

28 TFF

TORINO FILM FESTIVAL

Friday, December the 3rd, 11:30 am, Massimo 3

Vitalij Kanevskij

Meeting Vitalij Kanevskij, Varvara Krasil'nikova, Dinara Drukarova, Katja Kanevskij.

One, Two

Question: Why was One, Two interrupted and why did you choose not to finish it?

VK: *The movie One, Two was developed with a French producer, who had bought the rights on my script; Things were going along well even if we weren't sure to have the whole budget. Eventually while we were shooting in Russia we suddenly ran out of money and the French told me they hadn't managed to put together the rest of the budget. And so I asked some Russian producers who accepted to read the script and see what I'd shot; finally they decided they weren't interested in the project, maybe because they had some political restrictions on what was shown of the Army... In any case I had to stop shooting, however I don't feel too bad for it. What I wanted to show was that place of suspension that I'd experienced during my three years of service in the Army. It was a confined area, closed, isolated in which the pilots who'd already fought through two wars, one in Korea and one on their homeland (where Russians officially shouldn't have been) we're re-qualified to pilot MIGs. I thought it was important to report this context in which young men get isolated to be made soldiers however humanity of life is in some way never lost... represented for example by the female character.*

New projects and production issues

Question: do you have any new projects and do you think they'll have problems catching Russian producers' attention? Would it be better to search elsewhere, in France maybe, or are there opportunities in your Country too?

VK: *I've shown some Russian producers my work, yet I haven't had any positive feedback... I think they're more interested in movies that have an economical comeback guaranteed, such as American movies... Actually if there are any producers in the room, I'd be happy to make you rich and famous!*

Prohibited topics

Question: We've learned many things on the Soviet Union thanks to a certain sort of film, Freedom is Paradise by Bodrov for example; his movies have a much more concrete dramatic impact, much more direct also in the way you deal with these tabu issues...

VK: *I was always told teenage criminality never existed in U.S.S.R... I knew it existed, since I was coming from it, I was a street kid! Therefore I wrote a script entitled My Guardian Angel, the one which became in the second version Freeze, Die, Come to Life. There was a KGB officer in Vgik, the town I studied in, who told me, in a kind and gentle way, I was better off dropping my idea of the little thief, because it was absolutely fiction and didn't describe truly the reality of our County, if I didn't want to fall into serious trouble and that it would've been better if I dedicated to some valorous hero in Soviet history instead. I answered back that all of it was real and I knew it for sure because I came from such a reality myself: I was that kid! I also added on that the movie was not at all against the Regime, which I'm deeply thankful to for the opportunity it gave me with film. Back then I truly believed we were a great Power, I believed we could even overcome America. I ended up not listening to the officer's advice and went on on my on my independent path winding up in jail. Prison was the tool used to make independent people come back to society... Everyone was telling me to let go, that I would never become a director, despite all I went on believing this was the path God had chosen for me: you can feel it, you know it when what you're doing is your destiny... Maybe you can tease me saying I'm an idiot believer, But I am a believer and always will be*

Perestrojka

Question: In the general cultural confusion during the Perestrojka, how was your movie considered?

VKN: *I remember very well when Vitalij had to re write the script of My Guardian Angel after it had been stolen...Back then he was a person wit no ambitions however somebody read the script and liked it; so they gave him the opportunity to shoot it. Back then I was the directors assistant and I remember the really low quality film we had which had us re-shooting entire scenes that already nice the first time; eventually we finished the movie and a strange period began. We'd ask ourselves what the feedback on the movie would've been, what was it's destiny... I remember one Sunday, that's kind of like my day off family too, I had to rush back home because Vitalij had been asked to bring a copy of his movie to the Film Institute because Alan Parker was there and they wanted to show him the movie. Parker watched it and decided to push it to Cannes. Do you know what it means to dream of Cannes in a freezing winter night in St. Petersburg? It was a dream coming to life. Up until then Vitalij couldn't leave the Country, he couldn't even go to Bulgaria because he was considered a person to keep under control, from that moment onward he began going to Festivals, invited to Cannes he won the Golden Camera... a dream.*

That of Perestrojka was a confused period, restless, there were many problems in film system but also in the movement itself. Many directors began doing what Vitalij had has always been doing in his own way that is with the not-nice things in our Country, the Cirnuka... Vitalij is a very demanding person, he's always been an uncomfortable personality, and maybe that's why it's hard for him to get attention.

