

MATI DIOP 29.11.19

CINEMATEKET, GOTHERSGADE 55, 1123 KBH

ok fuck netflix really really really
då blir det utan den nya. men kanske med 35 rhums istället?
vet ni när den kommer ut på netflix i scandi - om det är någon som har det kan man se det på sidan när man är inloggad?
frågan är bara var.
MM är dox biografen färdig är det en annan som skulle passa bra med Diop som vi kan hyra in hos oss?
och vem skulle man kunna skriva och fråga om en nyskriven text.
vad säger ni andra?

Man kan ikke se på Netflix hvornår ATLANTICS får "premiere", man kan bare se traileren lige nu. Ingen datoer. Virkelig irriterende at de ikke bare slipper den til bio-visninger i det mindste i månederne inden den er ude på stream!

Ja, det er sgu da helt perfekt at vise ATLANTIQUES direkte fra Netflix!

lørdag!
med atlantiques efter! så bra.

Jeg er med på det hele. Netflixpirateri ligeså

TOUKI BOUKI, yes!

Og måske vise [dancescenen](#) fra 35 SHOTS på et tidspunkt midt i det hele.

This fever is a nightly invader,
That strikes the patient during deep sleep.

He jumps off his bed and runs to the bridge.

There, he believes seeing
beyond the waves,
trees, forest flowered meadows.

His joy erupts in thousand exclamations.

He experience the most burning desire to flow into
the ocean.

Mati Diop 2009 Atlantiques

What happens: events interiors, snatch
them from the cradle, from the source.
I want to watch watching arrive.
I want to watch arrivances. I want to
find the root of needing to eat. And
taste it: work of sweat
sleep.

CIXOUS

X

Terrassen: "If I would ask one question for a Q&A
with Mati Diop, I would ask her about distance and
proximity, her distance and proximity to Dakar."

X

"Im very curious about your use of the sea, the
ocean - the travel and the ghost, transitional
voyages?"

X

"For someone who loves cinema so much, can you
talk about collaborating with Netflix and therefore
not having a cinema-run premiere in so many coun-
tries. Is it a matter of obtaining a bigger freedom in
the production or how do you think about the distri-
bution and accesability, the experience of watching
your films?"

X

Ne me demandez
pas si j'aime la
grâce

"Forget Europe, lets talk about here."

"Look at the ocean.
It has no borders...
No borders.
Yet it offers no branches to hold on to.
Nothing to hold onto."

<https://www.instagram.com/matidiop>

**"It's pretty late and it's incredible that
it is still relevant," she said. "My first
feeling to be the first black female di-
rector was a little sadness that this
only happened today in 2019." "I
knew it as I obviously don't know any
black women who came here before.
I knew it but it's always a reminder
that so much work needs to be done
still."**

*I write based on the actors I choose. We quickly form a
work-group, a play-group. Mati Diop*

This is something I experienced with
Claire [Denis]. The magic aspect is finding
the right person. I understood that most
of the work didn't really come from her di-
rection on set, but from the fact that she
chose the right person for the role. It's not
really about what she's going to say on set
to make me understand. There's a dimen-
sion that goes beyond.

*"I just hope people leave the film with a special feeling
or mood, one that you remember like a melody for days,
weeks or forever, rather than just remembering the story
itself"*

"When you feel your own little story meets the
bigger story the feeling is that it doesn't belong
to you, which is quite moving really.

*"This is the legend of the bird that rises from the
ashes," Diop said in a director's statement about
the film. "Here, the phoenix is a young woman.
After devoting a short film to the men who leave by
sea, my current interest is in the women who stay
behind, the ones who wait for a brother, a lover, a
son to come back."*

"When I started writing the script, I realized that I
hadn't really seen any film with a black couple that
was worthy of Romeo and Juliet," Diop said. "And
through Ada and Souleiman I wanted to relate a
similar kind of tragic love, in the age of rampant
capitalism." <> When I was writing I was thinking
the invisible force that was taking possession [over
people] as a way to talk about very different, very
strong influences. Africa was crossed at first by the
Arabic and Muslim culture, who colonized black
Africa, then France, then of course American cul-
ture, and now it's China and Dubai. It was also a
way to try to figure out how today looks, what the
imagination and the landscape, the interior land-
scape, of a young girl of Senegal today looks like in
terms of influences.

