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PARAGRAFF

ASTRA FILM
Festival

15-21 OCTOBER 2012



interview

ALAIN DE HALLEUX

director,

"Chernobyl 4 ever"

"When we forget about the past, we lose the opportunity to build the right future"

A whole generation after the Chernobyl incident, do you feel that the world has indeed forgotten about it, or that it's just a growing danger?

I will answer this question by asking another. Don't you think people already forgot Fukushima? When I speak with the people around me, they usually say "Fukushima? When was it? Isn't it already fixed?". So we can easily imagine how the people forgot Chernobyl! When I went to Ukraine, I was very surprised. For the youngsters, The Zone was already something virtual. They were playing a video game called Stalker. In this virtual zone they were killing mutants, trying to avoid getting too much radioactivity. At the same time, the international comity led by France was trying to hide the image of Chernobyl reactor number 4 under a new sarcophagus. When I put those two facts together, I realized that Chernobyl's memory was in danger. And when we forget about the past, we lose the opportunity to build the right future.

Chernobyl 4 Ever was released in early 2011, so I think it's safe to say your project started long before the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. The necessity of the warning it sends is obvious now, but why did you feel it was necessary to make sure people don't forget 1986, back when you initially conceived the film?

I began my movies about the nuclear industry in 2006. A power plant almost exploded at Forsmark in Sweden and I wanted to understand why. I said to myself: "Well is it possible that another Chernobyl could occur in our safe capitalist and "democratic" Europe?". So I investigated to understand how the nuclear power plant was managed. I did "RAS, Nucleaire Rien a Signaler" a documentary about the subcontractors on the French and European nuclear power plants. I realized that those invisible workers were very badly treated and that our safety was in danger. I was shocked also by the fact



that nobody knew their work and were using the electricity this guys were producing facing radioactivity. Of course I did that movie because I was scared to have to live what the people in Ukraine and Byelorussia had to face in 1986. So, when I realized that the 25 anniversary of Chernobyl was approaching I built Chernobyl 4ever. I just finished that second opus when, two weeks after, Fukushima explodes. I was not only sad, but terrified. What would be the future of Japan? After 25 years, the international community didn't succeed yet completely fixing reactor number 4 which has almost no fuel left inside. How to fix 4 reactors full of fuel in a very dangerous seismic area? I immediately saw the destiny of Japan in 25 years and it was very depressing...

Speaking of Fukushima, I understand you're filming again. What can you tell us about the project?

I'm making the portrait of Minamisoma, a city at the edge of the Fukushima area, which hesitates between letting itself die and fighting to reborn. This city is in a way a metaphor of our world which reached a turning point of its history. I follow 3 families. One decided to

stay, another hesitates to leave and the third decided to leave the city. But if we can escape Minamisoma, we cannot escape from our planet. So how to survive in bad conditions?

Chernobyl 4 Ever will be making its Romanian debut one of these days, at the Astra Film Festival. How do you feel about the festival? Will you be joining us again, once your current documentary is completed?

Being at the editing table of my documentary about Fukushima, I cannot unfortunately join the festival. Actually I declined a lot of invitations. I am sorry about that, because I make movies in order to lead them in the world and to present them to the public, to share new ideas. But I must help the last one to come into the world... Next time, if the entire system doesn't collapse in the meantime. But to not end on a dark note, let me tell you what my grandfather used to tell me: "If you step in shit, do not look too long at your shoe. Look around for mushrooms, as the best are growing near shit!". So there is always something light and bright near the shadows...

Un interviu realizat de
MILITON STĂNESCU



Weekend agenda:

