

2014

SPECIAL EDITION OF THE MONTHLY MAGAZINE ON SLOVAK CINEMA

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A man with dark hair, wearing a light blue t-shirt and camouflage-patterned pants, is lying on his side on a wide, light-colored concrete ledge. He has his arms crossed over his chest and is looking towards the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a dark, textured wall.

REVIEWS

- ▶ Velvet Terrorists
- ▶ Normalization
- ▶ Miracle

INTERVIEW

- ▶ Pavol Pekarčík,
Ivan Ostrochovský,
Peter Kerekes
- ▶ 2013 IN SLOVAK FILM
- ▶ WE INTRODUCE
THE SLOVAK FILM
INSTITUTE



Best
1921
1991
Of
Slovak
Film

An Introduction to 35 Slovak Films and 20 Slovak Filmmakers

Film entries written by
Peter Hames



The English version of *Film.sk* is published to coincide with the start of the Berlin International Film Festival and last year at this time we already knew something surprising – the Slovak-Czech film *My Dog Killer* (*Môj pes Killer*) by director Mira Fornay won the Hivos Tiger Award at Rotterdam. This year did not start so spectacularly for Slovak cinema, but the list of planned premières shows that it is not in any way the beginning of the end.

Moreover, there is some good news coming out of the Berlin Film Festival – the Slovak co-production film *Velvet Terrorists* (*Zamatoví teroristi*) was chosen for inclusion in the Forum Section. A majority Slovak project was last presented at the Berlinale in 2011 – it was *The House* (*Dom*) by Zuzana Liová; it also was presented in the Forum Section. However, the situation for Slovak participation in the main competition is not so good. The last film to be presented there was *When the Stars Were Red* (*Keď hviezdy boli červené*) by director Dušan Trančík, and that was back in 1991. Two years before that, Slovak filmmaker Dušan Hanák won the Silver Bear for Best Director at the Berlin IFF for *I Love, You Love* (*Ja milujem, ty miluješ*, 1980) which had been completed for years but “could not speak” – however, that is the tale of our country (with a “velvet” finale).

You can read about the context of the *Velvet Terrorists* on the following pages. It was released in cinemas in autumn last year and, as ensues from the articles in this magazine, the year 2013 was of interest with regard to Slovak cinema. For the Slovak Film Institute it meant (among other things) the 50th anniversary of its existence and that is one of the reasons why we are writing about this institution. You will find information about the numerous and close relations of the SFI with Slovak filmmaking in the final part of *Film.sk* – the magazine where we (again) have tried to shed a little light on the cinematography that might surprise us...

► Daniel Bernát (Editor-in-Chief)

The History and Present of Film.sk

Film.sk is a monthly about film events in Slovakia published by the Slovak Film Institute. It has been published since January 2000 and up to 2010 it was the only film periodical in print in Slovakia. The magazine's editor-in-chief Simona Nôtová was present at its birth and she managed it until September 2012. Naturally, the monthly has undergone conceptual changes over the course of its existence but it was always based on the principle of the provision of a broad range of information on the events in the local film and audiovisual milieu.

At present, *Film.sk* is comprised of permanent sections: the Interview, Topic and Review which are complemented by further regular and irregular sections. These include current film events, reports on film festivals and film presentations in Slovakia and abroad, evaluating reflections on important events, an overview of distribution premières in the given month but, in addition, the glosses or comments of experienced film journalists, contributions by filmmakers who respond to questions about the projects they are currently working on, profiles of personalities of Slovak cinema, separate texts about new Slovak films based on the accounts of directors and producers, presentations of inspirational new books from the area of film literature and several other sections. *Film.sk* also contains attachments which chart the annual results in one of the areas of Slovak cinema and provide valuable statistical data. One of the regular attachments brings a report summarising Slovak cinematography for the previous year, divided into a number of chapters: Legislation, Financial Support, Film Education, Film Production, Film Distribution, Cinemas, Multiplexes and Film Clubs, Film Festivals and Film Screenings. The study of Czech cinematography, which is also published as an attachment to the monthly magazine, takes on a similar structure.

Contemporarily, *Film.sk* is a well-established film magazine capable of appealing to film experts, filmmakers, students and the wider public alike. The website www.filmsk.sk has supported its printed version since 2001.



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 Slovak Film Institute
Address:
 Film.sk, Slovak Film Institute,
 Grösslingová 32, 811 09 Bratislava,
 Slovak Republic
 TEL.: +421 2 57 10 15 25
 E-MAIL: filmsk@sfu.sk
Editor-in-Chief:
 Daniel Bernát
Editing:
 Mariana Jaremková
Editorial board: Peter Dubečský
 Alexandra Strelková
 Marián Brázda
 Miro Ulman
 Simona Nótová
 Štefan Vraštiak
 Karmen Koutná
English translation:
 Ivana Musilová
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03	FROM THE HISTORY OF THE SLOVAK FILM INSTITUTE
04–06	2013 IN FEATURE FILM
07–09	2013 IN DOCUMENTARY FILM
10–11	2013 IN ANIMATED FILM
12–13	TOPIC: Distribution of Slovak Films in 2013
14–17	REVIEW: Velvet Terrorists directed by Pavol Pekarčík, Ivan Ostrochovský, Peter Kerekes
18–21	INTERVIEW: P. Pekarčík, I. Ostrochovský, P. Kerekes
22–24	REVIEW: Miracle directed by Juraj Lehotský
25–27	REVIEW: Normalization directed by Robert Kirchhoff
28–29	TOPIC: Distribution Lives of Short Films
30	TOPIC: Blocks of Short Films in Slovak Cinemas
31	NEW FILMS
32–37	WE INTRODUCE THE SLOVAK FILM INSTITUTE
32	ABOUT THE SFI
33–34	PROJECTS OF THE SFI: Digital Audiovision and Further Key Projects
35	CURRENT EVENTS: Slovak Films Issued on DVD Abroad
36–37	DVDS AND FILM PUBLICATIONS OF THE SFI
38–39	INTERVIEW: Film Historian and Critic Peter Hames
40	NEWS SECTION

The Slovak Film Institute is Fifty Years Old

The Slovak Film Institute (SFI) is the sole state-funded memory and archive institution operating in the area of audiovision in Slovakia. The National Film Archive and the National Cinematographic Centre are the SFI's basic organisational units. The SFI is a member of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAP), European Film Promotion (since 2006); it functions as a service workplace for the European Audiovisual Observatory (EAO) and the Council of Europe cinema support fund – Eurimages. Creative Europe Desk Slovensko is also part of the Slovak Film Institute.

- ▶ The Film Institute in Bratislava was established on 1 April 1963 and it was placed under the directorate of Film Production and Distribution (Filmová tvorba a distribúcia) in Bratislava. The film archive also became part of the Institute; it was established in 1958 by the film historian Ivan Rumanovský at the Slovak Film Distribution Company (Slovenská požičovňa filmov).
- ▶ In 1970, the SFI was presented with a copy of the first Slovak full-length feature film *Jánošík* (*Jánošík*, dir. Jaroslav Siakel, 1921) which was later restored, provided with a soundtrack and in 1995 UNESCO placed it among the world cultural heritage.
- ▶ In 1972, the Film Institute came under the Central Office of Slovak Film (Ústredie slovenského filmu).
- ▶ By the end of 1976 the Film Club of the Central Office of Slovak Film was opened in Bratislava; at the present day, Cinema Lumière, belonging to the Slovak Film Institute, is located on its premises.
- ▶ In July 1989 the SFI came under the state organisation Slovak Film Production Bratislava – Koliba (Slovenská filmová tvorba Bratislava – Koliba) up to 1 January 1991 when, by decision of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic (MC SR), the Slovak Film Institute – National Cinematographic Centre was established as an independent public contributory organisation managed by the MC SR. Hence, by delimitation, the SFI also acquired producer rights to the archived films which were made before 1991 by Slovak Film Production.
- ▶ The Slovak Film Institute participated in the preparation of the extensive publication called *History of Slovak Cinematography* (*Dejiny slovenskej kinematografie*, 1997); currently the second, updated edition is in preparation.
- ▶ In 2001, the SFI became a full member of the prestigious International Federation of Film Archives (FIAP).
- ▶ In 2002, the SFI published its first DVD (*Pictures of the Old World/Obrazy starého sveta*, dir. Dušan Hanák, 1972); since then it has published dozens of other DVDs in over 500,000 copies.
- ▶ In 2002, the SFI started to implement the long-term integrated audiovisual information system project, SK CINEMA, for processing, storing, interconnecting, organising, searching and presenting information from the SFI's individual departments.
- ▶ In 2006, the Government adopted the draft Project of the Systematic Restoration of Audiovisual Cultural Heritage with the objective of rescuing cinematographic and audiovisual works and gradually making them accessible to the public. This is the SFI's long-term priority project.
- ▶ In 2008, the Audiovisual Act entered into effect. It regulated and re-defined the position, tasks and activities of the SFI.
- ▶ In 2008, SFI's shop Klapka.sk was opened. It presents a broad offer of filmological literature, DVDs and CDs and other materials.
- ▶ Since 2011, in association with the Radio and Television of Slovakia, the SFI has implemented the national project entitled Digital Audiovision in order to systematically digitise the audiovisual heritage and make it accessible. Two specialised digitisation workplaces are part of the project.
- ▶ In September 2011, Cinema Lumière was opened in Bratislava. Films are shown in two screening rooms and the cinema is operated by the SFI.

Find more information on SFI on pages 32–37.



Stories Devoid of Love or Shame

► Jana Dudková

To watch contemporary feature films produced with majority Slovak participation no longer entails a direct invitation to martyrdom or self-torture. On the contrary, today the community of people interested in Slovak film is tempted to view in comfort a series of stories delimited, let us say, by the year of “release” in cinemas which more or less convincingly testify to the condition of audiovision, society and culture in the country.

The story of the first months of 2013 turned out to be a story of festival successes of films known as “social dramas” by people in the film industry. Together with the screening of *Fine, Thanks* (*Ďakujem, dobre*) by Mátýás Prikler and *My Dog Killer* (*Môj pes Killer*) by Mira Fornay at the Rotterdam IFF, the question again arose as to whether it is good for the local cinema to focus only on “festival” films. They do win important awards but they are not capable of attracting enough paying (local) audiences to the cinema. Therefore, many film critics awaited the second half of the year with tension – this was when the first two films supported from the Minimal Programme of the Slovak Audiovisual Fund (AVF) – low-budget “genre” films aimed at less “elitist” audiences – were released in cinemas.

In 2013, altogether eight full-length feature films with majority Slovak participation were released in cinemas. Only five of these form part of this story.

For instance, *Intrigues* (*Intrigy*) is a costume film which bucks all current trends. With its rigorous mise-en-scène and conventional adaptation of literature, it's distantly reminiscent of the old tradition of Monday plays on Slovak Television – however, they never had any ambition towards cinema release and *Intrigues* did not make the most of this potential. And, unlike this television format, *Intrigues* does not even have the potential of critical allusion to the present day. Hence, the question arises of what audiences the filmmakers sought to address through the satirical picture of social elites of the 18th, 19th or beginning of 20th centuries? When we learn that the film consists of three works created as part of post-graduate studies at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts, we get an answer to this question, at least in part. The film really looks like an exercise with unsteady directing, occasional clumsy acting performances and with almost no relation between the dialogues and current social problems.

Attonitas has a different potential. Just like *Intrigues*, this low-budget project was made without the financial support of the AVF (the filmmakers only applied for post-production and distribution support, in both cases unsuccessfully). In addition to this relative “independence”, it has one other thing in common with Bebjak's horror *Evil* (*Zlo*, 2012) – a similar sub-genre narrative of the expedition which sets out to shed light on the nature of paranormal activities in the haunted house. If we omit the amateurish dialogues or how the filmmakers spin out the plot in vapid, prolonged shots of the faces of the protagonists wandering around the manor house, the film is not quite a vain attempt to utilise a low-budget and undemanding (in terms of scriptwriting) sub-genre for presentation of the existential fear of the era we are living in. The protagonists of *Attonitas* are young people who “film” themselves even in everyday life, in petty and compromising situations. The loss of privacy and fear of betrayed love lead to a surprising punch-line which reacts also to the idea of an unlawful state, the gratuitousness of the police or evil, and even the “most innocent” of us are capable of resorting to it.

Corruption of the state apparatus is also the topic of *The Candidate* (*Kandidát*), and the final theme of a lonely avenger returns in a different form and attempt to create a different genre (a combination of gangster film and western) in *Indian Summer* (*Babie leto*). The development strategy of both films is also similar in that both are connected to current fiction trends. The new film by Gejza Dezorz brings brand new themes, environments and moods to Slovak cinema. *Indian Summer* hovers between sleazy, even chauvinistic, trash and contemplative narrative which (thanks even to the story linked to murdering) brings it close to the works of the Coen brothers. Moreover, the film brings a quite unexpected view of minorities and it does not fret about political correctness, it is not interested in careless positive exoticism, to such an extent that it combines ideologically incompatible contexts in the post-modern cynicism manner: for instance, the neo-Nazi actor and singer Rasťo Rogel in a story which seemingly promotes friendship between the majority population and problematic nationalities (Roma, Hungarian).

Unlike *Indian Summer*, Jonáš Karásek's *The Can-*

didate balances on the edge of “cynicism” in a completely different manner. To date, this film has had the most perfect, most varied and most efficient marketing campaign in the history of Slovak cinema – to such an extent that it even overshadowed the originality of the story or its subversive potential in the first reviews (ultimately, *The Candidate* had very good cinema attendances). The multiple coding turns the film into an allusion to product promotions, its visual and in part sound design also refer to them. Elements of metropolitan soap operas, improvisational dialogue humour and advertising aesthetics are supplemented by themes of hidden resistance against the hypermarket culture (references to the Skrat Theatre, Pohoda Music Festival, etc.). The cynical impression of the film as a marketing product is also countered by the story which recalls conspiracy theories about wiretapping, but also the hypermodern loss of privacy or topical links between the church, advertising and political powers.

Films reacting to the current period through various genre prisms (horror, thriller, revenge film) have their opposites in films dealing with the moral consequences of the drop in the standard of living. In February, directly after being screened at the Rotterdam IFF, *Fine, Thanks* was released in Slovak cinemas. Unlike *Made in Ash* (*Až do mesta Aš*, 2012), *Miracle* (*Zázrak*) or *My Dog Killer*, it does not deal with people from the fringes of society. On the contrary, it highlights the moral degradation of the middle class; thus, compared with the above films, it also risks less respect to the topic. *Fine, Thanks* does not deal with the topic of social segregation. It “only” offers a picture of dysfunctional families where relations are based on economic calculus, or where they have fallen apart due to the loss of a child. The film is built on Mátýás Prikler's graduation film made in 2009. In his graduation film, the director decided to break with the unwritten rule of the dominance of Slovak as the language which the characters of Slovak films are expected to speak (of course, only if they are not Roma) even before *Apricot Island* (*Marhuľový ostrov*, dir. Peter Bebjak, 2011) was released. The stories of three families are combined in the resulting full-length feature film; the strange exoticism of the dual Slovak-Hungarian identity remains present all the

time: on the one hand it slightly alienates and serves to question the fact that Slovak identity as a matter of language and ethnicity is taken for granted, but on the other hand it is also aimed at audiences in Hungary, where the exoticism of the Hungarian ethnicity as a minority within a foreign state gets into a less acceptable, almost trifling form (the Slovak anthem in television broadcasting).

