

Buddy Movies presents

**THE ASSEMBLY**  
a film by Mariana Otero

2017 – France – 99 mins. – Digital – Color – 1.77 – Sound 5.1  
Visa # 146 839

**Opening October 18, 2017**

Photos and press kit available for download at  
[www.epicentrefilms.com](http://www.epicentrefilms.com)

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## **Synopsis**

March 13, 2016, Place de la République, Paris: the Nuit Debout movement is born. For over three months, people of all walks of life challenge themselves to invent a new form of democracy. How can they speak together without speaking with one singular voice?

### **Interview with Mariana Otero**

#### **How did this film begin?**

I was present as a citizen from the beginning of Nuit debout, and on April 1st, 2016 – March 32nd, in the calendar of Nuit debout -- I finally picked up my camera. I can't help it, filming is my way of relating to the world. I didn't know what was happening at this Place de la République, but I understood that it was something extraordinary and that it was a story that deserved to be told. In the middle of the state of emergency, a few months after the terrorist attacks, this square which had been a place of mourning and commemoration was transformed: it became a place of resistance, reflection, and exchange.

In the beginning, I thought that I was simply going to keep a record of the many commissions and initiatives which appeared each day on the square, by posting scenes online regularly. But I understood very quickly that this format wasn't going to work. In order to take a different approach from the news media, who focused on the spectacle without taking the time to understand what was happening from the inside, I needed to put in the time and make a film which could give form to what was being built, day after day. It was my way of participating and getting involved in what I sensed was something historically important. It's also true that I encountered, at Nuit debout, a question which obsesses me as a citizen and which has been at the heart of my filmmaking for 25 years: how can we build something together, while considering each person in their singular importance? How can we reinvent the collective?

This question was everywhere at Nuit debout. Very quickly, I made the choice to approach it through the beating heart of the movement, speech and its circulation, or more specifically, the assembly and the commission responsible for running it. How can we speak together without speaking with just one voice? This was one of the questions of Nuit debout, this would be the question of the film into which I threw myself, recklessly, without a net to catch me. There wouldn't be any plan written in advance, no time to prepare, no time to get advance financing either. Everything would need to be improvised, over an unknown period of time. For me, accustomed to scouting, writing, and preparing before I begin filming, it was a plunge into the unknown. I abandoned my usual practices and methods. But I decided to try this new way of doing things, and to set everything else aside and devote myself to this story.

**Unlike your other films, this one isn't built around characters; how do you explain this choice?**

The question which guided me during filming was this: how does the collective welcome the individual, what place does it make for it, how do the singular and the plural combine? At Nuit debout this combination was very different from anything I had seen or filmed before.

Hundreds of people, no leader, no representative, no one who was worth more than anyone else.

There was total equality, and at the same time each person's singularity and difference was recognized and affirmed.

The strong feeling I had with my camera was that focusing on one member of the group more than another would be totally inappropriate to what was happening. On the square, the unit of "measure" was the commission, people who were always meeting together: one, then another, and so on, without exclusion. I built the shoot and the film around this intuition.

During the film, some people appear and then disappear, melting into the crowd in one shot and then reappearing in another. I am aware that this can be disturbing for the viewer. They become attached to someone in one scene and then they have to detach themselves. But this is the world of Nuit debout, it's the mode of being at Nuit debout. To my mind, the narrative form couldn't not respect that. As someone in the film put it very well, "Nuit debout is not a body of people." This is why I didn't want to attach a traditional narrative form, with characters, to a reality which worked differently. This is how I see documentary film, in the correspondence between its form and the reality that is filmed.

In *In Our Hands*, when the workers learn that their factory is going to close, something *happens* to them. Whether they decide to join the cooperative or not, their refusal or their acceptance, is part of the story: "what happens to them" is the story. They become the characters in the film.

In the case of Nuit debout, the story is not what happens to the people on the square, but "what happens in the square." The hero here is the assembly, it's the spoken word: how does it circulate? How is it transmitted? How is it transformed? The main character is speech, in all its forms, the forms of language and of the body which accompany it, the act of speaking as much as what is said. The faces of those who are listening as much as those who are speaking. It's the democratic transformation of this assembly.

