

Iris Kronauer

## Wiping Dust in Venice

In January 2001, as Manchevski is editing *Dust* in London, Albanian guerillas take Macedonian journalists hostage in a Macedonian border village. Over the course of the next several months the KLA/NLA guerillas ambush and kill a number of police and army personnel. Macedonia is on the front pages, as the country inches towards a civil war, facing its biggest crisis in its short history as a modern independent nation. This is a spillover of the NATO war with Serbia over Kosovo.

Many Macedonians feel that the root of the conflict was never properly explained. They also feel their voice is not heard in the West, while the entire world is reporting from Macedonia.

Manchevski writes an opinion piece for The New York Times, but The Times decides not to run it. He offers it to National Public Radio, but they request more and more rewrites of the opinion piece, demanding changes which would make it – in Manchevski's opinion, as someone who is familiar with the situation – inaccurate. For example, NPR requests that Manchevski removes the references to the fact that Albanians in Macedonia have high school education in their native language. Tens of thousands of Macedonian Albanians study in Albanian. The article is published in *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on August 25th, 2001 and in The Guardian on August 15th, 2001. Both newspapers change the title, and both newspapers edit the article without Manchevski's approval, shifting the focus of his argument. The original title of the piece was *Just a Moral Obligation*. *Süddeutsche Zeitung* changes it to *The Seed of Armed Violence. NATO Is to Blame for Macedonia's Fate* and The Guardian changes it to *NATO Gave Us This Ethnic Cleansing*. The references to the 'Moral Obligation' were edited out. Russian Pravda and Belgian Standaard also reprint the article. Standaard publishes an answer signed by "Agron Buxhaku, student". Even though Manchevski's opinion piece does not deal with issues of ethnicity, but rather with issues of legality and violence, the newspaper feels the need to contrast his article with Buxhaku's (who is ethnic Albanian) response. The 44-year-old "student" resurfaces within a few months as a spokesman for the guerilla KLA/NLA, and eventually becomes a minister in the 2002 government which includes former guerillas from the KLA/NLA. He is currently Macedonia's ambassador to France.

In the article, Manchevski argues that the KLA/NLA were trained and armed by the US and NATO, and that the KLA/NLA – contrary to the current master narrative in the press – weren't fighting for their minority rights, but were instead fighting for real estate and political power<sup>1</sup>. He calls for NATO intervention, stating that it is a moral obligation for NATO to take back the weapons they supplied to their KLA guerilla allies in the fight against Milosevic and who are now pouring into Macedonia from the outside.

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1 Fifteen years later, the KLA/NLA winners hold top government positions: deputy prime minister, government ministers, ambassadors, mayors, etc. cf. critical comment on this: Norbert Mappes Niedeck, *Balkan Mafia. Staaten in der Hand des Verbrechens – Eine Gefahr für Europa*, Berlin 2003, p.13: After the smiles and the peace accord, after the odd arrangements made subsequently, a horrible suspicion began to dawn on the viewer up in the gallery: the conflict in Macedonia had not been about minority rights, but about protection money and spheres of influence – and the protagonist had not been a subjugated, or even a roused people, but a criminal underworld that had crawled up into the light of day.

More importantly, he sets out to debunk the theory that the war in Macedonia was an inter-ethnic war rooted in centuries-old animosity. He calls for return to the rule of law, asking for those who take to arms to be treated the way any attacker on the police or the army in a Western democracy would be treated.

Even before *Dust* is shown, the press start linking the fictional, historical content of the film to current politics. In June 2001 The Los Angeles Times suggests that Luke, the Oklahoma bounty hunter caught up in the Balkans chaos with no any idea as to what is happening symbolises NATO in the Balkans<sup>2</sup>. The Times writer, David Holley had not seen the film, but does say: "Loosely based on history from the final years of the Ottomans, *Dust* can be seen as an artistic commentary on the wars that tore the Yugoslav federation as it broke up in the 1990s. [...] In some respects the film foreshadows the current fighting in Macedonia – which seceded peacefully from the Yugoslav federation – between ethnic Albanian guerrillas and government forces."

In April 2001, a detailed report on the 2000 production written by the arts correspondent Fiachra Gibbons is published in The Guardian. It is accompanied by an interview with the director about the conflict between the Macedonian government forces and the ethnic Albanian guerrilla organization KLA/NLA.

Manchevski takes a stance against the dominant view in the Western media that this is yet another ethnic conflict in the Balkans. He notes the mafia-style activities of the armed groups concerned (drugs, human trafficking and land grab) and condemns their violent tactics: "Too much has been made of this stuff about centuries-old hatreds. At least part of the shooting is about local strongmen being able to keep their thieftom so there are open roads for smuggling, the drug trade and running the brothels. It is that basic for a lot of these guys with the guns."<sup>3</sup>

The Western media "ethnic" explanation of the ex-Yugoslavia wars turns personal here: Gibbons comments on Manchevski's remarks by noting that the director himself belongs to the Slav majority<sup>4</sup>. This is a slightly derogatory term (the proper word would be Macedonian). It also suggests that Manchevski's opinion is influenced by his ethnicity (additionally, the Macedonians (or "Slavs") were seen as the oppressors in the KLA/NLA war "for human rights").

*Dust* opens the 2001 Venice Film Festival on August 29, 2001 to great fanfare.

The British critic Alexander Walker sets the table for the political discussion at the very beginning of the Venice press conference. In a question, he accuses the director of portraying the Turkish soldiers in *Dust* in a racist way (even though they are Ottoman; note the black soldier among them). Walker links the film to Turkey's quest for EU membership, even suggesting that Manchevski had a political agenda when making the film – trying to block Turkey from joining the EU.<sup>5</sup>

Walker's statement at the press conference was followed by his attempt to equate the cowboys with NATO in his review: "Milcho Manchevski's *Dust* isn't a disaster: far from it. But it is a film with very disturbing racist overtones. [...] It is promoted as a Spaghetti Western, Sergio Leone-style. But it appears to have a more insidious and contemporary political agenda: the cowboys can be seen as representing mercenary America getting involved in overseas civil wars in which it has no standing. The Turks are treated as gibbering hyenas in red fezzes, indiscriminately and repugnantly caricatured. The fact that Turkey is currently pushing its claim to become a European Union member – a move that

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2 Quoted from LA Times, David Holley: Film explores a timeless *Dust* swirling in the Balkans, June 6th, 2001.

3 Guardian, Friday Review, April 13th, 2001, p.4.

4 "Manchevski, it has to be said, is a Slav", Ibid

5 Walker was an outspoken opponent of the British Lottery film funding and the companies benefiting from it. The Film Consortium – the main producer of *Dust* – is one of them. Walker, *Icons*, p. 258ff.



wouldn't be welcomed in Manchevski's native Macedonia, or in Greece, either – makes *Dust*'s timing not just unfortunate, but downright suspicious.<sup>6</sup>

Manchevski responds to Walker's question at the press conference by saying: "Thank you for your statement." He has said in later interviews that he did not want to dignify the ludicrous charges.

However, his high road approach does not get traction. The wire services report on the controversy and repeat the charges of racism. The label "racist" goes global. Even though other reviewers in Venice do not refer to Walker's Turkey and the EU construction, he does manage to politicize. "The business with the Turks" takes central stage in many reviews: "The story, which links up America at the beginning of the twentieth century with modern-day Macedonia in the midst of the Balkan wars<sup>7</sup>, seems extremely contrived, while the ghastly endless shoot-outs in the style of a Balkan-Italo western became increasingly boring. Added to this is his political message, almost propaganda, which gives the Turks, in particular, a very raw deal," writes Erwin Heberling in Schnitt.<sup>8</sup>

A number of Venice critics follow suit, focusing on the "issue" of the Turks and on the arbitrary association of the film with the armed conflict in Macedonia at the time of the premiere, thus conveniently politicizing *Dust*, without really dealing with the film itself. They ignore the complex structure of the film and the New York City plotline. Tobias Kniebe of *Süddeutsche Zeitung* says: "*Dust* is based on a personal discovery: in photos the last cowboys of the American West look just like the wild bands of men who rose up in rebellion against centuries of Turkish rule in 1912. So Manchevski sends two young men from Oklahoma to the Balkan war of the time: Luke (David Wenham) is a bounty hunter in search of riches; Elijah (Joseph Fiennes) is a cuckolded husband in search of revenge. They become involved in the fight for freedom, the ethnic butchery that exacts a bloody tribute from Turks and Macedonians alike. On one occasion, it is a herd of sheep that is caught in the crossfire; on another, the village harvest. Huge watermelons burst next to soldiers' heads – and afterwards, myriads of flies descend on what is left. All this is difficult to bear and it serves only one purpose, if any: to point out, yet again, to the parties in the current Macedonian conflict how necessary it is to search for peaceful solutions."<sup>9</sup>

Rüdiger Suchsland wrote in *www.artechok.de* about the press conference: "This film, financed not least with grant money from Germany and Great Britain, caused controversy less because of its sometimes exaggerated bloodbaths, than because of its wholly one-dimensional portrayal of the occupying Turks – it was difficult to contradict those who spoke of this as racism."<sup>10</sup> Suchsland also did a short interview with Manchevski for the Berlin daily *Der Tagesspiegel*<sup>11</sup>. Here he concentrated on the supposedly political tone of the film; an accusation of racism was not put to Manchevski.

*Süddeutsche Zeitung* on August 29, 2001 writes: "In strong contrast to Cannes, the opening film is not without controversy: *Dust* – by Milcho Manchevski, who won a Golden Lion in 1994 with his debut film,

6 This is London online, September 4th, 2001. Walker stood by his view of the film when *Dust* was released in England, in only a few cinemas, in early May 2002. He vehemently attacked one of its backers, Civilian Content, for investing British Lottery money in the film. cf. Alexander Walker: *Dusty and Dire*, in: This is London (The Evening Standard Online), May 3rd, 2002: "My revulsion watching it was redoubled by my shame as a minor shareholder in the company, Civilian Content, that controls the National Lottery franchise which invested 1,699.000 (pounds) in it. I'm currently a loser on my shares. The public are even bigger losers – on the movie. With the aged squeezed for pensions, school desperate for teachers and hospitals bereft of almost everything, aren't we generous financing obnoxious bits of Balkan history like *Dust*?" Walker here obviously confuses history and historical films. Also, his assumption that Macedonia or Greece wouldn't welcome Turkey in the EU obviously projected back into the relationship between the future countries in 1900 century politics, which had nothing to do with the politics of 2001. Neither Greece nor Macedonia objects to Turkey becoming an EU-Member.

7 *Dust* never addresses Macedonia today – or the Balkan Wars 1912-1913 (or of 1991-95) – IK

8 Heberling, Erwin: Die Politik kehrt zurück: Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica, Venedig 2000 (sic), in: *www.schnitt.com*, 234,1153,01, November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

9 *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2001, Tobias Kniebe.

10 *www.artechok.de*, September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2001, Rüdiger Suchsland.

11 *Der Tagesspiegel*, September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2001.





Hier Gewalt ist ... David Wenham in Milcho Manchevski's Mazedonien-Eposen „Dust“

Foto: Bernadette

## Drei Augen für ein Halleluja

Filme von Manchevski, Bertolucci und Larry Clark auf dem Filmfestival von Venedig

Sie ist kaum zu übersehen, die schönste Venedig-Festspielfilme. Man muss nur die Hauptstraße entlanggehen, bis man die letzte Seiterle im Nacken spürt, die Linderung bringt von der Schwere des Lido. Schon ist sie da – zusammenblinder Haat, Sommerwonne, grüne Augen. Und dann, zwischen dem leicht geöffneten Lippen, der Schärfe: Da blickt uns ein weiteres Auge an. „Dust“ Augen werden nicht reichen“, heißt es dann. Ein Flakel, das eigentümliche Fernsehen wirkt, tatsächlich aber ein Traum von der Mista del Cinema formuliert. Dass man ein zutiefst hohes Bild, für all die wunderbaren Bilder, die es in den nächsten Tagen hoffentlich zu sehen gibt. Auf Italienisch klingt das noch poetischer, „non bastano“, das Gegenteil von Basta, genugwird.

„Dust“ übersetzt, den Titel des Eröffnungsfilms von Milcho Manchevski. Das suggeriert eine Dualität von Staub und Pulver. In diesem Fall Schießpulver. Ein Bombenexplosion in der Mitte der mazedonischen Belge, ein Showdown der Gewalt, der sich mit der Feuerkraft eines Fechtzugs messen möchte. Manchevski hat seinen Jähren lang nicht von sich hören lassen, weil er mit „Before the Rain“ den Goldenen Löwen gewann und die ethnische Gewalt in seiner Heimat voraussetzte – aber seine Themen sind die gleichen geblieben: die Verbindung von Geschichte und Gegenwart, die Verknüpfung zeitlicher und zeitlicher Mythologien.

„Dust“ basiert auf einer persönlichen Entdeckung. Die letzten Gezeiten des amerikanischen Westens sind auf Fotos genauso wie die wilden Banden, die 1912 in Mazedonien den Aufstieg wagten, nach Jahrhunderten türkischer Herrschaft. Also schickte Manchevski zwei Jungs aus Oklahoma in den historischen Balkanregion: Luke (David Wenham) ist ein Kapitalgeber auf der Suche nach Reichtum. Eliza (Joseph Fiennes) ist ein betragener Krimineller auf der Suche nach Rache. Sie geraten in Freiwildkämpfe und ethnische Gemetzel, die bei Türken und Mazedonien schwelenden Rassenfäden fördern. Einmal kommt eine Schafschere ins Kreuzfeuer, ein andermal die halbe Erde eines Dorfes. Die plötzliche Energie-Wasserkraften selbst Schicksale, und über das, was übrig bleibt, machen sich Tausende Flügel hin. Das ist schwer zu ertragen, und es dient, wenn überhaupt, nur einem Ziel: Den Parteien

im situativen Mazedonien-Konflikt noch einmal einzuschreiben, wie stensiv es ist, nach friedlichen Lösungen zu suchen. Manchevski lebt in New York, aber er hat politische Bedeutung in Mazedonien, wo er als eine unbedeutende Stimme der Vernunft wahrgenommen wird. Dennoch sollte man „Dust“ nicht nur aus dieser Perspektive sehen. Somit wirkt der Film, mit seinen leuchtend grünen Hüten, brennenden Sprühen und Marmelade-Klängen, bewahrt. Als exzentrisches Melodram kommt er hingegen besser weg. Nur die Einbettung der Geschichte in die Gegenwart, die Manchevski bei „Before the Rain“ so wunderbar gelöst hat, misslingt hier leider völlig.

### Der Fraktionschef womöglich

Kaum hat man „Dust“ aus den Kiefern geschüttelt, kann man in den italienischen Zeitungen die neuesten Mazedonien-Nachrichten lesen: Da steht dann auch, warum die deutsche CDU für den Einsatz der Bundeswehr stimmt und dabei ist von „unserem Friedrich Merz“ die Rede. „Dust“ ist ein Film, der die Fraktionsvorsitzende der CDU, Klink, klar und deutlich benennen kann, müsste doch auch im Kino wieder Schwere und Grandezza, Klarheit und Dramatik zu Stunde bringen. Aber irgendwas klappt es dem nicht. Auch „L'Amore profumato“ von Giuseppe Bertolucci, dem Bruder des Verstorbenen Bernardo, ist da keine Ausnahme. Drei junge Schauspieler und ein Seelenstempel von Dignitas, das kommt ein bisschen episch, und außerdem sind die Dänen bei solchen Themen sowieso nicht zu schlagen. Warum „L'Amore“ der Eröffnungsfilm der zweiten Wettbewerbsreihe um den „Löwen des Jahres“ ist, bleibt rätselhaft. Ein drittes Auge jedenfalls braucht man nicht für diesen Start.

Man sagt es ungern, aber der erste Adrenalinschub kommt auch diesmal aus den USA. „Bully“ ist ein kleines, völlig kompromissloses Werk von Larry Clark, das in Amerika gar nicht erst zum Rating eingeworfen wurde, also nur von einer Hand voll engagierter Kinos gezeigt werden kann. Es spielt in Hollywood, aber nicht dem Hollywood, sondern einem Mittelklasse-Vorort an der Küste von Florida, ein paar Meilen nördwärts von Miami Beach. Tatsächlich ist der Ort aber kaum lokalisiert, es ist derselbe,

in dem sich auch schon Clark's „Kids“ herumgetrieben haben.

