

DSCHOINT VENTSCHER FILMPRODUKTION AND AKKA FILMS PRESENT

QUINZAINÉ
DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT
CANNES 2012

THEY WANTED TO CHANGE THE WORLD
THEY ATTACKED A SWISS BANK



OPERATION LIBERTAD

A FILM BY NICOLAS WADIMOFF



NICOLAS WADIMOFF

INTERVIEW

How did you come up with the film's premise?

The question of political commitment and its consequences had been on my mind for several years and I felt like turning the idea into a film. All the recently screened films dealing with guerrilla warfare or armed civilians somehow missed a major point: either the protagonists were portrayed as extraordinary characters with antisocial personality disorder or as romantic heroes. Actually, I happen to know some of the people involved in the struggle of the 1970's, even though they are much older than I am. I must say they appear to have been like ordinary and dispassionate citizens leading mundane lives. That's the main reason why I felt you could relate to them.

When did you come up with the particular filming technique that makes the audience an accomplice of the group's violence? Was this part of the initial project?

As a matter of fact, it was necessary to perceive them as no different from the rest of us, but like ordinary citizens. The desacralization of the urban insurgent goes hand in hand with close-up camera work, not with long shots. Even though we had in mind the style of Rémy Belvaux's *MAN BITES DOG*, we were very much influenced by Peter Watkins's movies, especially *PUNISHMENT PARK*. The camerawork, as well as the actors' performances, enhanced the sense of the ordinary. While Jacob Berger and I were co-writing the script, we first considered making a mockumentary that blended archival footage, mock interviews of famous or not-so-famous protagonists from those days and fake TV shows. We actually shot some of these scenes but we didn't put them in the film.

With the mockumentary approach, you also allow the actors to look right into the camera...

In the beginning, our intention was to create a home movie feel. The protagonists would seem to be willing to be filmed by the cinematographer. We wanted to convey closeness. On the other hand, Hughes, the cinematographer, is a character in the movie, even if his presence is essentially felt by off-camera sounds. The interaction between Hughes and his camera reminds us of his presence. He belongs in the story. He is the character who lets us into it. At the same time he forces us to raise the question: what would we have done if we were in his situation?

How much research did you do? Did you look into the history of the Red Brigades and the Baader-Meinhof Gang?

The research I did for the documentary *QUAND ON ALLAIT VOIR CARLOS* that I made 18 years ago has been very useful. I also read a lot of documents and books, watched films and met lots of people to discuss the issue. The footage of the funerals of Baader, Enslin and Raspe in 1977 had left an indelible mark on my mind. I was 13 at the time and felt

attracted to these long-haired, bearded activists with their jean jackets and raised fists. Later on, I watched the same sequence in *GERMANY IN AUTUMN* made by a group of German filmmakers, including Fassbinder. This sequence helped us to visualize the concept of *OPERATION LIBERTAD*. We had the cast and the crew watch the sequence several times. Before the shoot, we turned a huge disused factory into a rehearsal area and we brought along lots of books, documents and DVDs... I quite enjoyed that part of the job and I think the cast and the crew liked it too. This is where the film came to life and took on a life of its own. My co-workers had done an amazing job and we were able to find everything we needed there: documents, pictures and all sorts of archive material.

Is the laundering of a South American dictatorship in a Swiss bank based on historic facts?

I came up with the story together with Jacob Berger, the screenwriter. We were pretty sure that the Paraguay dictator must have left some money in Swiss banks during the dictatorship days... We were caught up by history: a few months before the film shoot, in July 2010, a Paraguayan lawyer, a Human Rights activist, demanded that \$5 billion deposited in secret Swiss bank accounts by Stroessner, the Paraguayan despot, be returned to Paraguay. There were probably people like Vilas that worked in a Zurich subsidiary of the Société de Banque Suisse. And as far as *OPERATION LIBERTAD* is concerned...

The characters that make up the group have strong, distinctive personalities. How did you come up with their personal and political backgrounds?

Once we had agreed on the number of characters and their characteristics, we started breathing life into them. We gave them a back story and created relationships between them. Some are very much like people I actually met. Jacob Berger and I both lived in squatter settlements in the early 80's. We were too young in 1977 to live this era to the full, but some signs and codes have been left behind. This world was not unknown to us and we used it as a guideline during the writing phase as well as during preproduction and principal photography. We thought up the characters easily. They had such a compelling presence that, little by little, it felt like making a documentary. We rehearsed a lot to try to suggest lived experience. Some actors interviewed friends and relatives to understand what it was like back then.

You don't romanticize the group's action and you're not judgmental either. How did you keep the right distance with the issues at stake?