Compared with Prikler's film, *My Dog Killer* by Mira Fornay has a more uniform style and dramaturgy; it is more consistent in its acting performances, as well as in the overall visual and acoustic setting of the mood. Just as in *Foxes (Líštičky, 2009)*, Fornay avoids verbal explanations but this time her narrative is built on the tragic principle of imminent fratricide. It is motivated by the ambivalent attempt to get closer to the protagonist's mother and, at the same time, to blackmail her through the kidnapping of his brother who was the reason for the break-up of his parents' marriage. In addition to the sibling drama, *My Dog Killer* also outlines the more burning social background of the story: poverty, the economic decline of the region and the related chilling omnipresent waiting, postponing of solutions and actions. The impossibility of moving ahead, which ultimately leads to racial segregation, is accompanied by the endeavour to belong somewhere (and to be able to fix one's affiliation in a solid identity) and, in the end, also by the occasional outbreak of homophobic or racially motivated aggression.

Miracle by Juraj Lehotský is the third film in the series of last year's social tragicomedies, tragedies and dramas. It is neither so ambivalent or even fragmented in terms of its dramaturgy and style as *Fine, Thanks*, nor so consistent in maintaining the allusive narration as *My Dog Killer*. Seemingly observational moments alternate with scenes where the characters verbally explain their motivation, feelings and stories, and these expositions in particular are sometimes superfluous, based on the repetition of well-known clichés and corny metaphors. The excellent image narration suffers from the non-inventive use of words and their hidden meanings. This is pertinently illustrated in the ending of the film which should at last clarify what "the miracle" in the title means – it is the miracle of motherly

love associated with the cliché idea of the transformation of the main character when she suddenly discovers tenderness at the moment when she sees her newborn – however, in the meantime, she has already given up her child for adoption.

Three very varied films stand out among films depicting stories of people from the periphery and films funded by the Minimal Programme. In addition to *Attonitas* and *Intrigues* we should also make mention of *Love Me Or Leave Me (Miluj ma alebo odíď)* from Mariana Čengel Solčanská. It was made with support from the AVF and it had quite a successful marketing and distribution strategy. However, with its poetics, theme and emphasis on women as authors, it surprisingly returns to the films *Blue Heaven (Modré z neba, 1997)* and *Quartet (Quartetto, 2002)*. Unlike these two films, *Love Me Or Leave Me* also includes the rivalry between a mother and daughter who are both interested in the same man. The problems solved in the film and the method of working with emotionally charged situations are reminiscent of popular television series, even though lesser-known faces were cast in the main roles. This film is conservative, even anachronistic; it restores to Slovak cinema the tendency to flee from social problems to isolated places where suppressed family traumas surface in order to make it possible for the family to re-consolidate in the end.

The leitmotif of a rejected woman or woman as a victim returned in several films produced last year. Since *The House (Dom, 2011)* by Zuzana Liová, where the protagonist takes fate into her own hands, Slovak film returned again to the traditional patriarchal ruts. However, on the other hand, the theme of faded or chained love between spouses, lovers, and love between parents and children or between siblings appeared in all last year's films. It appears to be the case that, whether the economic crisis, the criminal underworld of the country or the nature of the hypermodern "era" is stressed, Slovak filmmakers continue to be intrigued by the transformation of the emotions and morals of present-day society, indicating that Slovak films remain films in which passion is not trusted, but belief in a productive rectification of society has also been lost. ▲

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Emphasis on Current and Serious Problems

► Pavel Smejkal

Six majority Slovak documentaries and two films with minority Slovak participation which were screened in local cinema distribution in 2013, plus about ten more films in the programme selection of our most important festivals, constitute the basis of this article. Straightaway, this initial list reveals that last year was rich in documentaries that were, moreover, afforded space and attention.

A thematic emphasis on serious and frequently highly topical social problems and, at the same time, a divergence from the poetics usually associated with contemporary Slovak documentaries is one of the main characteristics of last year's production. Up to now, a certain imprecisely defined "artistry" has been the qualifying condition for the release of a documentary in the national cinema distribution. A remarkable example of the change came to Slovak cinemas so to speak from a foreign country: *Crooks (Šmejdi)* by Czech director Silvia Dymáková is a film without big artistic ambitions but with a great potential for success. Also, thanks to cinema release and organised screenings for seniors, the film managed to trigger a public discussion of unprecedented intensity and, it seems, it also managed to contribute to specific changes.

Within the dichotomy expressed by the English terms *author-driven* and *issue-driven cinema*, documentary film in our cinemas inclined inconspicuously towards the second type. Naturally, this classification only applies to a limited extent; however, in practice it usually determines the success

of the film in the market, its communication, festival and distribution strategy. If we were to look more closely into the way that local filmmakers and distributors talk and write about their documentaries, in most cases we would encounter an emphasis on the "author's nature" – whatever that may mean. But, in the changing distribution environment, it is consistently more important to have a tailor-made strategy for each film and in such a situation the theme becomes the key attribute. Currently, Filmtopia tests and improves this approach; it is actively seeking for an audience for its film *Miner's Bread (Banický chlebiček)* in the severely deprived areas in the Gemer region and in other districts with similar issues. In his documentary debut, Roman Fábian recycled his graduation film and returned to the people living in the region which became a victim of the post-revolution economic transformation. The distributor also worked primarily with the theme in the *Velvet Terrorists (Zamatoví teroristi)* – in this case it was the theme of anti-communist revolt. With the not altogether skilful manipulation within the PR campaign, this theme proved to be rather

more explosive than it had appeared at first sight. Out of last year's production, this film made by Pavol Pekarčík, Ivan Ostrochovský and Peter Kerekes probably comes closest to fitting the formula of an auteurist documentary made the Slovak way. In the documentary, the filmmakers develop the poetics which has repeatedly proved successful at world film festivals and, following its successful start in Karlovy Vary, it appears that the formula will work once again, notwithstanding that, under a more critical examination, the film emerges as a not very convincing construct and it reeks of mannerism, apart from the third part which is the best of the three.

The release of the film in Karlovy Vary also opened the door to other foreign film festivals for Pavol Korec's film *Exhibits or Stories from the Castle* (*Exponáty alebo príbehy z kaštiela*). The group portrait of the inhabitants of the old people's home located in the baroque chateau in Stupava was made by Formats Pro Media. For this company, it represented its first larger experience with a creative documentary and festivals. Their example shows that, with a little luck, international success is not an unattainable goal, even for inconspicuous projects without a big background.

Atelier.doc has been putting a lot of effort into establishing themselves at international festivals for a longer period of time and in a more systematic fashion, and last year brought them a breakthrough in this respect. The lingering success of *Fragile Identity* (*Krehká identita*, dir. Zuzana Piussi), a slapstick documentary about the mental condition of Slovak nationalism, which was screened for the first time at a festival in autumn 2012 and released in art house cinemas in January and, in particular, the excellent reception of *Normalization* (*Kauza Cervanová*) at festivals in Jihlava, Leipzig and in Warsaw, enhanced the position of the company among producers of documentaries with export potential. It is worth stating that, although both the films are closely linked with Slovak life and institutions, they proved to be attractive for international audiences also. Based on the response of mass media and social networks, these films are well received despite being highly subjective; this subjectivity appears to be overlooked by the audiences. Zuzana Piussi's and Robert Kirchhoff's works defy the classification used in the beginning of this article.

Nonetheless, only those audiences equipped with an understanding of the local context are capable of deciphering the author's licence more efficiently.

Also, Adam Olha started in Jihlava in 2012 with his full-length debut *New Life of a Family Album* (*Nový život*). The Audience Award signalled that he has succeeded in making an accessible, communicative film which is capable of addressing a broad audience. In Slovakia, rumour had it that popular actress Jana Olhová would unveil her private life in the documentary, which helped to promote the film. *New Life of a Family Album* made good use of all these trumps in its domestic cinema distribution and, at the same time, the film travelled around world festivals quite successfully, as it gained some advantage from the fashionable wave of "family" documentaries using amateur films and home videos. Another Czecho-Slovak documentary co-production features in the catalogue of the Association of Slovak Film Clubs. Director Olga Špátová picked up the project titled *The Greatest Wish* (*Najväčšie pranie*) of her father Jan Špáta by making a film with the same name. In the early 1960s and late 1980s, Špáta recorded the desires and dreams of two revolution generations by carrying out a survey. In the third of these films, Špátová seeks in vain for a similarly obvious and easily graspable historical conflict. Its absence results in the respondents not having much in common.

Débuting Tomáš Krupa did not conceal his ambition to provide an account of his generation, either. However, *GRADUATES/Freedom Is Not for Free* (*ABSOLVENTI/Sloboda nie je zadarmo*) emerges as unrelated portraits of three of the director's friends from university. Hence, the representativeness of such a selection is questionable, to say the least. Krupa gives preference to style over method; as director, he surrenders totally to the self-pitying unison of the accounts of his protagonists without reflecting on it in any way. What a pity. The unemployment of young people is undoubtedly a theme which deserves a more effective treatment – in fact, it currently affects almost the whole of Europe.

Several remarkable Slovak documentaries found their way to the screen thanks to local festivals. Most of them were screened at festivals in the first half of the year at Febiofest and at the Art Film Fest. Cinematik Piešťany continued in 2013 also

with the tradition of a separate competition section where new documentaries were naturally concentrated. Several of them were not released into cinema distribution: *Kampaňeros* – Peter Važan's film made at meetings of political parties prior to the last parliamentary elections. Director Adam Hanuljak returned to the protagonists of his earlier documentary in the sparse but impressive film *About Young Parents 2* (*O mladých rodičoch 2*). In *The History Lesson* (*Hodina dejepisu*) Dušan Trančík deals with the issue of teaching national history on the Slovak and Hungarian sides of the Danube. The casual discussions of secondary school students which derive from the different interpretations of the Treaty of Trianon constitute the focus of this film. The discussions unveil deeply rooted myths and prejudices but also a furtive strengthening of the transnational European identity. Travelogues were represented in the Cinematik competition by *Forgotten Dubois* – *Undiscovered Beauty* (*Zabudnutý Dubois – Neobjavená kráska*) by director Miroslav Béreš and *The Enticed by Heights* (*Posadnutí horami*) by Pavol Barabáš. Another documentary by Barabáš *Footprints on the Ridge* (*Stopy na hrebeni*) also comes from the *Tales of the Tatras* (*Príbehy tatranských štítov*) series. It was shown at the Bratislava IFF. The portrait of screenwriter and poet James Ragan entitled *Flowers and Roots* (*Kvety a korene*) was screened at the Made in Slovakia Section at the same festival; it was made by Dodo Banyák. Pavol Korec also presented his film *Propeler* (*Propeler – hľadanie strateného času*) at the Bratislava IFF. The final premières

of the previous year took place at the One World Festival. One of the films screened was *Judge Me and Prove Me* (*Súd' ma a skúšaj*) by Ivica Kúšiková about the elimination of female religious orders in the 1950s which ultimately won in the Slovak competition.

The Internet as a new distribution channel increases in significance from year to year. Piano is the platform in most frequent use in our country for the online distribution of documentaries. It gives users access, for a single down-payment, to premium content of newscast portals. In particular, the daily *SME* and magazine *tyždeň* give space to Slovak films on their websites. Last year, for instance, *GRADUATES/Freedom Is Not for Free*, *Kampaňeros*, the short portrait of musician Andrej Šeban entitled *Časozber* (tv.sme.sk) or films produced by Artileria – *New Life of a Family Album*, *Osadné, Other Worlds* (*Iné svety*), *Blind Loves* (*Slepé lásky*) (filmy.tyzden.sk), were brought to audiences in this way. As for international audiences, the DAFilms platform remains the one that is strategically most important. It is characterised by a "more choosy" curator approach to creation of the catalogue and focuses on users from amongst film professionals. For instance, Filmtopia recently began a collaboration with DAFilms. At present, the company offers *Bells of Happiness* (*Zvonky šťastia*) and *Miner's Bread* via this service.

It seems that 2014 will be similarly prolific. The anticipated full-length debuts by Miro Remo and Vladislava Plančíková, but also many projects in progress made by renowned authors, appear to be promising. ▲



Animated Films Closer to the Audiences

• Eva Šošková

No professional animated projects were completed in 2012 but the upcoming year 2013 promised all the more interesting works in Slovak animation. These promises were kept and we were able to look forward to new films and other positive things. Slovak animation managed to use all the distribution channels and thus access new audiences.

We will start with cinema distribution. Within Project 100, two new Slovak animated films were released in cinemas by the Association of Slovak Film Clubs (ASFC). The short *Moon (Mesiac)*, 2012 by Ondrej Rudavský, a Slovak visual artist living abroad, was screened before the restored full-length feature film by Alain Resnais *Hiroshima My Love (Hiroshima Mon Amour)*, 1959). In his film, Rudavský plays out his own tried and tested themes that form part of the broad range of his visual (not only audiovisual) works – spirals, complicated masks, technical and simultaneously mystic creatures, angels, multiple identical characters, decorativeness. He eschews the narrative elements, emphasises the stylistics and visual art in order to trigger the associative thinking of the audiences. Creation is an intuitive matter for Rudavský and he apparently also requires intuitiveness on the part of his audiences.

By contrast, Ivana Šebestová bases her short drama *Snow (Sneh)*, 2013 on a story and narrative. It was screened before the full-length feature film *Snow White (Blancanieves)*, 2012 by Pablo Berger. Šebestová remains faithful to her style of cut-out animation and the theme of partner relations. A slight shift was thus made in the technique she uses – physically cut materials are

animated using 3D computer software – and also in the theme – “love” is presented against a background of the ideas, life and customs of Eastern philosophy. *Snow* is an introspective view into the inner world of the heroine living in an illusion in which the audience also partakes by using classical narrative elements (the narration is limited, the audience knows only what Maja knows).