Eine Art Teenage Underworld, wo hässliche Dinge passieren, die nur durch die totale Ignoranz oder Brutalität der Erwachsenen überhaupt erst möglich werden. In Interviews erzählt Clark lapidare Geschichten, die er in seiner Jugend erlebt hat. „Ich kannte dieses Mädchen, das mit seinem Vater und allen fünf Brüdern schliefen musste, und keine hat je etwas unternehmen ...“ Durchaus verständlich, dass irgendwann der Kampf gegen diese Art der Verlogenheit zum Lebensmotto wurde. „Ich nenne mich einen Moralisten, und die Leute lachen darüber. Aber ich meine es absolut ernst.“

Hier hat Clark aus einer Mischpoke zu gefunden, die wirklich passiert ist. Marty (Brad Pitt) wird von Bobby (Nick Stahl) gepöbelt und geschlagen, schon seit früherer Schulzeit, aber Bobby ist eine charismatische Figur, sein Mentor und Surferbruder. So einen nennt man im Süden der Highschool, einen „Bully“. Bobby kann Marty sogar beschaffen. Er nimmt ihn mit in seinem Wagen und sammelt die Girls auf, da sind auch hübsche dabei, aber immer recht vulgär, und dann wird geprügelt. Clark zeigt das alles sehr direkt, seine Kamera kriecht beinahe hinein in die Beine der Shorts und Jeans, und das wird ihm wohl wieder als Voyeurismus angesehen. Aber, ist es vielleicht auch, aber nur so wird erklärlich, was dann passiert: Marty blüht bei einem Mädchen hübsch und schwingen sie, sie steckt ein Selbstvergiftung, und bald ist klar – Bobby muss weg, er muss getötet werden. ... Ein Nacht in den Sümpfen macht sie ernst. Am Ende, im Gerichtssaal, sieht man die noch immer leuchtenden Augen, die jetzt ergründet sind. Ähnlich ergibt es auch den Zuschauern, aber so muss es sein: Dem Unwissenen ins Auge sehen, das will Clark, bevor die Kommunikation ganz abfällt. Nach „Bully“ verlässt man das Kino hellwach. Ein erster Schlag gegen die drückende Feindlichkeit am Lido, und also auch gegen die gefährliche, sich immer festsetzende Tendenz, die je länger sie existiert, desto mehr die gesamte Filmwelt überflutet, mit geschlossen Augen – und trotzdem genug mitkriegen, um am Ende ein Urteil zu fällen: Ein drittes Auge, wie bei der nächsten Plakat-Tenentante, wäre das keine schlechte Lösung.

TOBIAS KNEISE

## HEUTE

### FEUILLETON

#### Kredite für die Achsenmächte

In Bern wurden die Bereiche der Bergier-Kommission vorgestellt Seite 15

#### Vorwärts – und wieder zurück

Mortara Nachfolger Peter Baurer präsentiert sein neues Programm für die halbjährige Festspiele Seite 17

### MEDIEN

#### Tiere, Sex und Fußball

Prin von Salin bereitet sich einen Sender: „Nacht Live“ Seite 19

## Abwahl mit Anstand

New York verabschiedet sich von Giuliani „Decency Commission“

Mit dem unklaren Blick der voraussetzenden Geschichtsbildung sehen die New York Post und CNN Redakteur Giuliani heute schon als einen der größten Politiker Amerikas. Vor allem, weil er den mauernden Meloch New York vor dem Bankrott rettete und in einen Modellfall für das Wirtschaftswunder der neunziger Jahre verwandelte. Die Kommode lockte er mit Steuererleichterungen. Die Touristen und Bürger mit der Politik der „Zero Tolerance“, die New York innerhalb von vier Jahren zu einer der sichersten Städte Amerikas machte. Dazu öffnete er die Polizei fast fast vollständig gegen die Machtbeschränkungen aus. Die Copi dankten es ihrem Chef, vergaßen die Mafia, die Stadtstreicher und Drogenhändler von den Straßen. Dazu sie es dabei mit den Menschenrechten nicht so genau nahmen, brachten Sensationsfälle ins Licht, wie der des afrikanischen Gastarbeiters Amadou Diallo, der mit 41 Schüssen „verschont“ getötet wurde.

Die Kandidaten, danach im Herbst dieses Jahres um die Nachfolge-Giuliani zu werden, haben es nicht leicht. Selbst liberale Demokraten wie Mark Goren versprechen, Giuliani Errungenschaften in Ehren zu erhalten. Medienmüll Michael Bloomberg gibt sich, ganz in der Tradition von Silvio Berlusconi, gar als Rechtsaußen der Lokalpolitik. Nur eine von Giuliani-Nachwuchsen wollen sie als Kandidaten als einen der nächsten Anstandlungen gleich wieder abschaffen – die so genannte „Decency Commission“, der Ausschuss für Anstand. Gen der Bürgermeister einberufen hat, um mit der Philosophie und Strenge der Kinde aufzunehmen. Nachdem Giuliani Versuche, das Budget des städtischen Brooklyn Museum of Art zu beschneiden, von mehreren Instanzen als verfassungswidrig abgelehnt wurden, sollte die Kommission aus rechtlichen Bürgern dafür sorgen, dass unanständige Kunst in Zukunft in städtisch geförderten Kulturinstitutionen keinen Platz mehr hat. Der erste Bericht, den die Kommission verfasste, entging sich als launiges Bürokratengewitz. Die Museen auf der schwarzen Liste des Bürgermeisters, allen voran das Brooklyn Museum of Art und die New York Public Library, sollten weniger Staatsgelder bekommen. Außerdem sollten sie Taktik, auf denen sie Besucher von Spenden, hinter, entfernen. Ansonsten lautet die Kommission um mehr Toleranz für alle Glaubensrichtungen und Weltanschauungen.

Mark Goren ließ man verlässlicher, er werde im Amt das einzig Anständigste tun und die Kommission für Anständigkeit auflösen. Fernando Ferrer, derzeit Stadtpräsident der Bronx und Goren's Kollaborant bei den Demokraten, meinte: „Ich wünsche, der Bürgermeister würde sich genauso abgeben, wenn es um die mangelnde Finanzierung der öffentlichen Schulen geht.“ Und selbst Michael Bloomberg ließ die Daily News wissen, er werde die Kommission auflösen lassen. So wird der große New Yorker Kulturkampf am 1. Januar 2002 zur historischen Wahl der amerikanischen Politikern hinführen. ANTONIAN KREYER

*Before the Rain*. *Dust* is a hard Balkan-Western, a Cain and Abel story in the guise of two cowboys from Arizona [Oklahoma – IK] – Joseph Fiennes and David Wenham – who in 1912 [the film is set in 1903–1908 – IK] get caught up in the turmoil of the first great Balkan war [the film is actually set during and immediately after the Ilinden uprising, not during the Balkan Wars. This is a big difference, as Ilinden was a local uprising against the Ottoman rulers, and the Balkan Wars were fought by the Balkan nations for territory – IK] at the time of Atatürk [Atatürk was still to step on the historical stage – IK]. It is a film that is uncompromising in its opinions (**see Manchevski's article on the Macedonian conflict in the SZ of 25/8**) [emphasis IK].” Here it is implied that Manchevski is uncompromising as a political commentator and that this attitude is reflected directly in his work as a filmmaker.

There are some critics who have specific ideas about the political position on the current events that Manchevski, as a director, should take in his work. In *The Guardian*, for example, Peter Bradshaw writes how Manchevski connects the modern New York story with the Macedonian story: “Putting a modern perspective on the abyss of central European warfare and bloodshed is a shrewd idea; the shootout sequences between noble peasants and fez-wearing Turks are unusual to the point of delirium, and Manchevski finds pleasingly cruel twists in juxtaposing the crime and corruption of modern Manhattan with the distant war of Macedonia. But there is something obtuse and disingenuous in finding this modernity not in the obvious fact of NATO intervention, but in a hip-hop New York crime scene, where no one knows that this history has real, contemporary meanings and repercussions quite distinct from Manchevski's sentimental fantasy. He gives Macedonian identity an apolitical sheen of stylistic cool, just as Luke and Elijah get to do a sort of glamorous Butch – and Sundance – in Bolivia riff.”<sup>12</sup>

Here, Manchevski is actually expected to connect his work to current affairs: “There's also a mean-spirited feel to the film, which, seen in the context of contemporary conflicts in the Balkans, hardly provides a positive message about this war-torn part of the world.”<sup>13</sup> His artistic expression is limited to the role assigned to him by the critic – that of a director who uses his film to comment on the current political situation in the “crisis region” and send “positive message”. As a director who is interested in anything but a quasi-realistic filmic portrayal of current events such as “the obvious fact of NATO intervention”, he is dismissed by Bradshaw of *The Guardian*. The obvious message of humanism that lies behind the brutality of *Dust* is completely ignored.

A similar argument was put forward by James Christopher in *The Times* of September 2, 2001: “Like *Titanic*, the whole thing takes on a misty rose-tinted view of the past. And by uncomfortable proxy, the present Balkan crisis [...] yet the film blindly makes assumptions about ancient Balkan grudges which wouldn't look amiss in a Mel Brooks film [...] Manchevski hits important nerves but his politics, like his twin stories are all over the place. True, *Dust* is not a piece of ‘realist’ cinema, but having placed his film in the teeth of a deadly serious conflict, can he really shrug off the responsibility?”

The idea of taking the history of the Balkans as a subject for a work of popular culture – as in a film about Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, for example – does not conform to the expectations of the critics. It is as if a director who comes from a “crisis region” is expected to create only the type of work that reinforces the existing image of the region, as created by the media. More importantly, why would anybody – especially a film critic familiar with the process of making a film – think that anyone (Manchevski in this case) has placed his film “in the teeth of a deadly serious conflict”? Christopher tops it with scolding Manchevski for “[trying to] shrug off the responsibility”.

In the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Andreas Kilb tries to explain why “old” South-Eastern Europe is not suitable as a canvas upon which the Western genre would be projected: “It is true that *Dust* attempts to transfer American cinema formulas to old South-Eastern Europe. That this proves unsuccessful has nothing to do with Manchevski's quality as a director, or with the abilities of his

<sup>12</sup> Guardian online, September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2001.

<sup>13</sup> cf. also David Stratton, in *Variety*.





# Britons stir the Dust at Venice festival

Opening film criticised over racism and violence, reports **Hugh Davies**

A BRITISH film, *Dust*, directed by Milcho Manchevski, is the first European feature to be screened at the Venice International Film Festival since the outbreak of the Balkan wars.

The film, which is set in the Balkans, is a story of a young man, played by a British actor, who is sent to a concentration camp by the Albanians. The film is a story of a young man, played by a British actor, who is sent to a concentration camp by the Albanians.

A film of the Balkan conflict, it is a story of a young man, played by a British actor, who is sent to a concentration camp by the Albanians.



Michelle Williams as the British woman in the film *Dust*.



The film's director, Milcho Manchevski, who wrote the script.

Manchevski, who wrote the script, is a Macedonian filmmaker who has worked in the Balkans for many years.

The film is a story of a young man, played by a British actor, who is sent to a concentration camp by the Albanians.

In his article<sup>17</sup> the critic Zarko Radakovic argues that Kilb normalises and does not allow mixing of the West and East narratives: "The narrative of the West must be valid for the Western genre, while the stories from the East must be told with the eastern integral consideration of the history, says Kilb. [...] I would strongly oppose this normative, moralising and really conservative critique that we have been reading for years in some of the German newspapers."

Jan Schulz-Ojala, writing in Berlin's Tagesspiegel, insists on a direct relationship between the portrayal of the Ottoman soldiers and what he perceives to be Manchevski's political views. The article also contains a scandalous personal defamation. With questionable logic that seems to be there only to serve his final denunciation, the critic abridges and falsifies the form and content of *Dust*, getting (on purpose or accidentally) many plot points outright wrong. Schulz-Ojala identifies three levels of the film: one relates to the encounter between Edge and Angela in New York. The second level relates to the Macedonian part of the story, as told by Angela. "The third shows several extensive, rural battle scenes, in which the Turks come on as stupid, loud, cackling villains (against noble Macedonians whose honour and sovereignty have been injured) so that after committing a number of provocatively gruesome crimes, they can be justly mown down by the surviving Macedonians. [...] *Dust* is loud in its concept, confused in its structure and wholly lacking in humour – in the shape of an Eastern-Western, it seems like a propaganda film for Manchevski's thesis, disguised by a historicising veil: instead of the Albanian Muslims, it is the Ottomans here who behave like the epitome of savages, while the Macedonians are innocent as lambs and go to the slaughter in droves. And seen like this, the young black man, who the old lady explains the Balkans to, is nothing other than the West itself, which in the fight against eternal Ottoman Islam needs, to an extent, to be woken up with trumpet blasts. The caricature-killer aesthetic with which the Turks are stereotypically depicted – and that is the scandal – has something undeniably (neo)-Fascist. What on earth were the festival organisers thinking of when they chose this film to open the programme? Surely it cannot have been the sarcastic pleasure of making at least Berlusconi's friends on the far-Right happy."<sup>18</sup>

17 Zarko Radakovic was the critic at the Deutsche Welle radio Serbian section. His article "Wiping Milcho Manchevski's *Dust*" was broadcast on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2001 and later also published in the Bulgarian magazine Kultura. See Radakovic, Zarko: Da izbrisem praha ot Milcho Manchevski, Kultura No 3 (2192), (September 14, 2001) <http://www.kultura.bg/bg/article/view/5831> (February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015).

18 Schulz-Ojala, Jan: *Krieg an allen Fronten*, Tagesspiegel, August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2001.



Schulz-Ojala was not only irresponsible with his accusation of neo-Fascism. His article also thoughtlessly glosses over real acts of unbelievable violence that took place in Macedonia during the historical period the films deals with (and even at the very same time the film opened). At the same time, he denounced Manchevski's political activities in support of peace there as mere ethnic self-interest. The critic also introduced another contemporary conflict into the story of *Dust*: the West's struggle with Islam.

Schulz-Ojala ignores the fact the violence in *Dust* is an equal-opportunity business – in the film everybody has the chance to suffer, no matter their ethnicity. He also seems incapable of dealing with the structure of the film. He erroneously identifies three levels in *Dust*. Setting aside the fact that neither *Dust* nor Manchevski have ever stated anything that could remotely be interpreted as anti-Islamic, one is tempted to use the twisted logic Schulz-Ojala employs and turn the argument against him. Given the fact that the German racist war against the people of South East Europe in both world wars was conducted with the help of Islamic troops, one would have to ask Schulz-Ojala whether this has anything to do with his support for Islam. Schulz-Ojala's approach could also be interpreted as paradigmatic for the position of some German intellectuals who have often denounced criticism of Islam as "Islamophobic" and continue to play down antidemocratic, anti-Semitic and misogynistic traits of Islam for the sake of political correctness.

The challenging aesthetics debate that *Dust* calls for is avoided by the critics in Venice: politics seems an easy excuse not to have to deal with the challenging film. In this worldview, even cinematic virtuosity is dismissible: Referring to the article, Urs Jenny wrote in *Der Spiegel*: "Measured against this, his film – imagining a past in which good and evil still seemed clearly distinguishable from one another – is overwhelmingly naive. It is pure – and even in the wildest slaughter, highly virtuoso – cinematic spectacle. [...] Manchevski has great – and also very literary – ambitions, but he is most convincing in his successful resurrection of the Spaghetti Western in Macedonian costume."<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, Walker's assertion and the controversy are central in most Venice reports in the global media, from Spain to Brazil, from the UK to the Balkans.

The reports and reviews aggressively relate *Dust* to the current political situation. This is only possible by limiting the scrutiny of the film to its Macedonian elements. The New York story – half of the film – is ignored in many reports; this in turn means that the concept of the two interlocking stories and reflection on the two-way effect the story and the listener have on one another is missing from the reporters' consideration. The director's political views are used to (miss)interpret the film, even though they are nowhere to be found in *Dust*. The critics are not inclined to accept a film that refuses to make a political statement on contemporary events in a non-Western region. The creation of narrative space in the Wild East, which turns not only a piece of Macedonian, but also of European history into an epic film, is seen by the critics as politically suspect, culturally unacceptable and artistically misguided. By observing the film through such a lens, the critics miss the opportunity to seriously consider *Dust* as an ambitious and challenging contribution to a new European Cinema.

Variety prints "*Dust Busts*" on the front page. Commentators like Alessandro Baricco, the best-selling Italian author, who launches a spirited defence of the film, stressing its innovative nature, remain exceptions in Venice. "I like *Dust*. It is an open work with everything and its opposite; it combines

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19 Roulette der Gewalt, Augenausstechen als Leitmotiv, *Spiegel online* September 5th, 2001.

linguistic fragments and archetypes to create a product so unpolished that the Americans would have shot it down in flames. [...] The critics are not prepared for films and books like these. It would be like going to the mountains in a bathing suit and being surprised by the cold, like seeing a locomotive for the first time and saying 'Where are the horses?' It's lucky that the public is more intuitive about works like this than the critics", says Baricco.<sup>20</sup>

Domenico Procacci<sup>21</sup>, the Italian producer of *Dust*, is not alone in saying that the hostile attitude of the press towards the film had already been adopted **before** the film was shown at the afternoon press previews on the 28th and 29th of August.

Years later, the Bulgarian-English scholar Dina Iordanova writes a longer piece about *Dust*, postulating that the poor Venice reception was a result of Manchevski's opinion piece in *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *The Guardian*. She argues that the opinion piece had invited critics to interpret the film along political lines. She even hints that Manchevski planned to publish the text at the time of the festival to secure publicity for the film. Given the fact that *Dust* was the opening film of the festival, it doesn't seem the film needed additional publicity.