**documentaries, music
and the awards ceremony**

recommendations

ASTRA FILM FESTIVAL

three days to go

The award ceremony for the 12th edition of Astra Film Festival will top off the last days of the festival on Saturday evening and it is programmed to begin at 7 pm in the John Marshall Hall of the Casa de Cultura. The members of the jury, made up of Luciano Barisone, Sorin Botoșeanu, Hanka Kastelicová, René Kubáček, Cristian Nițulescu, Christophe Pomez, Cristi Puiu and Michael Stewart will decide who will be the winners of this year's edition. The awarded films will be screened once again on Sunday, in Săucan Hall, starting from 14:00. But until the ceremony, the audience of Astra Film Festival is invited to attend an Open Session that starts on Friday, at 4 pm, where a masterclass coordinated by Serge Gordey will take place. The masterclass will be centered on the theme of "The Web Documentary and the Interactive Story". At 10 pm in the evening, the Czech music band DVA will play in the foyer of the festival and will sing in unexisting languages, with playful sounds and will use the most unexpected instruments - guitar, banjo, looping, kitchen beatbox, saxophone and toys. Their concert is part of the Soundczech Festival that takes place also at Astra Film Festival 2012 and which also brought on stage in Sibiu another Czech band - Floex - on Monday. On Saturday, right after the award ceremony, at 9 pm, Anton Pann - a band that plays old Romanian music - will climb on stage. The band, formed in 2004, gets its inspiration from medieval ottoman, Byzantine and oriental manuscripts, reviving the eclectic beauty of old music. As for film screenings, on Saturday, the audience will be able to see a series of controversial films that explore the truth about the Dacians. Between 11 a.m and 3 p.m, three event-films will be shown in Săucan Hall - "Draco, the Stone Faces", "Dacians - Unsettling Truths", and "Decoding Dacia - Romania's Lost Heritage". Each of these films puts in balance the risks of a vision that vacillates between directorial intention, the public's expectations and historiographic inertia.

LAURA DUMITRESCU

interview

ANNE SCHILTZ, CHARLOTTE GREGOIRE

directors, "Common ground"

"We wanted to understand how do people communicate in a block of flats"

Anne Schiltz and Charlotte Gregoire received a prize in 2007 in the Romanian competition of Astra Film Festival. They came back this year in the same competition with "Common ground".

For most Romanians "întreținerea" is a subject only from the point of view of the amount they have to pay. What did you find so interesting about this concept, "întreținere"?

It was a possibility to tell a lot of things through "întreținere". To know how's the life in a block. To meet people that live in the block. But we also wanted to understand how people communicate. And one of the moments they do this is, twice a month, when they come to pay the bill. In these moments there are a lot of people. They talk, they shout at each other or they do only small talk. But they meet. So for us these moments were very important, to get to understand something about the block. And also, in a way, we tried to give a certain structure for the film through the repetition of these moments.

How did you arrive at this particular block of flats?

We came there by chance. We wanted to make a film about a block in the city. We visited some buildings, always with someone we knew inside the block, because it was easier to get in. But this one it was really by chance. We didn't know anybody there. We just entered because an old woman outside the block said "come in". She said we could go to the third floor to meet Dumitru, the administrator. He was there and was interested by the idea.

For how long did you shoot for this film?

We came there once or twice a year for four years in a row. We stayed for a



couple of weeks. And we lived in the block. We rented a flat or a single room, depending on where we could find a space. We thought it was very important to live there, to get to know the people, to be there in case anything happens.

During the film you get the impression that they are very familiar with you, with the camera? How did you manage to do that?

I think the key was that we decided to live there. So we spent a lot of time with the people. We got to know them very well before the shooting. And when we began shooting, we also spent a lot of time without filming, eating with people, drinking, sharing things. So little by little we became neighbours. Of course, we didn't get to know all the people. There were ten floors and 66 apartments. There were also people who did not want to be filmed or be in the film and we respected that.

Most of the discussions, get down to two major topics: "It was better before '89" and "best thing is leaving Romania". What is your personal view on these two topics, for you as foreigners?

We can understand that for some people it was easier before and we also understand people that prefer to be "free" and go away to earn some money. But we did not come with these subjects. They emerged. A lot of people were talking about money, leaving or not leaving and about the times before.

When we went there, in 2010, there were manifestations on the

streets so a lot of people talked to us about how it used to be before. In the film, there's one woman who said she didn't like the time during Ceaușescu, other woman said it wasn't so bad.

It's not the first time you came to Astra. How do you find the festival?

We were here in 2007 when we even received a prize. We like Sibiu and we wanted to be here again because it's important for us to be with our film. It's a film about Romania and it's the first time we show it to a Romanian audience. And we're nervous about it.

