

DIES D'AGOST

(AUGUST DAYS)

SYNOPSIS

Confused after several months of work, searching for material to write about a time in history about which a journalist had often spoken about, Marc calls his brother David to leave together on a short vacation.

But Marc cannot switch off from work and David takes him further south, to a place where people comes from far away searching for a fish with cat-like whiskers. Without realizing it, the two brothers travel into an unknown countryside where many things happened to their grandfathers, and they come across a series of drifting characters that will take them into a lost paradise.

TECHNICAL INFO

Produced by Benecé Produccions

An initiative of the Master's Program in Creation Documentary by the Pompeu Fabra University

In associated production with Televisió de Catalunya, S.A.

With the participation of Televisión Española, IRUSOIN and the collaboration of ICAA, ICIC, Catalan Films and TV

CREW

Direction and script	Marc Recha
Assistant director	Pol Rodríguez
Executive producer	Xavier Atance
Delegate producer	Núria Botellé
IDEC-UPF delegate producer	Jordi Balló
Production manager	Victoria Borràs
Head of production	Nico Villarejo
Director of photography	Hélène Louvart

Photographs and stills	Xavier Ferrer
Focus puller	Benoit Rizzotti
Editor	Sergi Dies
Direct sound	Dani Fontrodona
Sound editor	Marisol Nievas
Sound mixer	Ricard Casals
Music composed by	Pau Recha, Fina La Ina and Borja de Miguel
Voice in off	Berta Reixach

CAST

David	David Recha
Marc	Marc Recha
The forest guard – trumpet player	Mariona Ordóñez
The campsite waitress	Fina Susín

SONGS

SI TU DISAIS (Dominique/Toorop/Chataigner/Bondu)

Performer: François Breut

LA RUE NE TE PRENDRA PAS (Dominique)

Performer: François Breut

HUI FA VENT

Performer: Clara Andrés

Author: Clara Andrés

Courtesy by Clara Andrés (P) 2005

NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR

Ramon Barnils (1940-2001) was a journalist I met in Barcelona at the beginning of the nineties. A voracious reader, confirmed smoker, indefatigable conversationalist with a recalcitrant irony, he had been the editor of the CNT newspaper “Solidaritat Obrera” (Workers’ Solidarity). Behind much of what he said, one could often perceive a referent of a certain depth; it were the remains of a period that many had forgotten, or that some didn’t want to remember. To talk about the years of the Republic in a country

where Franco's dictatorship still casts a long shadow soon aroused my curiosity about this man.

Some years later, after his death, the chance came up to make a film about this subject. But the material I found at that time was full of doubts and commonplaces, often oversimplified and somehow excessively dependent on a specific genre – like report or historical reconstruction-, leaving not much space for personal development and questioning. The problem was how to set off on a drifting journey that at heart was a journey of discovery, following the steps of a man who had disappeared prematurely. The whole conjunction was thorny, so my suggestion to the film producers was to establish a way of working that would let me gradually uncover the paths that we would follow.

With the agreement of those who had quickly grasped the idea, a series of interviews were set up with anyone who, one way or another, had been connected to Ramon Barnils. No images were recorded, only the sound. What could have been a string of radio interviews commenting on the vicissitudes of the character became an audio journal that would act as a catalyst to set the departure point for the story.

These audio documents became the real script of the film, and an inestimable source of knowledge and reflection. They became a guideline for work.

However, problems soon started to appear. After various months of interviews, it became obvious that the character was saturated. It was time to stop and take a few steps back, in order to be able to pick up the work again properly. I phoned the director's assistant, we took the car and drove to the village where Barnils' mother had been born, a place with reservoirs nearby, ideal to wander about, swim and just while away the time.

It was then, during one of those solitary swims, that I was suddenly hit by the idea of seriously fitting into the film all the experiences that had occurred during the interviews. Why not bring all the unexpected turns, doubts and headaches into the story we were going to film? In other words, the trigger of the adventure we were starting should emerge from real life, from the difficulties one faces when trying to write a reasonably ordered text about the period one man had often spoken about.

The starting point was set: centred on a journey made by twin brothers in a van to get away from work, approached as a sort of Road Movie –throughout the filming process we called it "Cat Fish Movie"-, during which they would come across a series of characters who, one way or another, would establish a contact point with their world.

Characters that were almost drifting in a changing world, turned upside down by the systematic plunder and spoiling of the land, where the human tendency towards destruction of life inexorably transforms them into vague shadows.

This erratic wandering would have to be the common denominator for all these characters, including the brothers. The journey needed to bring together the way of life, in some cases libertarian, of certain people born in 1970 (a time of hopes and expectations that would later become disappointing disillusion), what they had lived through, their relationships with their parents and friends. Characters seen through the eyes of the twin's younger sister, born a decade later, who gives a highly personal touch to the story of her brothers' experiences in those August days.

We thought an interesting way of reflecting these aspects would be to use some biographical episodes from the life of those taking part in the film, to ask them to let us enrich the story of this journey with their own personal experiences. That meant the casting would have to be based on these premises. It was not an easy task to find people who shared this willingness. What we were really proposing was that the subjects of these biographies would perform their own experiences. To fictionalize this human content meant diving into the world of observation of life. The participation of these people, without much acting experience, would be determinant to set the compass that would guide us into a story that would be written day by day during the filming.