More importantly, Iordanova's piece contains serious inaccuracies: she claims that even though the Macedonian financial contribution was small, it brought the film industry in the country to a complete standstill for two years. This is the opposite of what actually happened (the official report of the Macedonian Ministry of Culture for 1999-2000 lists eleven features and fourteen documentaries financed during the period – this significant rise in addition to the positive effects that big co-productions had on the small Macedonian film industry). Even though a reporter in Macedonia pointed out the inaccuracies to Iordanova before she submitted the piece, she still tried to publish the text with erroneous information. This makes one wonder whether this is more than just a case of innocent factual errors.

In 2007, Iordanova continues with the troubling and inaccurate accusations of racial politics in *Dust*, while placing it in the broader context of „Balkan Cinema“, a term she has been employing for years in her academic writings – yet a term that does not serve any analytic purposes here, while feeding the prejudices about „the region“ and ignoring the individual narratives of each individual film and ignoring the fact that they come from different cultures and have been made under different political and historical circumstances: „Turks were assigned the role of the archetypal bad guys in the region's literature and cinema [...] Thus, scenes of cruel Turks impaling fair-haired Slavic rebels have been a frequent feature in Balkan cinema. A few examples of such fare are the Yugoslav *Banovic Strahinja* (1983), the Greek *1922* (1986), the Bulgarian *Time of Violence* (1988) and the Macedonian *Dust* (2001).“

Like with *Before the Rain*, Iordanova misreads *Dust*, tearing out of context what suits her thesis, while ignoring the rich tissue of the film's narrative – for example, the fact that in *Dust* the violence is perpetrated by anyone who carries a gun: American, Macedonian, Albanian, Greek, Turkish, and that the depiction of the „Turks“ (actually Ottomans) in the film is far more nuanced than Iordanova wants us to believe it is<sup>22</sup>.

On the other hand, Svetlana Slapsak suggests that the creation of its own stereotypes, countless ironic quotes from other Westerns in *Dust* and the creation of its own narrative space for the „Wild East“ are the main reasons the film has been rejected by critics in the West. „The West does not like to see its culture turned upside-down, so that all the stitches can be seen, all the strategies of colonial manipulation. That is exactly what Manchevski did in his movie. [...] The main aim of the colonizing

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20 Quoted from Vizzavi.it, Speciale Venezia 2001

21 Procacci in the panel discussion about *Dust*, cf. [www.veneziafilmfestival.com](http://www.veneziafilmfestival.com), Meeting Domenico Procacci and Alessandro Baricco, September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

22 Dina Iordanova, in: *Whose is the memory? Hushed narratives and discerning remembrance in Balkan Cinema*, in: *Cineaste*; Vol. 32 No. 3, Summer 2007, p.22.

Die Stimmung ist nicht besser als die Lage: Das 58. Filmfestival von Venedig wird von Italiens Regierung gemieden und präsentiert zur Eröffnung mit Milcho Manchevskis „Dust“ einen veritablen Propagandafilm

## Krieg an allen Fronten

VON JAN SCHULZ-OJALA

Macht Ministerpräsident Berlusconi, der eine starke Mann Italiens, der Biennale in Venedig und damit der international prominentesten Kulturinstitution des Landes leinhardt den Garau? So harsch kann man es - noch - nicht sagen. Die Stimmung unter den Machern zu Beginn des 58. Filmfestivals am Lido, seltsam wartend und unruhig, lässt allerdings Schlimmes befürchten für die Zukunft der traditionsreichen, künstlerisch-offenen und politisch im Zweifel eher linken Mostra, die sich erst vor vier Jahren mit einem neuen Statut mehr Autonomie gegenüber den mächtigen staatlichen Feindrindern erkämpft hatte. Und wenn es aus schlecht kommt, ist dies das letzte Festival unter der Leitung des renommierten Alberto Barbera. Der hatte es seit einem Amtsantritt vor zwei Jahren binnen kurzer Zeit geschafft, Risiko- und Reiz in der Programmierung, kommunikativ-atmosphärischen Pragmatismus und ein geradezu deutsches Organisationsgenie auf das leganteste miteinander zu verbinden.

Viel diskutiertes Axiom für das neue, schlechte Klima zwischen Politik und Kunst in neuem Italien ist eine Art Affront des sich bestallten Kulturministers von Berlusconi Forza Italia, Giuliano Urbani, der sich an der Eröffnung des Filmfestivals abendete. Er war im Ausland, hieß es am Mittwoch - und das klingt so, als hätte sich während Michael Naumann bei der Biennale wegen eines Segelflugs in der Karibik entschuldigen lassen. Auch Urbani's Kollegin, die Gleichstellungs-Ministerin Stefania Prestigiacomo, fehlt am Lido, wie sich überhaupt die Regierung nur mit Honoratioren der zweiten Garie blicken lässt. Zur Schluss-Gala, wobei ich mich nicht als eingeladenen Gäste offenbar unter "Senen", wie Biennale-Chef Paolo Baratta diplomatisch sagt, wird innerhalb der Kulturminister erwartet, zusammen mit dem Staatspräsidenten Carlo Azeglio Ciampi.

Das alles mag Provokation sein - und ist doch, wie jedes Provokation zugleich und mehr als das. Denn die Statue, die die Biennale für ein jedes Preis zu bewundernde Selbstständigkeit (Barbera) sichert, kam im April nächsten Jahres zum nächsten Verfalltag zu gelte werden - und damit auch der Vertrag des alternativen Biennale-Gesells Paolo Baratta. Der sagte am Dienstag der „Repubblica“ auf die Frage, ob weitermachen wolle, er sei in seinem Leben „als Kandidat“ aufgetreten, und im Übrigen länger als „zum Atem, zum Saufen“, von Rückhalt und vom Wut, als mit dem die Politik hinter den künftigen Entscheidungen der in allen Kunstsparten tätigen Biennale sei. Bei der Pressekonferenz zum Festabschluss gestern Mittag äußerte sich Baratta unverwundbar kühl - aber dahinter mit blühender Schärfe. Sein Job sei es, dafür zu sorgen, dass „die Schiffe über“, von eigener Zukunft keine Rede. Inzwischen wird bereits gemunkelt, dass die neuen Herren Italiens auch den überlebenden Barbera nicht mehr dulden wollen, obwohl dessen Vertrag noch bis zum Herbst nächsten Jahres läuft.

Auch das Programm ist schon im Vorfeld unter Feuer genommen worden. „Antikommunist“ sei es, mit nur zwei Beiträgen im Hauptwettbewerb - ein Vorwand, den Barbera auf der Pressekonferenz mit dem Hinweis aufgriff, es seien insgesamt zwölf



BRITANNISCHE FILMREGISSEURE David Wenham und Joseph Fennel in „Dust“.

von Highlights

amerikanische Filme zu sehen. „Jauja“ auch seien die meisten Filme, habe es von Leuten, die sie nicht gar nicht gesehen haben können - Barbera kommt in einer weiteren „leichten Anmerkung“ etwas ruhiger, er habe eine „gute Wut“ aus Konfusion und Dummheit ausgewählt. Merkwürdig, merkwürdig. Was wäre denn das offenbar gewünschte: proamerikanische Gute-Laune-Kino - und, mehr noch, was hätte es auf einem Festival zu suchen? Und wieso muss sich ein Festivalbesucher überhaupt mit sich selbst einen Quoten-Hänsel beschäftigen - statt offen zu vertreten, er wolle sich dafür keine Zeit nehmen zu berücksichtigen, sondern die jeweils schönsten Filme eines Jahrgangs auswählen?

### Kunstfreiheit

Nun, bei Milcho Manchevskis Eröffnungsfilm „Dust“ ist es, um es gelinde auszudrücken, nicht leicht geworden. Mag sein, dass die Festivalmacher ihn mit einem gewissen selbstbewussten Souqan ausgewählt haben, schließlich herrscht in ihm politisch ein Dauerkrieg zwischen Willen, Gewissen und Generationen. Und geschrieben wird in „Dust“ so ausdauernd und hingehauptet wie sonst in den Filmen der politisch bedingten Biennale, wenn nicht gerade die Medien ihre Mühsal einhalten. Künstlerisch aber entsteht der zweite Film des seit Jahrzehnten in Amerika lebenden Wundkinder, der 1994 mit sei-

nem großen Epischen-Wurf „Der Regen“ des Goldenen Löwen in Venedig und später weitere 33. Filmpreise gewann, auf der ganzen Linie. Und politisch ist er nachgerade ein Skandal.

„Dust“ versucht, das Amerika von heute mit den Wundkinder von Anfang des vergangenen Jahrhunderts zusammenzusetzen - die Idee mag autobiografisch motiviert sein und ist doch thematisch kapital mislungen. Diese eine: Ein junger Schwarzer (Adrian Lester) bricht auf der Suche nach Gold in die schlichten New Yorker Wohnquartiere einer alten, arbeitslosen Dame (Rosemary Murphy) ein, wird von ihr überredet und findet mit der Raum in Schach gehalten. Diese zwei: Die Idee dringt in die Story von zwei amerikanischen Brüdern (David Wenham und Joseph Fennel) auf, die vor langer, langer Zeit, in Liebe zur gleichen Protagonisten erkrankten, gescheiterten zogen, um dort als Südländer Krieg zu führen, gegen die Türken und vor allem gegenwärtig: Diese drei: In mehreren breiten ausgesparten undlichen Schlachtfeldern treten die Türken als Barone, laute, dazwischen Tausendkinder gegen heidische, noble in ihrer Ehre und Sonnenlicht gekleidete Maestros auf - und werden föhlich, nachdem sie einige provokant grafische Verbrechen begangen haben, mehren von überlebenden Wundkinder niedergemet.

Zurück zu Ebene eine: Wie sich herausstellt, ist die Idee mitten in einem solchen Gemetzel gefahren worden. Und nicht gegen

Ende des Films. Beide den jungen Schwarzen nicht, als - zufällig gelüftet - ihre Suche heim ins amerikanische Reich zu schaffen.

Vergangene Woche hat Manchevski in der „Südtiroler Zeitung“ ebenso besonnen wie eindringlich die Note an ihre „politische Verpflichtung“ gemeldet, eben jene UCK-Abenteurer zu entwerfen, die sie selbst im Kosovo-Konflikt ausgerollt hatte - bevor diese mit eben diesem Waffenrichtig Krieg gegen Maestros führen. „Dust“ wirkt - gefährlich laut, strahlend wie und absolut humorlos - im Gewand eines Western-Epikens wie der Propagandafilm für Manchevskis These: nur verbindet in einer historischen Fiktion. Statt der altmodischen Moden genies sich hier die Gegenwart als Übermenschen, und die Maestros sind so unschuldig wie die Kinder, die im Film teilweise abgeblendet werden. Und der schwarze Junge, den die Idee des Balkan erklärt, so gesehen, ist er niemand anderes als der Westen, der im Kampf gegen den ewig semantischen blauen Gewissensfaden mit Südländern erwacht werden muss. Die Kille-Fiktion-Asthetik, mit der die Türken stetig im Bild gesetzt werden, hat - und das ist der Skandal - es war durchaus (Neo-)Fischerisches. Was hat das Festival gemieden, diesen Film zur Eröffnung zu programmieren? Das satirische Vergehen, zumindest des ganz rechten Freundes Berlusconi eine Freude zu machen, kann es doch nicht sein.

culture is to make an object of perception and research out of the colonized culture, and certainly not to question the place, the subject, or the authority in explaining.”<sup>23</sup>

**Much of the Western perception of the creative position of a director from the „Balkans war region“ is revealed in what an art historian said to the author about *Dust*: aesthetically an extremely successful piece – if only the director had not related his story to Macedonian history. Manchevski’s „mapping of Macedonia“ in the real and imaginative sense of the word, was virtually censored by the critics in Venice, pointing to the European problem with „the region“.**

At Venice<sup>24</sup> and in later interviews Manchevski emphasizes that the idea and script for *Dust* were developed over several years – and that he is not interested in making blunt political statements with his films. Still, the timing of the film’s opening leaves him caught in an historical trap. Even at the red carpet Venice gala opening, broadcast live on Italian TV, Manchevski is asked what he thinks of the current NATO peacekeeping mission in Macedonia.<sup>25</sup> Manchevski answers that he is glad that those who armed the guerrillas will now collect their weapons. A number of Italian critics write about the opening film in the current context of the Italian soldiers in Macedonia. In his festival review, the critic Tullio Kezich says: “Today, Macedonia, with the conflict that tears it apart on the border of Albania, is a true European tragedy, one that involves – among others – 738 Italian soldiers, for whose fate we shiver.”<sup>26</sup>

The Turkish<sup>27</sup> ambassador to Macedonia – who visited the set of *Dust* in the summer of 2000 to communicate his concern with the portrayal of Turkey in a film that has not been made yet (and which did not deal with the state of Turkey) – must have been pleased with the results of Walker’s accusations, with the tone of the “racism” discussion and with the ultimate fate of *Dust*. He complains to the Macedonian government about *Dust* while the film is in pre-production. One can only guess how he had learned about the content of the film. Is he complaining on the basis of the word of mouth in Macedonia about the big European production? Did he have access to the script and if yes, who had given it to him?

These questions remain unanswered until today, and it will take more than a decade for *Dust* to be shown in Turkey, at the Izmir International Film Festival in 2012, in spite of the fact that Manchevski’s follow-up to *Before the Rain* which was film of the year in Turkey was highly anticipated there. When it screened in Turkey again two years later, it was announced thus: “Rare and perhaps the only example of a work that combines Ottomans and Cowboys. With a highly original narrative – a film not to be missed.”

As for the audience – *Dust* never made it to the cinemas in most countries. Based on a small sample one could assume the film would have been appreciated by audiences worldwide. The journalist Maria Pia Fusco, in a public discussion on *Dust* with Alessandro Baricco and the Italian co-producer, Domenico Procacci: “It is a film that in its almost total negative criticism can be credited with uniting the right, the left and the centre. But it has to be said that though the press screening ended with applause

23 Luke Balkanwalker Shoots Down Corto Maltese: Milcho Manchevski’s *Dust* as an Answer to Western Cultural Colonialism, in: *Identities*, Journal for Politics, Gender and Culture, vol. 1, no.3, 2002, p.97.

24 cf. e.g. Rüdiger Suchsland’s interview with the director in *Tagesspiegel* online of September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

25 Operation Essential Harvest (or Task Force Harvest) was a deployment mission in the Republic of Macedonia by NATO, officially launched on August 22<sup>th</sup>, 2001 and effectively started on August 27<sup>th</sup>. Because national contributions were larger than expected, the force ultimately grew to approximately 4800 troops. See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation\\_Essential\\_Harvest](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Essential_Harvest)

26 Kezich, Tullio: *Dust*, un brutto western, *Corriere della Sera* (August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2001). For the quote see: <http://www.corriere.it/speciali/festivalvenezia2001/kezich3008.shtml> (April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2015).

27 Turkish Government interference in film projects goes back to at least the 1930s when the Turkish government successfully fought for decades the MGM attempts to film Franz Werfel’s masterpiece *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* in Hollywood. Werfel’s book deals with the Armenian genocide during World War I. See: Welky, David: *Global Hollywood versus National Pride. The Battle to Film The Forty days of Musa Dagh*, in: *Film Quarterly*, 2006, Vol. 59, p.35-43. Welky also refers to recent attempts by the Turkish Government and paramilitary groups to block the international distribution of Atom Egoyan’s *Ararat* (2002), a film that also deals with the Armenian Genocide, p. 35f. A more recent example is the reaction to Fatih Akin’s *Cut* (2014). The introduction to his interview for France 24 states: “Even though [Akin] was insulted and received death threats for making *The Cut*, the director ‘did not get any trouble’ from the government and describes a ‘live and let live’ response from the authorities.”



## Kebab-Western aus Mazedonien

Filmfestspiele Venedig: Der Eröffnungsfilm "Dust" von Milcho Manchevski und die Globalisierung des Kinos

Von Hanns-Georg Rodek

Wer am Sonntag um 17 Uhr noch nichts festes vorhat, dem sei ein Abstecher nach Venedig zum Filmfestival empfohlen. Im Casino auf dem Lido ist eine Diskussion angesetzt, die spannend zu werden verspricht. Titel: "Eine andere Welt ist möglich". Teilnehmer: Regisseure, die beim G8-Gipfel in Genua dabei waren.

Dies sind die ersten Festspiele nach Genua, die ersten nach der Wahl Silvio Berlusconi zum Ministerpräsidenten, und die Jury leitet Nanni Moretti, der in Cannes gewann und zeitgleich seinen Kreuzzug gegen Berlusconi verlor. Es wäre voreilig, die 58. Biennale zum politischen Festival zu erklären, aber wenn sich die Globalisierung des Kinos exemplarisch demonstrieren lässt, dann im Autorenkino; auch wenn sich kaum ein Filmemacher findet, der an dem "G"-Wort ein gutes Haar lässt.

Bald die Hälfte der Filme ist nicht mehr eindeutig einem Entstehungsland zuzuordnen; Benoit Jacquot's "Tosca"-Verfilmung firmiert als französisch-italienisch-deutsch-britische Koproduktion, Ken Loach's "Navigators" segelt unter deutsch-englisch-spanischer Flagge. Der Grund liegt darin, dass sich Autorenfilmer ihre Finanzierung zusammenstückeln müssen, wo sie sie bekommen.