Snow Canon is built upon associations and corre-
spondences of ideas and images. I filmed the girls
as a landscape in mutation, and the mountains as
the interior space of the two main characters. They
are distant, inaccessible and yet captivating: as
unattainable as the desire and its temporality which
are the subject of the film."

"I work in response to a desire. Last Night, my first
short film, was born from a desire to film the bodies
and faces of my friends."

*I write based on the actors I choose. We
quickly form a work-group, a play-group.*

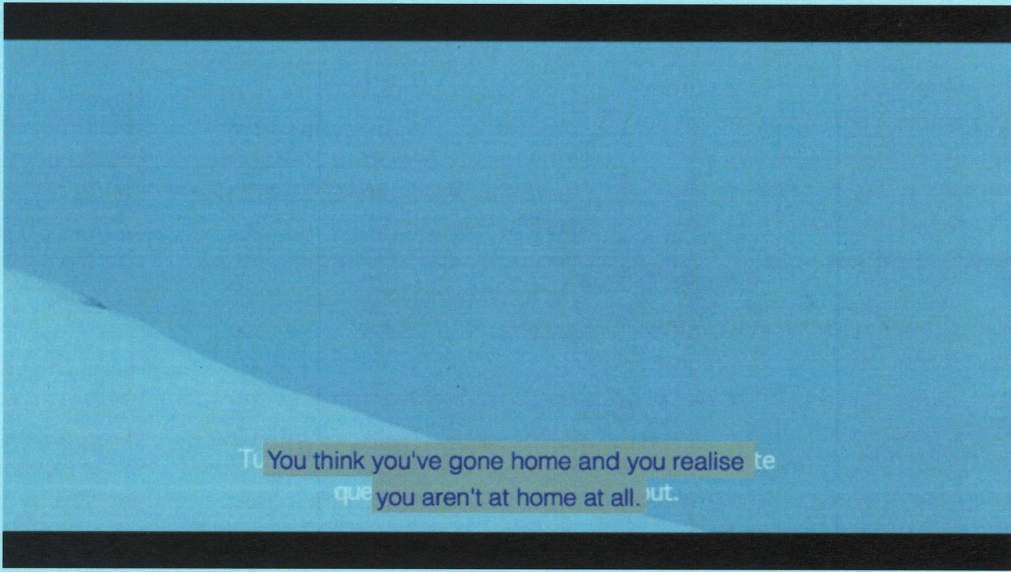
atlantiques - bande son alternative

She started her career as an actress, starring in
Claire Denis' 2008 drama "35 Shots of Rum." The
experience was life-changing for the 25 year-old.
Playing the daughter of a black father (Alex Des-
cas) reminded her of her blackness, which effec-
tively launched her investigation into her African
identity, and working with Denis was inspirational in
other ways. "It allowed me to see a woman as a
filmmaker," Diop said. "And so it made me realize
that I could be a filmmaker myself."

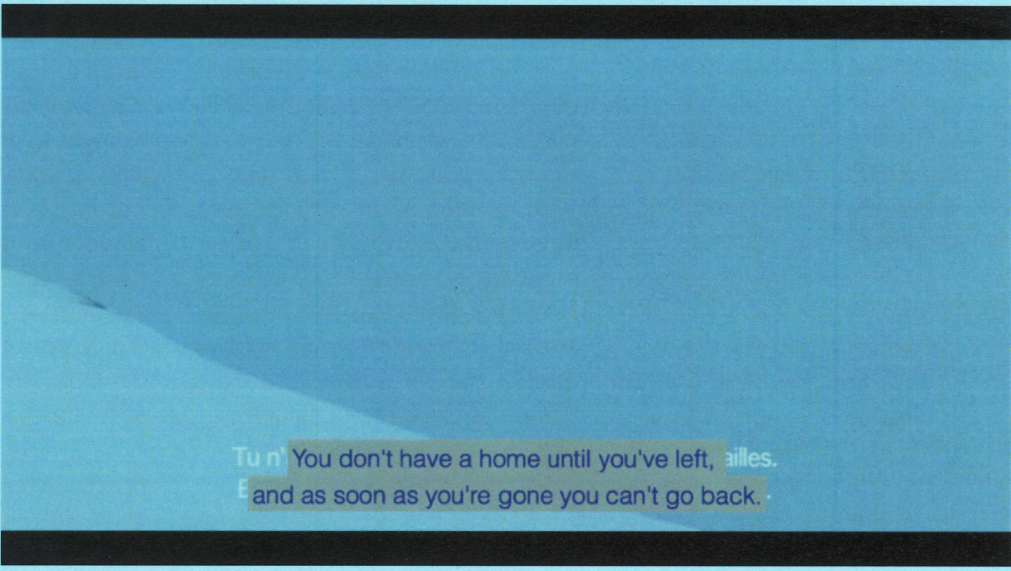
"Atlantiques" tells the story of a young woman from
Dakar, whose fast-paced lifestyle is disrupted by
the sudden disappearance of her lover. He is soon
believed to be dead, especially as bodies of some
of his friends start to wash up on a Dakar beach. It's
thought that they must have gone to sea in one of
the many boats (known locally as pirogues) that
leave Senegal's shores, crossing the Atlantic to
Europe in a treacherous journey as the passengers
seeking better prospects.