**How did the filming work, in practice?**

Many of the conditions I need to be able to make a film didn't seem to be present... (laughs). Starting with the number of cameras and "Periscopers" on the square who would place themselves without any hesitation in front of my camera lens, and complicated my relationship with the people I was filming. Also, most of the people involved in the movement were distrustful of the media, which they believed was more

interested in violence than in the reflection and work being done at the Place de la République. In the middle of a commission meeting, during debates that could be raucous, I would have to explain that I was a film director and not a television reporter. Not easy to do in a couple of minutes, in the midst of uproar. After a few weeks, to make our lives easier, my sound engineer and I decided to put pieces of fabric on our backs indicating that we were not reporters, but simply independent documentary filmmakers!

We also frequently needed to cope with the police violence which occurred throughout the whole duration of the movement, in ways that were just incredible, whether it was against protesters, the press, or filmmakers.

Like many others, I experienced the use of tear gas and smoke grenades on multiple occasions, during protests and around the square. I was also blocked from filming and taken to the police station with my team, and my equipment was confiscated for several hours, on the false pretext that filming was prohibited. In short, conditions were not ideal.

In spite of these difficulties, I continued filming, day after day, because I was caught up in the desire that circulated around the square. And I had an advantage: time. Unlike the press, who disappeared when the crowds of onlookers began to disperse, I kept filming not knowing how long this would last, what form it would take, and where it was all going. It was impossible to plan ahead like with my other films. Here, I filmed by instinct, holding on to this thread of the assembly, speech, listening, and democracy, the true characters of the film.

### **How did you edit the film?**

I knew that the sequencing would be chronological and that the film would be in part, but only in part, a chronicle. *The Assembly* was born out of one event, the “El Khomry” [labor reform] law, and was always subject to and had to take into account external events, like the “49.3” [an aggressive parliamentary maneuver used to pass controversial economic reforms] or police violence. As a result, the more long-term reflection was always being interrupted by emergencies, and the assembly always had to put off to the next day what it was trying to solve, to implement, and to build. The question comes up in one scene: is the priority to fight against the El Khomry law or to consider, for example, organizing a constituent assembly and a voting process? I wanted to convey this pressure of events from one day to another.

And more generally, I thought it was important to bring the government’s violence, with the use of the 49.3, which silenced the Assemblée Nationale, and the police violence, which silenced the protesters, into confrontation with a popular movement which sought, in contrast, to reinvent a democratic, participatory assembly where everyone’s voice could be heard.

But I didn’t want to confine myself just to this chronological retelling. And so the editing was relatively complex. The goal wasn’t just to tell the story of the movement from day to day, with all its repetitions, even though those repetitions were important, but also to draw out, beyond what made the movement successful, the things that were its essence and the fundamental questions it posed. The film gives *my interpretation* of what this movement was.

I put in scenes which, for me, help to convey the multiplicity of issues and questions raised by Nuit debout.

### **Was Nuit debout a failure?**

I don't think so. Unless we think that Nuit debout should have been able to solve, in three months, the problems our democratic system has been facing for decades. Also, Nuit debout hasn't completely ended. Very concretely, there are groups and networks which were created at Nuit debout which continue to meet. But more profoundly, Nuit debout marked a generation and helped to politicize a whole swath of the population which had distanced itself from the "politicians'" politics of the major parties. What was theorized at Nuit debout became part of the 2017 presidential campaign: themes worked on at Nuit debout, like universal basic income, the Sixth Republic, voting by lottery, recognition of blank votes, became part of the campaign in massive ways, whereas previous campaigns had been dominated by security issues.

This is why Nuit debout and the spring of 2016 might turn out to be turning points in the history of the Fifth Republic.

