

Oughton, Karen *Karen Oughton interviews Fabrizio Federico, director of Black Biscuit (2011)*

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Black Biscuit is the debut film directed by and starring Fabrizio Federico. He plays Chet, a life model who becomes a sex worker and film maker. The film chronicles Chet's changes in outlook as he earns more and interacts with a cast of genuine 'street superstars' including homeless people and an ex-child ping pong champion while attempting to adhere to the Pink8 manifesto – Federico's vision for creating punk cinema.

Karen Oughton: What is *Black Biscuit* about?

Fabrizio Federico: It's about many things, but it boils down to finding the inner strength to realize your dreams. Along the lines it captures a sub-cultural environment where everyone is trying and struggling to break away from a life of vice, loneliness, and hostile surroundings. It's a physical and psychological trip through hell and about the people who make it through. There's benefits and drawbacks that go along with the movies themes. Being a libertine and expanding your mind can leave you high and dry after you reach a certain point with sex, drugs and traveling. That's what the characters in the film experience.

KO: You've said that you made *Black Biscuit* as a 'revenge' act against university lecturers. If you are so against the formal study of film, why have you approached an academic journal to publicise it?

FF: Because I heard that you're not the usual academic. I feel that universities are very elitist when it come to views, which is a shame because they should promote a more open minded ethic, and consider everything. Before I started making the film I mentioned what I had in mind and was shot down by a number of lecturers who said that a feature film couldn't be made the way I wanted, which made me laugh because I knew that wasn't true, it just made them sound like dinosaurs. I don't care about making money or following rules but that negative attitude could damage certain students who look up to their lecturers for guidance.

KO: You have spoken about the importance of a film being 'untainted'. Do you think it is possible to create an untainted film considering that audiences cannot help but be reasonably cine-literate because of the way film is spoken of even in the mainstream?

FF: Yes I think it's possible, you just have to shut down the media in your mind and be here now. I don't think the general public are cine-literate, they've always been cautious when it comes to daring movies, audiences take themselves too seriously when watching modern films and they label them as being self indulgent when they don't instantly comprehend them.

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I'm not tied to any producer or studio so I have absolute freedom to be off the wall and capture the absurdity of life. My work has been called 'Punk Cinema'. I love wiping out the myths that surround filmmaking. What attracts me to punk is the attitude. The fashions come along with it but the attitude of 'I can do anything' really excites me. It really isn't hard to make something pure, just tell the world to shut its mouth and you'll be fine, cinema should be individualistic not conservative.

KO: Which film makers inspire you?

FF: When I'm making a film I'm more inspired by music and I'll listen to it constantly. So if I'm after something dark I might listen to Slint, The Doors or Iceage. If I want a mellow feeling Chet Baker's always good, Jandek if I'm suicidal, or Justin Bieber if I want quick adrenaline. I've always been drawn to artists who have been de-railroaded from normality. I grew up watching Westerns, Paolo Villaggio and Charlie Sheen movies. But directors like Jonas Mekas, Donald Cammell and Paul Morrissey are the ones who killed me.

KO: What do you know about film technique and cinema?

FF: Nothing and I don't want to know. As long as it records movement I'm happy. I used toy cameras and mobile phones to shoot *Black Biscuit*, I loathe perfection. I've always loved the story about Werner Herzog stealing his first camera. You make a movie by any means necessary, to me asking for funding is like going to your parents and begging for some pocket change. Cinema is an adventure if you have the right people around, if you don't then it's a job. *Black Biscuit* cost around £500, I just included an un-tapped resource of society, I don't want to work with professionals.

KO: Who would be your ideal audience for *Black Biscuit*?

FF: If you're open minded then I'm happy. I've noticed that most of the audiences have been tough and smart but looking to play Russian Roulette with their minds.

KO: What film, to you, is the antithesis of what film should be?

FF: *The Last Movie* (1971) by Dennis Hopper is my favourite film of all time, I love the fact that its aesthetic was so unique that Hopper was banned from making films in Hollywood for 10 years. Which is exactly what's happened to me, I was hopeful that cinema might have moved on a bit since 1970 and become more accepting of non-linear films but I was wrong. I wanted the poetic rebel spirit of society to drip from the screen, each film is based on a chosen spirit not a plot line.

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KO: Your Pink8 manifesto states that the filmmaker should make money by getting a job that challenges their ethics. How did you decide which of your ethics to challenge?