Die Internationalisierung der Venedig-Filme geht aber noch tiefer. Der Serbe Goran Paskaljevic bedient sich in "How Harry Became Tree" eines alten chinesischen Märchens - im Albtraum verwandelt sich ein Mann in einen Baum, aus dessen Holz ein Sarg gezimmert werden soll - und siedelt es in Irland an. Die Britin Clare Peploe (verheiratet mit Italiens Bernardo Bertolucci) hat für "Triumph der Liebe" die im alten Sparta angesiedelte Komödie des Franzosen Marivaux in die Toscana verpflanzt. Und der Brasilianer Walter Salles transponiert mit "Gebrochener April" eine albanische Erzählung nach Südamerika.

Schon der Eröffnungsfilm hätte welt-, zeit- und kulturumspannender nicht sein können. "Dust" umgreift 100 Jahre, hüpft von Amerikas wildem Westen in Mazedoniens wilden Osten und bringt balkanische Guerillas unter einen Hut mit New Yorker Gangstern und Sigmund Freud (höchstpersönlich).

Milcho Manchevski's zweiter Film nach "Before the Rain" (der 1994 in Venedig gewann) lieferte eine Eröffnung, wie man sie bei den großen Festivals geraume Zeit nicht erlebt hatte: ein Wagnis, ästhetisch, formal und inhaltlich. Daran ist im Einzelnen eine Menge auszusetzen, aber wir sind jüngst von so viel Auf-Nummer-Sicher-Gehem eingeschlafert worden, dass

Manchevski allein für die große Geste Beifall gebührt.

Der kühne Entwurf des 42 Jahre alten Mazedoniens (der in den letzten Tagen die Nato-Aktion in seiner Heimat als pro-albanisch kritisiert hat) nimmt seinen Ausgang zur Jahrhundertwende im Wilden Westen Amerikas. Zwei Brüder lieben dieselbe Frau, die sich für einen entscheidet. Der Verlierer bricht zu neuen Ufern auf, nur, dass die nicht - wie gewohnt - weiter westlich liegen, sondern im alten Europa. In Paris lenkt das junge Kino sein Leben in neue Bahnen. Als er in die Wochenschau erfährt, dass auf den Kopf des Führers der mazedonischen Rebellen gegen die osmanische Herrschaft eine hohe Belohnung ausgesetzt ist, eilt er auf den Balkan: Go East, young Man. Mit Schießseisen umzugehen weiß er ja.

Luke (David Wenham) unternimmt im Grunde dieselbe Reise, die 60 Jahre nach ihm der frustrierte Clint Eastwood angetreten hat - von der neuen in die alte Welt. Sobald Luke im Osten ankommt, funktioniert das wie ein Italo-, besser gesagt, wie ein Kebab-Western. Die Anspielungen sind Hollywood, der Stil ist Cinecittà und der Geist Srebrenica. Luke steht eine Belagerung durch wie John Wayne in "The Alamo", sein Bruder Elijah (Joseph Fiennes), der ihn verfolgt, wandelt im Poncho durch Gebirge und schnippt Münzen in die Luft wie Eastwood, und der türkische Major (Salaetin Bilal) rotet mal gerne ein ethnisch unbequemes Dorf aus wie General Mladic.

Für sich allein ergäbe das eine begrenzt reizvolle Parabel über Entwicklungshilfe: Wie amerikanische Experten in Kriegsführung einen eher schläfrigen Balkankonflikt aufpeppen. Manchevski jedoch fügt ein drittes Element hinzu, das seinem "Dust" in Ansätzen "Es war einmal in Amerika"-Qualität verleiht: Der Film erzählt aus der Sicht einer alten Frau, die im New York des Jahres 2001 einen Einbrecher stellt und ihn mit vorgehaltener Pistole zwingt, ihre Lebensgeschichte anzuhören. Darin liegen Qualität und Achillesferse von "Dust". Die Zeitdimension erhebt das Drama vom Individuellen zum Exemplarischen, nur leider ist das Entstehen des unwahrscheinlichen Bandes zwischen weißer Greisin und schwarzem Kleinkriminellen unglaublich geschrieben und gespielt.

"Dust" wird als ehrgeiziger Versuch in Erinnerung bleiben, der amerikanisch dominierten Globalisierung eine europa-zentrierte entgegensetzen. Manchevski belegt das uramerikanischste aller Filmgenres mit Beschlag, schickt seine Hauptfiguren zweimal hinüber in die alte Welt und verpasst seinen Amerikanern europäische Biografien. Auch eine andere Film-Welt außerhalb Hollywoods ist möglich. Wäre sie nur gleich gut inszeniert.

and whistles, the public in the main theatre (Sala Grande) received it very well.”<sup>28</sup> Some distributors cancelled the plans to show the film, while others cut down on and changed their release plans. *Dust* never really recovered from Venice 2001 and was hardly distributed theatrically afterwards though it was enjoying very good presales. In addition to the co-producing countries (Great Britain, Macedonia, Italy and Germany), *Dust* was presold to most of Latin America, Spain, Poland, and Japan before it premiered. The global success of *Before the Rain* made Manchevski’s second film a desirable commodity. But after the Venice ambush, it was difficult to sell the film. France cancelled the purchase, Spain renegotiated its deal, Britain and Italy scaled down the release plans. The UK Producer Chris Auty – who also ran The Works, the distribution and sales company that was handling *Dust* – didn’t capitalize on the controversy. Even though *Dust* later developed a cult following on the internet, it had a very limited theatrical distribution in Europe. It opened in Poland six years later, in 2007.

None of the reviews of *Dust* published after Venice (when the film was released in a number of territories), nor the reactions to the numerous festival and retrospective screenings of the film, deal with politics. Instead they deal with the aesthetic and artistic achievements of the film.

It opened in Macedonia immediately after the Venice fiasco. The battering the film received at the hands of the western critics did not affect how the film was perceived at home (if one indeed considers Macedonia to be home for *Dust*). Even Manchevski’s harshest critics gave it good reviews. It broke many box-office records in Macedonia. The number of academic papers on *Dust* in Macedonia surpasses even the number of papers written about *Before the Rain*. The film was called “the Macedonian Guernica” in the local press and it remains the favorite of all Manchevski films to many home viewers. In 2004, *Dust* was the subject of an academic conference (Re)inventing Collective Identities at the Leipzig University<sup>29</sup>. It was also part of a film series on the Balkans at Kunsthalle Fridericianum in Kassel in 2003/2004 and is part of teaching curricula at numerous universities.

#### EPILOGUE:

Scandal and controversy are nothing unusual at major film festivals. It is, however, difficult to escape the feeling of unfairness and viciousness permeating many of the articles written about *Dust* from Venice 2001. Some baselessly insist that the director is trying to put across a crude political message, even propaganda. Some contain defamatory attacks – including unfounded and outrageous accusations of racism – attacks without parallel in the recent history of film journalism. Many of the arguments were not based on an analysis of the film; instead they were based on the critics’ reading of a current political situation and of Manchevski’s public statements unrelated to the film. Manchevski’s ambitious experiment with narrative structure and his complete and intricate tapestry of visual, aural, narrative and character elements was ignored.

People interviewed for this text often spoke of the curse of the second film, when talking about the reception of *Dust* in Venice. Opening Venice might have been the wrong choice, they noted; the audiences might have expected something lighter. *Moulin Rouge* was the opening film in Cannes that year.<sup>30</sup> Still, it seems that the curse of the second film had more to do with the perception than with the actual second

28 Quoted from Vizzavi.it, Speciale Venezia 2001

29 (Re)inventing Collective Identities – an interdisciplinary conference on the film *Dust* was organized by the Philosophy Department and the Art and Communication Project, at the Leipzig University, January 15-17th, 2004. Here are the titles of some of the papers on *Dust* presented: *The Kinesthetic of Dust – The End of Drama* by Prof. Andrija Dimitrijević; *The Living and the Dead – Masternarrative, Narrative Frames and Collective Identity in Dust* by Beatrice Kobow; *Mental Maps. Constructions of Identity in Space and Time* by Dr. Claudia Weber; *The Wild West of the Balkans* by Prof. Stilian Yotov;

30 Director Mira Nair won the Golden Lion with *Monsoon Wedding* that year and declared upon receiving the prize: “This one is for India, my beloved India, my continuing inspiration.” Would anybody consider Nair responsible for the continuing high-risk nuclear power politics of the Indian government? For the quote see: [www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/film-and-tv/news/first-woman-to-win-golden-lion-668799.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/film-and-tv/news/first-woman-to-win-golden-lion-668799.html)? (September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008)

film. While doing research for this text, the author spoke with a critic who had written about the film. He stated that today he wouldn't write anymore that *Dust* was a nationalistic film, and that he had surely done Manchevski wrong.

Manchevski refused to answer Alexander Walker's accusation at the press conference in Venice 2001 that he had made a racist film and had a political agenda in *Dust*. He felt that a biased and charged question like that didn't deserve an answer. However, he takes up the question later. When *Dust* is released in the UK in 2002 (the initial plans were changed and it is shown on only three screens in London), The Guardian asks Manchevski to comment on the critical reception of the film in Venice. Even though the piece wasn't published<sup>31</sup>, it gives insight into the position of the director concerning the political reception of *Dust*. He talks about this in several further interviews<sup>32</sup>. "How do you defend yourself against an accusation that you are a racist? Are you implicitly accepting the accusation as soon as you have started answering it? [...] Why is it so difficult to see a film that draws on non-geographic human experiences, including film genres? Racism? How to tell a critic: No sir, you're wrong. This film is not trying to satisfy your ethnocentric curiosity nor is it trying to confirm your understanding of 'the other'? This film is ethno-blind and color-blind. It's about people. You are the ones who see Albanians, Turks, Macedonians, Slobovians, where I see good guys and bad guys rolled into complex characters. In this film all men with guns are bad guys, regardless of ethnicity, but can you see that from London or Berlin? Are you the one requiring a person's ethnic DNA before deciding if s/he is a good guy or a bad guy? Do you project your own fears, prejudices and bigotry upon me, as the 'savage' other? How does one protect a work of art (as Mike Figgis would say) from the tabloid power of a critic? More importantly, how does one protect it from his/her ethnocentric PROJECTION? Where have you gone, Pauline Kael?"

Upon the US premiere in 2003, Manchevski said in an interview that he did not take the Venice reviews at face value: "In Europe, politics substitutes for gossip. I guess Macedonia was the bad guy at the time. And I think there was hostility (to the film), which had nothing to do with politics. The way the film plays with structure is in your face."<sup>33</sup>

Manchevski also said he had no intention of making a straight genre film: "They read the fact that *Dust* on purpose goes against expectations as a failure to fit in within their expectations. If you're making a living quickly analyzing and putting a film into categories, then it's probably going to rub you the wrong way. If it pisses off a lot of petite bourgeois, the gatekeepers, then great."<sup>34</sup>

"Mainstream narrative cinema is all about expectations, and really low expectations, to that. We have become used to expecting very little from the films we see, not only in terms of stories, but more importantly and less obviously in terms of the mood and the feeling we get from the film. I think we know what kind of a mood and feeling we're going to be immersed in before we even start watching a film. We know it from the poster, from the title, the stars, and it has become essential in our decision-making and judging process. I believe it's really selling ourselves way too short. I like films that surprise me. I like films that surprise me especially *after* they have started. I like a film that goes one place and then takes you for a loop, then takes you somewhere else, and keeps taking you to other places both emotionally and story-wise... keeps changing the mood, shifts the process, becomes fearless."<sup>35</sup>

31 In the end the editors at the Guardian thought the piece, titled *Projection Protection*, too specialised in the context of the limited release and asked him for a more general approach in the text. Manchevski declined.

32 E.g. Kujundzhiski, Zarko: *Macedonian Rashomon. Interview with Milcho Manchevski, Film Director*, in: Shine, 26, May/June 2002. Brown, Keith: *Independence: Art & Activism/ A conversation with Milcho Manchevski*.

33 Feinstein, Howard: *Epic and Personal in New York and Macedonia*; Milcho Manchevski's "Dust", [www.indiewire.com](http://www.indiewire.com) For the quote see: August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2003 [http://www.indiewire.com/article/epic\\_and\\_personal\\_in\\_new\\_york\\_and\\_macedonia\\_milcho\\_manchevskis\\_dust](http://www.indiewire.com/article/epic_and_personal_in_new_york_and_macedonia_milcho_manchevskis_dust) (February 4, 2015)

34 *Ibid.*

35 Raskin, *On Unhappy Endings*.



"A puzzle. After watching the film, the viewer needs to put together the pieces of the mosaic and to try to understand it. Not without effort. The present and the past constantly intertwine in one story which is rightly defined as **Cubist**. Like a Braque painting, actually."

(*L'eco di Bergamo*)

"Passion, hatred, greed, cruelty, blood, destiny, repentance in the Balkans. **Ambitious and fascinating**, sometimes great, sometimes rhetorical, compelling but sometimes slow, violent but with touches of virtue, the film by Milcho Manchevski is a Balkan Western, a **fine example of imperfection to love**."

(*La Repubblica*)

"This extraordinary TransContinental, TransCentennial epic plays like a cross between a savage Leone Spaghetti Western and an **arthouse experiment in temporal narrative structure**. [...] The clever ending keeps you guessing right up to the last. By juggling past and present in what might be described as a cubist mosaic editing style, the whole grapples at some length with the meaning or futility of human existence begging questions long after viewing. Director Milcho Manchevski is a real original and *Dust* (a Feta Western?) unlike any other film you'll see this year. Besides, where else can you see a frail old lady bloodily knock a young male burglar for sin?"

(4 stars out of 5; *Jeremi Clark, What's On In London*)

"[Features] a brooding central performance from Joseph Fiennes, and is **superbly eccentric** on most levels. [...] The conflation of Sam Peckinpah's Wild West aesthetic with the chaos of Eastern Europe is often **startling to watch**." (*The Independent Review*)

"Manchevski has a rare **visual intelligence**, whether filming the face of a dying woman or Times Square's reflection in a windshield."

(*Village Voice*)

"Part tragedy, part farce, quirky melodrama and buddy flick; ***Dust* is a very strange film**... It does make sense, but

you have to be wide awake to catch it... *Dust* is flawed, but it has a certain appeal. Although at times disjointed and incoherent the film embodies a kind of outlandish ambitiousness that would make David Lean proud."

(*James Gorman*)

"*Dust* is a twist of the standard western scenario but retains the heroic, desert-choked essence of the genre."

(*Australian video review*)

"The chaotic, brutal iconography of Italian Westerns is put to novel use in this time-traveling, self-referential, hugely ambitious story... The Macedonian sequences are

**breathtaking**, unfolding against

a sere, desert landscape of blasted villages and bloody corpses. Manchevski has nothing less in mind than an **investigation into the nature of storytelling**, twisting and fracturing his narrative and using jarringly disjunctive images **to pull the past and present into a moebius strip of cruelty**, retribution and hope of heaven."

(*Maitland McDonagh, TV Guide*)

"**High-end surreal western**" (*stopklatka.pl*)

"In the end *Dust* is about how love can blossom even in the hardest of hearts." (*The Globe and Mail*) "Milcho Manchevski's stylized western, *Dust* is a **potent, assured and ambitious piece of filmmaking**... Mr. Manchevski suavely shuffles his various narratives, sometimes smoothly presenting the juxtaposed tales and on other occasions cutting violently from one story to another. The literal violence -- gun battles and punches detonating all over both stories and leaving a spray of intentional confusion -- is staged with bracing clarity... Mr. Manchevski demonstrates his gifts as a visual stylist and a filmmaker in command of the technical aspect of the medium. The constant onslaught of information -- sounds and pictures -- quiets down, and by the end everything makes sense, to the extent that it needs to. (He even uses howls of despair and pain as transitions.) The scenes that act as triggers to propel us into the dual stories work amazingly well... There's enough culture clash that *Dust* doesn't need the equivalent of a Zen koan."