We did not intend to pass judgement on issues like whether it was politically legitimate to resort to violence, but rather to address the harsh issues that these men and women had to face. They were torn between the harsh reality of facts and their actions, whose violence they wouldn't acknowledge. There is no doubt that taking direct action involved taking risks, and believing that you can be "pure as snow" is wishful thinking... This comes at a price, it always does. Well, those are the issues I wished to raise.

As a matter of fact, the group members question the "footage" that has been shot and point to the importance of

editing – just like a film crew would. Did you intend to create a parallel between political action and cinematic action?

I like to create a distance with the audience. In AISHEEN, my previous film, there was a scene which altered the way the viewer perceives the film and created a sort of film within the film. In OPERATION LIBERTAD the idea of the cinematographer having qualms about the action that he is filming and about his own presence, allowed us to express our own doubts. It's not an ironical approach. I wanted my characters to be convincing and the audience to relate to them and follow them in the course of the events, with their

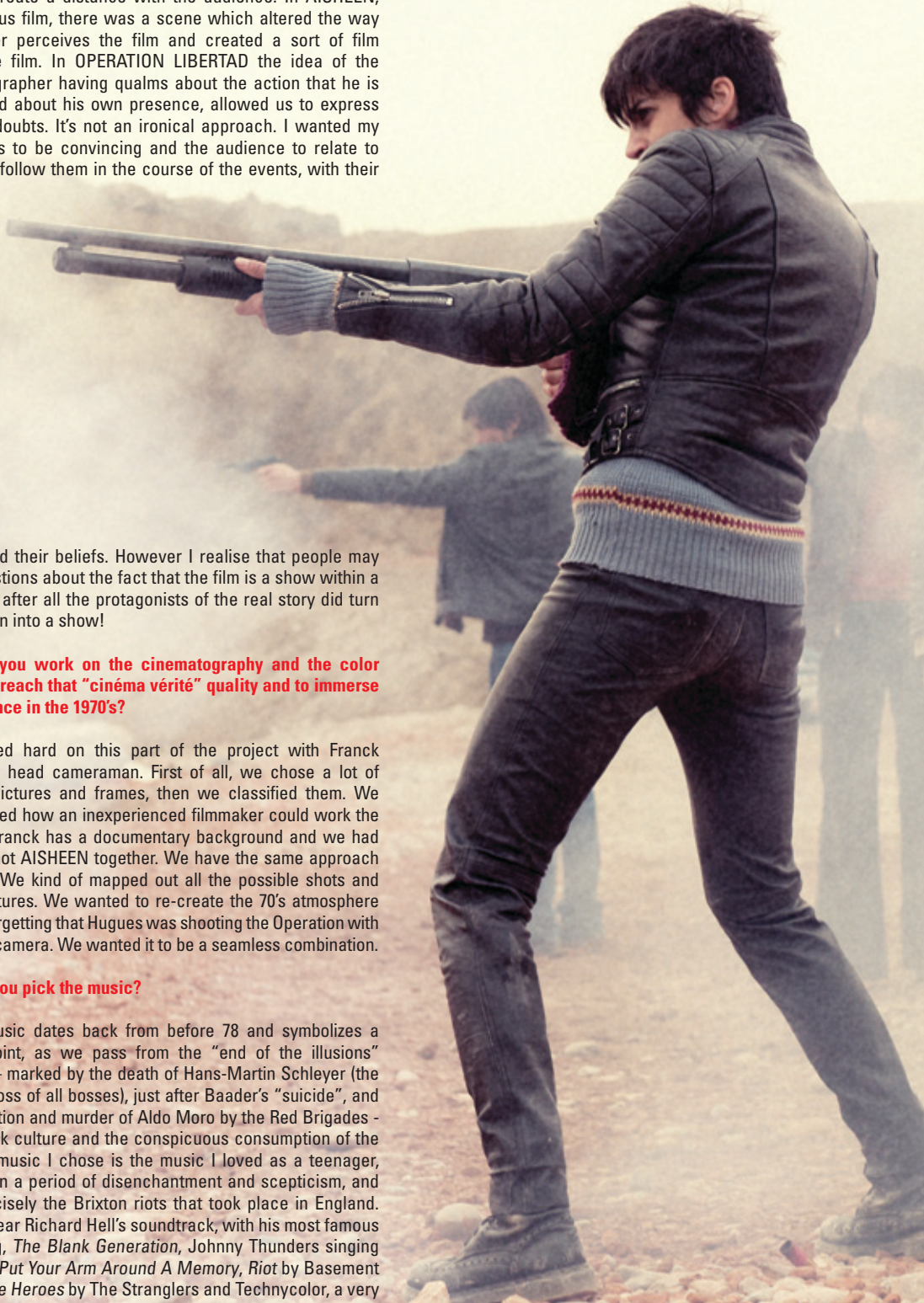
doubts and their beliefs. However I realise that people may raise questions about the fact that the film is a show within a show, but after all the protagonists of the real story did turn their action into a show!

