



**ENCLAVE REVIEW**

## Untamed Cinema Maximilian Le Cain

The Buharov Brothers, Ivan and Igor, are Hungarian filmmakers, musicians, visual artists, and practitioners of expanded cinema. They became Buharovs and brothers in the early '90s. Kornél Szilágyi and Nándor Hevesi told me of several reasons for their adoption of this Russian-sounding name: puns on Hungarian words meaning 'to make in a DIY fashion' and 'to drink'; the (ultimately unsuccessful) submission of an early film to a film festival that seemed to award its prizes only to Russian work; a punkish flaunting of early '90s Hungarian hostility towards Russia. Subsequently, they discovered that 'Igor Buharov' is a star chef in Russia, president of their restaurateurs' and hoteliers' federation, an intriguing fact considering that our Igor Buharov also studied cooking. Once, an old lady asked to have her photograph taken with the Hungarian Igor, even though she knew he wasn't the famous chef. It seems that sharing

his name was enough. Allegedly, Hungarian Igor also answers to 'Dr. Globus', but that's another story...

My first encounter with a Buharov film was at Thessaloniki Film Festival in 2008 in a major retrospective of films that emerged from Hungary's Béla Balázs Studios (or 'BBS'). Although it ceased production in the '90s, the BBS is an extraordinary phenomenon, unique in the history of East European cinema. Its official purpose was to act as a state-owned 'workshop' that functioned as a stepping-stone between film school and the industry. What it became was a self-regulating, government-funded experimental film studio, working with an unprecedented degree of freedom from Communist state censorship. Granted, the films made there were almost never shown, but they were made and the rich heritage of innovative work that emerged from it is truly remarkable.

The Buharovs' short *Hotel Tubu* (2002) was the only post-BBS film included in these programmes, selected as an indication that its visionary spirit lives on. And the Buharovs are quick to acknowledge BBS films as a crucial influence and inspiration. Yet even in the context of watching hours of often highly impressive BBS work, *Hotel Tubu* kept insistently, repeatedly floating to the surface of my consciousness, the most haunting film of the festival by far. Its almost confrontationally unselfconscious use of faux naïf imagery presented with a peculiar lyricism and a mysteriously plaintive atmosphere was apparently quite simple. Yet it left an unshakeable impression of highly charged elusiveness, as of a half-remembered dream that unsettles and nags at us because we have either forgotten what it was trying to impart or because what it reveals is ultimately untranslatable into terms other than those contained in its form.

Fortunately, the curator at Thessaloniki proved sympathetic to my urgent need to see this film again and gave me a couple of DVDs featuring two of the Buharovs' three features and several shorts. Watching *Hotel Tubu* again (and again and again and again...) confirmed my first impression: it wasn't a case of 'getting it', of finding a conceptual key to this work. Instead, it held true to what remains the most accurate description of experiencing a Buharov film I've encountered: 'getting lost in someone

else's dream' (*Off Screen Film Festival Catalogue*, Brussels 2008). This is not to suggest that their films are without coherent ideas. They can even contain quite explicitly political ones. But they are as perfectly absorbed into the oneiric texture of these visions as any other element.

The promise of *Hotel Tubu* was delivered on in the Buharov films I subsequently saw, all fractured, extremely surreal movies. Darkly playful hallucinations that share the aura of having been discovered forgotten in someone's granny's attic, precisely revealing a world perhaps subconsciously suspected but hitherto un-describable. They have in common an improvised quality and a sense of the homemade. Not only in their beautifully rough visual textures, which are due mainly to being mostly shot on Super-8 with tiny budgets, but often in the people, objects and spaces before the camera. The casts are composed of extraordinary ordinary people rather than film stars: lived-in faces bringing their own stories to the films rather than tools trained to convey fictional confections. The props, which sometimes conspicuously reappear in different films, can likewise seem to have an existence of their own carried over into the picture. This helps lend the films the weird intimacy of children's games, in which familiar people and places are made alien and the weirdly alien becomes immanent to the everyday. The overall look of the films varies (and often also includes rough animated shots and sequences), but almost always retains the raw appearance of a trippy home movie. The absence of any explicitly up-to-the-minute looking buildings or objects leaves this cinematic universe hovering slightly adrift from temporal specificity, somewhere in the closing decades of the 20th century. This further enhances the sense of a vague collective childhood that we continue to subconsciously inhabit.

The great Polish film director Andrzej Zulawski once made reference to 'films you cannot tame'. Such films, at least for me, are extremely few and far between. But since my encounter with *Hotel Tubu*, the Buharovs have become synonymous with the idea of 'untamed cinema' to the exclusion of all other filmmakers. In 2010, I screened two of their short films in Cork as part of a Black Sun experimental music and film event. This year, I arranged a mini-retrospective of their work

at Corona Cork Film Festival, which both Buharovs attended. Of course, the primary and overt motivation was to share exceptional and little-known work with local audiences. But I suspect a hidden, personal agenda: to see if I could finally put my finger on what it is exactly, that elusive half-remembered-dream element that drew me back to *Hotel Tubu* and proved present throughout their filmography. But to no avail. Their films remain gloriously 'untamed'.

Maximilian Le Cain is an experimental filmmaker. He edits Cork Film Centre's online film journal, *Experimental Conversations*, and programmes films for the regular Cork-based experimental music/film event Black Sun. A generous selection of Buharov shorts can now be viewed at their Youtube page: <http://www.youtube.com/user/igorbuharov>



Igor and Ivan Buharov, *Hotel Tubu* (2002), film still. © Igor and Ivan Buharov.