(*Elvis Mitchell, The New York Times*)





"*Dust* is an anachronistic and iconoclastic crosscultural "baklava Western" that explores what happens when West meets East in the violent history of the Balkans... In both features, Manchevski uses diverse characters and a fragmented narrative structure to create a mosaic in which **the details of history are subjective, contradictory, and illusory**, and recollections are repeatedly altered to suit the desires of the storytellers or the narrative structures of the stories that they want to tell. In *Dust*, Manchevski carries this approach to **abstract and surreal dimensions**... The filmmaker also plays with the authority of documentary photography; in *Dust*, photos are records of a past which, as the stories unfold, we realize might never have happened. **The photographs are only as true as the tales in which they reside**... But perhaps *Dust* is most significantly a film about Manchevski's **love for the act of storytelling, which passionately endures despite violence and loss.**"  
(Roderick Coover, *Film Quarterly*)

"Gloriously uneven, **deliriously delightful film**... Yet these frustrations with the story make the film fascinating rather than distracting. Manchevski seems so confident in his storytelling abilities that we trust him even when we don't understand him. There is never a dull or belabored moment here – every scene advances whatever metaphorical point Manchevski is making, and it does so with **out-standing visuals and terrific, subtle performances** from the four leads. At 124 minutes, the film seems shorter than it is, because it moves so quickly and captivates us so totally."  
(*Film as Art: Daniel Griffin's Guide to Cinema*, 3 ½ out of 4 stars)



\*In 2004, *Dust* is the subject of an academic conference (Re)inventing Collective Identities at the Leipzig University.  
*The Kinesthetic of Dust – The End of Drama* by Prof. Andrija Dimitrijevič;  
*The Living and the Dead – Masternarrative, Narrative Frames and Collective Identity in Dust* by Beatrice Kobow;  
*Mental Maps. Constructions of Identity in Space and Time* by Dr. Claudia Weber;  
*The Wild West of the Balkans* by Prof. Stilian Yotov;  
*Collective Identity - or: Who Are We?* by Prof. Georg Meggle  
*Dust - on Politics, War and Film* by Dr. Iris Kronauer  
*A Shootist for VMRO - a Double Redemption and a Sin* by PD Nikolaos Psarros  
*When A Story Hides the Story - Dust as a Form of Collective Rorschach Test* by Erik Tängerstad  
*De(constructing) Balkanism in the Film Dust by Milcho Manchevski* by Prof. Despina Angelovska  
*Balkans as a History of Violence?* by Prof. Wolfgang Höpken  
*(Re)Staging of the Real - Painting and Film* by Ulrike Kremeier



## Dust

\*\*\*1/2 out of \*\*\*\*

Milcho Manchevski's *Dust* is a gloriously uneven, deliriously delightful film about the emergence of the Old West mentality into contemporary times. At least, I think that's what it's about: It is so convoluted and choppy that it doesn't even pretend to make a lick of sense, but then, neither did the West itself, a place where men were driven by the untamed spirit of the land to do inexplicable, brutal things to one another. Manchevski, no stranger to intricate storylines (his brilliant *Before the Rain* was hailed as the European *Pulp Fiction* for its multiple, interwoven continuities), has created one here so elaborately visionary that it is nearly too much for him to contain, but his stirring visuals and brilliant juxtaposition of conflicting images enables him to keep up with himself.

The film tells three intersecting stories from two distinctly different eras. On the outer ring, we have Edge (Adrian Lester), a small-time burglar living in present-day Manhattan who robs the home of 93-year old Angela (Rosemary Murphy) in hope that he will find enough money to pay back debts he owes the mob. Things take an interesting turn when Angela turns out to be more feisty and resourceful than the average elderly woman: She promptly breaks Edge's nose and holds him at gunpoint. At this point, she forces him to listen to the story of her life, and she keeps him interested by promising a fortune of gold if he sticks around for the tale's end. This is enough incentive to keep around anyone who owes the mob money; it helps that Edge is really a decent fellow who has been forced into crime against his will. Throughout the film, a mother-son relationship will develop between Edge and Angela; he maintains that he only wants the gold, but he makes a series of critical choices throughout that reveal his growing affection for the woman.

Angela's story concerns American gunslinger Luke (David Wenham), an archetypal cowboy living during the turn of the twentieth century. Most of the film occupies his tale. To Luke's chagrin, he has survived the Old West, watched civilization tame it, and now restlessly searches the earth to find a place that matches the feral, frontier spirit that shaped his identity. After a few fleeting scenes that establish him as a deadly force of nature, Luke (who is not without self-deprecating humor—he carries a six-shooter with the words "The Gospel According to Luke" inscribed on its handle) finds what he is looking for in the Republic of Macedonia, where he casts his lot with Turkish rebels who battle the Christian government. He is pursued by his younger brother Elijah (Joseph Fiennes), a religious fanatic who has joined the Ottoman government and has an unspoken grudge with his brother. Throughout the course of the film, the brothers will meet and nearly kill each other several times, suggesting that there is bad blood between them that helped perpetuate Luke's flight from America.

Eventually, we get that story too, in another flashback arch about the brothers, when they were younger and living in the American West. Manchevski cleverly sets these scenes apart from the Macedonian sequences by shooting them in black and white; otherwise, it would be difficult to tell exactly when these scenes take place, and where (we've known since the *Spaghetti Western* that the West and the East are remarkably similar scenically). It is only these moments that develop Luke and Elijah as three-dimensional characters and establish exactly why they are fighting on different sides in the Ottoman rebellion. These scenes are fleeting, but they are also crucial because they clearly outline the brothers' hatred for one another. I won't give much away here, but let's just say that in the spirit of the great Western archetypes, there's a woman involved.

I leave it to you to see how all of these various threads from different eras all tie together, but Manchevski (who also wrote the screenplay) weaves through the labyrinth in a way that is always compelling, even if it doesn't make much sense. Most characterizations are so vague that viewers will have to fill in the gaps; the San Francisco sequences seem like they belong to an entirely different movie, and the chief scenes in Macedonia never take the time to develop persuasive characters or motives from the supporting cast. The heart of the picture lies in the black-and-white sequences, which essentially boil the century-

long tale down to the anger felt between the two brothers, which, even nearly one hundred years later and across two continents, still resonates with pain and betrayal as it leaks onto Angela and Edge's storyline. But the film takes a long, articulate road to the revelations found in these flashbacks; it suggests far more than it reveals before it finally unites all the plot threads, and even then, we're not sure exactly how they all fit.

Yet these frustrations with the story make the film fascinating rather than distracting. I think this is because Manchevski seems so confident in his storytelling abilities that we trust him even when we don't understand him. There is never a dull or belabored moment here—every scene advances whatever metaphorical point Manchevski is making, and it does so with outstanding visuals and terrific, subtle performances from the four leads (the two brothers in the past, Edge and Angela in the present).

What is the point? I think the clue is found in Manchevski's juxtaposition of images and sounds from various eras and cultures. They often run together, and it's absorbing (and surprising) how smugly they blend. An example: During a decisive showdown between Luke and Elijah, the two struggle and shoot at one another until they find themselves in a stalemate—they stand inches apart with their guns literally pushed into each other's faces. The scene proceeds as any such western showdown would, with pensive, twitching close-ups as each brother silently deliberates his next move. But then, out of nowhere, the soundtrack turns into angry, explicit gangsta rap, which adds entirely new dimensions to the proceedings. The rhythm of the contemporary music is stunningly appropriate in this ancient setting, and as we watch this paradox work itself out in front of us, Manchevski jumps back to the present, to reveal that it is music coming from outside the window where Edge and Angela chat. Edge shuts the window and laments, "I hate that music!"

But the ultimate punch-line isn't the crucial factor here. What's curious is Manchevski's revelation that the rap music works seamlessly in the Western context. For as much as Luke feels he must travel the earth to find another place as untamed as the Old West, Manchevski's fusion of old and new reveals that America is still as untamed and as frigid as it ever was. Folk songs have simply been replaced with rap, and gunslinger outlaws are now desperate burglars from the hood. The beat is different, of course, but the song has always remained the same.

But Manchevski's theme isn't so one-noted that I can sum it up with one example. Though Luke is sparse, he is an increasingly complex character the more he moves about the Ottoman Empire and encounters various villagers and soldiers. For that matter, so are Elijah and Edge, who emit with decency even as they descend farther into revenge and greed, respectively. Both timelines feature a hunt for gold and acts of unspeakable violence to other human beings, and yes, there is the inevitable Western showdown where guns blaze and the soundtrack soars. But Manchevski cushions these moments with sincere and moving acts of decency from these hard-boiled characters. He doesn't stop to wonder why they periodically make the right choices, but I don't think he has to: His point is that for all of our depravity and selfishness, even the worst of men can be compelled to do the right thing simply for the sake of humanity. The film eventually reaches a point when all three men must make critical choices; on one hand, they can preserve themselves, on the other, they can put themselves in danger to help someone else. You might be surprised to see which character chooses which option, and the actors are never anything less than convincing as their characters shift and deviate.

At 124 minutes, the film seems shorter than it is, because it moves so quickly and captivates us so totally. It helps that it is gorgeous to look at, with Barry Ackroyd's stark cinematography constantly reminding us that this is western, despite its various global settings. As a Macedonian himself, Manchevski must have seen a strong connection between the barbaric wars of his country and the struggles against civilization in the Old West. That Luke and Elijah, two decidedly Western characters, fit so well in this Eastern struggle confirms the director's theory, and even as Manchevski delivers a strong cultural sense of his own country's revolution, the archetypes and images grounded in the Western maintain its sense of familiarity for American viewers. Never does the film seem foreign or its characters displaced. In Manchevski's universe, the Wild West spans all time and space.

The final scene is likely to cause a mess of a headache for anyone who tries to take it literally. It suggests that every plot point we've thus far seen in the various narratives is utterly pointless, except as one gigantic metaphor pointing to the theme that it represents. After two viewings of *Dust*, I still can't quite figure out how much of what we see is real, or if it really all a delusion. But if it is a delusion, whose is it, and what does this mean for the characters with whom we have spent the last two hours? Manchevski doesn't say, and this is likely to outrage some viewers who feel like the film has been wasting their time. I personally found it quite compelling, but you've been warned.





و یسندگاران همکار







## Cinema: le recensioni

Il secondo film di Manchevski, primi piani alla Sergio Leone tanta polvere e omaggi all'esotismo di Hugo Pratt

## Dust, lungo racconto tra New York e Balcani

di ROBERTO NEPOTI

La storia di Dust si articola su due piani temporali. New York, oggi. Un ladro ricattato da poliziotti corrotti ascolta il racconto di un'anziana signora, Angela, che nasconde un tesoro e si dichiara pronta a consegnarglielo in cambio della sua attenzione. Il Far West americano, cent'anni fa. Attraverso la narrazione della vecchia seguiamo le avventure di due fratelli perdutamente innamorati della stessa donna, Lilith. Luke il maggiore (David Wenham), fugge in Europa e finisce in Macedonia dove partecipa da mercenario alle sanguinose lotte per bande tra macedoni e turchi. Ci arriva anche Elijah (Ralph Fiennes), deciso a riscrivere a modo proprio la storia di Caino e Abele.



Una scena del film.

Vincitore del Leone d'oro '94 con il suo film d'esordio, "Prima della pioggia", il macedone Milcho Manchevski ha aspettato sette anni per realizzare il secondo. Forse un intervallo troppo lungo, con troppo tempo speso a pensarci su: perché Dust contiene tutto e il contrario di tutto, traversa il tempo e lo spazio, sintetizzandolo come un dipinto cubista, è nuovo e vecchio al tempo stesso.

Insomma è un mezzo pasticcio: costellato di momenti visivamente potenti, però un mezzo pasticcio. Nella parte newyorkese il regista adotta fotografia e stile da actioner metropolitano, con un montaggio concitato e un bel ritmo. Gli episodi al passato, invece, regrediscono ai tempi dello spaghetti-western; ma uno spaghetti-western diretto da Kusturica, con primi piani alla Leone e truculenze degne di Giulio Questi, che qualcuno ricorderà (Manchevski di sicuro). Mentre trapelano sporadici omaggi all'esotismo di Hugo Pratt, inclusa un'ironica comparsata di Corto Maltese, Dust si abbandona a espedienti da vecchio metacinema, come il ritocco delle inquadrature con sparizione a vista dei personaggi. Poi la polvere torna alla polvere e il film viene archiviato, tra molte perplessità.



**L'INTERVISTA**  
di Roberto Nepoti  
L'artista macedone Milcho Manchevski, vincitore del Leone d'oro 1994 con "Prima della pioggia", ci racconta la sua esperienza nel cinema e la sua visione del mondo.

## «Dust», paesaggio di violenza Il film fuori concorso ha inaugurato la mostra



**«Io, un cinico che si conserva ottimista»**  
Manchevski presenta la sua opera ambiziosa, divisa tra America e Macedonia

Il regista macedone Milcho Manchevski, vincitore del Leone d'oro 1994 con "Prima della pioggia", ci racconta la sua esperienza nel cinema e la sua visione del mondo. Il film "Dust" è un'opera ambiziosa, divisa tra America e Macedonia, che esplora temi di violenza e identità. Manchevski presenta la sua opera ambiziosa, divisa tra America e Macedonia, che esplora temi di violenza e identità.

When Milos Forman persuaded Joseph Fiennes to star in his movie in the Balkans, nobody mentioned forest fires, dysentery, mud shoes, a plague of mosquitoes or the nearby war. **Finch** **Gibson** reports from the set of the 'western western' Doc

## 'COME ON. IT'LL BE FUN'

J

When Milos Forman persuaded Joseph Fiennes to star in his movie in the Balkans, nobody mentioned forest fires, dysentery, mud shoes, a plague of mosquitoes or the nearby war. **Finch** **Gibson** reports from the set of the 'western western' Doc



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PRIME CINC USA

ENERGICO «DUT», DEL MACEDONE MANCHEVSKI

La vecchia narra  
una storia feroce

### Lighting Requirements

[illegible]

Milcho Manchevski, il quarantasettenne regista macedone già autore del premiato *Crima della pioggia*, nato in Macedonia ed emigrato negli Stati Uniti, torna così anche di tornare insieme al Paese d'origine e il Nuovo Mondo. Il passato e il presente, le brutture violente permeano negli stampatori macedoni basculanti e nella criminalità contemporanea. L'ufficio dei malviventi e la spionaggio, assassinio, il corrotto

da turchi irascibili che a volte trasformano gli spionti arabi in testardi burocratici; il film non rinuncia a piene di forza, vince di eleganza e di musica raffinata, diventa una meraviglia.

[illegible]

Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, 1994). The curriculum is a

## Matematica, amori e sottomarini

Un «Enigma» in Inghilterra, nella seconda guerra mondiale

[illegible]

prodotta dalla casa cinematografica di Mick Jagger, la Jagged Film, è scritta da Tom Stoppard, il drammaturgo inglese che era così bravo, a tratti del comico di Richard Harris, un bene attore d'occasione del 1980 che ha venduto in ventotto Paesi oltre un milione di copie.

il protagonista è ispirato. Alas Turing, uomo di primi crederi del computer, già poliziotto e anticomunista che si unisce a quarantasei suoi compagni di una sola parola (il luogo della sua intimità è un muro rosso appunto di quella sua storia primordiale).

**Dr Michael Ayres**  
can: Douglas Scott, Kate Windsor  
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SPECIAL CINE MANIA

**VIAGGIO IN MACEDONIA SUL SET DI JUST,  
IL WESTERN DI MILCHO MANCHEWSKI**



## Due cowboy nel Far East

A sei anni da *Prima della pioggia*, e dopo una trasferta parimenti hollywoodiana, il regista macedone dirige un epico dramma di amore e violenza. Con Joseph Fiennes e David Wenham

#### 4. **2004a** *Wardlaw* *How to Write for Kids*

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Abstract

2000

### Abstract

**Keywords:** child sexual abuse; disclosure; self-blame

**Abstract**

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Figure 1

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## RECENSIONI

## Dust

Presentato all'apertura del Festival di Venezia dello scorso anno, il nuovo film di Milcho Manchevski ha suscitato moltissime polemiche e pochissimi consensi. Un "errore di valutazione" come ha confessato il produttore Domenico Procacci, sebbene era difficile per chiunque immaginare quello che sarebbe accaduto nei Balcani proprio in quella caldissima fine agosto, né tanto meno prevedere le aspettative "politiche" che "Dust" ha poi creato. Ma come tentò di sottolineare in conferenza stampa il regista macedone, allora come oggi il film non ha mai voluto sollevare alcuna riflessione o inclinazione politica.

Attraverso la sua narrazione fluttuante tra spazio e tempo di un racconto in un racconto, Mančevski ricrea con straordinario estro l'epopea di un Est selvaggio, la rivoluzione macedone dei primi del '900, che tanto somiglia a quella messicana e in cui uomini con grandi ideali di libertà, cavalcavano e uccidevano senza sosta. Un selvaggio Est che sembra il riflesso proprio di quel selvaggio West da dove partono i due eroi, Luke ed Elijah, fratelli in costante lotta tra loro e perdutamente innamorati della stessa donna, che finirà con lo sposare Elijah.

Nessun altro genere cinematografico riesce a creare immagini tanto forti e quasi mitologiche come il western.



## Elm 模型

[illegible]

ダスト

[illegible]

ミルチヨ・マンチエフスキー監督  
7年を経た待望の第2作「ダスト

"DUST"  
TO DUST, ASH TO ASH



## The New York Times

August 22, 2003

MOVIE REVIEW | 'DUST'

### Gunfight at the Old Macedonian Corral

By ELVIS MITCHELL

**M**ilcho Manchevski's stylized western, *"Dust,"* is a potent, assured and ambitious piece of filmmaking brought down by weighted dialogue and, playing Americans, the British actors Adrian Lester and Joseph Fiennes and the Australian David Wenham. This dazzling and dazed movie begins on the streets of contemporary New York, as a camera moseys down a street and then crawls up the side of a building, peering into several windows as various apartment dwellers play out their lives. It's as if Mr. Manchevski were thumbing through a selection of stories as we watch, deciding which appeal to him the most.