As the screening of short films in cinema distribution has encountered huge problems in the post-1989 market economy, the outcome has been that animated films can be screened only at festivals (no return on investments). In 2013, we witnessed several attempts to resolve this problem. Hence, Slovak animated films could have been viewed in cinemas also as part of new distribution projects – short film blocks. The ASFC distributed in cinemas the first part of the *Slovak Shorts* series and, in addition to a documentary and feature film, the animated *Pandas (Pandy)*, 2013 by Matúš Vizár and older *tWInS* (2011) by Peter Budinský were also screened. The success of the co-produced Czecho-Slovak sci-fi *Pandas* caused a sensation in both countries – the film won the third prize in the Cinéfondation Section (students' film competition) at the Cannes IFF. The film is a refreshing boost for the Slovak animated scene. Unlike the

tendencies of contemporary authors who focus on the individual inner world of the heroes, provide generally valid moral truths or offer entertainment based on the reflection of the film form (for instance the genre and style of feature films), Vizár names and opens many current political, economic and social topics in one compact unit. However, he does not attempt to preach: he employs humour and irony to depict the evolution of a panda influenced by the irresponsible behaviour of people. The ASFC plans to put together and screen a block of short films once a year.

The block of students' films from the Academy of Music and Performing Arts *Grasshoppers (Kobylky)* was the second series in cinema distribution. The Academy and the distribution company Continental Film always released a new collection of students' films once a month. Hence, in 2013, animated films from the Animation Studio at the Film and Television Faculty of the Academy of Music and Performing Arts were also screened in cinemas. The young active animator Andrej Gregorčok who also collaborated in the making of *Snow* had two comedies in the selection: a film about a jealous bulb *Lighta* (2012) and the parody on Frankenstein *Frankenhand* (2011). After the department was established, a stream of women directors who deal with women's themes of human relations came into being and the latest generation also includes a few women. As for the block of short films, Martina Frajštáková presented her graduation film *Terra Nullius* (2011) and Mária Ol'hová *The Bubble (Bublina)*, 2012). While Ol'hová leaves the story at the intimate level of one couple, for Frajštáková the relationship between a man and woman constitutes a metaphor of the unhealthy relation of man towards nature. Veronika Kocourková's student film *Love at First Sight (Láska na prvý pohľad)*, 2011) deviates slightly from this wave; nevertheless, this film is also about the relationship between a couple, albeit in the form of a slapstick comedy. Thanks to the *Grasshoppers*, another film by Peter Budinský was screened in cinemas in 2013; this time it was a film he made in his fourth year at school (he made it as part of a student exchange programme), *Bird of Prey* (2009), about the transferability of violence. The 2013 film selection concluded with the clay animation (less frequent at the Academy) *Mr. Carrot (Pán Mrkva)*, 2013) by Tomáš Danay about an invincible vegetable and

the treacherous food-processing technology. This film represents the second, in this case not thematic, but stylistic wave at the Academy for which stylised animated blood acts as a sort of symbol of freedom and simultaneously an explicit element distinguishing animated films for children from films for adults.

Television is another distribution channel that is not very frequently utilised in our country. After several years wait, we were at last treated to a brand new original Slovak bedtime story last year (and Ivan Popovič continues his older project *If I Only Had a Screw Loose! (Mať tak o koliesko viac!)*). The cut-out animation *Mimi and Lisa (Mimi a Liza)*, 2013) is about the friendship between a handicapped and healthy girl. Seven episodes have been made so far, with a further six in the production stage. At the same time, the book *Mimi & Lisa* was published, representing an interesting promotional step in the context of Slovak animation. The RTVS broadcast the new series during the Christmas week.

In 2013, animated films also began to be distributed via the VoD service. The charged Piano system offers the possibility of seeing three animated films on tv.sme.sk: Vizár's *Pandas* (2013), *Dust and Glitter (Prach a ligot)*, 2011) by Ové Pictures (Michaela Čopíková and Veronika Obertová) and an older film by Ivana Šebestová *Four (Štyri)*, 2007) told in a mosaic manner.

The TV series originally made for TV JOJ called *Local TV (Lokal TV)* continues on the web. In addition to the series itself, the animators from the InOut studio also make a lot of bonus materials – independent programmes dedicated to the individual characters; thus, the project expands continuously.

The successful completion of the *Mayhem (Virvar)* project and the issue of the double DVD, consisting of a selection of 16 Slovak animated films made from the late 1990s to the present day, were the final surprises of 2013. Slovak animation is getting closer and closer to its audiences and let us hope that it will get even closer. Because film doesn't actually exist without the eyes and ears of the audience. ▲

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What One Candidate Is Capable of Doing

► Miro Ulman

The year 2013 again showed what one hit is capable of doing. Jonáš Karásek's debut, *The Candidate (Kandidát)*, was only premièred in October; nevertheless, in just a few weeks, with 80,234 viewers it achieved seventh rank in the list of top domestic films over the era of independent Slovakia and, thanks just to this film, the audience figures for viewing domestic films almost doubled year-on-year.

With regard to production, 2013 proved to be the most prolific year in the history of Slovakia, with 22 full-length Slovak and co-production feature films (of these only 8 were minority co-productions). The number of premières also achieved a record. Distributors released 23 full-length films in cinemas (15 feature films and 8 documentaries) and 5 blocks with 27 short films. Two further titles – *Snow (Sneh)* by Ivana Šebestová and *Moon (Mesiac)* by Ondrej Rudavský – were screened prior to full-length films. So, in the course of 2013, audiences had the chance to watch 52 domestic productions in cinemas!

Whilst only 90,830 viewers saw all the premièred domestic films in 2012, in 2013 there were 160,151 viewers, which meant a 76.32 percent year-on-year increase. The increase is also approximately the same when comparing attendances at premièred purely Slovak films and majority co-productions. In this case, 126,339 paying viewers represents a year-on-year increase of 78.65 per cent. Almost

two-thirds of them came to watch *The Candidate* (63.51 per cent) and the three most successful domestic majority premièred titles (*The Candidate*, *Love Me or Leave Me – Miluj ma alebo odíd*, *Normalization – Kauza Cervanová*) attracted 81.48 per cent of audiences altogether.

After the sharp drop in the average attendance per screening of a 100 per cent Slovak film or majority co-production in 2012 (21.86 viewers), we more or less returned in 2013 to the 2011 level (37.59) when the extremely successful film *Lóve (Lóve)* was premièred. Thanks to *Colette*, last year's interest in minority co-productions also increased by almost 70 per cent, and the average attendance per screening of minority co-productions also increased year-on-year from 12.19 to 17.80 viewers. *The Candidate* (52.86 viewers) and *Like Never Before – Ako nikdy* (52 viewers) had respectable average attendances per screening. Conversely, only an average of 0.67 viewers per screening were curious enough to watch the fourth

block of *Grasshoppers (Kobylky)*. The average admission fee per domestic film was EUR 4.29 which is almost one euro less than the total average admission fee in 2013.

The previously mentioned *The Candidate* by director Jonáš Karásek was the most successful domestic film in 2013, with 80,234 viewers. Only Mariana Čengel Solčanská's *Love Me or Leave Me* (14,139 viewers) and the minority co-production *Colette* (17,279) managed to cross the 10,000 viewer threshold. Robert Kirchhoff's documentary *Normalization* was also successful with 8,565 viewers, and last year it ranked fourth among the most successful Slovak films.

In 2013, only three new Slovak films were also screened on 35 mm copies (*Fine, Thanks – Ďakujem, dobre*, *My Dog Killer – Môj pes Killer*, and *Miracle – Zázrak*) and all the premièred titles, except for *Fragile Identity (Krehká identita)* by Zuzana Piussi, were available on DCP. Eight distribution companies brought the films to cinemas. Continental Film remains the largest distributor of domestic productions with five films and four blocks of films. With regard to the aforementioned figures and the success at festivals, we may consider 2013 as being a pretty successful year in Slovak cinema. ▲

DISTRIBUTION OF FIRST-RUN SLOVAK AND CO-PRODUCTION FILMS IN SLOVAKIA IN 2013

MOVIE TITLE	DIRECTOR	PRODUCTION YEAR	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	RELEASE DATE	ADMISSIONS
1. <i>The Candidate (Kandidát)</i>	Jonáš Karásek	2013	SK/CZ	10/10/13	80,234
2. <i>Love Me or Leave Me (Miluj ma alebo odíd)</i>	Mariana Čengel Solčanská	2013	SK	1/17/13	14,139
3. <i>Normalization (Kauza Cervanová)</i>	Robert Kirchhoff	2013	SK/CZ	5/16/13	8,565
4. <i>Indian Summer (Babie leto)</i>	Gejza Dezor	2013	SK/CZ	10/31/13	5,191
5. <i>Miracle (Zázrak)</i>	Juraj Lehotský	2013	SK/CZ	9/5/13	5,135
6. <i>My Dog Killer (Môj pes Killer)</i>	Mira Fornay	2013	SK/CZ	3/21/13	3,329
7. <i>GRADUATES/Freedom is Not for Free (ABSOLVENTI / Sloboda nie je zadarmo)</i>	Tomáš Krupa	2012	SK	4/25/13	1,819
8. <i>Attonitas</i>	Jaroslav Mottl	2012	SK	2/28/13	1,736
9. <i>Fine, Thanks (Ďakujem, dobre)</i>	Mátyás Prikler	2013	SK	1/31/13	1,649
10. <i>Fragile Identity (Krehká identita)</i>	Zuzana Piussi	2012	SK/CZ	1/10/13	1,483
11. <i>Miner's Bread (Banický chlebiček)</i>	Roman Fábian	2013	SK	7/6/13	1,285
12. <i>Velvet Terrorists (Zamatoví teroristi)</i>	Pavol Pekarčík, Ivan Ostrochovský, Peter Kerekes	2013	SK/CZ/HR	10/4/13	763
13. <i>Exhibits or Stories from the Castle (Exponáty alebo príbehy z kaštiela)</i>	Palo Korec	2013	SK	4/11/13	425
14. <i>Slovak Shorts I (Pásmo krátkych filmov I) - block of films</i>	4 directors	2011-2013	SK/CZ	10/24/13	368
15. <i>Grasshoppers I (Kobylky I) - block</i>	6 directors	2010-2013	SK	9/24/13	94
16. <i>Grasshoppers II (Kobylky II) - block</i>	6 directors	2010-2012	SK	10/15/13	54
17. <i>Intrigues (Intrigy)</i>	Juraj Kilián	2013	SK	4/25/13	46
18. <i>Grasshoppers III (Kobylky III) - block</i>	6 directors	2011-2013	SK	11/12/13	18
19. <i>Grasshoppers IV (Kobylky IV) - block</i>	5 directors	2008-2013	SK	12/3/13	6
TOTAL 100 % Slovak films and majority co-productions					126,339
1. <i>Colette</i>	Milan Cieslar	2013	CZ/SK	9/12/13	17,279
2. <i>Honeymoon (Libánky)</i>	Jan Hřebejk	2013	CZ/SK	8/29/13	6,051
3. <i>New Life of Family Album (Nový život)</i>	Adam Olha	2012	CZ/SK	2/28/13	2,635
4. <i>Little Baby Jesus (Dočkáme sa Ježiška?)</i>	Lenka Kny	2013	CZ/MX/SK	12/5/13	2,368
5. <i>The Blacksmith from Woodham (Kovář z Podlesí)</i>	Pavel Göbl	2013	CZ/SK	5/16/13	2,354
6. <i>Clownwise (Klauni)</i>	Viktor Tauš	2013	CZ/LU/SK	11/28/13	1,051
7. <i>Aftermath (Dozvyky)</i>	Władysław Pasikowski	2012	PL/NL/RU/SK	11/14/13	970
8. <i>The Greatest Wish (Najväčšie pranie)</i>	Olga Špátová	2012	CZ/SK	3/7/13	896
9. <i>Like Never Before (Ako nikdy)</i>	Zdeněk Tyc	2013	CZ/SK	11/14/13	208
TOTAL Minority co-productions					33,812
TOTAL All Slovak and co-production films					160,151

Really Terrorists, Even Though Velvet?

► Pavel Branko

The three stories of the full-length documentary *Velvet Terrorists* are connected only by the thin thread of conviction pursuant to the same section 93 on terrorism but, otherwise, these three men (youngsters at the time of their conviction) and their fates could not differ more. Hence, in effect, these are three independent films linked by the topic of hatred against Bolsheviks, communists, commies, etc., as well as by the fact that these films are not about their deeds from the past but rather about the way the protagonists live today.

This oscillation between the time layers is different in every case – the first story focuses on the present day, in the second one both lines overlap and in the third they blend, as stress is laid on the protagonist's obsession with the fight which developed from the fight against the communist establishment into a fight against today's establishment which has grown on the imaginary ruins of the communist one. Thus, we need to take a look at each of the films individually, as they differ as much as their protagonists.

The prologue consists of shots from manifestations of the immense power of communist structures, seen innumerable times before, presented as the embodiment of the permanence of the system against which an individual can do nothing. The authors introduce those individuals, who have found the strength to make a stand against this predominance after all, against a backdrop of explosions taking place only in minds, so that materialised visions, such as trees exploding at the roots when the protagonist is passing by, give the image a touch of imaginative surrealism –

the idea materialises. This is a unique technique in documentary filmmaking.

Stano presents a tragicomic story of a typical Slovak, albeit a likeable loser in human terms. He made a botch of his active step, hence an ideologically motivated deed, in a manner about as Slovak as one can imagine – with a bottle in hand, which transforms his act of revolt into a farce. Now he is living his monotonous life of a frustrated loner who perks up only during hunting trips by car when, in addition to shooting animals (reference to the penchant for weapons and violence, even though accepted by society), Slovak sexism develops fully in the drunken atmosphere of male conviviality as a mirror image of complexes smothering the real relationship potential. The staged condensed embarrassment of the stereotype of love-matching attempts through newspapers and magazines, placed repeatedly into the same framework in terms of space and colour, refers to the farcicality of similar scenes in the early works of Miloš Forman, and at the same time presents a tribute to Ulrich

Seidl's method which draws a deeper human truth from the situations involved in such procedures. Even here the authors mine the psychological truth by showing a lonely soul yearning for a partner as medication against loneliness. However, by repeated shots from the interior of the moving car, they tell us in cinema direct manner why these clumsy attempts, shorn of any empathy on the one hand and equipped with the awareness of human dignity on the other, cannot end other than as a lost cause. The protagonist accepts the comic interludes aimed at him with good humour and that makes him likeable – only a few have the courage to allow themselves to be ridiculed.

The occasional peeking at attractively-formed girls meant "for eyes only" connects him with the entire male world which pursues this sport (no honour to any exceptions) with the same enthusiasm as he does. Stano is no Oblomov and he tries to get from life as much as possible, but we also see him as a leaf drifting on the river where he floats with another candidate, not without comic ingredients. He tried to do something once, and even this deed turned against him grotesquely. He is not built for deeds at all, let alone historical ones.