How did you work on the cinematography and the color palette to reach that "cinéma vérité" quality and to immerse the audience in the 1970's?

We worked hard on this part of the project with Franck Rabel, the head cameraman. First of all, we chose a lot of footage, pictures and frames, then we classified them. We also showed how an inexperienced filmmaker could work the camera. Franck has a documentary background and we had already shot AISHEEN together. We have the same approach to image. We kind of mapped out all the possible shots and image textures. We wanted to re-create the 70's atmosphere without forgetting that Hugues was shooting the Operation with a moving camera. We wanted it to be a seamless combination.

How did you pick the music?

All the music dates back from before 78 and symbolizes a turning point, as we pass from the "end of the illusions" (1977/78) – marked by the death of Hans-Martin Schleyer (the German boss of all bosses), just after Baader's "suicide", and the abduction and murder of Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades - to the punk culture and the conspicuous consumption of the 80's. The music I chose is the music I loved as a teenager, it ushers in a period of disenchantment and scepticism, and more precisely the Brixton riots that took place in England. You can hear Richard Hell's soundtrack, with his most famous punk song, *The Blank Generation*, Johnny Thunders singing *You Can't Put Your Arm Around A Memory*, *Riot* by Basement 5, *No More Heroes* by The Stranglers and Technicolor, a very famous Swiss punk band.



LAURENT CAPELLUTO STIPE ERCEG NATACHA KOUTCHOUMOV
KARINE GUIGNARD NUNO LOPES ANTONIO BUIL

OPERATION LIBERTAD

BY NICOLAS WADIMOFF

In 1978, the members of a small revolutionary group break into a Swiss bank near Zurich. They film the entirety of the action so as to prove the collusion between the Helvetic financial system and dictators. 30 years later, the tapes of the "Operation Libertad" resurface...

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY FRANCK RABEL SOUND CHRISTOPHE GIOVANNONI PRODUCTION DESIGNER GEORG BRINGOLF VISUAL DESIGNER ANDRÉ-LINE BEUPARLANT COSTUME DESIGNER CIDALIA DA COSTA MAKE UP ARTIST LETICIA ROCHAIX-ORTIS SCRIPT UFUK EMIROGLU 1ST AD SONIA ROSSIER LINE PRODUCER GERARD CAVAT EDITED BY KARINE SUDAN AND PAULINE DAIROU MIX FLORIAN EIDENBENZ CASTING BY SARAH TEPER AND LEILA FOURNIER PRODUCED BY SAMIR NICOLAS WADIMOFF EXECUTIVE PRODUCER TUNJE BERNS AND JOËLLE BERTOSSA IN COPRODUCTION WITH ALBERTO CHOLLET, SERGE LALOU, CHARLOTTE UZU AND MICHEL MERKT SUPPORTED BY BUNDESAMT FÜR KULTUR ZÜRCHER FILMSTIFTUNG, LE FONDS REGIO & LA LOTERIE ROMANDE, THE CITY & CANTON OF GENEVA, FOCAL, FONCTION CINEMA, RTS RADIO TÉLÉVISION SUISSE - SRG, SSR, SUISSIMAGE STORY BY JACOB BERGER AND NICOLAS WADIMOFF

SWITZERLAND - FRANCE / 90' / HD / COLOR / FRENCH / 2012 / FEATURE FILM

WWW.OPERATION-LIBERTAD.COM



SONGS BY
THE STRANGLERS
RICHARD HELL
BASEMENT 5

PRESS CONTACT
IN CANNES

LES PIQUANTES
FLORENCE ALEXANDRE
+ 33 6 31 87 17 54
ALEXANDRA FAUSSIER
+33 6 14 61 48 41
ALEXFLO@LESPIQUANTES.COM

INTERNATIONAL SALES
IN CANNES: BOOTH RIVIERA H1

DOC & FILM INTERNATIONAL
13 RUE PORTEFOIN
75003 PARIS FRANCE
TEL + 33 (0) 1 42 77 56 87
FAX + 33 (0) 1 42 77 36 56
SALES@DOCANDFILM.COM
WWW.DOCANDFILM.COM

DANIELA ELSTNER
+ 33 6 82 54 66 85
D.ELSTNER@DOCANDFILM.COM

ALICE DAMIANI
+ 33 6 77 91 37 97
A.DAMIANI@DOCANDFILM.COM

HWA-SEON CHOI
+ 33 6 59 21 70 00
HS.CHOI@DOCANDFILM.COM

doc & film
international