He and *"Dust"* settle on a darkened room that Edge (Mr. Lester) has just broken into. He's prowling the apparently empty place for valuables, casting around and finding nothing but old photographs, some of which seem to date to the beginning of the 20th century. He is surprised in his dirty work by the place's elderly inhabitant, Angela (Rosemary Murphy). He hits her, but before he can escape, she whips out a large antique — but still functional — six-shooter and proceeds to prattle on about her life. Her tale, unfolding in black-and-white, is the story of two brothers, the lusty outlaw Luke (Mr. Wenham) and the virtuous, religious Elijah (Mr. Fiennes).

Their story starts in the Old West, with a fight over a prostitute (Anne Brochet), whom they both love and Elijah marries. The resulting envy and bitterness send Luke fleeing to Macedonia. After seeing a silent film about the region and its lawlessness — an external turmoil obviously meant to mirror his own inner conflicts — and a bandit known as Teacher (Vlado Jovanoski) with a huge price on his head, Luke also decides it's a place to make his fortune.

Mr. Manchevski suavely shuffles his various narratives, sometimes smoothly presenting the juxtaposed tales and on other occasions cutting violently from one story to another. The literal violence — gun battles and punches detonating all over both stories and leaving a spray of intentional confusion — is staged with bracing clarity.

When Luke arrives in Macedonia, the screen is deluged with hot, bright desert colors that are oddly soothing to him given the foreign locale. The director signals that he is as unreliable a narrator as Angela because communicating emotion is more important than relaying facts in *"Dust."* He wants to convey the sense of being torn, which both Luke and Edge feel. Edge is hustling for money because a pair of thugs he owes are slowly — and happily — breaking parts of his skeleton piece by piece until they're repaid.

Mr. Manchevski demonstrates his gifts as a visual stylist and a filmmaker in command of the technical aspect of the medium. The constant onslaught of information — sounds and pictures — quiets down, and by the end everything makes sense, to the extent that it needs to. (He even uses howls of despair and pain as transitions.) The scenes that act as triggers to propel us into the dual stories work amazingly well.

*"Dust,"* which opens today in New York and Los Angeles, almost has the feel of a spaghetti western made by Bryan Singer, who demonstrated the same superlative skills of legerdemain in *"The Usual Suspects,"* in which the point was also to keep the audience off guard and consistently move the balance of power among the protagonists.

But Mr. Singer recognized that the best way to such mastery of craft was in a plot that didn't seek to make emotional demands; his film was essentially an urban legend told over a campfire, with pieces added for spice just when the audience thought it knew where the film was headed.

Mr. Manchevski employed a similar splintered-storytelling approach to insinuate the plot of his ingeniously realized *"Before the Rain,"* in which the slivers of apparently haphazardly scattered plot all came together. (In that film the Godardian cubist style was buttressed by titles that acted as chapter headings.)

*"Dust"* takes this ghost story approach while simultaneously trying to limn a film rife with dovetailing displays of devices like parallels and metaphor, trying to use all these elements to explicate character. Both Luke and Edge undergo a series of tests, obstacles they must conquer to understand what they are, and are not.

Luke's baptism of faith comes in his time with Neda (Nikolina Kujaca), a pregnant peasant angel in Macedonia, and his attention to her is eventually tangled with another skirmish between Teacher's forces and his opponents. The scale is almost as biblical as the Scripture quoted by the underwritten, and overaccented Elijah. Mr. Wenham rises to the challenges of material that requires his growth to come in a profusion of stages.

Edge's trial pushes him to overcome selfishness, but the presence of Angela in his life is also a parallel. It is overly convenient, and such an underexplained mystery that it never makes any sense. There's enough culture clash that *"Dust"* doesn't need the equivalent of a Zen koan.



## COW BOY MODERNO

Un film ambientato in diverse location dal West all'Est Europa di fine secolo

**Appariva così la sfilata di Cerruti 1881** presentata lunedì a Milano nell'ambito della settimana della moda. In effetti dalla casa di moda hanno spiegato che la collezione è stata realizzata proprio pensando a una pellicola proiettata a diverse velocità e dal film "**Dust**" di **Milcho Manchevski** è stato ripreso il concept di una collezione che ha fuso passato e presente. I protagonisti della sfilata sono stati tanto eroi buoni - vestiti di tonalità spezziate - che personaggi cattivi - con addosso colori neutri e color sabbia. Gli abiti, disegnati da Adrian Smith, sono stati presentati tanto nella versione modellata, che nei volumi più ampi e comodi. E per il giorno anche pantaloni da pistolero del Western ripensati in tessuti moderni e colorati e magari abbinati a giacche eleganti e maglie da cow boy. A dominare la scena tanto blu notte, ma anche colori come il tamarindo, l'arancione bruciato ed il nocciola. A partire

dalla collezione del prossimo anno tutto sarà firmato Cerruti 1881. Le diverse linee saranno invece tra loro contraddistinte da un'etichetta nera con un diverso tratto colorato (grigio, cobalto o arancio per la prima linea per quella a diffusione e quella sportwear).

"Il restyling del marchio - hanno spiegato dalla casa di moda - è un vero e proprio ritorno all'essenza dei valori di casa Cerruti racchiusi e rappresentati da una cifra 1881".

A margine della sfilata l'amministratore delegato del gruppo Fin.Part, che controlla la casa di moda, Gianluigi Facchini, ha dichiarato che la finanziaria sta puntando sempre più a focalizzarsi sul rilancio di Cerruti e di Pepper. La holding ha invece trattative in corso per dismettere le calzature (dopo che venerdì scorso è stata annunciata la cessione di Maska) e per realizzare una scissione della controllata Frette.



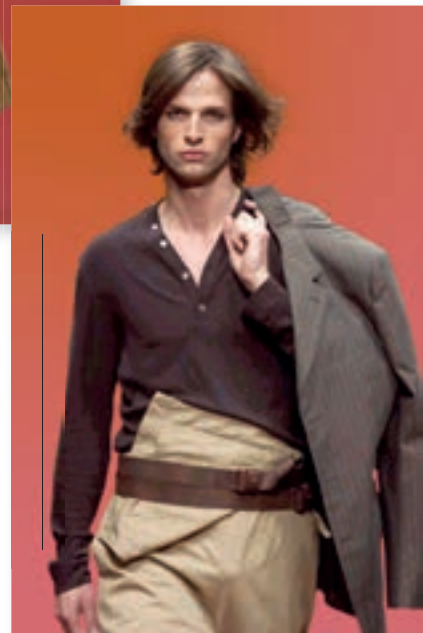
Cowboys ride again in a bad world

By Matthew Temple

Published: May 21 2004 17:58

Though John Wayne dismissed Westerns as fashion vehicles - "You can wear a blue shirt, or, if you're down in Monument Valley, you can wear a yellow shirt" - the catwalk embraces the genre, albeit more Butch Cassidy than Rooster Cogburn. Or even, in the case of **Cerruti**, the Balkan Western **Dust** by **Milcho Manchevski**, who chronicled a demythologised Wild West: "The good were good and the bad very bad. No *Hamlets* there." The film is "more metropolitan and intellectual", says

Cerruti 1881's Pier Davoli, themes reflected in the collection. Elegant-rugged Sundance suits, gunslinger coats and holster-like man bags all in dusty colours evoke *High Noon* meets high style. But Davoli insists Cerruti's cowboy wears the "form and colour of the Wild West without being tied to the traditional concepts portrayed in American movies". His hero isn't Wayne; it's Clint Eastwood, *il mascalzone* (the scoundrel): "A symbol of life without fear."







**Il cinema da maccheronico: «La Nato due anni fa ha fallito ma ora dobbiamo avere fiducia»**

**S**uoi studi cinematografici sono stati da sempre, fino al recente fallimento, un punto di riferimento per i giovani. Il regista di «La Nato» è stato il primo a fare il regista. E ora, dopo il fallimento, si è dato un'occhiata indietro e si è detto: «La Nato ha fallito ma ora dobbiamo avere fiducia». Il regista di «La Nato» è stato il primo a fare il regista. E ora, dopo il fallimento, si è dato un'occhiata indietro e si è detto: «La Nato ha fallito ma ora dobbiamo avere fiducia».



**Intervista** Parla Milko Manchevski. Il suo «Dust» ha aperto ieri sera la rassegna

# «Viviamo nel West»

Il cinema di Milko Manchevski è stato definito «il cinema del futuro». E ora, dopo il fallimento, si è dato un'occhiata indietro e si è detto: «La Nato ha fallito ma ora dobbiamo avere fiducia».

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**REC** In «Dust» il regista ha voluto strafare. Troppa violenza gratuita

## Una storia esagerata

**N**el film Principale di Milko Manchevski, il regista ha voluto strafare. Troppa violenza gratuita. Il cinema di Milko Manchevski è stato definito «il cinema del futuro». E ora, dopo il fallimento, si è dato un'occhiata indietro e si è detto: «La Nato ha fallito ma ora dobbiamo avere fiducia».

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[stoplatka.pl](#)

## Surrealistyczny western wysokiej klasy

Reżyser Milko Manchevski okazał się ułudziowym żonglerem – z wielką wprawą żonglując tutaj konwencjami, stylami i gatunkami filmowymi. Z tego iscie cyrkowego popisu powstała produkcja, która w wyjątkowy sposób absorbuje widza, przedstawiając mu złożony świat surrealistycznych wizji miesających się z rzeczywistością.

„Proch i pył” opowiada dwie, przenikające się historie. Akcja jednej toczy się współcześnie, natomiast drugiej przenosi nas do początków XX wieku. Rabuś inieniem Edge, okradający właśnie dom samotnej staruszki, zostaje przez nią wzięty na zakładnika i zmuszony do wysłuchania pewnej opowieści. W tym momencie reżyser zmienia scenę i z Nowego Yorku przenosi widza na Dzikie Wschód do Macedonii – zaczyna się historia dwóch braci, którzy mimo, iż się kochają, w pewnym momencie stają się śmiertelnymi wrogami. Luke jako najemnik stara się uciec od przeszłości, natomiast uduchowiony Elijah ściga brata, aby dokonać na nim zemsty.

Możecie mi wierzyć, że jest to jedynie uproszczony zarys fabuły trwającej nieco ponad dwie godziny sensu, w ciągu którego publiczności prezentowany jest spektakl przemocy, zwrotów akcji i surrealistycznych wizji. Rytm filmu jest bardzo nierówny – reżyser przedstawia widzowi wysokiej jakości sceny walk, aby zaraz zwinąć tempo i delikatnie wpłynąć na wody kina kontemplacyjnego. Manchevski postarał się jednak, aby żaden ze stylów prowadzenia narracji nie dominował, zachowując przystępną dla publiczności równowagę. To, co przyciąga w „Prochu i pyle”, to zauważalny dystans twórców, do ukazywanych wydarzeń. Wiele scen miejscami ocierających się o kiczowatość, traktowanych jest z przymrużeniem oka, co pozwoliło zaimportować do obrazu nieco ironicznego, zabawnego humoru, który najwyraźniej daje o sobie znać we fragmentach rozgrywających się we współczesnym Nowym Jorku.

„Proch i pył” nie byłby filmem godnym polecenia, gdyby nie uniejętny montaż, którego efekty widoczne na ekranie kina wręcz olśniewają. Momenty płynnego przenikania się elementów świata realnego i wymyślanego niezwykle dobrze się ogląda, zwłaszcza, że często mają humorystyczne zabarwienie. Jest jednak jedna rzecz, która może wpłynąć na niekorzystny odbiór tej produkcji – wspomniany wcześniej czas trwania sensu. Dla widzów, do których specyficzny styl filmu Manchevskiego nie przemówi, obraz może się wydać męczący i przudugi.

Nie zmienia to jednak faktu, że zwolennicy niekonwencjonalnej twórczości będą się na „Prochu i pyle” świetnie bawić, zwłaszcza, że oferuje on nie tylko wiele atrakcji wizualnych, ale także i bardzo dobre aktorstwo, przekonująco zbudowane i nieowesternowy klimat, którego przymiarem, że z przyjemnością zasmakowaliśmy.

Maciej Andrzej Szydłowski



## Romance woes Venice; 'Dust' busts

SEPTEMBER 4, 2003 10:30PM PT

**Adult embrace 'Wedding,' 'Mama'**

**Dave Rooney (http://variety.com/author/dave-rooney)**

VENICE — Breaking a six-year trend of Hollywood domination, the return of a European production to the Venice Film Festival's prestigious opening night slot should have been a local industry celebration.

Instead, the Aug. 29 world premiere of "Dust" provided a seriously underwhelming sendoff for the grande dame of Euro fest's 58th edition.

Demonstrating that the sophomore curse can be a powerful malediction, Milko Manchevski's return to the Lido proved a far cry from the Macedonian director's debut here in 1994 with "Before the Rain," which walked away with the Golden Lion and went on to earn an Oscar nomination for best foreign language film.

Violent reaction

The violence, brutality and misguided aims of the blood-drenched Balkan Western attracted few defenders on the Lido.

But sex, romance and family conflict had audiences applauding in two entertaining entries that unspooled during the opening days, both of which are the kind of commercial comedy-drama rarely seen in fest competitions.





## Review: 'Dust'



AUGUST 26, 2003 | 12:42PM PT

Seven years after sharing the Venice Golden Lion for his debut feature, "Before the Rain," Macedonian auteur Milcho Manchevski is back with "Dust," his highly problematic sophomore effort. Essentially a Euro Western, spectacularly lensed in Macedonia, film borrows freely and unwisely from superior predecessors in the genre, while struggling to explore interesting themes involving the personal legacy we hand down to our descendants.

## Los Angeles Times | ARTICLE COLLECTIONS

← Back to Original Article

Movies | MOVIE REVIEW

## Universality of bloodlust and excess in an unusual west

'Dust' stretches to set a visually gripping but unrealistic and overtly violent gun-slinging showdown in Macedonia.

August 22, 2003 | Kevin Thomas | Times Staff Writer

"Dust" is a bust, a big bad movie of the scope, ambition and bravura that could be made only by a talented filmmaker run amok. Macedonian-born, New York-based Milcho Manchevski, whose first film was the elegiac 1994 "Before the Rain," attempts a Middle Eastern western, a fusion suggesting the timeless universality of chronic bloodlust. It's a potent visual idea, full of darkly amusing irony but undercut by wretched excess, underdeveloped characters and a queasy mix of sentimentality and violence. Its framing story, while absolutely a stretch, is far sturdier than its flashback, in which three central figures are never more than mere ciphers. It has energy and cinematic flourishes to burn, but its savagery is so incessant that the film is ultimately merely numbing when it aims to be wrenching.

An elaborate tracking shot commences in a seedy New York street at night and climbs to the window of a small, cluttered apartment. Inside, a young burglar, Edge (Adrian Lester), is ransacking the place with little reward and increasing angry frustration when he comes upon Angela (Rosemary Murphy), an alluring, elderly woman in her bed, lying in darkness and surrounded by countless medicine bottles. Edge seriously underestimates Angela's sharpness and capacity for self-defense; the upshot is that she tempts him with allusions to a stash of gold coins to get him to listen to her spin an incredible tale.

Once the screen goes a luminous, hazy black-and-white to suggest the past, it's clear that in the flashbacks there will be no ordinary western unfolding, for "Cherry Orchard" is the least likely name for a brothel of the Old West, with nary a Madame Ranevskaya in sight -- nor a virgin for the picking, for that matter. A popular regular, the gunfighter Luke (David Wenham), brings along his Bible-quoting younger brother, Elijah (Joseph Fiennes), so that his favorite, Lilith (Anne Brochet), can initiate Elijah into manhood. So taken with Lilith is Elijah that he promptly marries her, inflaming Luke's jealousy to the extent that enmity between the brothers drives Luke to Europe, where in Paris he sees a primitive newsreel reporting the fall of the Ottoman Empire and images of Macedonia overrun by savage hordes of bounty hunters, their most lucrative target a Macedonian revolutionary leader called Teacher. Luke sets off to nab the Teacher, lunging into a torrent of bloodshed and slaughter, intensified by invading Turkish forces. For reasons of his own, Elijah pursues Luke to Macedonia for a standoff.

Manchevski cuts furiously between past and present, and the implication that Angela may be embellishing Luke's exploits could be amusing had Manchevski given Luke and Elijah any dimension or personality and not wallowed in nonstop violence. This is not to say he exaggerates the horrors of this or any subsequent Balkan uprising. That Atom Egoyan's eloquent "Ararat," which has some virtually identical images, approaches the Turkish genocide of the Armenians indirectly makes Egoyan's tactic seem all the more powerful in its effect compared with Manchevski's head-on bluntness.

That acerbic, fearless Angela could have such a potentially transforming effect on the brutal Edge seems a sentimental stretch. But the talents of Murphy, whose screen appearances are infrequent, and young Lester make Angela and Edge's relationship more persuasive than it has any reasonable right to be. (Only at the film's climax is it revealed how Angela is connected with Luke.)