Referring to Atlantiques, Diop points out how she
chooses not to treat immigration as a subject, but
as an individual and sensitive experience, as a kind
of time travel. In this way, she demonstrates how
place resides in physical space as fervently as it
does within the limitless expanse of the imagination.

<https://twitter.com/hushtag/matidiop>



>People watching sailing scene in Tou-
ki Bouki in Mille Soleils AKA A Thou-
sand Suns< - you know the boat that's
leaving tomorrow? Should we take it? - And where
will we find the money? You can't even pay off your
debts and you're talking about boats! - We leave
and we arrive clandestinely in Europe - And then?
- Don't worry, it'll be easy - We just need a bit of
money and then we'll be like good people. We need
to be elegant, look like we have a lot of money. Be
generous to those we meet - No one will believe it.
When we get back, I'll be someone important. Ev-
eryone will call me Monsieur Mory. And you, you'll
work for the Red Cross you know? - All those no-
good people work, they have plenty of money! Se-
duce on of them and you become the President.



- You're not dancing?
- So they can all stare at us?
- You're something.

"Cinema is magic in the service of dreams"
DIJBRILO DIOP MAMBETY

PROGRAM

Atlantiques • 16 min • 2009
Snow Canon • 33 min • 2011
35 Rhums (Excerpt)* • 5 min • 2008
Billard Luxury Palace** • 4 min • 2017
Big in Vietnam • 29 min • 2012
Olympe • 5 min • 2017
Liberian boy*** • 4 min • 2015
Mille Soleils • 45 min • 2013

* directed by Claire Denis
** in colaboration with Manon Lutanie
*** Felicite remix #1

Mati Diop's *Mille soleils*

By: Mads B. Mikkelsen

Here's another way of looking at things, thanks to Mati Diop's *Mille soleils* (2013).

In a traditional sense, documentary might be thought of as the kind of filmmaking (or other artistic practice) that engages with the real – or, with *that which is actually the case*, a definition of 'the real' which itself belongs to a certain philosophical tradition that distinguishes the real from the possible, actuality from potential.

That which actually is the case, in this sense, is the sum of realised possibilities; let us for a moment imagine a world of endless potential where anything can happen at any time. Out of this set of unlimited and equally possible turnouts, only a certain number of potential outcomes are made manifest, or real. This is the world we live in – and this is the world documentaries are destined to deal with.

The thought experiment continues: This definition of documentary as a mode of film practice that engages with 'that which is the case' in turn suggests its own opposite; a mode of documentary filmmaking engaged with the *possible* rather than the actual. A rare and theoretically impossible kind of cinema that documents that which *could be* the case.

Some may object that this cinema of alternative realities is the domain of fiction and of the dinosaurs walking the earth in *Jurassic Park* (1993). However, fiction based on the premise of a narrative 'what if...' differs from our notion of a documentary of the possible exactly in its abandon of any reference to the real and to that which actually happens to be the case. Dinosaurs on a rampage? Who cares! It's not like anyone's life is *really* in danger.

But in the rare case of a film documenting something that only exists as a possibility, something fundamentally real is still at stake. By insisting on the reference to the real, actual situations and real people are exposed in their vulnerable and human ways.

Mille soleils by Mati Diop is one such film. Or, to be more specific, it rewards being seen and appreciated as such. It was also the initial cause of the idea proposed here.