* "întreținere" is a very Romanian term defining all the maintenance and boarding expenses (gas bill, electricity, water, heating et al.) to be paid monthly when living in a block of flats

Interview by ROBERT BĂLAN



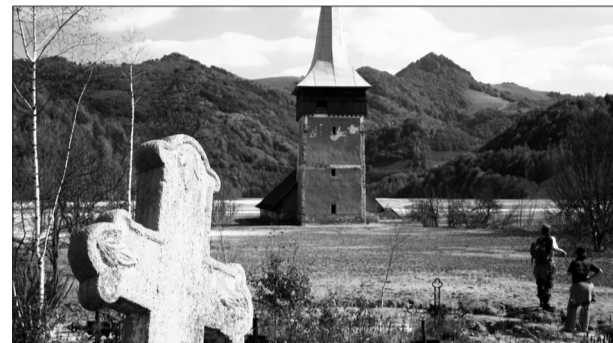
Roșia Montană, Town on the Brink

Fabian Daub, Germany,
Romania

Eco CinematogrAFF, 92'

► Friday, October 19th, 19:00, Marshall hall
► Sunday, October 21st, 3:00, Marshall hall

The mining operations project nearby Roșia Montană has long been one of, if not the biggest source of controversy



involving ecology in Romania. The effects the industrial gold exploitation could have on the area are potentially disastrous. The use of cyanide based chemicals in processing the raw extracted materials and the storage of waste byproducts in a decantation pond nearby which might or might not have porous strata underneath pose a grave risk that many hope would not be taken. Alongside this issue, the German-Romanian production turns an eye on the other downside the Canadian funded project might have - the dissolution of a whole community, that of the Roșia Montană village. This is actually already under way and if it hasn't been led to its completion yet, it's solely because of the few people who love their homes, life-styles and natural surroundings enough to keep opposing, as much as possible, the strong adversary they have not only in Gold Corporation, but also in the Romanian state backing up the Canadian venture.

MILITON STĂNESCU

Common ground

Anne Schiltz, Charlotte
Grégoire, Belgium

Competition: Romania, 82'

► Wednesday, October 17th, 14:30, Marshall hall

► Thursday, October 18th, 21:30, Studio hall

For the many Romanians who live in a block of flats, "întreținerea" (the monthly electricity, heating and gas bills) is interesting only taking into consideration the amount of money that must be paid. But what if somebody who never heard of



this genuinely Romanian concept and term were to come here to study it? The two Belgian filmmakers Anne Schiltz and Charlotte Grégoire, both anthropologists, look at things differently in "Common ground". For them, "întreținere" is not just a monthly duty, but the bond between the people who live under the same roof. And these things drive them to dig deeper into the peoples' lives, examining the interests, passions and occupations of the people who share the same elevator, roof and entrance door. One of them is giving alms, another one prepares for the children's birthday party. One is watching soap operas, another one watches a tennis game. The administrator is, of course, present with all his philosophies, and so are the classical grumblers. So are the regrets concerning the era before 1989 and the hopes to be able to emigrate.

CĂTĂLIN STURZA



interview IRIS ZAKI

Director, "My Kosher Shifts"

"I believe there are many different ways to document reality"

"My Kosher Shifts" won first prize in the inaugural Open City London Documentary Festival in "My Street" category, dedicated to finding the best short film about the maker's neighbourhood or community. The film is an MA project, but it is, in the same time, a very personal investigation. Did you think about undertaking such an investigation - which is like a dive into your childhood - for a long time?

This is my very first film and I didn't have any idea of how it is going to be like before I started shooting. Since the Jewish hotel is a very small and homey one, there is an informal communication with the guests. At the beginning I was more reserved, but after a while my conversation with them had become more intimate, and I saw that not only can they handle it - but they actually like it. The nature of our conversations is simple and spontaneous. I haven't prepared questions, I just asked them whatever I was curious about and since it is a bi-directional conversation - they did the same. They were exploring me and I was exploring them. The power relations of filmmaker-subjects is an aspect I wish to challenge. I am a very open and straightforward person, and I think that once these relations are more balanced, it could lead to a more authentic communication. If I am expecting my subjects to put themselves out there and open up to me, I'd like to do the same.