The profile of the main hero could be characterised in this way if he were fictitious. However, Stano is a real person driven by the stream of life, quite a passive and all-in-all likeable man placed in the creative process by the authors into metaphorised situations transcending real human fate. That is also the reason why what the film allows to be extrapolated from the character does not have to pertain in real life, which is less predictable than the laws of dramaturgy. This applies to the other two stories of the triptych too.

Fero is a tougher guy and his penchant for weapons and fighting accompanies him in various forms throughout the film. He teaches his son how to escape his pursuers at a natural motor-racing circuit, even though his son will obviously never need these techniques; he teaches his wife to shoot at a private shooting range – she accepts his penchant good-heartedly, but she is by far not as enthusiastic about it as he is. In the reconstruction scenes, we see him preparing for the assassination of the President, how he imagined evading arrest or how he listened to Radio Free Europe in the boiler room of the Communist Party Committee... In short, Fero still lives his past and its goals, but at the same time he is a settled Slovak father of a family and it is no coincidence that we see him repeatedly in the feather bed. For his sons the revolt is something akin to old stories from the battle of the Piave River or, at most, a chance to play an unusual game... When their father tells them in a coastal restaurant about his vain attempt to get into contact with a foreign secret service, they look almost like two dummies in their car, which they attempt, in a different situation, to push uphill. Unlike their mother, they don't give a damn about any anti-communist (and obviously any other) revolt. We do not learn from the film what actually occupies their lives – well, it is not about them, but about their father. However, the generation gap is striking, even though the film does not emphasise it. And so the protagonist is shown as a man who remains proud of his revolutionary past for which he has paid, but less as living in the present day, even though he is still full of strength and he surely doesn't spend his days only in the feather

bed. What a pity that the film ignored this layer. On the other hand, the fact that the protagonist stands alone with his past in today's consumer society clearly testifies to the era we are living in. If the portrait included contemporary social contexts too, it would certainly add to its depth.

The third story, *Vladimír*, is, in filmmaking terms, the most refined. It presents two fascinating personalities who are able to forget the camera and as non-actors let the filmmakers have a glimpse into their intimate sphere during the reconstruction of the joint phase of their lives with unbeatable authenticity. Viewed as a whole, the film appears like a handbook, a terrorist training manual – Vladimír introduces his potential adept and adherent to his rich know-how in a thoroughly detailed and methodological manner, he drives her to the limit of her strength in his physical demands. The film demonstrates this process equally precisely and with a sense for detail through the lens of the watchfully observing camera. It is dramatised by inventive editing of the image and orchestration of the sound.

As for the facts, the film raises a lot of questions. We do not learn why a convinced anti-communist, repeatedly imprisoned during the totalitarian regime, ultimately causing his marriage to fail, remained a potential terrorist even after the fall of the regime. The final attack at the Huxley-esque billboard *Your Happiness Is Our Dream* promising two birds in the bush as erstwhile Orwell-esque Communist Party notice boards promised communist paradises on Earth, could be the key, but is this motif sufficient for him to stay so obstinately in the old ruts, even under the new conditions? We do not learn why Vladimír carried out his casting only among girls. The story does come close to the thin red line of erotic sparkling in moments of intimacy but never crosses it – the two of them become close rather on father and daughter terms. We do not learn why the teenage exotic beauty undergoes terrorist training which cannot help her in the stressing conflicts evoked by her imagined queerness – she needed rather a karate course. Hence, a lot is lacking in this film.

Despite so many legitimate questions, the story mesmerises by what is not lacking. Vladimír and Iva emanate the charisma of authentic personalities in their spontaneity and their relation-



ship, growing in the course of a demanding joint training, develops in psychological terms so credibly and suggestively as if this was not a reconstruction of something already experienced in some variation, but as if we were watching a feature film with such empathic protagonists that they merge with their characters, including Vladimír's occasional slip into bitter humour, but at the same time, we are watching an observational documentary. However, since we know that the two of them are not performers but the originals, this makes the experience of this *cinéma vérité* all the more stronger. The end makes a very precise point. We have never before seen Iva without Vladimír, but now she is doing her long-distance run at night alone – the training is over, the new adept of velvet terrorism has achieved full qualification. Of course, the question arises right away, what does she need her new qualification for, but this issue was already broached.

The triptych concludes with short returns to all three stories, underlining what these different life-trails have in common: a tragicomic but touching impulsiveness and amateurism of their approach, rather as if they were looking for a way to vent their dissatisfaction with the situation. One of them even trained a successor for this complex, which was inadequate then and even more inadequate today, so he evidently continues his quixotism. It is this quixotic element, which could be called a reversal of the well-known saying to "to crack a nut using a sledgehammer", as the protagonists attacked the symbols of the system, not the system itself, and that is the real thread connecting the three different attempts to change the course of history and the profile of their carriers today. At a time when transpersonal objectives often invoke a sceptical grin, the comic-romantic overlapping of their fates and also the two everyday and one obsessive ending should strike a drowned down-chord in our souls. How many quixotisms ultimately changed the course of history? Only further development will show which did and which did not. It is no quixotism to devote such a challenging, manifold and riveting film to this topic. ▲

Pavol Pekarčík (1972, Spišská Sobota)

Graduate of the Department of Documentary Direction at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Bratislava. He made several films with Ivan Ostrochovský who made *Velvet Terrorists* (*Zamatoví teroristi*) in collaboration with him. These were *Lesser Evil* (*Menšie zlo*, 2004), *Wind* (*Vietor*, 2004), *Karakorum* (2005), *Uli Biaho* (2008); Pekarčík also worked on Ostrochovský's film *Ilja* (2010) as director of photography and editor. He collaborated in various positions in the making of *Gypsy* (*Cigán*, dir. Martin Šulík, 2011) or *Made in Ash* (*Až do mesta Aš*, dir. Iveta Grófová, 2012).

Ivan Ostrochovský (1972, Žilina)

He studied film science and documentary film at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Bratislava. He made films such as *Pietro Pascalo* (2000), *Script for a Documentary* (*Scenár k dokumentárnemu filmu*, 2001) and he collaborated with Pavol Pekarčík on *Lesser Evil* (2004), *Wind* (2004), *Karakorum* (2005), *Uli Biaho* (2008). He was awarded the Igric Award for the 30-minute documentary *Ilja* (2010) dedicated to music composer, Ilja Zeljenka. He also collaborated in the making of several TV series and he (co)produced films of his colleagues.

Peter Kerekes (1973, Košice)

He studied film direction at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Bratislava. *66 Seasons* (*66 sezón*, 2003) was his full-length debut. It was screened in cinemas and it won several awards, including one at the Jihlava International Documentary Film Festival. However, Kerekes's films reaped awards at festivals prior to him making *66 Seasons* – this holds true in particular for *Morytats and Legends of Ladomírová* (*Ladomírske morytáty a legendy*, 1998). Five years ago, his full-length documentary *Cooking History* (*Ako sa varia dejiny*, 2008) was screened in cinemas. For instance, it won the Special Jury Prize at HotDocs in Toronto or the Golden Hugo at the Chicago IFF. Kerekes also collaborated in the making of several Slovak and foreign TV series.

Velvet Terrorists (*Zamatoví teroristi*, Slovakia/Czech Republic/Croatia, 2013) _ **SCRIPT AND DIRECTED BY:** Pavol Pekarčík, Ivan Ostrochovský, Peter Kerekes _ **DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY:** Martin Kollár _ **EDITED BY:** Marek Šulík, Zuzana Csépló _ **MUSIC:** Marián Čurko _ **PARTICIPANTS:** Stanislav Kratochvíl, František Bednár, Vladimír Hučín, Amanda Nagyová, Marcela Bednárová, Iva Škrbelová _ **LENGTH:** 87 min.

Palo Pekarčík (left), Ivan Ostrochovský and Peter Kerekes ■ PHOTO: Katarína Hlinčíková

Excitement of Documentary Unpredictability

► Katarína Tomková

After the successful start at the Karlovy Vary IFF, where *Velvet Terrorists* won the FEDEORA Award in July 2013, three Slovak documentary filmmakers are getting an international première of their film. The project, prepared initially by Palo Pekarčík and Ivan Ostrochovský, who were later joined by Peter Kerekes, will be presented at the 64th Berlin IFF in the International Forum of New Cinema, also known in brief as just "Forum". We talked to the three directors – Pekarčík, Ostrochovský, Kerekes – about how the film came to be made and what it means for its makers.

The protagonists of *Velvet Terrorists* are three different men who were convicted of terrorism during the communist regime. Is the film about something else for each of you or do you have a unified view?

– Peter Kerekes: Each of us definitely perceives it differently. I was interested in the form. We probably managed to achieve it in the story about Vladimír Hučín – I wanted to capture the excitement of documentary unpredictability together with the aesthetics of a feature film. I was fascinated by the form that can be used to capture this theme.

– Ivan Ostrochovský: All three protagonists have strong stories which can be either ruined or enhanced by the way in which they are filmed. That's what our discussion was about: how to "sell" the moment of futile sacrifice. We also spent a long time talking about romantic motifs – Slovak films in general deal a lot with love, emotional motifs – and the fatalism of the pointless sacrifice, the paths we were brought up with, is what we tend to react to. However, it was important to figure out how to engage with pathos so as to avoid making a pathetic film, but rather a film about pathos.

One way was to use humour but we had to think about how to ration it.

Do you perceive *Velvet Terrorists* as a comic or tragic film? Documentary or rather fiction?

– I. O.: As this film is a full-length debut for Palo and me, everyone perceives *Velvet Terrorists* through Peter's works. And suddenly he is different. Prior to this film, his characters used to stand about in long shots and talk. He didn't make the film by putting shots together like pieces of a puzzle. *Velvet Terrorists* is a different type of narrative, much more structured than a feature film.

– P. K.: And, paradoxically, this is probably the most documentary film of all those that have been made here over a long period of time. In particular, when we made the films about Fero and Stano, we placed the cameras, usually two, around them, a situation was devised and they talked for an hour. Then we selected only a part of this. They were only given minimal instructions. That is how films about nature are made. There is one basic requirement – that the animals don't run away – this was given by the take of the camera and microphones; they knew that they would sit here and it would take place here.

– I. O.: Moreover, *Velvet Terrorists* doesn't look like a Slovak documentary. For instance, the camera was often mounted on a tripod, travels were made... Slovak documentaries are usually made off the cuff. This film has a composition, a devised image, it didn't go down the traditional route: "I'll film him wherever I catch him". We even went location-hunting before we started shooting. As we had enough money and time, we could make the film the way films should be made, in my view, and we could think everything over thoroughly.

– P. K.: The subsequent procedure was also interesting – when we made the sequences with Stano and Vladimír, first we shot a lot of situations without dialogue, without any interaction. Stano worked at a construction site, Vladimír and Iva trained. But this way they got used to the presence of the camera and when we started filming interviews and interactions between them, they no longer bothered themselves with what we were doing.

– I. O.: For that, I always use my favourite example from director Tomáš Hulík – he trained a beaver for his documentary about nature, but that still doesn't make it a feature film.

Who invented the situations in which the characters move freely?

– P. K.: A large part of the situations is based on their lives or stories. For instance, every day Stano gets to work by car with his four friends. He sits in the pub every day and drinks beer, he catches fish – all these are real situations. We wanted to raise a number of questions and we tried to move them on to the theme of women, but we also shot them when we had no idea what Stano was talking to his friends about. And ultimately, these turned out to be the best scenes. Of course, some of the scenes were staged. In Stano's case, it was the scene where he says he's going off to look for a girlfriend. In Hučín's case, that he's looking for a female terrorist.

– I. O.: We needed to recount their experiences and feelings somehow. If Stano were to talk about prison whilst seated at his kitchen table, no one would want to watch that. Accordingly, we helped it out a bit: we invented the scene where he paints his cell, but how he did it turned it into a wonderful scene. The outcome always depends on the protagonists.

The development of the project took years. Did your original intention change over the course of time?

– I. O.: For a long time we agonised over what the documentary should be about at all. As we started with Fero Bednár, first of all we emphasised his family, sons, his wife. But then Peter brought up the story of the girlfriend who left Fero and so we agreed that the story about Stano would also be about women. And so this structure was also logically used for Vladimír's story. When it was only Palo and me in the project, we just knew that we wanted to tell the stories of these three terrorists.

– P. K.: (laughing) One of Ivan's original ideas was to make a film about the former terrorist-training in Czechoslovakia and he came up with the idea that we would, in parallel, undergo terrorist-training in Palestine, meanwhile filming ourselves during the training. Since I didn't want to look like a coward, I pretended it was an interesting idea (laughing). I'm pleased to say he thought better of it.

– I. O.: Another idea was that the protagonists would actually prepare for the assassinations. Of course, they wouldn't carry them out, but the preparation would be real. We wanted to create

a bridge between the past and the present and show, in real time, what they experienced previously. We even tried out several such real situations.

– Pavol Pekarčík: For instance, Stano used to go and “observe” the President. At some state ceremony, in a café or even at the Peace Marathon – he stood quite close to him and observed him. It was nice to see how the cameras of all the media filmed the head of the state – only one was aimed at a weird-looking guy somewhere alongside.

How would you characterise your protagonists?

– P. K.: They are convinced idealists who didn’t do what they did to gain some personal profit but in the conviction that they would change society for the better. However, they don’t use terrorist methods nowadays, because they can influence public opinion in a different way.

– I. O.: They were very young at that time. They were twenty-three or twenty-four years old. They let themselves be ruled by their hearts, they were hot-headed. The incoming information was also quite different at that time – in my view, an ordinary citizen stood no chance of assessing the situation realistically.

Was there a difference in the way they acted in front of the camera and in normal life, when the camera was not rolling? Did they stylise themselves in some way?

– I. O.: Actually, they stylised themselves automatically even without the presence of the camera. After all, we were strangers to them. Moreover, they knew that we were going to make a film about them.

– P. P.: Exactly. They knew that we could make use of any hesitation to get to their more intimate core. Maybe, with the exception of Stano. He let us into his “intimate space” and so he let the audiences in also.

– P. K.: That’s why we invented the terrorist for Vladimír Hučín. So many news films have been made about him, he knows what the “camera looks like”, and how to work with it: he talks only after everything has been set up, he talks in complete sentences, he controls himself to a great extent. After a few initial interviews, we knew it was going to be impossible to make a documentary about this man, that he would always be declaiming something. That’s why we needed to invent some situations – and then Ivan came with the idea of finding a girl

for him whom he was supposed to train. I thought it was total bullshit (laughing). But on one occasion we visited Hučín at home and he welcomed us wearing an apron with a cloth in his hand – he was just wiping the ficus. And that’s a scene as if cut from *Léon*. Then I said to Ivan: “OK, I apologise, you were right” (laughing).