The film follows the ageing actor Magaye Niang of *Touki Bouki* (1973) semi-fame, the revolutionary roadmovie by Mati Diop's late uncle, Senegalese filmmaker Djibril Diop Mambéty. Today an elderly gentleman with a modest day-job as a cattle herder, Magaye is invited to present an outdoor 40th anniversary screening of *Touki Bouki* in the middle

of Dakar. The day turns out less glamorous (and much less sentimental) than most re-premieres of culturally iconic films, keeping in mind that *Touki Bouki* is something of a Senegalese *Two-Lane Blacktop* (1971).

At first, Magaye's wife is complaining about his denim-clad appearance ("I'm a star," he snaps back at her on his way out the door), and *en route* to the screening he has an argument with the young taxi driver about the political engagement of today's youth versus that of his own generation, and about the prospects of political reforms – or perhaps even of a revolution.

Arriving to the square where *Touki Bouki* is to be presented, Magaye spends the time before and during the screening drinking with a group of men in a nearby bar, to the chagrin of the organizer of the evening. At first, a group of children probably seeing the film for the first time do not believe him when he tells them that he was once the restless rebel youth driving around on a motorcycle who they now see on the screen.

As the unfortunate night comes to a late end, Magaye is confronted with the course his life has taken since his days of youth – and with the impulsive decision to leave Anta, the love of his life, just before the ferry about to carry them to a new life in France was bound for departure.

This revelation of Magaye's long lost love, told to us by himself on the soundtrack while we see a woman sweeping broken glass from the floor in an empty and silent bar at night, underlines the idea of *Mille soleils* as a film revolving around the idea of the relation between the possible and that which establishes itself as the 'real'.

On the side of story (Magaye's own, as well as that of the film), the melancholy of realizing what *could have been* serves as a melodramatic turning point in tune with the idea of the film as investigating the possibility of documenting the possible, so to speak. However, there is a crucial, temporal difference between the two things. The unfulfilled love story and its implication of starting a new life in another country is concerned exactly with what *could have been*, whereas the film is (also) concerned with what in the present tense *could be*. And this is where the concluding part of *Mille soleils* picks up, introduced by a marvelous, panoramic image of an icy ocean.

Magaye calls Anta from a phone booth, and is told to "make it quick" by the operator as Magaye only has one thousand FCA franc to spare for the call. Anta picks up, and although she is surprised to hear his voice they quickly catch up. She is now living in

Alaska, he is wondering if there are eskimos there. As they are talking, Magaye spots a masked man in the streets outside on a motorcycle identical to the one he was riding in *Touki Bouki*, the handlebars decorated with ox horns. Their eyes meet in an intense gaze, the masked man gasping up the engine to an aggressive roar.

Next thing we see, the masked man is hitting the road on his bike, alone, followed by an image of Magaye traversing the snow-covered fields of the Alaskan wilderness in his bare feet, as the long-distance phone conversation between he and Anta continues on the soundtrack. In an unexplained vision, he/we see(s) a naked woman walking by in the damp ice desert.

Is Anta ever going to return, he wonders, as a James Baldwin quote is weaved into their conversation, which underlines the paradoxical nature of choice and identity: "You don't have a home until you leave it and then, when you have left it, you can never go back."

In the final images of the film, Magaye is back where he started herding his cattle in a grassy field in the outskirts of Dakar accompanied by Tex Ritter's theme song from Fred Zinnemann's *High Noon* (1952).

What makes Mati Diop's film so remarkable is the humble and seemingly effortless way in which it passes from one modality to another. It is worth noting that *Mille soleils* follows a series of highly distinctive and innovative, experimental short films from Diop (who also appeared as a skilled actress in Claire Denis's *35 rhums* (2009) and Antonio Campos's *Simon Killer* (2012)). Although they are clearly the works of a singular, artistic vision, her work so far does not comply too well with the dramaturgy of building up an *oeuvre d'auteur*, where each film is thought to add a new layer of artistic accomplishment to the existing body of work in order to achieve some sort of climax supposedly inherent to the maker's vision from the start. (A claim which her coming feature film debut might force us to revise, let's see.)*

In any case, her breakthrough short film *Atlantiques* (2009) and the subsequent *Snow Canon* (2011) and *Big in Vietnam* (2012) should be seen on their own terms as much as for making way for *Mille soleils* which, with its 45 minutes, is her longest to date.*

In retrospect, however, Diop's work taken as a whole does come off as truly globally conscious with the themes of exile and displacement (and the more privileged theme of tourism, as in the early *Ile artificielle-Expédition* (2006)) as reoccurring concerns.