On the other hand, the film explores a more general theme, commenting on the cultural differences between orthodox, religious Jews and non-religious, secular Jews in Israel, and rising a number of questions about the motivations behind the "kosher" taboos. Did you think, at some point, that the question you rise, and your polemical style could upset some sensitive people?

I think it is all down to your approach. I respect my subjects and their beliefs very much, I don't think



that I know better, and therefore I don't see a reason for them to get upset. They follow so many rules very strictly and should be able to discuss it. Also, in Orthodox Judaism it is considered important to educate seculars Jews, with no knowledge, and to try and get them closer to the religion. Saying all that, I am not afraid to upset people by expressing my thoughts and beliefs in a respectful way, and when it comes to political views or if someone is being racist, I do let them know how I feel.

The film is based on your experience working as a receptionist at a Hassidic Jewish hotel in North London. Did you get the job as a receptionist having the film in mind?

I started working at the hotel just as a part time job as a student. I haven't imagined back then that this job would become a film project. Being so curious about orthodox Jews I have managed to establish a unique communication with my guests and when I told people about it, they were intrigued. I realised I shouldn't miss this opportunity, so right before shooting my final project for my Master's, I decided to drop my original idea and to film the hotel by documenting my shifts.

There are moments when you take a very active role in the film,

starting arguments with some of the characters. You don't leave your opinions behind, and your position is very obvious. I suppose you aren't a supporter of the neutral, invisible filmmaker, who takes a silent role behind the camera.

I believe there are many different ways to document reality, and it is not that some ways are better than others it is just that different ways result in different documentations and films. In my film I wasn't playing a role as much as was myself. I do tend to confront people and to be provocative in my nature. I always have something to say and I don't think I would make a very good observational filmmaker, so I am very pleased that people can appreciate my authentic way and my active role in the film. That is why I've added the "My" to the title. It is an ethnographic film, but it is a personal experience.

Were all your characters aware that they were being filmed - by a static camera, positioned at the back of the hotel reception?

Of course. When I was thinking about making the film I went to my boss to ask for her permission to do so. I was sure she is going to say no but surprisingly she agreed and loved the idea. Most of the characters stayed for a few days, so I have already had the communication with them established before asking them to film it. The camera was in front of them. It wasn't hidden or anything. I was quite surprised by their openness, since many of them are not exposed to films and TV, but they were very relaxed and genuine in front of the camera. I believe that the fact that I put myself in there with them contributes to the authenticity of the conversations. At the end of the day most of them are not exposing personal details as much as they are expressing their point of view about life and religion.

Interview by CĂTĂLIN STURZA

The Tundra Book. A Tale of Vukvukai, the Little Rock

Aleksei Vakhrushev, Russia
Competition: International, 105'

» Wednesday October 17th, 22:15, Marshall hall
» Friday, October 19th, 22:00, Studio hall

In the peninsula Ciukotka of Chukotka tundra, in Arctic Siberia, the life of nomad reindeer herders is the same as it used to be hundreds of years ago. The harsh winds and low temperatures seem to have frozen even the time. Old man Vukvukai, aged 72, is the owner of 14 000 reindeer and he also presides a community made of his family - his wife, sister and sons -, their families and several other Chukotka herders. He does all these with secular wisdom, inherited by blood, but also with sparkling humour. The fight for survival and for a certain degree of wellbeing in the rough conditions of the tundra is complemented by his personal strife to keep his grandsons next to him. Sometimes, when he's having a rest and a cup of tea in his iurta, he's striving to convince them not to leave the tundra, to continue the secular family tradition and not to let themselves be lured by the city lights.

"The Tundra Book" offers a fascinating and intimate perspective of the universe of an isolated community and of its rhythm. The exquisite images of a land at the end of the world and the idyllic, yet hard life of the main characters, completed by fragments of Chukotka chants, create a hallucinating and captivating film from the first minute to the last.