– I. O.: Actually we resolved two problems in this way: how to work with Hučín and, at the same time, we got the theme of a woman into the story, just as in the cases of Fero and Stano. Moreover, the theme of recruitment had been present for a long time. One of the initial ideas was to announce an audition for terrorists – the main protagonists. That was supposed to be the beginning of the film.

– P. K.: And we even filmed it. It was a real audition at which we would – so to speak – have chosen our three terrorists. We filmed in television for two full days – people came to us and aired their problems. The announcement stated that we were looking for people who were dissatisfied with the current situation in society and who would be willing to change it in any way – even by violence. And a very odd group of people turned up...

What was most difficult to do with the protagonists?

– I. O.: Intimate scenes where the character reveals something sensitive. For instance, when Iva asks Hučín questions while he is attached to the polygraph. Or when Iva is suspended, crying and you can see her belly. It took us two months to talk her into it. It was not about her belly or the tattoo on it, but about the fact that we had found a sensitive spot of hers.

– P. K.: Or to persuade Fero Bednár to call his ex-girlfriend.

– P. P.: Or rather to persuade him to take the clothes off the mannequin... (laughing) He was grumbling all the way through about how weird he would look.

You are the directors, but also the producers of the film. Did you make a virtue out of necessity or does it give you a certain creative freedom?

– P. K.: In the case of a documentary, the financial structure often adapts to what has to be filmed. When we produce the films ourselves, we are able to make flexible decisions. To have a producer standing over us and to constantly have to



■ PHOTO: Katarína Hlinčíková

explain to him why we made this or that decision – that would slow us down terribly.

– I. O.: We agreed that we would contribute the same share to the project, but it was Peter who applied for the funds – it was clear that he had the most experience and best reputation as a producer.

It was probably quite a complicated process for you – getting used to each other.

– P. K.: When we started writing the script, I felt physically sick. I’m used to a monogamous relationship with my colleagues. And suddenly two guys come along who don’t understand you. Naturally, I assume that they’re at fault, not me (laughing). On the other hand, I felt that I needed to move on. I really didn’t want to make something like *Cooking Terrorists*¹, I wanted to deviate from what I had done before. Palo and Ivan were good partners for that. It was dreadful collaborating with them, but it was good (laughing).

– I. O.: Peter clearly doesn’t understand the meaning of the concept “monogamous relationship”. Palo and I had a monogamous relationship up to the *Velvet Terrorists* (laughing). But sure. Palo and I probably experienced the same. We were used to one another and we didn’t even need to talk when we were making the film. Then Peter invaded into our silence and he just started to talk and talk. We all found it difficult to learn to listen, explain and make compromises. Peter really enjoys making films, he loves the turmoil and working with a larger film crew. I suffer in such situations, I have migraines and I throw up. I never even show up without first having four shots of Becherovka. Nevertheless, it was a great experience.

What about possible future joint projects?

– P. K.: We are preparing a film about censorship and censors together with Ivan. The idea stems from the experience of cinematographer Martin Kollár at a Saudi airport – he was leafing through a magazine and it turned out that all revealing curves of world-famous top models had been covered up by hand using a black marker. We started thinking about the people who earn their living “dressing up” women in this way. We would like to find such “guardians” of morals all over the world. ▲

¹ An allusion to his film *Cooking History* (Ako sa varia dejiny).

Orphans and Their Parents

► Mária Ferenčuhová

After *Fine, Thanks* by Mátýás Prikler and *My Dog Killer* by Mira Fornay, *Miracle* by Juraj Lehotský has become the third film with a social theme to be quite successful at festivals in 2013. We cannot speak of social films as mainstream in cinematography; they resemble rather an unpredictably winding stream and, for audiences, sometimes even an underground stream rather than a huge river. Nevertheless, they are on the increase and that should not be overlooked.

As is often the case for films with a social theme, all three of the above films are about families experiencing a crisis, or even about dysfunctional families. While in *Fine, Thanks* (*Ďakujem, dobre*) we see how family ties are torn, ripped apart under tension or weakening under the pressure of circumstances, exhaustion or fatigue, so that communication languishes and falters, Mira Fornay and Juraj Lehotský show us the consequences of family ties which ceased functioning a long time ago. In *My Dog Killer* (*Môj pes Killer*) the dysfunctional family leads to the protagonist replacing it with a skinhead community and subsequently to a tragedy and, at the same time, to his inability to feel or reflect on this tragedy. The failing family in *Miracle* is supplanted by a re-education centre from the institutional perspective and by a relationship with a beloved man from the emotional one. Both – quite logically and fatally – fail.

The protagonist of *Miracle* is fifteen-year-old Ela who is confined by her mother and her new partner in a "re-education centre". Ela invests

all her hopes in a relationship with an older, but emotionally blunt and socially inadequate boy, Roby, who works somewhere "out there" as a security guard in a supermarket and lives in a garage on the fringe of the city. He is the reason why Ela absconds from the re-education centre. But Roby is not capable of supporting her, he is indifferent to her, even capable of selling her for a few hundred euro or a few grammes of methamphetamine.

When Ela loses all hope of maintaining her relationship with Roby and the dream of them leaving together for England falls apart (the motif of England appears also in *The House* (*Dom*) by Zuzana Liová, even with the same rejoinder as a reaction to the protagonist's intention: "They sure are just waiting for you."), she returns to the centre without hesitation and of her own volition. She is deserted, without any background and perspective, albeit apparently not broken or desperate. She displays an unusually strange mixture of defiance and resignation. She doesn't let anyone

badmouth her mother, but she has long since stopped counting on her mother's ideas, orders and advice. It is so that she doesn't communicate with anyone any more. The miracle that, thanks to her sensitivity, appears to emerge for a second at the end of the film will probably have to grow elsewhere. In another family, a foster one, maybe even functional and sustainable...

Juraj Lehotský found the main outlines of the theme and even the protagonist herself in an actual re-education centre in Eastern Slovakia where for several years he, together with screenwriter Marek Leščák and director Mátýás Prikler, has already been organising film workshops for these unmanageable children or rather children unmanaged and deserted by their families. This positioning of the film in a "documentary" and personal experience is reminiscent of last year's film by Iveta Grófová *Made in Ash* (*Až do mesta Aš*) which was co-written by screenwriter and dramaturge Marek Leščák who also co-wrote *Miracle*.

Just as in *Miracle*, in Grófová's film we also find a hostile, even merciless world and a pure soul whose ideals and gullibility contrast sharply with the cold and cruel world. The "pure hearts" of the protagonists, however, appear differently in both films: while Dorotka's sensitivity is revealed in particular in her desires, dreams and fears shown in animated sequences, Ela's sensitivity and receptiveness percolate from her deeds when she,

for instance, takes care of bedridden patients in a hospital where she undergoes practical training as an orderly. But Ela is also much more childish than Grófová's Dorotka, and her joys and short temper are those of a teenager. Her testiness, expressed by shoving and shouting, which are signs of helplessness rather than aggressiveness, may recall another forlorn heroine – Betka from Fornay's début *Foxes* (*Líštičky*). But, unlike Dorotka who drifts on the waves of life, and unlike Betka who reacts aggressively to almost every unexpected disruption, and even unlike most of the faltering male protagonists in *Fine, Thanks* and *My Dog Killer*, Ela is actually able to make decisions. It even appears that she is able to take responsibility for her decisions – albeit these are not always fortunate or correct.

In this way *Miracle* represents a timely breach of the stereotype on offer – girls without a background who become victims of sexual violence or hostages of men without a way out, as we see in *Made in Ash*, *Gypsy* (*Cigán*) by Martin Šulík and in part in *Foxes* by Mira Fornay. Ela also experiences rape and humiliation, but she escapes this ambit.

However, despite the dissimilarities in the films mentioned – not solely with regard to the theme – it is the similarities that predominate. For instance, Juraj Lehotský chose a similar narrative to what we find in *Made in Ash* and *My Dog Killer*. He throws situations into the face of the audience without

necessarily bringing them to an end, he does not play with the audience, he does not fawn over them with his script. Just as the previous two films, *Miracle* captures only fragments, does not clarify the motivation of the secondary characters; nevertheless, the film gets right to the gist. From the screenwriting and dramaturgic perspectives, it is probably the most accomplished of the three films mentioned above.

The music with its precisely applied minimalist chords, and equally the camera, which keeps close to the protagonist most of the time, contribute to the impression of precise construction and narrative purity. The camera does not allow the heroine to run away from the shot and, if it does, the audience feels that it is always near her. The camera deserts Ela only in one scene: this is when Roby takes drugs and leaves her alone. (But, on the other hand, it is the camera that brings unexpected elements into the film: it doesn't show us Ela's neglected teeth until almost the middle of the film, thereby admitting that it has mainly been covering her from flattering angles.) Conversely, in *Made in Ash* the camera sometimes turns away from the protagonists almost autistically and concentrates on the forlorn city interiors, or it even

presents the image out of focus at sensitive moments. We also see this defocusing at the key moment in *My Dog Killer* where, after the Roma boy dies, the camera literally "refuses" to focus on the main protagonist. By contrast, the camera in *Miracle* is almost nurturing – as if its supervision were acting as substitute for the missing mother figure. And so, even though Ela is an echo or a close relative of other characters from Slovak social films, even though she is the step-sister of Betka and Dorotka, even though all these characters are the forlorn orphans of living parents, Ela at least has the protective view of the camera above her, or next to or around her. Is that enough for the audience or not? Despite *Miracle* being a precisely constructed and strong film, it comes to cinemas only as an also-ran. For a cinematography where only a few full-length feature films are made every year, a multiple déjà-vu can suddenly become a smaller miracle than *Miracle* would have been just a year ago. ▲

Juraj Lehotský (1975, Bratislava)

He studied photography at the Secondary Technical School of Art in Bratislava and then documentary filmmaking at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts. He has directed several short films and has made contributions to large series. He made two full-length projects – the documentary *Blind Loves* (*Slepé lásky*, 2008) and the feature film *Miracle* (*Zázrak*, 2013). The former won many awards, inter alia the C.I.C.A.E. (International Confederation of Art Cinemas) Award in the Quinzaine des Réalisateurs (Directors' Fortnight) Section at the Cannes IFF; in Slovakia it won five national film awards – *Sun in a Net* – including the award for Best Documentary and Best Director. Lehotský's latest film *Miracle* was awarded a Special Mention in the East of the West Section at the 48th Karlovy Vary IFF and the Best Actress Award for Michaela Bendulová at the 23rd Film Festival Cottbus.

Miracle (*Zázrak*, Slovakia/Czech Republic, 2013) **_DIRECTED BY:** Juraj Lehotský **_SCRIPT:** Marek Leščák, Juraj Lehotský **_DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY:** Noro Hudec **_EDITED BY:** Marek Šulík **_MUSIC:** Martin Burlas **_CAST:** Michaela Bendulová, Robert Roth, Venuša Kalejová, Lenka Habrunová, Kika Potočná, Žaneta Polhošová, Sandra Radičová and others.

The Thick Black Line

► Pavel Smejkal

The release of the Slovak-Czech documentary *Normalization* (presented in Slovakia as *The Cervanová Case – Kauza Cervanová*) in cinemas was accompanied by unprecedented interest from the mass media which accorded the film all the hallmarks of being a real event. Otherwise reserved opinion-makers among film reviewers were also mesmerised by the film and straight after its release they were talking of a "big" film of "world class". It was the subject of discussion for years, so it was difficult to prevent the expectations.

The title *Normalization* indicates that the author's ambition is to talk about the modern history of the country and about a specific crime case which is to serve as a synecdoche. However, the resulting form of the film may surprise.

When the lifeless body of a young woman was found in the summer of 1976 in a stream near Kráľová at Senec, an investigation was started. It was one of the most extensive in the history of Czechoslovak crime investigation. The victim was identified as a medical student, Ludmila Cervanová. Witnesses last saw her alive on the campus in Mlynská dolina, Bratislava. So the police interrogated students who attended the disco at the Unic Club on the night of her murder. Cervanová allegedly left the disco late at night, she headed for the bus stop and got into a car with unknown men. Evidence, clues and experts' opinions were added to the hundreds of testimonies recorded in the investigation dossier. The case gained huge media attention which culminated when, after years of unsuccessful investigation, the police

finally accused a group of men from Nitra. The public was mobilised to such an extent that they demanded the death penalty. In the end, seven citizens of Nitra were awarded sentences of four to twenty-four years in prison on the basis of a few confessions and witness testimonies. After the Velvet Revolution, the Supreme Court quashed the verdict due to doubts inherent in the case. The convicts were released and they started to talk publicly about political conspiracy, forced confessions and the manipulation of evidence which put allegedly innocent people behind bars.

The basic features of the case are well-known to the Slovak public and they inevitably raise a lot of questions. If the audiences expect factual answers from Kirchhoff's film, then they will be frustrated. *Normalization* is a courageously subjectivised narrative which emphasises the epistemological rather than the ontological level of the case. Hence it may happen that, at the end of the film, the audience has the impression that they know less about the whole matter than at

the beginning. Or at least less than they thought they knew. Do not be misled by the catchy but somewhat misleading tagline issuing from the mouth of the polygraph examiner – the truth in this case is at least as complicated as lies. The fragments of the truth are concealed all the time somewhere behind the faces which we may observe and examine on the screen. Here the truth is something impenetrable, interiorised, dependent on mediated revelations which just have to be questioned. It is wholly typical that, after more than two-thirds of the film has been shown in this agnostic spirit of contradictory testimonies, improbable and even less probable explanations, a twist comes literally as the *deus ex machina*. The polygraph externalises everything internal – memories, fear, conviction – into a set of diagrams and data on a roll of paper. Kirchhoff recorded the course of the testing, but he didn't show all those important lines and curves in the film and again he let people talk about them – they were experts but, again, essentially people interpreting the results. Thus, the answer to the cardinal question of guilt still remains a matter of more or less informed subjective conviction with many issues projected in it – the most significant perhaps being the a priori trust or distrust in the judicial system.

At the same time, it is needful to state that the author's conviction of the innocence of the convicted men from Nitra is obvious in the film and that that is perfectly all right. Kirchhoff presents his conviction, but does not force it on others. If he does convince the audience of anything, then it is of the reasons for doubts about the legality of the investigation and trial. He put a lot of effort particularly in the part about the post-revolution development of the case and the retrial, which simply confirmed the 1980s verdict without taking into consideration the evidence newly discovered in the Levoča archive. Kirchhoff suggests that this was a consequence of the policy of thick lines, a content and personnel continuity in the judiciary prior to and post the revolution. The reform of the judiciary is a political agenda and in this sense his film is also political – just as, even though less explicitly, the *Disease of the Third Power (Nemoc tretej moci)* that director Zuzana Piussi made two years ago. However, sometimes the director shifts needlessly from arguments to attractions (for

instance the sneaky confrontation of President Gašparovič with General Prosecutor Trnka).