Murphy is unquestionably the film's star and major character, and she is a glory even if the film is not. Had Manchevski given the same kind of substance and weight to Luke and Elijah he could have achieved a balance between past and present, a major drawback of the film along with its excessive violence. Under such circumstances there's little incentive to consider the film's allegorical implications and various allusions.

"Dust" is a great-looking film of vast scope, and cinematographer Barry Ackroyd brings it a rich texture and bold panache, which could also be said of David Munns' imaginative and detailed production design and Kiril Dzakovski's score. The passion, free-spiritedness and vision that Manchevski brings to "Dust" makes his self-indulgence all the more depressing.



# History in Dust

## An Interview with Milcho Manchevski

*Dust* (2001), Macedonian filmmaker Milcho Manchevski's second feature, is an anachronistic and iconoclastic crosscultural "baklava Western" that explores what happens when West meets East in the violent history of the Balkans. The film takes viewers on a wild ride across time and space that begins in contemporary New York City, goes back to the American Wild West, and then to the Macedonian revolution of 1903, where two American cowboys find themselves caught up in a battle between Macedonian revolutionaries, Greek and Albanian bandits, and the ruling Turkish military. *Dust* opened at the Venice Film Festival in 2001 and has since spurred essays, articles, and even a major conference. The film offers one of the first cinematic presentations of regional history from a Macedonian perspective. Incorporating the filmmaker's historical research, it paints a visceral and violent picture of how alliances between the Turkish oppressors and Greek clergy, and terrible acts committed by Albanian and Greek bandits, shaped Macedonia's history and sense of identity. The film was made independently with European funds following Manchevski's falling out with Miramax over control of the picture and, despite its Western themes and international recognition, it had difficulty finding American distribution. It was only introduced to a few American markets in 2003, when Lion's Gate purchased the U.S. distribution rights.

*Dust* is a long-awaited successor to Manchevski's Oscar-nominated debut feature, *Before the Rain* (1994), which presented a tragic set of stories about love and violence in modern Europe. In the wake of an infamous outbreak of violence in Macedonia, the segmented narrative of *Before the Rain* follows three love stories that take place in war-torn Macedonia and far away in London. In both features, Manchevski uses diverse characters and a fragmented narrative structure to create a mosaic in which the details of history are subjective, contradictory, and illusory, and recollections are repeatedly altered to suit the desires of the storytellers or the narrative structures of the stories that they want to tell. In *Dust*, Manchevski carries this approach to abstract and surreal dimensions. The histories that the characters present seem to change at whim, and the characters even insert themselves into events that would have occurred long before they were born. The surreal qualities of their stories are enhanced by dream sequences, bizarre anachronisms, faux archival recordings, and strange settings. Manchevski also combines black-and-white and color film to play with audience expectations about what is past and present. In these ways, the filmmaker intentionally undermines "a basic author-viewer contract," as Manchevski describes it, "that the film will maintain a unified tone and surface like an old-fashioned painting."

The Macedonian-born Manchevski studied film in the U.S. at the University of Southern Illinois and is now a professor in the Graduate Film Program at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. Manchevski, who has also created performance works, paintings, documentary photo exhibits, and written novels and stories, frequently draws on visual and literary models for his cinematography. In *Dust*, he moves between painterly styles, saturating some scenes in the textures and colors of dust and blood, while making other scenes sparse. The filmmaker also plays with the authority of documentary photography; in *Dust*, photos are records of a past which, as the stories unfold, we realize might never have happened. The photographs are only as true as the tales in which they reside. Audiences enter Manchevski's world of *Dust* as intruders. The film begins with a break-in:

Edge, a young criminal, searches through a dark apartment for loot, but instead finds a gun-toting old woman named Angela, whose quickness on the draw already suggests an unusual past. Holding Edge at gunpoint, Angela tells a story of two brothers, Luke and Elijah, who live in the Wild West around the time of Angela's birth. After Luke sleeps with his brother's wife, he flees to Macedonia (then under the rule of the Turks as a part of the Ottoman Empire), where he becomes a bounty hunter and pursues a revolutionary warrior known as "The Teacher." Elijah pursues Luke. Arriving in 1903 Europe at the end of the cowboy era, they are characters caught out of time.

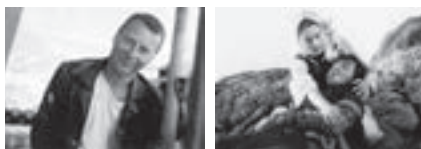
Despite his faithfulness to his research, Manchevski says he is more concerned with how differing versions of the same past are constructed (and what they tell us about the individuals caught in such moments of conflict) than with any particular historical or political overview. He questions the nature of cinematic evidence: "Once I set the film where I set it, I felt it was my responsibility to portray the times and the human elements—behavior, language, costume, relationships, attitudes, body language—with as much accuracy as possible, since, for better or worse, film is way too often taken as a record of the times. Sort of the way paintings and frescos were treated hundreds of years ago—people thought, if we see it painted here, it must've happened. So, the paintings were used to tell a lot of lies."

Manchevski mixes old photos, film clips from the silent era, and faux historical clips he has created, to show how history is an anachronistic product of the imagination. In one scene, Luke unknowingly steps between a movie projector and the screen to become a spectacle of the fading world of the Wild West from which he comes, and in another scene, he reappears almost 50 years after his death to haunt his aging brother. Viewers soon discover that Angela is an unreliable narrator who will place herself in scenes occurring before she is even born. Her subjectivity helps draw into question the value of archival evidence in judging the past. Historical referents are continually mixed, remixed, and altered in the act of storytelling: events are comically and tragically exaggerated, and at times even retold with entirely different endings.

By way of Angela's tale-telling and through the adventures of two American gunslingers, Manchevski offers a distinctly Macedonian perspective of Balkan history. Viewers enter into what Manchevski represents as a heroic (if also tragic) period in Macedonia's struggle for independence, violently quashed by the Turkish, Greek, and Albanian players in the region. Their violence is widespread and indiscriminate. The groups of bandits and bounty hunters seem to attack each other as much as the guerrilla fighters they are meant to be pursuing, resulting in, literally, a bloody mess. This violence is equaled only by the fighting between the Turkish soldiers and the revolutionary warriors; the Turkish responses to guerrilla attacks are ruthless. Manchevski shows the Greek complicity with the brutal practices of the Turks; an Orthodox priest even accompanies the Turkish major during one of the film's most violent scenes. Meanwhile, only one negative image of "The Teacher" moderates the Macedonian's otherwise heroic image, and the other Macedonians are shown as noble but powerless. Yet out of this free-for-all come unexpected discoveries as the protagonists make choices about how to survive and what to fight for; mercenary ambitions are challenged by acts of brutal violence, courage, and love.

Roderick Coover

## History in Dust



Left: the filmmaker; Right: Nikola Radev and Dan Western in *Dust*.

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In the frame story, Angela becomes a kind of mother figure for Edge, just as she is also mother to the story. When her health falters, Edge cares for her, and eventually adopts her story as his own, carrying it forward to a new generation. *Dust* is a story about brotherly love, in this case of love gone wrong, corrupted by Luke's ultimately tragic act of having sex with his brother's wife. In Macedonia, *Dust* also becomes a story about selfless love, and about societal or patriotic love. But perhaps *Dust* is most significantly a film about Manchevski's love for the act of storytelling, which passionately endures despite violence and loss.

RODERICK COOVER: *Dust* is a film about storytelling and history that takes place in worlds not usually thought of together—contemporary New York City, the American Wild West, and the Macedonian revolution. What did you learn from the contrasts between those different worlds?

MILCHO MANCHEVSKI: Contrast is good. It's good for drama, and good for art. I learned that there is more in common than you would think, and this is probably the result of our need to create little or big clichés, since life seems to be easier to explain away that way. In addition, in *Dust* I was aiming for a story which incorporates the structure of the story itself as a crucial element of the story.

On paper, Macedonia under Ottoman rule and the Wild West sounded like an outrageous combination, but when I started doing the research and then filming, the two places felt like they could go together. The original inspiration came when I saw there were common elements in the iconography of the Macedonian revolution at the turn of the century that are visually similar to that of the Wild West and of the Mexican revolutionaries and bandits, with their long beards, bandoliers, and white horses. It is as if they all shopped in the same boutique. The warriors seemed to draw on many of the same ideals of a warrior code, at least visually.

I discovered things that seemed surreal when seen through the eyes of somebody who frequently watches Western movies, things like the fact that Billy the Kid was from Brooklyn, the fact that cowboys and Indians rarely fought because by the time the cowboys came into being there weren't many Indians left in the area—Texas and Oklahoma—or the fact that General Custer was one of the worst students ever to attend West Point.

In doing research, I also discovered that there were actually Americans coming to Macedonia. The American writer Albert Sonnichsen, who had previously been in the war in the Philippines (like an earlier and lesser-known John Reed), fought in the Macedonian revolution for a period of six months and returned to San Francisco to write a book about it called *Confessions of a Macedonian Bandit*. He even carried a camera with him, and traded processing chemicals with the leader of the rebels. Sonnichsen (or a nastier version of him) could be the prototype for Luke, had not Luke been written before I found out about him. Reality did its best to support this piece of fiction. Contemporary New York felt like the right third side of the triangle—it is equally different from each of the two. On a more personal level, all three are integral parts of who I am.

What happens as the story of a battle between brothers in the Wild West is told in the East, in Macedonia? The only difference is the fact that both brothers are away from home. When you are in a familiar environment it is softer. There in Macedonia, the brothers' conflict became harsher. Placing the archetypes in new contexts means questioning them as elements in how you tell a story. They can become richer, or they can deflate. It is sort of like a Robert Rauschenberg print: a piece of it could be found-art and another piece made from a photograph, some of it is an actual brushstroke, but what really matters is what these pieces tell you as a whole—when you step back—rather than what they tell you on their own.

However, I think all films are about people and not about the grand ideas underpinning the films. This became a film about a very old woman, almost 100 years old, telling a story—and we don't know how much of it she is making up—about a thief who is, in a way, us (the listener), about two brothers in the Wild West who travel to Macedonia, about an immigrant prostitute, about a revolutionary, and about his pregnant wife. *Dust* is about the thirst to hear stories and, more importantly, to tell stories. We seem to learn a great deal about how to behave from the stories we hear in life.

Edge is us, the viewer. He is also the character who changes the most. In the process of storytelling, Angela becomes the mother to Edge and to the narrative. She doesn't have any children, but the story is hers. She

adopts the thief as if to pass her story on in the few days she has left. In both *Dust* and *Before The Rain*, the women are the strong characters despite the male posturing and guns. The women support the infrastructure of what is going on. Just as in life. Edge is the listener of the story who then takes it on as his own. The story is a virus, I guess. You give it to someone else and change it in the process. Edge is us.

At first Edge shows ambivalence to the past Angela talks about. His ambivalence seems to reflect that of the audience, who must learn the value of history.

There is incredible resistance to hearing history today. I don't know whether it was that way 100 years ago. But today history is almost a dirty word. Somehow anything older than the moment now is not interesting, is not cool, is not sweet. It goes with being more selfish, less embarrassed. I find that sad. Research is so much fun and at the same time it can be really dirty, perverse, unexpected, and yet somehow true. It can confirm what Tolstoy said: "History would be a great thing, if it were only true."

In *Dust* there are different approaches to storytelling, including the use of surrealistic images, movements across history, and seeming anachronisms. At one point an airplane flies over the gunslingers, at another Freud appears as a side character.

We cannot ignore the knowledge of new movements in art, pretending as if film is just technology. We can stay stuck in pseudo-realism, but then we cheat ourselves out of great possibilities. However, part of what we see in *Dust*, which seems surreal, is actually historical. Time has compressed itself, and it's only our perception of time that tries to separate the past into different drawers and files. The end of the Ottoman Empire still seems like the Middle Ages, we think the Wild West is the nineteenth century, the airplanes are twentieth century, and Freud, well, he's almost twenty-first century... but they all exist at about the same time. 1903 was the year of the first flight of the Wright brothers, it was when the Macedonian revolution against the Ottoman Empire happened, the time that the Wild West was just becoming history. That's the year that *The Great Train Robbery* was filmed. It is only a couple years after the Spanish-American War in Cuba, yet only four years before the first Cubist painting and only five or six years before Freud came to visit America. So, all of this was happening at the same time.

It is just our perception of history that these events belong to different worlds—it is as if we have a need to turn things into clichés. Having said this, there is the additional compression of time because Angela, the storyteller, is a contemporary of the twentieth century; she was born at the beginning of the century, and she is nearing death at the end of it. There is also a little scene which takes place in 1945, just after the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima.

Film is ideal to play with time—on the most physical level you can convert time into space. One second of time becomes 24 frames—which is a length of space. Whenever you edit, you shuffle it in order to create the illusion of continuous time. In *Dust* I explored that basic effect, but while keeping it still playful and easy to watch. Because when I go see films I would like to think there is a silent contract between the viewer and the filmmaker by which the filmmaker is not going to be too overbearing and I as a viewer am going to have fun while we go on this strange ride.

Is there also a political reason why you found it interesting or important to mix genres the way that you did?

The delineation of different cultures in our heads is very often only prejudice and racism. People are very similar and they behave in similar ways—it is only our fear and ignorance that speaks of "French this" and "Japanese that" and "Macedonian that." So in trying to confront and crash several genres, several places, and several times, I was hoping to awaken the critical eye in the beholder to the possibilities of trans-cultural similarities and prejudices in reading human behavior and art.

More importantly, I was also trying to work with a synthesis of what we've learned in storytelling so far. Perhaps film never fully tried to explore the roads pointed to by James Joyce, Marcel Proust, Schönberg, or Picasso and Braque, but we cannot ignore these ideas anymore, we cannot pretend we live in the nineteenth century. Yet, that is precisely what most mainstream film today does: stuck with a retelling of a cheap version of a nineteenth-century novel.



*You show a great attention to fluids, which draws attention to the title of the film.*

Well, the film is called *Dust* because there is no Western without dust and also because it asks, "What do we leave behind when we are gone?" There is a line in the film that says, "Where does your voice go when you are no more?" So, what do we leave behind? Do we leave children? Or photographs? Or recorded moving images? Or stories? Or ashes? Dust? You will notice that the film is very dry. It is very yellow and very dusty. We used tons of dust and flour to get that look. That dryness was also a symbol of being alone, of being ashes. And, wherever there are moments of communal life or communal happiness, it happens around water—around a river or people who are washing each other. Being with someone is like being in water; it is comfortable and brings life. By contrast, if it is too dry, you die.

*Dust is a very violent film about a male world; men cause death not only to other men but also to the women they meet, which is something we saw in Before the Rain. How does this male aggression play out in Macedonia or, for that matter, in the contemporary story in the film?*

Ingmar Bergman says something like this: "Violence in film is a perfectly legitimate way of ritualizing violence in society." I like seeing good, adult action-violence in movies. Not sadistic, passive violence. There is something exhilarating about action-violence precisely because it is the movies and not real life. I am terrified of any kind of violence in real life, but putting violence in film is a way of exorcising it. The violence in *Dust* also has a very strong counterpoint in the selfless actions and love that the film also shows.

On a smaller, purely cinematic level, action-violence presents such cinematic potential because it is very kinetic. There is so much movement—and there are many aspects as to how you can portray action-violence, including what happens to the characters just before and just after. The real issue is not what, but how. I find the portrayal of violence in movies questionable when it is treated as easy. Perhaps it is a question of what you are left with at the end of a violent scene or violent film. Do you walk away with a complex feeling or a simple one?

When there is violence in a Schwarzenegger or Stallone film it is very easy and clean, which I think is problematic. People are shot, and then gone. The hero takes real pleasure in it. Unless you are shot in the brain or the heart you don't die on the spot, so what happens during those 20 seconds, or 20 minutes, or two days, while you are dying on the spot? Are you shocked? Do you cry? Do you puke? Do you curse? Do you beg for mercy? Do you get a hard-on? Do you think about the separation of church and state? What happens? When I see a guy stepping on a mine, flying through the air, then standing up and picking up his own arm with the other hand—and he's not even aware of the fact that it is his own arm he is holding—that is a different kind of thinking.

*There also seemed to be a fluid movement between the conscious and unconscious—between the seemingly natural and the surreal. After people die, their spirits live on with the other characters for a period, or a character on the edge of death might enter briefly into some other world before returning to the world of the living.*

## An Interview with Milcho Manchevski



Left: Labina Mitevska in *Before the Rain*; Right: Katrin Cartlidge and Rade Serbedzija in *Before the Rain*.



subjective, contradictory, and illusory, and recollections are repeatedly altered to suit the desires of the storytellers or the narrative structures of the stories that they want to tell. In *Dust*, Manchevski carries this approach to abstract and surreal dimensions. The histories that the characters present seem to change at whim, and the characters even insert themselves into events that would have occurred long before they were born. The surreal qualities of their stories are enhanced by dream sequences, bizarre anachronisms, faux archival recordings, and strange settings. Manchevski also combines black-and-white and color film to play with audience expectations about what is past and present. In these ways, the filmmaker intentionally undermines "a basic author-viewer contract," as Manchevski describes it, "that the film will maintain a unified tone and surface like an old-fashioned painting."