ELIZA ZDRU



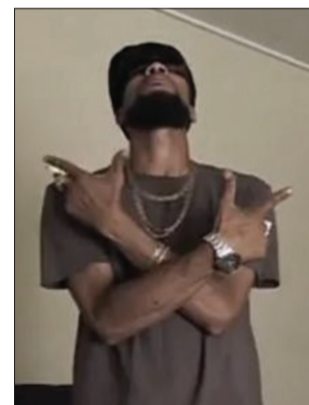
Gangster Project

Teboho Edkins, Germany,
South Africa

Competition: Student, 54'

» Tuesday, October 16th - 15:30, Săucan Hall
» Friday, October 19th, 16:00, Săucan Hall

A film about passwords, amulets and other vernacular secret formulas of the mafia communities in Cape Town, "Gangster Project" is a documentary about the psychology of the need for legitimacy. Two ambitious adventurers delve into the poor suburbs of Cape Town and challenge the gang leaders of the most dangerous neighbourhoods to tell their story in front of the camera. Setting aside the conflict between white people and black people and the rising power that the blacks in the territory, "Gangster Project" is, more than anything, an infernal journey in limbo, among human hyenas, sardonic grins, spasms of hatred, the generous family pride of the gang leaders, in which the threshold of initiation is passed in jail and the acceptance rites involve a bullet put through a human body. Between prudence and the circumstantial risk that transforms the opportunity into privilege, "Gangster Project" is an argument for the fact that a human being, even the worst one, is the one who makes a place, and also the one who masters it.



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LAURA DUMITRESCU

» On Monday evening, two elderly couples remain a few minutes on their seats, after the last screening of the evening. "It's our first time here at the festival. This year we have decided to get out a little bit into the world. We are from Sibiu. (says a gray haired gentleman; the lady sitting next to him joins the discussion) We don't know if we can come every single day, we're only just studying the programme. Today we came from the very first film. (An elegant lady, standing in front of the group, turns towards us). I was absolutely delighted by the opening feature, "The Old-Time Village", by Dumitru Budrala. It reminded me of my childhood, my parents' village and the old traditions. I regret so much that Romanian traditions are getting lost so

fast nowadays. Only the old people are left in the villages..."

» Two elegant young women are entering the main hall, a few minutes before the beginning of the concert of the Czech band Floex. "Last time I came to the festival was in 2007. Then I left for five years, I went to college in Cluj and I haven't been able to come at Astra until this year. We have the programme, we were planning to study it now and make an agenda for the following days. We'd like to come every day, if we can. No, we're not students anymore, we finished college this summer. How do we know about Astra film festival? (they start laughing) We're from Sibiu, we've known is ever since we were in highschool. It is a very well known festival."

vox pop



interview

EDUARD MOSCHITZ

director, "Mama Illegal"

"In Western Europe nobody knows about the situation of the Moldavian illegal immigrant women"



Eduard Moschitz, an Austrian TV broadcaster who just finished his first feature documentary, stopped at Astra Film, in Sibiu, after a very long flight from Argentina. His greatest desire is that his documentary "Mama Illegal" - that already won the Great Prize at the One World Human Rights documentary film festival - would reach a large audience, in order to put the spotlight on the problems of the Moldavian women who abandon their children to go work in the West.

"Mama Illegal" was already screened at several documentary film festivals - in Belgium, in Argentina, in Romania, Lituania and Germania. Is this a part of the film marketing - this marathon?

I'm not interested in marketing. I'm interested to bring the film in front of a large audience, in front of very different kinds of people, and to present those people the situation

in Moldova, where a large part of the inhabitants have to leave their country, working as illegal immigrants in the Western Europe, and leading a very difficult life in their exile countries. In Austria, I work as a journalist for the national television. What I do, as a film director, is to try helping those people. There are no films about Moldova, nobody knows anything about this country. In December, the film will be screened at the European Parliament - which I think it is very important for the politicians there, where no one knows anything about this country.

Are the politicians going to come and actually see the film? Or the chances are that most of them will come to the cocktail party, and very few will make it into the theatre?