Several features – beginning with the structure of the narrative and ending with the music dramaturgy – reveal the inspiration from *The Thin Blue Line*, so to say a canonical documentary about miscarriages of justice. Based on testimonies of participants and witnesses, American director Errol Morris compiled a picture of a strikingly similar case which, by coincidence, occurred in the same year as the murder of Ľudmila Cervanová. In this case also, the over-motivated investigators jumped on the first available solution to an unpleasant and sensitive crime, ignoring everything that did not fit in their puzzle. However, while Morris adheres to a strictly rigorous method, Kirchhoff's approach is more intuitive. This difference is mainly displayed in the montage techniques. Morris actually utilises only five types of material: testimonies of the people involved shot as talking heads, staged reconstructions of the events corresponding accurately to the individual witness versions, documentation from the dossier and newspaper articles, several fragments from old Hollywood films and neutral archive images (the detail of a tape recorder playing the recording of a witness testimony or the nocturnal urban scenery). Thanks to these boundaries and disciplined editing, there is no place in the film for the author's speculations.

In *Normalization* Kirchhoff worked with a more variegated palette of materials: initiated situations (the morgue scene, almost like from Roy Andersson), situations captured by "fly-on-the-wall" techniques (the quarrel between the accused men) or even by candid camera, television and private archives, archive shots, documentation from the dossier, Dangle's drawings, commentary, etc. The natural expansion of the collected material is related to the interest of mass media in the case and clearly also to the eight years spent working on the project. Director Kirchhoff consistently visits new witnesses in the film, driven not by the effort to better understand but rather by the compulsive need to see and touch everyone and everything related to the case, not to omit anything. He appears in front of the camera several times, he knocks on locked doors and tests the door knobs or asks questions from behind the camera. Hence, in a certain sense,

the film is a story about his subjective experience of the case, about the obsessive search for answers which ultimately, maybe, are not transferable.

In Morris's *The Thin Blue Line* the editing is subordinated to consistent control over meanings ensuing from the individual syntagmas. This effort to exclude everything that is random and inadvertent from the structure of the narrative is visible also in the reconstruction scenes which are mostly built from details making it possible to "put into brackets" that which cannot be proved. The montage procedures in Kirchhoff's film are nowhere near so incontestable. It may happen several times that the audience will not know what they are watching at that particular moment: is it simply an illustrative shot or does it hold some significance for the Cervanová case? In particular, the montage of image and sound is quite problematic in some moments (for instance, the part of the film dedicated to the so-called Arab trail or the initial commentary with an unclear enunciator). All these reservations are actually reservations against the argumentation technique and are mainly obstructive if we expect Kirchhoff's film to be something which it is not and probably doesn't even seek to be. However, if we concede at the outset that we are watching an author's documentary that does not strive to be strictly objective, *Normalization* may strike us with surprising intensity and in unexpected places.

Morris's film had an interesting after-effect. On its basis, the trial in question was re-opened and the unjustly accused man was released from prison. This case revealed that the quality of democracy is not solely a matter of the infallibility of the system, but also of the functionality of check and balance mechanisms, within which mass media – including film – play a potentially significant and responsible role. Kirchhoff's *Normalization* is a different type of film despite all the similarities, and we are not led to expect anything similar from it. The purpose of the film is mainly that it allows the audience to experience the extreme destiny of the victim – whether or not the victim is the convicted men, the persecuted witnesses or the young girl who figures symbolically in the first and last shots of the film. ▲

Robert Kirchhoff (1968, Nitra)

He studied documentary filmmaking and dramaturgy at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Bratislava. In 2002, he established the production company atelier.doc which, for instance, took part in several projects by documentary filmmaker Zuzana Piussi. Kirchhoff himself made films like *Black Word/Čalo Lav (Čierne slovo/Kálo lav, 1999)*, *Hey You Slovaks (Hej Slováci, 2002)*, *Flowers of Evil (Kvetý zla, 2003)*, *Glamour and Misery (Lesk a bieda SNP, 2005)*... *Normalization (Kauza Cervanová)* won the Special Mention of the Jury at the 17th Jihlava International Documentary Film Festival and also the Honorary Mention and the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury at DOK Leipzig.

Normalization (Kauza Cervanová, Slovakia/Czech Republic, 2013) _ **SCRIPT AND DIRECTED BY:** Robert Kirchhoff
_ **DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY:** Ján Meliš _ **EDITED BY:** Jana Vlčková, Adam Brothánek _ **MUSIC:** Peter Zagar

Distribution Lives of Short Films

► Jana Ondiková

Short films – “shorts” – have their own distribution lives; that is, if they were not prematurely buried by those who contributed to their making or who hold the rights to the films. There are increasingly more and more paths leading shorts to their audiences. So many that it seems that they are making it difficult for the producer to make a decision.

The life cycle of a completed and, inevitably, valuable film usually begins at festivals. It is a matter of mutual prestige as to at which festival the Slovak film (yes, even a short) will be premièred. This is particularly evident at the largest events, such as the International Film Festival Bratislava, Art Film Fest, Cinematik and Febiofest. The Student Film Festival Áčko or the recently revived Early Melons Festival focus on the presentation (predominantly) of short student films. Short animated films from all over the world compete at the Biennial of Animation Bratislava and at the International Animation Festival – Fest Anča. Many other festivals seek to find the most interesting of the current Slovak production depending on their focus (One World Festival, Mountains and City Festival). Thematic screenings (Cinema Bus) or film seminars (4 Elements) rather tend to revive older shorts. The Cinema Bus, which is a unique project in Slovakia, thanks to the reverse gear engaged, as it resurrects cinema technology in forsaken village community centres and transports its own audiences by bus, screened for instance the short *Photographing the House Dwellers (Fotografovanie obyvateľov domu)* by Dušan Trančík or the documentary début *Water and Labor (Voda a práca)* by Martin Slivka. The Bažant Cinematograph buses equipped with a 35-mm projectors travel around Slovak cities and summer music festivals. Under the open skies, it brings to the general public much more ambitious short titles in advance of the full-length features being screened (last year for instance,

the organisers commendably took out of the golden fund documentaries by Dušan Hanák or animated films by Jaroslava Havetová).

Cinema digitisation currently underway also, naturally, affects the possibilities of distributing short films in cinemas. Cheaper screening formats should logically lead to an increase in the number of short films shown in advance of the main film; nevertheless, distribution companies and their willingness play the decisive role. The Association of Slovak Film Clubs (ASFC) is a stable fixture (if not the last mohican) among distributors regarding the inclusion of short films prior to the main film. It is in no way coincidental that, in the past few years, the Association screened the animated films *Stones (Kamene)*, *Dust and Glitter*, *The Last Bus (Posledný autobus)* or *Snow (Sneh)* and *Moon (Mesiak)*. In 2013, the ASFC started to distribute a block of short films for the first time. In addition to the animated titles *tWINS* and *Pandas (Pandy)*, the block includes the documentary *The Star (Hviezda)* and the feature *The Exhibition (Výstava)*. In turn, Continental Film started a collaboration with the Academy of Music and Performing Arts – from September 2013 up to the end of the year, the distribution company presented four blocks of short student films entitled *Grasshoppers (Kobylky)*.

The creative distribution referred to more and more frequently is also linked with the gradual change in society which has occurred in the area of the organisation of cultural life. In addition to traditional institutions, civic initiatives come into

play with ever greater strength and even without state support. In the most developed cases, they take the form of independent cultural centres (A4 in Bratislava, Žilina – Zárčie Station, Tabačka in Košice, Klub Lúč in Trenčín, Záhrada in Banská Bystrica, Nástupište 1-12 in Topoľčany...). Happily, their number continues to grow. We cannot say that the individual films can be re-run on these premises, but the organisers do their utmost to make the screening an unforgettable experience with the personal attendance of the filmmakers. The joint performance of *Soliloquy* by the Debris Company and the screening of the (in this way, even re-run) short dance films *VoiceS* (2010) by Peter Bebjak and Yuri Korec or *The Day (Deň, 2004)* by director Jozef Vlk may be considered a felicitous conjunction of a short dance film with dance theatre.

In the past few years, many larger and smaller cultural or community centres, residences, galleries and cafés have been built or renovated at which even short films can be screened. These films are usually part of travelling festivals or the echoes of festivals. In such a slowly awakening environment, it makes sense to try to apply creative distribution. The new distribution company, Filmtopia, was established in 2012 with precisely this objective. To date, it only has full-length feature films in its portfolio, but in time short films could be added. Filmtopia started an interesting collaboration with Doc Alliance Films as a partner in the acquisition of Slovak films and the promotion of an established international VOD platform – the online distribution channel DAFilms.com – in Slovakia. Slovak student films by Milan Balog, Miro Remo, Mišo Hudák or Jana Mináriková have already been available for free on this portal for a number of years.

Piano has, unexpectedly, become a new player in the area of Slovak film distribution. The system of charging for (part of) the content of significant Slovak newspapers and magazines on the web, at first received by readers with displeasure, turned out to be a very well-prepared instrument for VOD distribution. It all started with the documentary by Zuzana Piussi *The Grasp of the State (Od Fica do Fica)* which achieved unprecedented online ratings and kicked off film distribution via Piano. The platform profiled itself as an additional distribution channel which does not generate huge profits, but which

does not require producers to pay the costs of traditional distribution either. At the same time, it is an ideal way (frequently the only way) to make short films available. So far, these have been offered either some period of time after their cinema distribution (*Four (Štyri)* and *Dust and Glitter*) or even prior to it, as in the event of the adroitly timed animated film *Pandas* which was distributed straight after winning an award at the Cannes IFF. Piano admits that it has been the films that have contributed to a large increase in the number of its subscribers.

As for Slovak television companies, there is still no strategy for broadcasting short films. The programme on the news channel TA3 *Through the Students' Camera* was a nice attempt to show short films. In 2012, documentaries by students from the Academy of Music and Performing Arts and the Academy of Arts were broadcast. Foreign television channels usually deal with the problem of varying footages of short films by showing them in blocks. Or an entire programme is devoted to students' and short films, such as the one currently being prepared by ČT art. In this programme, films are presented and their makers introduced. A few film fans might remember a similar short-lived programme entitled *DKP* which was broadcast by the Slovak public TV channel.

And finally we get to those short films which have collected several major awards from prestigious festivals and are looking to get to the next base – distribution abroad. In 2011, Vanda Raymanová's *Who's There? (Kto je tam?, 2010)* was shown in French cinema distribution in advance of the animated “full-length” film *Gruffalo*. By contrast, the 12-minute-long *Pandas* was rejected for cinema distribution in the Czech Republic as being too long.

The sales agent profession does not have much of a presence in Slovakia. Nonetheless, producer Ivana Laučíková found an able sales agent in the Polish company, New Europe Film Sales, which has already managed to sell the awarded *The Last Bus* to several foreign televisions, e.g. the German-French WDR/Arte, American Shorts TV, Canal+ in Spain and in Poland. Nothing remains other than to wish such films a long life. ◀

There Haven't Been So Many Short Films in Cinemas in Years

► Daniel Bernát

Slovak filmmaker, Andrej Kolenčík, is present at this year's Berlinale Talents. This young graduate of the Academy of Music and Performing Arts already had two films in Slovak cinemas – both shorts. In 2013, an interesting distribution experiment occurred in which two blocks of short films enlivened the programme of cinemas. They presented an unprecedented number of Slovak “shorts” to the audiences – twenty-seven of them in all. The blocks were entitled **Slovak Shorts I** and **Grasshoppers (Kobylky)**.

Grasshoppers went into distribution in September 2013 and each month they presented a new collection of films by students or recent graduates of the Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Bratislava. Usually, six new titles were premiered as part of *Grasshoppers* on a monthly basis – feature, documentary but also animated films. One of the dramaturges of the project, Žofia Bosáková, told *Film.sk* that the individual blocks were put together “so as to evoke a broad range of emotions. We seek to promote subversive works which are also capable of enlarging on serious topics with a certain amount of distance or irony”. The name of the block seeks to evoke dynamics, intrepidity and healthy audacity. There were some remarkable films in the *Grasshoppers* blocks, nevertheless, attendances were minimal hence the project was terminated at the end of 2013. Of the ten blocks originally planned, only four were ultimately shown, with twenty-three films altogether. These included films which had achieved success at festivals (the documentary *Arsy-Versy* was prominent among them) and the audiences had the opportunity to see the early works of authors that they will probably hear a lot more about in the future.

As for young filmmaker, Andrej Kolenčík (he studied animated film at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Bratislava), he came more prominently to the attention of audiences even after his works were presented for the first time

in cinemas. This occurred last autumn within the short film block entitled *Slovak Shorts I*. A few months later he left for the Berlin Film Festival where he was invited into the Berlinale Talents. The Association of Slovak Film Clubs (ASFC) brought *Slovak Shorts I* to cinemas, and Kolenčík's documentary *The Star (Hviezda, 2012)* and the feature film *The Exhibition (Výstava, 2012, dir. Peter Begányi, A. Kolenčík)* were chosen for presentation in the block. The ASFC project consisted exclusively of films of young filmmakers which had reaped awards at festivals; the animated film by Matúš Vizár *Pandas (Pandy)*, which won third prize in the Cinéfondation Section (students' film competition) at the Cannes IFF, caused the greatest stir. *tWINS (2011, dir. Peter Budinský)* was the second animated film in the *Slovak Shorts I* block. Andrej Kolenčík collaborated in the making of the remaining two films in the block. The documentary *The Star* talks about a 55-year-old welder who always wanted to become an actor and whose dream starts to become true thanks to the theatre adaptation of the movie *Plan 9 from Outer Space*. In turn, the feature *The Exhibition* is about three middle-aged friends who surprisingly “stick up their middle finger” to unfavourable circumstances and become the winners in a lost war.

We cannot yet talk of audience success in the case of *Slovak Shorts I*, but this block is to continue and this year it should offer another series of short films. ▲

This Could Be An Interesting Year

► Daniel Bernát

What is Slovakia? The makers of the new film *Twenty (Slovensko 2.0)* were seeking the answer to this question and it's going to be possible to find the answers to similar questions in other films that are planned for 2014. And there are quite a few of them.

Ten directors, ten films, each one ten minutes long – these are the basic parameters of the *Twenty* project referred to above. It brings together authors of different generations, experience, poetics, orientation (makers of feature, documentary and animated films)... Among them we can find director Juraj Herz who made his reputation in the 1960s with films such as *The Cremator (Spalovač mrtvol)* or *Sweet Amusements of the Past Summer (Sladké hry minulého leta)*, and Martin Šulík (e.g. *Tenderness – Neha, Everything I Like – Všetko, čo mám rád, The Garden – Záhrada*) who was the key filmmaker in Slovak cinema in the 1990s. Also Peter Kerekes, one of the makers of *Velvet Terrorists (Zamatoví teroristi)* which was chosen for the Berlin IFF, was given ten minutes to express himself. And *Twenty* which should be released in the spring, will also proffer contributions by Slovak female directors Zuzana Liová, Iveta Grófová and Viera Čákanyová.