In passing from one modality to another – from the real to the possible – *Mille soleils* offers a meditation on the ethics and aesthetics of filmmaking which feels genuinely contemporary and relevant.

Does it also pose the problem of the 'distant observer'? A question always relevant to any film whose subjects and audience are thought to have little in common culturally; are we projecting our own wishes and fears onto the film? In other words, is the idea of documenting the possible a ridiculous, exoticising by-product of the excitement of viewing a formally innovative film about a Senegalese man in his own surroundings?

Perhaps – but not necessarily so. One of the marvels of film-viewing might even be just this: filling in the blanks, dreaming, and speculating, as opposed to everyone responding to the same film in exactly the same way. (It's no joke; that seems to be the ideal of most popular films made today.) In the same vein it is hopefully clear too, that the idea of 'endless possibilities' suggested here is not identical to the neo-liberal politics of self-realisation and uninhibited exploitation. Rather, the idea that the world is not fixed in its current state should (also) be seen as a liberating negation of exactly the uneven distribution of privileges that is defining what is possible (and what is not) to someone like Magaye.

Another problem: Does the statement of the filmmaker contradict the observation of her film's documentary qualities? Mati Diop calls *Mille soleils* a fiction film and has explained in great length how she wrote and directed seemingly free-flowing scenes and situations such as the telephone conversation between Magaye and Anta. Again, the answer is perhaps – but not necessarily so.

Diop's approach invites comparison with the 'ethnofictions' of Jean Rouch, where the subject and the filmmaker develop a symbolic narrative in creative collaboration, but that would be limiting and perhaps misleading, not least given her familial relation if not to her subject, then of course to Djibril Diop Mambéty. Her approach is intuitive rather than methodic and does not lay claim to scientific rigor.

What her film offers us is an occasion to contemplate the way in which a cinema rich with style and imagination can suggest trains of thought not necessarily written out in its premise. The question is rather: How does the filmmaker achieve this? The answer to that is both cinematographic and structural.

Mille soleils alternates between impressionistic images shot on

low-grade video, and more elaborately staged situations and facial close-ups on 35mm film, rendering very different sensory qualities to the events in the film. The video parts that constitute most of the scenes around the evening screening of *Touki Bouki* are mostly shot from a distance, similar to the politely non-interfering style of observational documentary. Things seem to simply 'happen' in front of the camera, which also has an eye for the poetic presence of the little birds chirping around over the drunken men in the bar and for the wondrous faces of the youngest audience members before *Touki Bouki*.

At times, however, the raw material of reality suggests something that might still exist as a possibility only. With 'cinema' as a universal metaphor for the desire to live out one's dream self, the moment where Magaye is being interviewed (and *now*, time for the Q&A!) in front of the outdoor screen bathed in the unnatural, saturated blue light of the video projector, the apparatus of cinema (or of its digital phantom) is literally covering him in its fatal embrace.

The documentary-style realism of these scenes are counter-balanced by the scenes on 35mm, for instance the dreamy imagery shot in Alaskan outbacks, and by how those scenes relate to the off-screen dialogue between Magaye and Anta. Thus, in a very tangible sense the image of Magaye walking though the snow in his bare feet can be seen as a 'document' of something that still exists as the possibility of actually going to Alaska to make up with Anta – and the vision of the woman slowly passing by, as a very beautiful and moving document-image of lost opportunities and unexplored paths.

A digression and a flight of the imagination, just like the one proposed here: the idea of certain films as having the capacity to transcend the limitations of 'documentary' forced upon them by the medium itself, by the theories around it, or by the spatio-temporal conspiracy of linear time. In any case, it's the kind of thing that only great films and filmmakers would invite you to consider.

Itself a possibility differering from all the others only in the fact that it was made real, *Mille soleils* is among the brightest burning films to appear before our eyes and minds in the past year, and a brilliant exploration of the ideally endless potential of cinema.

** This text was written in 2013 and first appeared in La Furia Umana. Mati Diop's first feature Atlantics was released in 2019.*