FF: I decided to pick nudity because I knew there was going to be a lot of it in the film and I figured it would be interesting to experience public nudity and the life modelling opportunity came up one day. It's a weird feeling. It's as if you're bulletproof or have an invisible cape on. I find it comfortable, I don't see what the big deal is with nudity. I was surprised especially when YouTube and the Cinema Houses banned my Directors Cut. I felt the nudity was portrayed as efficient.

KO: How did you choose the respondents you worked with? You've said they are 'street superstars' in your Pink8 manifesto, but it is notable in your publicity that you have emphasised those from alternative communities. Why?

FF: A lot of the mainstream are stuck in a daily routine because of money so I wanted people who were not scared or bothered about earning a living, and I included all the good and bad aspects of it. The idea came when I heard about the Venus Project who are an organization who believe that money will one day vanish. It's a beautiful crazy dream but maybe that's the ultimate answer for the world's problems.

KO: There are a lot of pictures of you holding cameras being used as publicity for *Black Biscuit*. What is the relationship between the everyday you and you as the actor/director/brand?

FF: The everyday me always has his antenna up, I have my days of being sad, wild, stupid, and thoughtful. I don't want to be bored.

KO: Some of the respondents appear to be play acting. How do you think we should think of that when considering *Black Biscuit*?

FF: My works looks like documentaries because they're so raw and the cast is made up of non-actors being themselves. What I do is interview the cast and find out about their lives and then I'll incorporate an element from their lives that fits into the film, so it's like they're re-living a past memory only this time they have control. I'm addicted to giving my work an abstract, violent dreamy feel. I'm not interested in structure. It's a new type of film with all these different layers which people can pick depending on their view of life. So some viewers think it's a documentary others think it's fiction, but it's everything. I wanted to make the most liberated film ever.

KO: What got left out?

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FF: Certain scenes that didn't fit the vibe of the film, I wanted to make it longer but I figured two hours was epic enough.

KO: You lost the original *Black Biscuit* owing to computer problems. Apart from meaning more work for you, how did the experience of that effect how you created the second version?

FF: I was kind of shell shocked when it happened. It was like your baby had died at 6 months old. So I gave it a bit of time and started over again, I was really superstitious when I was making the film and became a 'shining'. The whole 'shining' sense came unexpectedly, but you start to see mystical and pagan sensibilities around you vividly and you start to see signs in nature, I developed strange voodoo superstitions that attracted me towards dark subjects but I found joy in them.

The second version of the film is more out of control than the first. I didn't know how to use any of the equipment. I learnt from scratch so it was good training learning by error because you get new results, plus having exorcism audio on loop in the background helps you move forward. It was similar to being baptised while I was working, I find the screams comforting, like primal scream therapy. It's in certain scenes throughout the movie, it's tough finding out about real exorcisms because they're so secret.

In Italy, when I was about ten there was this rich boy who used to live in a secluded mansion in my village called Massa, and none of us local kids were ever allowed to play with him. He'd be hanging out in his huge gated garden trance-like, but I never even saw his face because he used to wear hats and hoodies. He lived a very lonely life and had this evil aura. I was never afraid of him but was very curious about what happened in that house. One of the local old ladies told me it was because he was possessed and many other people in the village also believed that. Down in Catholic Southern Italy things like that leave a big impression on you. On certain nights we'd hear screams that were very similar to the exorcism audio in the film.

KO: What was the most intense experience (emotional or physical) you had while working on the film?

FF: Having a candle put in my penis was a strange physical experience, but emotionally I guess having your footage confiscated by the police after filming something beautiful. Censorship should be a crime.

KO: You've said: 'The reason why you should make a film is because it's killing you not to.' What do you mean by that?

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FF: If you want to do something start right away because it gets tougher. My girlfriend's in the movie and we broke up many times while I was making it, I was harassed by the police, I had a murderer stalking me throughout the shoot but in the end it was all worthwhile because I learnt to swim.

KO: How did you react to being stalked by the murderer?

FF: I kind of enjoyed the intense attention. I know how to use a knife so I didn't lose any sleep from it.

KO: You've spoken about your interest in DIY culture. Often DIY culture is considered part of a mutual understanding between the people who make something together. Do you feel your film reflects that and if so why?

FF: Sort of, it was like we had a party but I paid for all the drinks. It's more fun to bounce ideas off of people and to bring in strangers because anything can happen. We never talked about an understanding or any boundaries, that would have ruined the spontaneity. Even that painful candle scene, it just happened. You can call it being an anti-director but I'm not suspicious of people, everyone is an expert at something so I just let them play with it.

Black Biscuit can be found on YouTube.