In 2014, several experienced filmmakers will return to cinemas with new full-length projects. One of them is Miloslav Luther who made the film *A Step into the Darkness (Krok do tmy)* based on a novel by Alfonz Bednár and in collaboration with his brother – cinematographer Igor Luther (who also had a part in the making of award-winning foreign films such as *The Tin Drum – Die Blechtrommel* by Volker Schlöndorff or *Danton* by Andrzej Wajda). *A Step into the Darkness* is set in the 1950s and director Juraj Nvota also returns to the era of communism in his new film *Hostage (Rukojemník)* – a tragicomic story emphasising child protagonists.

Jaroslav Vojtek deals with the complicated relationship of children and parents in his film *Children (Deti)*. This film is Vojtek's feature début, but befo-

re that he made several documentaries, some of which were closely related to children, so it may be expected that he will also use his experience this time for the benefit of authenticity. Moreover, his new documentary *So Far, So Close (Tak ďaleko, tak blízko)* should be premiered in 2014. In this film he follows the situation of families with autistic children.

It seems that the Slovak films on offer in 2014 will be varied also in terms of genre. Several films are prepared for cinema release, for instance *Fear (Strach)* – a set of horror stories by five directors, the crime comedy *Senior Quintet*, the romantic comedy *Play It Cool (Klub odložených mužov)*, and Robert Kirchhoff, whose documentary *Normalization* entered into distribution last year, calls his new film *Jazz Wars (Jazzové vojny)*, a documentary jam session. The road movie *Stanko (Stanko, dir. Rasťo Boroš)* is also to be premiered; this film was made as part of the Slovak Audiovisual Fund's special support programme entitled Minimal which was intended for low-budget films with a profiled genre. Last year the films which received support, *Indian Summer (Babie leto, dir. Gejza Dezor)* and *The Candidate (Kandidát, dir. Jonáš Karásek)*, were released into cinemas. The latter became the most successful Slovak film of 2013 and it is also in the top ten domestic films since Slovakia gained independence in 1993.

We are able to mention only a small part of the films to be released in cinemas in 2014 in such a small space. Unfortunately. Or, rather, luckily, as we may state that there's a great deal going on in Slovak cinema. ▲

Slovak Film Institute

► Daniel Bernát, Mariana Jaremková

The Slovak Film Institute (SFI) celebrated its 50th anniversary last year and this is the 15th year of publication of the monthly *Film.sk*. Currently, the SFI is managed by General Director Peter Dubecký and it consists of two basic units – the National Film Archive (NFA) and the National Cinematographic Centre (NCC).

The Film Archive Department, Documentation and Library Services Department and the Media-theque fall under the NFA; the SK CINEMA integrated information system and the Digital Audiovision Project are also related to it. In simplified terms, it can be said that the NFA's main role is to maintain the Slovak audiovisual heritage. The Film Archive Department, accordingly, is concerned, on an ongoing basis, with the professional storage, treatment and preservation of archival film materials, as well as with their restoration and rendering them accessible. The Project of Systematic Restoration of Audiovisual Cultural Heritage is closely related to the work of the archive.

The NFA contains not only film collections but also written documents related to a specific film, its production, promotion or reflection. The Documentation and Library Services Department takes care of these and similar funds.

The SFI is gradually digitising its collection and archival funds, and cataloguing them in order to render them accessible via the SK CINEMA information system. The membership of the SFI in international organisations contributes to the efficient management and utilisation of archival collections. The International Federation of Film Archives (FIAP) is one of the most prestigious – the SFI has been a full member since 2001.

The NCC, together with its departments (Film Events Department, Audiovisual Information Centre, as well as, in part, the Publications Department), seeks to bring Slovak film and information on it as close as possible to the public both at home and abroad by means of various activities and in collaboration with film organisations and events.

The SFI has been a member of European Film Promotion (EFP) since 2006, so it is part of a network of more than thirty European film organisations which promote their national cinematographies. *"We have stable foreign partners – festivals and markets; we collaborate with them closely. We have our fixed place at the markets in Berlin and Cannes. When working with film archives, the biggest step forward we have made is that the SFI is able to offer restored and digitised films. That opens up many possibilities to us and it also enhances our standing,"* remarks the Director of the NCC, Alexandra Strelková.

The SFI has had its official shop, *Klapka.sk*, since 2008. It offers goods related to film, especially Slovak film. The shop sells DVDs and CDs, film publications, magazines, calendars and posters. In 2013, over 1,400 publications and almost 6,000 DVDs were sold.

At the same time, the SFI operates a cinema which has been entitled *Cinema Lumière* since 2011. Films for demanding audiences are screened in the cinema and it attracts more and more audiences. While in 2012, the cinema attracted 36,155 viewers, the number last year was over 52,000. All four screening rooms and further premises for the public should be renovated shortly, whereby a modern digitisation workplace of the SFI has been established in the basement.

The Creative Europe Desk Slovakia, functioning since January 2014 as a consultancy centre focusing on the new programme of the European Commission, Creative Europe, also falls under the aegis of the Slovak Film Institute. ▲

Digital Audiovision Is One of the Most Important Projects

► Simona Nôtová

The national Digital Audiovision Project has been one of the ongoing priorities of the Slovak Film Institute (SFI) since 2011. Systematic digitisation and making the digital content accessible through memory and fund institutes are the main objectives of the Project. This is the largest digitisation project in respect of the audiovisual heritage in the Slovak Republic and the SFI makes use of European Union funds for its implementation.

The national Digital Audiovision Project is implemented by the Slovak Film Institute in tandem with its partner, Radio and Television of Slovakia (RTVS). Its objective is to build two specialised digitisation workplaces and to digitise at least 58,700 audiovisual cultural objects. The outcome of the project in the SFI will include at least 1,000 digitised film objects with descriptive metadata for long-term storage in high and low definition, and RTVS will digitise the remaining 57,700 audio and video objects. At the same time, the Digital Audiovision Project will create the basis for systematic handling of these digitised audiovisual objects in current formats which meet European standards, it will save a selected part of works from mechanical destruction or other devaluation and it will also facilitate access to works to be used for educational, training, scientific and research purposes.

Due to its extent, Digital Audiovision is a unique project within the entire European region. It will create the conditions for digitisation of the audiovisual heritage in Slovakia up to 2015, when the implementation of its main activities will be finished, but also for the period of a further five years of sustainability of the project's results. As the digitisation of archive collections is a long-term procedure, the main focus is to build a digitisation workplace to enable the SFI to continue this process even beyond 2020. The chief objective is to create a comprehensive functional and systematic unit of the SFI digitisation workplace

with direct links to the entire process of storing the Slovak audiovisual heritage and rendering it accessible, which is one of the basic functions of the SFI as a memory institute.

The SFI digitisation workplace was completed by the end of 2013 and the pilot operation should commence in the first quarter of 2014. According to Peter Csordás, a digitisation expert and also quality and control manager of the Digital Audiovision Project, its technological equipment will meet the current requirements of modern film archives and distribution channels for audiovisual works. He says that *"the complete processing chain is designed for a 4K/2K resolution. It consists of an efficient archival film image-scanner, archival sound-transcription, work-stations for digital image and sound-retouching, film and digital projection, grading workplaces, digital library and the digitised objects management system"*. The workplace will be used for the film conversion itself, for restoring the image and sound part of the work, production of the digital master and its derivatives, as well as for preservation activities with the film media after conversion and also for the creation of digital media for long-term archiving, due also to data migration for future generations. Updates of descriptive data in the information system and making the digitised works accessible via the SK CINEMA information system will also form part of the work. ▲

Further Major Projects of the Slovak Film Institute

– **Project of Systematic Restoration of Audiovisual Cultural Heritage and Making It Accessible:** this long-term project was started in 2006 by the SFI Film Archive staff. The project's objective is to systematically protect and gradually restore the audiovisual heritage primarily on film media, all the while maintaining the original quality, whereby it is necessary to comply with all norms and standards of archiving activities. New 35-mm film materials on a more durable polyester base are currently being produced in the Bonton Zlín Studios in the Czech Republic. With regard to the project, digitisation operations were carried out in 2008 – 2011; the outcome was a set of completely restored selected titles in 2K resolution on new digital media HDCAM SR 4:4:4 and their duplication for the purpose of making them available on Digital Betacam, Betacam SP, DVD, CD, VHS. Once the Digital Audiovision Project is launched, a large part of the digitisation works will be carried out within this national project.

– **SK CINEMA Project:** this is a long-term information system project which the SFI has been implementing since 2002. The SK CINEMA information system is used for processing, saving and presenting the information and knowledge acquired, created and utilised by the individual SFI departments. By degrees, all the collections, funds and artefacts managed by the SFI, as well as the information and knowledge from Slovak audiovisual culture and cinema art, will be subject to processing by the information system software methods, emphasising Slovak cinematic works and the creation of the Slovak national filmography. In particular, historiographical research and cataloguing activities are carried out in the processing of film, archival, documentation and library collections and funds within the SK CINEMA information system; the outcome is the records which, according to category, are included in one of the following databases: Slovak Film Database, SFI Catalogue, SFI List of Entries. Since 30 November

2013, these SFI databases have been accessible on the Internet through the SK CINEMA film portal which is in trial operation at the following address: <http://www.skcinema.sk>. The content of the portal is available in the Slovak language; its English version is in preparation.

– **The presentation of Slovak cinema and audio-visual abroad** has been one of SFI's priority projects since 2009; thanks to this project, the SFI promotes Slovak cinema to a broader and greater extent at numerous events abroad, with financial support from the Ministry of Culture. The project represents a natural extension of the SFI's ordinary activities and possibilities, with the aim of enhancing the extent and frequency of the presentation of Slovak cinema and audiovision, outside of the scope of SFI's normal activities; it is in compliance with the objective to extend and intensify the accomplishment of the SFI's mission and the roles carried out in accordance with the Audiovisual Act (No. 343/2007) in the area of the presentation of Slovak cinema and audiovision. The National Cinematographic Centre carries out and manages the project on behalf of the SFI. Financially demanding presentation stands at international film markets, the European Film Market in Berlin and the Marché du Film in Cannes, are the main pillars of the project. It covers the distribution of film materials from SFI's National Film Archive for foreign presentation, as well as the reaction to the development of digital technologies, the issuance of promotional publications about Slovak cinema and audiovision, the travelling costs of SFI staff and film professionals to selected events, etc. ▲

– The SFI has 24 films available on DCP and a further nine are planned for 2014.

– The SFI has 42 full-length films available on HDCAM SR 4:4:4 and a further 53 short documentary and animated films.

The SFI Offers the Best Beyond the Borders

► Daniel Bernát

The Slovak Film Institute (SFI) collaborates with foreign companies also in order to present to international audiences the top-quality works of Slovak cinema on DVD. Malavida Films presents them to the francophone market and the SFI recently started to collaborate with the British Second Run. Hence, films by Štefan Uher, Peter Solan, Dušan Hanák and Juraj Jakubisko have crossed the borders of Slovakia.

The French company Malavida included the first Slovak films in its production plan in 2010. At that time they released titles from the golden era – the 1960s – and there was no way *The Sun in a Net* (*Slnko v sieti*, 1962, dir. Štefan Uher) could be missing; it is regarded as the “starter” of the Czechoslovak New Wave. There were also two films by Juraj Jakubisko in the first batch of DVDs – *The Prime of Life* (*Kristove roky*, 1967) and *Birdies, Orphans and Fools* (*Vtáčkovia, siroty a blázni*, 1969) – and the drama *The Boxer and Death* (*Boxer a smrť*, 1962) by director Peter Solan. In the second batch in 2012, films by Dušan Hanák were released on DVD – specifically 322 (1969), *Pictures of the Old World* (*Obrazy starého sveta*, 1972), *Rosy Dreams* (*Ružové sny*, 1976), *I Love, You Love* (*Ja milujem, ty miluješ*, 1980), which also won the Silver Bear for Best Director at the Berlin IFF, and finally *Paper Heads* (*Papierové hlavy*, 1995) – the last full-length film by the director to date. And this year, thanks to Malavida, DVDs with films by Štefan Uher – *The Organ* (*Organ*, 1964), *The Wonder-Maid* (*Panna zázračnica*, 1966), *Three Daughters* (*Tri dcéry*, 1968) and *If I Had a Gun* (*Keby som mal pušku*, 1964) – gained access to the francophone audiences, as well as the composite narrative film *Dialogue 20 40 60* (*Dialóg 20 40 60*) which was made by Slovak director Peter Solan, his Polish colleague Jerzy Skolimowski and Czech filmmaker Zbyněk Brynych.

Last year the SFI started to collaborate closely with the British independent company Second Run

which released on DVD the previously mentioned *The Sun in a Net*, with the reputation of being a breakthrough film of Czechoslovak cinema, as the first Slovak title. This film will be followed by *Birdies, Orphans and Fools* (dir. J. Jakubisko), *The Dragon's Return* (*Drak sa vracia*, dir. Eduard Grečner) and *Pictures of the Old World* (dir. D. Hanák).

The Sun in a Net was released on DVD in August 2013. It contains an introduction spoken by British director Peter Strickland; the context of the period, the authors and the circumstances under which the film was made are clarified by a study by English film historian and critic, Peter Hames. The English edition of the DVD *The Sun in a Net* received a positive response. In 2013, the website *DVD Beaver* named it the DVD of the Month for September and the prestigious magazine *Sight & Sound* also devoted space to a review of this film. The author of the text, Michael Brooke, calls this film the most exciting discovery by Second Run since *Marketa Lazarová* (*Marketa Lazarová*, dir. František Vláčil) and *Sinbad* (*Szindbád*, dir. Zoltán Huszárik) were released on DVD. At the same time, he states that, although Uher greatly influenced the filmmakers of the Czechoslovak New Wave and his film is regarded as its basis, *The Sun in a Net* has scarcely ever been presented abroad. However, a number of reviews affirm that Uher's film continues to look vital even fifty years after it was made and they appreciate the technical quality of the DVD. ▲

Publication Activities of the SFI

► Mariana Jaremková

The Slovak Film Institute (SFI) is the sole domestic publisher specialising exclusively in the publication of professional film literature and its DVD production, mapping the history of Slovak cinema, is also exceptional.