DD: *Freeze, Die, Come to life! Was made in a very difficult period since the film distribution system wasn't working anymore and there were many problems on different levels... luckily the movie had great success, mainly thanks to Cannes, outside the Country, certainly more than did in Russia.*

Document and Fiction

Question: why did you change from documentary to fiction at a certain point?

VK: *I had never tried documentary before shooting *Nous les enfants du XX siècle*; I've watched many but I don't like them that much because I prefer giving a true image of reality rather than documenting it... in the beginning I wasn't too convinced by the idea of writing script for a documentary, I thought it would have been simply better to take the camera, walk down on the streets and film... Instead I had to write, so I wrote thinking about the places I grew up in and about the kids doing what I would like them to do to convey the feeling of street life... I believe you must pay particular attention to the respect you give to whom you film. Actually I think having lived similar experiences, and putting myself back in those situations filming the street kid, has allowed me not only to live the movie with them, but also to enrich the movie without being aggressive. I wanted to search for that joy of living I was sure these kids had despite all. The different register in the finale is exactly to enhance this aspect the same way my last question does: "could you have killed your father?" with this question, to which I would've answered no, I wanted to stimulate their attachment to life...*

The value of independence

VK: *I've never wished to be part of any trend, I've always worked on interior truth, that's my motor... for example, I don't like hanging out with movie Stars since their presence would betray in some way my personal truth... Usually you hide your personal truth for fear of exposing yourself too much, on the contrary that's exactly what I'm interested in: Whatever I do it's for my personal growth, to achieve consciousness of my life in this dimension to prepare what will be my next life... I need to reach reality, I make film for myself, to fight lie and darkness I see everywhere...*

Film making means creating a living thing, something that will go on living its own existence regardless of you and you can't do anything about it; this is why being a director (Intending author film director) is an extremely hard job. I don't really care about all the rest, it isn't about creation, it's merely reproduction. What we need now is film of feelings, sensations, running with a gun in your hand or beating up somebody's face has nothing to do with feelings... What can I do with film in which the producer adds it all up to a matter of business? Why? Only if there is one slightest divine light in what you do then it's worth doing it... This is all I care about, judge me as you wish, I don't care: I know who I am!

Prison

VK: *It's really hard to cope with the vision of kids in jail, all the worse if they're in because their mom is imprisoned... I saw my mother suffer so bad and I believe women should be forgiven for anything just because of their sensibility given by their ability to procreate. When I saw the women in prison I questioned myself on how the Madonna from the Sistine Chapel could be transformed into this Madonna with child the woman prisoner represents: I believe the reason of this transformation is that God never lets anyone down, never.*

Yesterday in Ferrante Aporti I noticed a great difference compared to the prisons over in my Country. Kids are followed, well fed, well dressed, they act as if they weren't even in prison, while in Russia everyone's restless, hard, severe with the recluses... Here it's different even though some, you can see it in the eyes, whine a little because they will never be something else, they'll fall back because if you were born thief, that's your destiny and there isn't much you can do about it. Maybe you'll consider me a bit crazy, but you can see who's destined to crime or not...

Production opportunities

Question: nowadays before making a movie there's a long process to go through, while in the Soviet system, thanks to Government film Institution, you could suddenly start working and I understand this can be lived with nostalgia; Maybe this is what pushes you to search for opportunities elsewhere?

DD: *I don't think it's right to give a Nationality to your work; I work with directors from all around the world and each one has his own way. Each time it's something new since everything is based on the director's personality... obviously there's a specific of rules, like in France for what concerns the rights of film staff , something that doesn't exist in Russia... in any case I personally don't feel nostalgic, I feel nostalgic for some people such as Pavel Nazarov who I've met last time in prison over 16 years ago...*