



DANSE DES HABITANTS INVISIBLES DE
LA CASUALIDAD



HISTORY

In the early 20th century, Chilean, Bolivian and Argentinian smugglers used the hostile mountains of the Andes for their traffic. One of them discovered by chance, *por Casualidad*, a huge mountain of sulfur at an altitude of 5200 meters. Step by step, by superhuman efforts, a mine was born. The man who discovered this mountain called it "Mina Julia," a tribute to his daughter who recently committed suicide.

20 kilometers far from Mina Julia, refinement plants were built in a valley. The sulfur was carried there from Mina Julia on tip trucks, along a huge cable transport. This "mining establishment for sulfur refinement" grew and became a village called La Casualidad. In the 60s, La Casualidad was at its peak : 2,000 inhabitants, two churches, a theater, a casino, schools, hospitals... A prosperous town was born in the middle of nowhere, at an altitude of 4200 meters.

In 1979, more than 40 years after its creation, the military dictatorship closed La Casualidad : importing sulfur from the United States was cheaper than producing it in Argentina. Residents had to leave, without shelter, without work.

Here is the end of the official story.



HIS STORY

The day the 2,000 inhabitants left, a 20 years old man, René, hid himself from the military and remained alone in the ghost town. Since then, he has been living all by himself in this land forgotten by men and gods. Desperately trying to revive his birth town, among ruins and memories.

Dance of the invisible inhabitants de la Casualidad is a portrait of this man, of La Casualidad and of this man who became La Casualidad - or is it the contrary ?



La Casualidad is an invention. There is no such man as the "last miner". I created this Beckettian character, the "yellow-helmet-superhero-of-the-useless", with René Duran, its interpreter. René was born in La Casualidad and actually worked there for several years but, like everybody else, he had to leave the city in 1979 when the military dictatorship closed the mine. He is currently living in Salta (460.000 inhabitants), like most of the former inhabitants of La Casualidad, and he works there as a policeman.



I didn't want to make an historical or political movie, not in its common sense. It seemed to me that I had to bring the documentary material into fiction, into mythology, in order to create an allegory of La Casualidad, of its past and present history (i.e. the former inhabitants' will to resurrect their birth town). The last miner, living in a city that no longer exists, working in abandoned factories, dancing with invisible inhabitants, could be the allegory.

I wouldn't say it is manipulation or lying, because like Herzog, whose *La Soufrière* or *Encounters at the end of the world* were both sources of inspiration (among others), I believe in an enhanced truth, in an invented truth. And the question was : how to represent the "truth" of the Native's feelings ? How to render the sensation of a lost paradise, of a vanished youth ? How could I bring the spectator to share their struggle for the reopening of the mine?

The last miner could reveal all those buried emotions, this collective utopia. Before considering themselves as Argentinians, those people regard themselves as miners, as people from the mountains, from the Andes, from la Puña. And now they feel like refugees, exiles, uprooted, and for me the best way to show that was to create this character who, being the last inhabitant of the city, reinforces by his presence the absence of the others. Who, by his desperate will to revive the city, emphasizes the desolation of the place.

Portrait of a man who sacrificed his life for one absurd dream, who sacrificed his body for political ends.



Apart from the initial concept, nothing was staged during the shooting. I was just following René in the city, like Sancho following Don Quichotte in his unconscious will to make *me* and *us* believe that his city isn't a ghost town, that its inhabitants are only in holidays, that the factories are still functioning, that he has to clean the place so that it look nice... René as the guardian of souls and me as Sancho, trying to believe in his master's fairy tales, despite what I'm seeing in my camera, in order to defend him later against the incredulous.

with
René Duran
Freddy Victor Flores Nuñez
Angel Estanislao Rojas Rocha
Teolinda Rocha Saravia de Rojas

camera and sound
Vincent Le Port

sound editing
Charlotte Butrak

sound mixing
Alexis Meynet

editing
Vincent Le Port
Natalia Bianchi
Xavier Sirven
Vincent Tricon

archive footage
Macaria Choque

music
John Fahey



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45' / Colour / France-Argentina / Dolby 5.1 / 1.77 / HD (Digital Betacam)



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