In 2013, the SFI issued three filmological works – the monograph *Diptych Štefana Uhra – Organ a Tri dcéry (Diptych of Štefan Uher – The Organ and Three Daughters)* by Eva Vženteková (in collaboration with the FOTOFO publishing house and the Academy of Music and Performing Arts), a collection dedicated to the works of French director Alain Resnais *Kinematografia mozgu (Cinema of the Brain)*; in collaboration with producer s. r. o.) and the publication *Eros, sexus, gender v slovenskom filme (Eros, Sexus, Gender in Slovak Film)* by Eva Filová. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the institute's establishment, SFI's Publications Department prepared a promotion publication in English entitled *Best of Slovak Film 1921 – 1991*. "Last year we also published bi-lingual Slovak-English film yearbooks for the period of 2006 to 2010 all together in one volume, for the first time on digital media and also available on the renovated website www.sfu.sk," said the Head of the Publications Department, Marián Brázda. In 2013, further projects were in preparation, one of which is the work by authors Peter Michalovič and Vlastimil Zuska which analyses westerns. It is scheduled for publication in the first half of 2014 under the title *Rozprava o westerne (Discussion of a Western)*.

The 2014 edition plan also includes the publication of the proceedings of the 15th Czecho-Slovak Filmological Conference, Film and Memory. "Over the course of the year, the publication prepared by the Documentation and Library Services Department is expected. It should provide the public with information on the institution itself, on its history and present activities, on the services rendered by the SFI and, in particular, on the collections and funds it maintains." Marián Brázda also refers to the issue of the promotion-

al text *Naše filmové storočie (Our Film Century)* by František Gyarfáš and Juraj Malíček, or of the 2011 and 2012 Film Yearbooks (again in digital form). The updated *History of Slovak Cinema (Dejiny slovenskej kinematografie)* holds a special position in the SFI's publication plans. This comprehensive publication was first published in 1997 and the second, extended edition is planned for 2015.

"As regards last year's most significant DVD titles, *Martin Šulík's debut Tenderness (Neha)* and the re-edition of *Dušan Hanák's Pictures of the Old World (Obrazy starého sveta)* deserve to be mentioned. The double DVD with films by *Dežo Ursiny – 6x Dežo Ursiny*, was very successful; *August '68/November '89* was also in great demand. And we also re-issued *Forty-Four Mutineers (Štyridsaťštyri)*."

Forty-Four Mutineers was issued on the occasion of the centenary of the start of World War I and, on the same occasion, the issue of Martin Holý's *Signum Laudis* is planned for 2014, for the first time in Blu-ray format. Leopold Lahola's *The Sweet Time of Kalimagdora (Sladký čas Kalimagdory)*, complemented by the director's short film *A Small Episode (Epizódka)*, is a much-anticipated DVD. "As regards the big projects, the 5-DVD *A Week in Film (Týždeň vo filme)* needs to be mentioned. A large collection of Blu-ray Discs is also under preparation; the issue should be complete in 2015. The collection should combine works from the golden fund of Slovak cinema along with current works," concludes Marián Brázda.

Every DVD has also English subtitles. All the publications of the SFI are available in the shop of the Slovak Film Institute – klapka.sk at Grösslingová 43 in Bratislava. The assortment available in the shop can also be ordered on the shop's website www.klapka.sk. ◀



Best of Slovak Film 1921 – 1991

The British film historian and film critic, Peter Hames, writes about thirty-five Slovak films made between 1921 and 1991 which are among the key works of Slovak cinematography. Hames writes in the form of brief observations detailing the characteristic attributes of the given work. Excerpts from media reactions to the given film are added after every contribution. The book also includes profiles of the directors who made the selected films.



DVD Pictures of the Old World

In the documentary *Pictures of the Old World (Obrazy starého sveta, 1972)*, director Dušan Hanák was inspired by the pictures of photographer, Martin Martinček, and he visited distant corners of the country to unveil the inner beauty of old people and to sensitively read their stories from their faces and hands. The DVD also contains five short films made by Dušan Hanák: *Artists (Artisti)*, *Practice (Učenie)*, *Old Shatterhand Came to See Us (Prišiel k nám Old Shatterhand)*, *The Mass (Omša)* and *A Day of Joy (Deň radosti)*.



DVD Forty-Four Mutineers

On the occasion of the centenary of the start of World War I, the Slovak Film Institute released Paľo Bielik's *Forty-Four Mutineers (Štyridsaťštyri, 1957)*. The film had already been released in the successful DVD collection *Slovak Film of the 1940s and 1950s (Slovenský film 40. a 50. rokov)* but the new release of this film has been complemented by a further five language versions. The film tells the story of the mutiny by Slovak soldiers against officers of the Austro-Hungarian army.



DVD 3x Peter Solan

The Slovak Film Institute released three films by Peter Solan on DVD, thereby paying tribute to one of the most significant Slovak directors who passed away in September 2013. The DVD contains Solan's full-length feature debut *The Devil Never Sleeps (Čert nespí, 1956)* made in collaboration with director František Žáček, in addition to his most famous film *The Boxer and Death (Boxer a smrť, 1962)* which plays out a remarkable duel within the confines of a Nazi concentration camp between a "commandant" and a "prisoner" and the final film, *Before Tonight Is Over (Kým sa skončí táto noc, 1965)*.



Slovak Films 13 – 14

The bi-lingual Slovak-English handbook provides information on Slovak films made in 2013 and about projects planned to be premiered by the end of 2014. Each film includes a brief summary and the names of the filmmakers, information on distribution, festival participation and awards, the filmography of the director and contact information on the producers. In addition, the publication also includes a Practical Guide and Industry Directory.



2-DVD August '68 / November '89

Six documentaries capture key moments of Czech and Slovak history related to the attempts to apply "communism with a human face" and the subsequent invasion of the allied forces in 1968, and to the Velvet Revolution in 1989. The DVD *August '68* contains the films *The Time We Live (Čas, ktorý žijeme)*, *Black Days (Čierne dni)* and *The Wake (Tryzna)*. The other DVD, *November '89* contains *Flight Report OK 89 – 90 (Letová správa OK 89 – 90)*, *All Together... (the Slovak Way) (Všetci spolu... (po slovensky))* and *Probe No. 1/1990 – Velvet Revolution Train (Sonda 1/1990 – Vlak nežnej revolúcie)*.

The Czechoslovak New Wave Was Special

► Miro Ulman, Daniel Bernát

Last year a new publication of the Slovak Film Institute, *Best of Slovak Film (1921 – 1991)*, was launched first at Art Film Fest in Trenčianske Teplice and subsequently at the Karlovy Vary IFF. It was published in English and it contains information on the thirty-five most significant films in the history of Slovak cinema. The texts were written by English film historian and critic Peter Hames who works as the programme advisor of the BFI London Film Festival.

You dedicate yourself to Slovak and Czech cinema not only in articles and publications but also in organizing film screenings and festivals. What makes these cinemas so attractive to you?

– I first became interested in Czech and Slovak films in the late 1960s and early 1970s at the time of the Czechoslovak New Wave. I was convinced that this was a more sustained and varied movement than similar movements in Western Europe, including the French „Nouvelle vague“. When I had the opportunity to write a book on the subject, it led to a continuing interest.

Which period of Slovak cinema do you consider the most interesting and why?

– Well, the answer is predictable – the 1960s. The work of Dušan Hanák, Juraj Jakubisko and Elo Havetta was particularly striking even if politics prevented their work making the international impact that it should have had. But looking back throughout the whole decade, the work of Uher, Barabáš, and Solan suggests strong developments throughout the period – to say nothing of Kadár's work at Barrandov.

While watching the movies you are writing about in *Best of Slovak Film*, what did you recall retrospectively? Did you experience some intensive acquaintance?

– I recalled my first visit to the Slovak Film Archive in 1973, when I was allowed to see Uher's *The Sun in a Net* (*Slnko v sieti*). I knew it was something special when my translator asked me to explain what was happening! Also, Hanák's *Pictures of the Old World* (*Obrazy starého sveta*) stood out as one of the best documentaries I've seen anywhere.

In your book you mention only films up to 1991. How do you see Slovak cinema after this period? Did you find some inspiring movies post-1991?

– The problems of sustaining feature production in the post-1989 period are both well known and inevitable. I think the last three years have seen really significant films by Zuzana Liová, Iveta Grófová and Mira Fornay. The fact that they are all writer-directors and all female is perhaps a sign of the times – not that it's easy to get such personal and apparently non-commercial projects off the ground. It's more a question of the desire to tell stories and communicate experience.

Seven years ago you told *Film.sk* that Slovak cinema is neither very well-known nor widely presented in Great Britain. Seven years is not a long period, but still, have you noticed any shift or progress in the way Slovak films are presented in Britain or in the quality and publicity of their presentation?

– Some titles like *Osadné*, *Blind Loves* (*Slepé lásky*), *The House* (*Dom*), *Made in Ash* (*Až do mesta Aš*), and Fornay's *Foxes* (*Líštičky*) have made it into festivals and attracted the attention of the informed audience. And, of course, *Bathory* has reached wider audiences through television and DVD release. The most significant development in terms of attracting wider critical attention will, I hope, be Second Run's DVD releases of *The Sun in a Net*, *The Dragon's Return* (*Drak sa vracia*), *Pictures of the Old World* and *Birdies*, *Orphans and Fools* (*Vtáčkovia, siroty a blázni*).

The Czech film publicist Jan Lukeš told *Film.sk* that in the present time we cannot expect a big

global success for Czech or Slovak cinema, because the world is interested in other, more conflicted regions. Do you agree with him?

– I think the world inevitably takes an interest in current political situations which generate a socio-political interest, but I think that there are other factors as well. Film festival programmers tend to be attracted by what is aesthetically novel or different – in other words by ‚auteur‘ cinema. Central Europe is not excluded – think of Béla Tarr and Jan Švankmajer. Their films may not reach large audiences, but they've provoked interest and debate throughout the world. There's also the matter of fashion. The Romanian New Wave is undoubtedly a reality but without the backing of Cannes and the French critics, it could easily have passed without being properly noticed. It took years for Tarr and Švankmajer to be recognised and even Kieślowski was not fully recognised until he made *The Decalogue* (*Dekalog*).

Supply is one thing, demand is another – are Britons interested in small cinemas from Eastern Europe, e.g. from Slovakia? Are they willing to discover unknown territories?

– I may have said this before. I don't think British audiences are primarily interested in the country of origin – although, it is inevitably English language films that they have the principal opportunity of viewing. When it comes to foreign language cinema, there may be a market for French films, but audiences are primarily concerned with the film's intrinsic interest – its subject, story, and critical reputation. In this sense, it probably doesn't much matter if the film is Slovak, Czech, Polish, Argentinian, or Japanese. So yes, they will try unknown territories if the film looks interesting. I think the situation is basically the same in all European countries – there's mainstream cinema (mainly American), films produced in the country itself, and a smaller market for films in other languages. ▲

Slovak Documentaries On-line

In December last year, the Slovak Film Institute (SFI) began its collaboration with the Czech distribution portal of the Doc Alliance initiative, DAFilms.cz, for the Slovak environment, in tandem with the distribution company Filmtopia supported by the Slovak Audiovisual Fund. Hence, visitors to the portal had the opportunity to watch a collection of Slovak documentaries entitled *Masters of the Slovak Documentary First Time On-Line (Majstri slovenského dokumentu po prvýkrát online)* from 16 to 29 December free of charge. The project was dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the SFI's existence, it presented especially a selection of the works of Dušan Hanák, Martin Slivka, Martin Šulík and Dežo Ursiny (he made two films in the collection with Marian Urban) and it received a positive response. The films were viewed between the above dates by 11,076 visitors to the portal. All films in the collection (except for Hanák's full-length documentary *Pictures of the Old World – Obrazy starého sveta*, recently issued by the SFI on DVD) remain available after the end of the special offer, among the almost 800 charged titles of the DAFilms portal.

AVF: Support of the Film Industry in Slovakia

In July 2013 the Ministry of Culture presented a draft amendment to the Audiovisual Fund Act with the aim of attracting big film productions to Slovakia and thereby supporting the film industry. The amendment was adopted by the National Council in October 2013 and it entered into force on 1 January 2014. Pursuant to the Act, as amended, the Slovak Audiovisual Fund (AVF) will open a new audiovisual industry support scheme provided in the form of special grants amounting to 20% of the expenditures invested by the beneficiary in the production of films or TV series in Slovakia. Producers of feature, documentary or animated films, at least 70 minutes long, and TV series with at least 40-minute long episodes, are entitled to apply for the grant. According to

the Explanatory Memorandum to the Act, the content of the film project must be in compliance with the legislation of the European Union, which will be affirmed by the cultural test or co-production statute. Further conditions for the provision of funds: the total planned budget for the audiovisual work must be not less than EUR 2.5 million and the minimum amount of eligible expenditures paid with regard to the production of this work is EUR 2 million. The AVF will provide detailed information by May 2014.

Digitisation of Cinemas

By the end of 2013, a total of 131 screening rooms in 65 cinemas were digitised, of which 44 were single-screen cinemas. Most of them were digitised thanks to support from the Slovak Audiovisual Fund (AVF). The share of digitised cinemas is 44.83% of all 145 registered cinemas, out-door cinemas and alternative premises in Slovakia. These statistics refer to cinemas which are digitised with the D-Cinema technology in accordance with DCI standards; however, last year the AVF also supported the first fifteen applications for cinema modernisation by the cheaper E-Cinema HD technology.

2014 Will Bring National Film Awards

In 2014, the national film awards, Sun in a Net (Slanko v sieti), will be awarded. They are awarded every other year and this time the Slovak Film and Television Academy (SFTA) will decide on the best creative performances and films which were made in 2012 or 2013 and released between 1 January 2012 and 31 December 2013. The SFTA will present awards in 18 categories and the results will be announced on 26 April 2014. The history of these awards, named after an important Slovak film by director Štefan Uher, dates back to 2004.



OBRAZY STARÉHO SVETA PICTURES OF THE OLD WORLD

Réžia / Directed by: Dušan Hanák
Námet a scenár / Story and Screenplay by: Dušan Hanák
Kamera / Director of Photography: Alojz Hanúsek
Fotografie / Photographs: Martin Martinček, Vladimír Vavrek
Hudba / Music: G. F. Händel, Václav Hálek, Jozef Malovec
Dramaturg / Dramaturg: Boris Hochel
Strih / Editor: Alfréd Benčíč
Účinkujú / Cast: Verona Ralíková, Adam Kura, Jozef Orságh, Juraj Michelík, Anton Miček, Františka Ševčíková, Adam Struhárňanský, Jozef Račko, Alojz Kováč, Matej Dudka

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 PRACTICE (UČENIE),
 OLD SHATTERHAND
 CAME TO SEE US
 (PRISIEL K NÁM
 OLD SHATTERHAND),
 THE MASS (OMSA),
 A DAY OF JOY
 (DEŇ RADOSTI)

