And yet, one thousand men and women (plus hundreds of thousands of supporters all over France and Europe) led this fight, lived it and endured months of struggle, demonstrated extraordinary collective political intelligence. Soon after that (after the second "gas shortage" crisis of 1974) the historical period we could call "social capitalism" or "social democracy", which began in France with the Clémenceau Laws of 1919, came to an end. Today we have returned to a pure and harsh form of economic liberalism (neo-liberalism or ultra-liberalism) which would have us believe that the compromises of the recent past (all those progressive laws, the entire economic system which functioned no worse than today's) were absurd.

The film remains, a film that forever demonstrates how the collective or democratic struggle of individuals not only succeeded in creating a new political force but, in the process, also changed peoples' very lives.

Later still, I filmed times of war and war itself and how life goes on. In spite of everything life is still possible.

I also spoke of the sometimes difficult love between a father and son, something also possible.

I spoke of a love assassinated but that death itself could not annihilate, a love which cannot be eradicated.

And finally, quite recently, while passing the Communards' Wall at Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris, site of the execution by firing squad of the last of the Communards in 1871, I thought of the words of the poet Stéphane Mallarmé: that all our defeats (and death inevitably is one of them) in no way mean that the

struggles were impossible or that our lives are without meaning and especially not to renounce giving Chance one more try.

Mallarmé, of course, said it much better than me:

A roll of the dice will never eliminate Chance

Addendum: *History standing still*

To more precisely define what I mean by "the possible" I would like to repeat something I heard while visiting Athens a few weeks after the legislative elections of 2015 and the subsequent victory of the Siriza Party. My wife and I had of course come to have a look-see. What we found (among other things) were large dispensaries that had been set up during years of extreme poverty and offered free medicine and medical care. One late afternoon we were invited to meet the [female] director of the dispensary near Omonia Square. She spoke perfect French. Here is what she said, or rather what I remember that most struck me:

"As I come to work every morning, I sometimes look up and see the Acropolis and it is as if I saw *History standing still*, suspended over Athens" As imperfect as it was, the possibility of Greek democracy, which has never been recreated since, persists, as if suspended in our minds no doubt waiting for another roll of the dice....