The idea was to take advantage of everything we would come across on the trip, having previously decided not to alter the environment at all. The extreme drought augured by the weather forecasters was a crucial factor to set the context for the adventure. Nature, or the complex relationship between humans and the surrounding environment suddenly and unavoidably became a main character. The forest fires were raging across the country and everyone was on maximum alert. While we were getting ready to film, a particularly virulent fire devastated most of the area we were going to pass through. During the editing stage, back in Barcelona, part of the Riba-Roja d'Ebre area where we had filmed the reservoir scenes was also burnt.

We had very few days to shoot; we undertook to film the whole story in four weeks. This meant accepting a particularly risky schedule with almost no time to re-do anything. It was as though we were escaping forward, and during that time we had to be alert to anything that might happen. The conditions were physically hard; we had to carry all the equipment back and forth into inaccessible places that were vehicles frequently could not pass through. What at first glance seemed like a walk around the countryside became a test of considerable tenacity and resistance. The sun, the heat and the stifling atmosphere, the flies and mosquitoes were our constant travel companions.

The desire to satisfy immediate needs, to keep the characters both fresh and real in a context where the beauty of the landscape would colour their human dimension, led us

to state a straighter project. This meant to do without some of the heavier equipment and using much lighter production structures than those typically employed in the film industry. We had to abandon certain comforts, but at the same time we had to ensure that this decision would not entail any loss of quality: the quality of the image, the sound or the human team. The film emerged from this desire and deliberately revolves within this production system, in the same way filmmakers like Jean Renoir had approached their work in the thirties.

To make the best use of our filming resources, we set up a second unit to cover the aspects that we kept finding on the way, but that the main team was unable to film.

This second team took photographs and recorded sounds; it was a kind of audio photo novel. Later, this graphic material became crucial in enriching the final edition of certain sequences.

Immersed in our idea of fictionalizing everything that crossed our way, we deliberately included the story of the old cat-fish that apparently, in 1974, a German had furtively introduced into the Mequinensa area of the Riba-Roja reservoir, which has now become a well-known destination for German and English anglers looking for these fish. Following the same criterion, we used certain passages from the war notebook – about the Battle of the Ebro, during the Civil War- that our mother's father had written in 1938. Likewise, Riba-Roja d'Ebre was the place our paternal grandfather had come from.

The two brothers passed through these places that are still stamped on the collective memory of many inhabitants of the area. But the idea of the two grandfathers separated by a river during the battle was eventually dropped in the final editing.

In the editing process, what did stand out as one of the story's narrative threads (as a floating, brush-stroked idea), was the subject of the lost paradise. It often takes form in the landscape, which one way or another establishes certain ties with the stories Barnils had told about long ago forgotten things, or that some did not want to remember: a time when towns and villages were changing, when everything was a promise of new prosperity, when people set off on adventures, looking for other ways of working, of living life, and that the turmoil of civil war and the victory of the fascist military rebels over the lawful Republic would forever destroy.

The lost world of those foundation years, marked by a pioneering, cheerful, jocular spirit, full of hopes and new challenges –an irrecoverable world in many ways-, acts as a guiding thread and stays with the two brothers to the end.

Marc Recha

AWARDS AND FESTIVALS

2006

AGT / 59th LOCARNO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (Switzerland) - Class A.

Selected for the International Competition

SEPT / 31st TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (Canada)

SEPT / 54th SAN SEBASTIAN. Opening of 'Made in Spain' section (Spain)

OCT / 44th NEW YORK FILM FESTIVAL (United States)

OCT / INTERNATIONAL CRITICS MEETING (Barcelona)

OCT / 29th MILL VALLEY FILM FESTIVAL (California, United States)

OCT / 39th SITGES FESTIVAL. Opening of the Catalan Focus section.

OCT / 2nd INQUIET (PICASSENT). Selected in the Official Section.

Best full-length fiction film award.

OCT / 49th LONDON FILM FESTIVAL (United Kingdom)

OCT / 35th FESTIVAL NOUVEAU CINÉMA DE MONTREAL (Canada)

NOV / 24th TORINO FILM FESTIVAL (Italy)

NOV / 28th FESTIVAL DE CINÉMA MEDITERRANÉE DE MONTPELLIER (France)

Technical support price GTC

PRESS CLIPPINGS

CAHIERS DU CINÉMA

– (...) "August days", happy and sensual walk, is overall a film about his own genesis, a return to his own origin. – NICOLAS AZALBERT

LIBÉRATION

– "August days", unquiet transition film, is not a portrait about a dead journalist, but a self portrait of a 35 years old Catalan filmmaker, sign of sensuality and compromise: his games, his doubts, his fears. – EDOUARD WAITROP

L'HUMANITÉ

– Brightness and lightness are the dominants in this splendid walk without obstacles. –
VINCENT OSTRIA

TÉLERAMA

– Marc Recha made with “Dies d’agost”, or “August days”, an experience that evokes “Gerry”, from Gus Van Sant : a travel like a cinematographical trip. -
FRÉDÉRIC STRAUSS

LA VANGUARDIA

– “Dies d’agost” it’s a risky bet, or easy, it depends on the type of public, took boldly to the last consequences. – LLUIS BONET

EL MUNDO

– “Dies d’agost” is a rural road movie, without mobile phones, in where the landscape, once more, talks for the director. – ELENA CUESTA

FOTOGRAMAS

- “Dies d’agost” shows that Marc Recha didn’t go for holydays for nothing: his way, so secret like the fish-cat that lives in the reservoir of Riba-Roja, is firm and precious, and announces future travels more stimulating still.- SERGI SANCHEZ