It is the first time I'm going there, I have no idea how things work. But there is one

Romanian parliamentarian, who supports the movie, and one of her counsellors is from Moldova - and both women are very interested in promoting this subject. What is very important for the three protagonists of the documentaries - two of them will be present at the screening, in Brussels - is that the people, and especially in Brussels, make a firsthand impression on the situation in the country. When the politicians in Moldova go to Brussels, they would always say that Moldova is a great country, that everything is going perfectly, that the unemployment rate is lowering, and they only need some money for such and such. But no one knows anything in Western Europe about the life in those poor villages, whose women leave to work as housemaids in the West. I therefore believe that it is important that those women should have the chance to tell their own stories, to show how it is to cross the frontier fraudulently, paying, each time, several thousand euro, and to leave your children at home, alone, for long years. As much as I know, there was no film, until "Mama Illegal", to describe this situation.

The message is, therefore, more important than the documentary itself? To bring the message in front of the people with a certain authority is more important than making a film for the sake of a film?

The most important thing is to make the message reach the people. I work as a journalist, and in my profession the situation is the same - it is important to reach the people, to tell them true stories. The documentary film is another way to do the same thing. But it is also important to touch them, to make them open their hearts, to change their way of thinking. If the documentary is good, than its subject can reach the people.

Only the filming of the documentary took seven years. Weren't those seven

lost years for Moldova, in terms of the opportunity to bring its message to Brussels? Had you made a film about illegal immigrants from Moldova in only six month, or one month - wouldn't it have been more efficient?

At first, one of the film's protagonists - Aurica - used to work for me, she was taking



care for my children. The women told me her story, and in 2004 I made a 30 minute film for the ORF, the Austrian public television. After this reportage, nothing changed. What I tried to do next was to follow her longer, so I did a second film - that was shown on the public television in 2007. Yet again, nothing changed. So I followed her for even longer - for seven years - and what I discovered is that illegal immigration destroys families. I have made a feature that I now present at different festivals, to the European Parliament, and to the Austrian Parliament. I hope that something will change, but it is a very hard work, that needs a very long time.

Which are your first impressions, at Astra Film Sibiu? Have you seen any film yet?

I have been thinking of this city a lot - it is a wonderful city, as far I have seen until now. I'm very pleased that I've received an invitation at Astra Film Festival, which is the most important documentary film festival in Romania. I believe that "Mama Illegal" should also be presented in the Romanian theatres, and I think that it really belongs to the Romanian culture - it is a film about the Romanian culture, that deals with problems that are also specific to the Romanian society.

Interview by CĂTĂLIN STURZA

PARAGRAFF

ZIARUL ASTRA FILM
FESTIVAL SIBIU

Redactor-șef: Cristina Petrescu
Redactori: Cătălin Sturza, Robert Bălan, Laura Dumitrescu, Militon Stănescu, Eliza Zdru
Tehnoredactor: Nicu Ilie
Foto: Francisc Arrany, Eliza Zdru, Sebastian Marcovici

event

DOCSTORIES BLACK SEA

masterclass

The workshop series "Docstories Black Sea" had its first session this year in Tbilisi and continued in Sibiu, at Astra Film Festival, with the second session; the final part of the masterclass series will take place this November in Amsterdam.

The special guests, Rick Minnich, Goran Radovanovic and Serge Gordey, will present the various techniques, secrets or traps of being a professional documentarian, sharing their vast experience in the field. On Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, after each film projection, the three guests will

discuss their documentaries with the audience, who signed up for the masterclasses in great numbers, coming from all the countries surrounding the Black Sea. They brought along their own stories and ideas, in order to receive precious advice about how to turn these into successful documentaries. The future filmmakers have the opportunity to state their opinions and make their stories heard, and, should it be the case that the discussions will last longer than the allotted time for this masterclass, Rick Minnich has convoked

everybody to an after hours Q&A session in Turandot hall of Ibis hotel, next to Casa de Cultura.

On Wednesday, "Forgetting Dad", Minnich's film, was followed by interesting discussions, concerning the filming techniques but also about the subject matter: what are the best and/or easiest ways to structure it, how much of the self should the documentarian allow to be seen in the film?

"Con Fidel, Pase lo que Pase", the documentary series filmed in Cuba by Goran Radovanovic, offers for the open session just as many interesting subjects for the audience. This evening, Serge Gordey's masterclass will talk about the implementation of the interactive documentary in the electronic world and how to overcome the classical barrier of the unidirectional transmittal of information, promising an equally enthusiastic debate.

MILITON STĂNESCU