Beyond the 60 commissions which coexisted on the square, dealing with questions related to the economy, the organization of business and work, wage labor, education, justice, ecology, feminism...Nuit debout shouted, sang, theorized the necessary renewal of our democratic institutions. Nuit debout is the beginning of this reevaluation of our institutions which, in my view, is going to become absolutely necessary in the years to come. And in this way, Nuit debout blazed a trail.

**Mariana Otero**  
**Director**  
**Bio-filmography**

Born in 1963, Mariana Otero discovered her passion for documentary filmmaking after studies in film at the IDHEC. She has directed several films for Arte, including *Non-Places* and *The Law of Middle School*, which was the channel's first documentary miniseries. From 1995 to 2000 she lived in Portugal, where she directed *This Television Is Yours*. The film, which revealed the inner workings of the country's largest commercial television station, the SIC, created nationwide controversy. Upon returning to France, she refocused on feature-length film with *History of a Secret*. The film, through the investigation of a family secret, brings to light familial and social taboos, and won prizes at numerous international festivals. In 2010, she directed *In Our Hands*, which tells the story of female workers discovering new freedoms while trying to transform their company into a cooperative. The film was nominated for a César Award for Best Documentary in 2011.

In 2013, she directed *Open Air*, a film which conveys the unique vision of the world of children in psychological and social difficulty. Alongside the film, she cowrote with Marie Brémont the book *Open Air: Interviews*.

In addition, Mariana has taught at the Ateliers Varan, of which she has been a member since 2000, at the Femis, at the University of Paris-Jussieu, at Creadoc (University of Poitiers/Angoulême) where she directed the Master in Creative Documentary Filmmaking for six years (2006-2012), and at the ECAL in Lausanne, among other places.

She is a member of ACID and served as its co-president from 2010-2012.

**2017: THE ASSEMBLY**

Festival de Cannes ACID 2017, Resistances Festival (Foix) 2017  
Estates-General of Documentary Film (Lussas), 2017  
FilmMaker Festival (Milan) 2017, French Film Festival (Lisbon) 2017

**2013: OPEN AIR**

Encounters in Cinema (Gindou), Estates-General of Documentary Film (Lussas), Traces of Life Festival (distinction), Zurich Film Festival, DocAviv (Tel Aviv), Edoc (Quito), International Film Festival (Rio de Janeiro), Women's Film Festival (Beijing)

**2010: IN OUR HANDS**

Festival de Cannes ACID, Estates-General of Documentary Film (Lussas), La Rochelle, Tübingen Festival, Doc Lisboa, Agadir, Buenos Aires, Linds...  
Nominated for a 2011 César Award in the category of Best Documentary

**2003: HISTORY OF A SECRET**

Feasts of Aden Festival, Lussas, La Rochelle, Locarno, Nyons, Buenos Aires, Women's Film Festival, distinctions at Valladolid, Florence, Belo Horizonte...

**1997: THIS TELEVISION IS YOURS**

Distinction at the Vic-le-Comte Festival

**1994: THE LAW OF MIDDLE SCHOOL**

Prize for Best Film at the 5th edition of Encounters in Documentary Filmmaking (Lisbon)

"Jury's Tip" Europa Prize, 1995

**1991: NON-PLACES**

Prize for Best Documentary at the Cinema and Banlieue Festival (Vaulx-en-Velin)

## Credits

Directed by	<b>Mariana Otero</b>
Photography	<b>Mariana Otero, Aurélien Lévêque</b>
Sound	<b>Aurélien Lévêque, Mariana Otero</b>
Sound engineering	<b>Hélène Ducret</b>
Editing	<b>Charlotte Tourres</b>
Mixing	<b>Nathalie Vidal</b>
Post-production	<b>Aïdan Obrist</b>
Produced by	<b>Buddy Movies</b>
Producer	<b>Pascal Deux</b>
In association with	<b>Archipel 35</b>
Distribution	<b>Epicentre Films</b>
Press	<b>Claire Viroulaud</b>

## Festivals

**Festival de Cannes ACID**  
**Resistances Festival (Foix)**  
**Estates-General of Documentary Film (Lussas)**  
**FilmMaker Festival (Milan)**  
**French Film Festival (Lisbon)**