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Audiences enter Manchevski's world of *Dust* as intruders. The film begins with a break-in: Edge, a young criminal, searches through a dark apartment for loot, but instead finds a gun-toting old woman named Angela, whose quickness on the draw already suggests an unusual past. Holding Edge at gunpoint, Angela tells

Yes, it's fun to weave shadows and documents into one—again, as in a Rauschenberg print. It is the cumulative effect that counts, the overall tone, and not the elements. The jolt between different tones in the film (from a comic moment to pathos, from violent to absurd, from documentary to surreal) is more of a shock to the system, I believe, than the jolt one experiences between different genres within the same film. It is the shifts in tone, not the shifts in narrative, that dislodge us.

This is where *Dust* becomes difficult to the conservative viewer: the shifts in tone are not something mainstream and art-narrative film endorse. On the contrary, the tone is sacred. You should either laugh, or be scared, or be inspired: Don't confuse me.

Yet, because of my temperament, and perhaps because I consider film to be such a narrative thing, the free-wheeling and fluid movement

between the document and the surreal, between the subconscious and the historical, are meticulously mapped out. They should feel like music, and the process of initial creation is irrational, like when I listen to music, but the actual construction is a lot of hard building-work. . . .

At this point I feel like making a film would be worthwhile only for the process of writing. Shooting would be worth it only as observing in disguise, observing how things are and how things do, rather than creating from the outside. I am very ambivalent about making films. I am not sure it is worth the trouble. On one level there is the pragmatic pressure because film is very expensive. It takes a long time to raise the money. It's technological, and there are a lot of people and a lot of egos involved in making a film. Since it seems so easy and so glamorous, film attracts some of the worst characters, people with the morals of Medusa.

On another level, there is the issue of having to tell a story in a certain legible way with certain

types (and number) of characters and certain kinds of endings—even when you are not working in Hollywood. That's a lot of pressure on something that pretends to be a creative art. In actuality, we are all employed in the circus industry, and we pretend we are Shakespeares.

**Roderick Coover** is the author of *Cultures In Webs (East-gate)*, an interactive CD-ROM about cross-cultural film and photography. He teaches in the Department of Film and Media Arts at Temple University in Philadelphia.

*Dust* is distributed on fi video and DVD by Lion's Gate Films (<http://www.lionsgatefilms.com>) and is commonly available at major video and internet outlets. Information about the film is available at the website, <http://www.realitymacedonia.org.mk>, and on Milcho Manchevski's own website, <http://www.manchevski.com.mk>, where readers will also find excerpts of Manchevski's fiction, photography, art, and links to essays and conference papers generated by his films.

**Abstract** Macedonian filmmaker Milcho Manchevski reflects on the nature of history, story-telling, and photographic evidence in a discussion of *Before the Rain* (1994) and his latest feature, *Dust* (2001/2003), a genre-crossing "Baklava Western" that explores what happens when West meets East in the violent history of the Balkans.

# On unhappy endings, politics and storytelling.

## An interview with Milcho Manchevski

Richard Raskin

Milcho Manchevski has to date written and directed two feature films: *Before the Rain* (1994), which won thirty awards at international festivals, including Best Film in Venice, Independent Spirit, an Oscar nomination, and a place in The New York Times' book *Best 1,000 Films Ever Made*; and *Dust* (2001), still unreleased. He has also made over fifty short films of various kinds (experimental films, documentaries, music videos, commercials), and has won awards for best experimental film (for "1.72" at the Belgrade Alternative Festival), best MTV and Billboard video (for Arrested Development's "Tennessee," which also made Rolling Stone magazine's list of 100 best videos ever). He is the author of a conceptualist book of fiction, *The Ghost Of My Mother*, and a book of photographs, *Street* (accompanying an exhibition), as well as other fiction and essays published in *New American Writing*, *La Repubblica*, *Corriere della Sera*, *Sineast*, etc. Born in Macedonia, he now lives in New York City where he teaches directing at the Tisch School of the Arts at NYU.

*'d like to start by asking about unhappy endings. It may be that my entire approach to this issue is wrong, but what I am most curious about is this: how can it be that a film that ends with the main character dying can leave the viewer feeling satisfied with the ending?*

I don't know why and how that happens. But I know that it does happen. And probably it has to do with what we get out of a film as we leave the movie theater. Obviously we don't need the conventional "and they lived happily ever after" as the element that's going to leave us satisfied. I've never really thought about it specifically. It's more of an intuitive or an instinctive thing for me. When I do it, it's because it feels like this is the way a film should end.

In parenthesis, I could tell you for example that when I wrote the outline for *Before the Rain*, Kiril - the young monk - was gunned down at the end of the first act. But somehow as I started writing the script, it just didn't feel right... it's as if he wanted to live so much independently of my desire to kill him, that he just refused to die; so I let him live.

I don't know what it is. To me, it's like when you're listening to Mozart's *Requiem*. It's immensely sad and at the same time it's immensely elating. Perhaps it has to do with the pleasure one gets from a work of art.

If things in a work of art make aesthetic sense, if they click, because of how the work was made, how things flow together, how you sense the per-

son - the artist - coming through, stepping down from the paper or from the screen or from the speaker, then the audience gets pleasure out of the art regardless of the conventional understanding of the "feeling" (tragedy, happy ending) the work itself deals with. That's what makes it satisfying, rather than knowing that somebody lives happily ever after. In the end, we all die anyway. Maybe it's about those moments of happiness and creation in between.

So again: I don't have a really rational explanation of why, but I know that tragic endings do make sense. Which is not to say that I don't enjoy films with happy endings as well. The real question is: what is a happy ending? A film or a story that takes you for a very satisfying aesthetic (and thus emotional) journey is something that has more of a "happy ending" than a film that neatly resolves everything and leaves the main characters married happily ever after, but is aesthetical cowardly and conservative and not terribly creative.

*I understand that in your own writing, you deal with this in an intuitive way. But I wonder if there aren't some specific strategies that can help the viewer to accept the sense of loss when the hero dies. For example, at the end of Before the Rain, the very fact that the rain finally falls on Alex somehow frames his death in a kind of metaphor.*

If I try to *analyze* the things I've directed - and the fact that I've directed them doesn't necessarily mean

that my analyses are right - my guess would be that things that feel essential to a tragic ending are more important than the actual tragic ending itself. Things like self-sacrifice, rebirth, cleansing. So in a way, maybe what's happening in these features is that they're encapsulating the essence of sacrifice and rebirth as part of the same whole. So in that sense, you can say "They lived happily ever after" in a larger perspective.

*Another thing I noticed is that when Alex is riding on the bus to his village, and talking with a soldier, the soldier says: "What are you doing here? Don't you realize you can get your head cut off?" And Alex says, "It's high time that happened." This is a kind of foreshadowing or even acceptance on his part of what was to come.*

Well, at that point in his life, he is fairly fatalistic. And I think that as a character, Alex has probably always been fatalistic, but at the same time, very active. Fatalistic but positive. However, at this point in his life, he perceives himself as someone who's done something terribly wrong. So he's become more of a tragic fatalist. Of course, he packs it in with a sense of humor, with a joke, so you are never sure - and I don't think *he's* ever sure

P.O.V. No.16 - FILM & POLITICS

On unhappy endings, politics and storytelling.  
An interview with Milcho Manchevski

[Richard Raskin](#)



Milcho Manchevski has to date written and directed two feature films: *Before the Rain* (1994), which won thirty awards at international festivals, including Best Film in Venice, Independent Spirit, an Oscar

- how much of it is a joke and how much of it is fatalistic acceptance of life's tragic unfolding. Perhaps he's hoping that his fatalism and his acceptance of responsibility will fend off tragedy. In the same scene, we see him play with the facts, as in a sick joke. When the soldier asks him about his girlfriend, Alex says "Oh, she died in a taxi," even though we know she's alive. And we realize: oh, that's when they broke up - in a cab. That is also more like the way people really talk. You know, people don't always deliver what the audience needs them to deliver, in order for the story to advance.

*You kill off some of your main characters in Dust as well.*

Yeah, I am still the same filmmaker with the same take on things as in *Rain*, except *Dust* is more complex, and more playful. It switches gears and mocks genres. Yes, there's quite a bloodbath in the film. But mind you, not even *close* to how many people die in Shakespeare's plays. Not even a fraction. Or in the Bible, for that matter. I found this interesting thought by Bergman, who says that film is perfectly legitimate way for society to ritualize violence. Mind you - ritualize, not glorify.

*Is it OK if we move into the area of film and politics, and maybe compare Before the Rain to Dust? In Before the Rain, if I'm not mistaken, you do everything you can to show the conflict from both sides, from both points of view.*

Actually, to the detriment of the proverbial Macedonian side. If you look at the characters, the more aggressive ones are all Macedonian. As a sign of good will, because *Before the Rain* is not about sides in a war, it's about right and wrong, and love and understanding. And it's about how humans behave. But go on.

*Do I remember correctly that there is a point where Alex says "Take sides!"*

Ann says "Take sides!," "You have to take sides." And he says, "I don't want to be on any of their sides. They're all idiots."

*Now Dust portrays a very different situation, where you have the Turkish invaders opposed by the Macedonian rebels who are defending themselves, defending their own land. And there, there is clearly a taking of sides. Is this what gave rise to misunderstandings about your politics?*

All killers in *Dust*, whether Macedonian, Turkish, Greek, Albanian or American are - killers. Not particularly nice people. They are, of course, nuanced characters, since we are not in a Schwarzenegger or Stallone movie. The really good guys are the ones who *give*, and in that respect the proverbial good guys are all women - Neda, Angela, Lilith...

The very second question that I was asked at the press conference in Venice when *Dust* opened the Venice Film Festival, was - and this is pretty much a quote: You've made a racist film, because it portrays the Turkish army and Turks in a bad light. This obviously had to do with an attempt [on my part] to keep Turkey from becoming a member of the European Union. End of quote. (*Laughter.*) This is on record from a respected English journalist and reviewer. (What's next - I am going to get the US out of Iraq with my next film?? Then I'll liberate Tibet, and then solve the Palestinian issue.)

So how do you answer something as ridiculous as this? It's obviously an assassination. Do you dignify the concept of someone feeling free to slander you and to project his prejudices upon yourself, by responding to it? What do you say first? Do you debate the fact that both with my actions in my life and in my films, I have shown that I am not a racist? That I deplore racism of *any* sort (and let's not forget - neither the Holocaust nor the atom bomb were invented in the Balkans)? Do I talk about the tolerance-building effect of my films, or about the multi-ethnic make-up of the crew who worked on my films (13 nationalities on *Before the Rain*, more on *Dust*), or about girlfriends and friends of other ethnicities I've had? It's ridiculous. Actually,

it's much more than that - it's insulting, manipulative, ill-intentioned, arrogant and - racist.

Do you sue the guy for slander? Do you say: "Hey, it's not even in this film. You're misreading it." Do you say: "Actually, you have a racist past as a member of the Orange militia in Northern Ireland," as that particular critic did?

Basically, you're a sitting duck.

And then I heard - I didn't even read it - that there was an article published in Croatia, in a magazine that has distinguished itself as an ultra right-wing nationalist publication, taking me to task for not understanding the plight of the Albanians in Macedonia. I'm sure their reporter who's never been to Macedonia understands it much better from Zagreb. (*Laughter.*)

I can't really speculate as to why industry insiders chose to misrepresent *Dust*. As a matter of fact, a lot of people misrepresented *Before the Rain* as well... but in a different way.

(I have probably repeated literally hundreds of times in interviews that *Before the Rain* is not a documentary about Macedonia. It's not a documentary about what used to be Yugoslavia. And it's not a documentary at all. I wouldn't dare make a film about the wars of ex-Yugoslavia of the 1990s because it's a much more complex situation than what one film can tell you. It should be a documentary; it shouldn't be a piece of fiction, because a piece of fiction is only one person's truth and a documentary could *claim* to be more objective even though they seldom are. And finally because I wasn't even there when the war was getting under way. I thought it was obvious from the film, because it is so highly stylized that I don't think anyone who's watching it while *awake* could see it as a documentary. Just the approach to the form, to the visuals, to the landscapes, to the music, the characters and everything - and finally the structure of the story - show that it's obviously a work of fiction. Still, some people chose to see *Before the Rain* as a "60 Minutes" TV segment, a documentary on the Yugoslavia wars.

But that misrepresentation - even if it could be as damaging - it wasn't as hostile as the misrepresentation or the misreading of *Dust*.)

With *Dust*, there are a couple of things I could start thinking about out loud, and I haven't done so in public so far.

Number one: as a filmmaker, you are often put in a position to debate other peoples' perceptions of you, their projections of you and their projections *upon* you. As an object of their analysis, you can never properly discuss their motivation, their prejudice or their misreading of the text. Or their real intentions. Yet, although they are active subjects who shape, reflect or bend the launch or the very public life of a film, they themselves and their motivations are conveniently not part of the debate.

The second thing that I would like to think about out loud is that a filmmaker's or an artist's political views, a filmmaker's or an artist's life, and the works that he or she creates, are three completely separate things. And I subscribe very much to what Kurt Vonnegut said; which is, if you bring your politics into your art, you are bound to make shit. I think daily politics doesn't belong in art. The artist has other, more interesting and stronger points to make than just who's in the White House these four years and will s/he go to war. Such as how absolute power in the hands of people with corrupted spirit can cause thousands of deaths.

As far as *Dust* is concerned, it's a film about Angela and Edge, an old woman and a thief. And about Luke and Elijah, brothers from the American Wild West. And about Neda, who gives birth while dying. It is about small people caught in the big wheels of history, who are big when they love and when they give. It's about the thirst to tell stories. About the question what we leave behind: children, pictures, stories or dust. About responsibility.



ity and self-sacrifice. It's not about ethnic conflict. The conflict we see in the film is not really ethnic; it's like all wars: it's about real estate and it's about political power. As part of the continuously shifting point of view in this film, we see part of the fighting through the eyes of Neda, who has saved Luke. Of course, she is lecturing him from her angle, advocating her take on the fighting and the killing, which doesn't automatically make her right. And Luke's answer is: "Oh, I'm sure you'll be really nice to the Turks if **you** win."

We see the leader of the Macedonian rebels, the Teacher, as a ruthless murderer who kills a scared young soldier by slashing his throat. The Macedonian revolutionaries also shoot wounded soldiers. On the other hand, the Turkish army kills civilians. And they did, historically. It's really hard (not to mention unethical) to make films according to p.c. [politically correct] scenarios of how the world **should** be if you happen to be portraying events that weren't p.c. Most of history was not p.c. At the turn of the 20th century the Ottoman army would go into villages and kill civilians, even pregnant women, would burn young children alive and chop peoples' arms and heads off. That is a documented fact (and, unfortunately, this was not the only army that did this). So I don't see why it constitutes a prejudice on anyone's part if this historical truth is being mentioned or portrayed. Sounds like a chip on someone's shoulder. (Yet, focusing only on painting this or any kind of historical truth alone should not be the sole goal of a good work of art; good art deals with aesthetic interpretation of people's feelings and philosophical concepts.)

I am prepared to debate the actions of the Ottoman army in Macedonia at the turn of the 20th century, as well as the actions of various revolutionary and criminal and nationalistic and self-serving gangs. I strongly object to interpreting the portrayal of the Ottoman army in Macedonia as a metaphor for anything but the Ottoman army in Macedonia, as some respected German newspapers did (who claimed that the Ottoman army was a **metaphor** for the Albanians in Macedonia). I think that's in the eye of the beholder, and taking him to the eye doctor would provide for a fascinating look into one's psyche.

**May I ask about one thing that's not really political? The Turkish major is the most amazing character...**

Precisely! If you were a racist, why would one of your most complex characters in the film, and the most urbane and the most educated, be of the people you are trying to slander?

**Exactly! Was he modeled on a particular person?**

No, he wasn't, but he was based on research. I started with the concept that the Ottoman officers were some of the best educated people in the Empire. It had been a powerful - in many respects admirable - multi-ethnic empire, at this point nearing its sunset. The Ottoman officers were well-educated and spoke foreign languages. From the research that I did (our core bibliography consisted of 160 books and articles written at the time and about the Wild West and about Macedonia under Ottoman rule), some were trained in Germany and had strong ties with the German military. This particular character, the Major, speaks German, he speaks French, we don't know whether he speaks English or not, but he does tell Luke that he doesn't speak his "barbaric language." He makes a point of that. Because to him, this character is an illiterate punk, a bounty-hunter from this remote corner of the world (America), who's come here to try **to make a living**... by meddling in the local affairs... and all for money.

The Major has a very strong sense of duty. To him, none of this is personal. He does say: "Look, these people are fighting against my emperor. And I have to protect him. It's my duty to find them and bring them to justice." He is one of the few characters in that place who has a very strong sense of order.

But it's interesting in this context to actually get a little more analytical and look into **what** it is that makes a film reviewer be so obviously biased. Is it something **in the film** that provokes people to project their own prejudices and their own problems upon this film? Or is it something **off-screen**? Is it my attitude to the stale and corrosive film industry? Or does it have to do with the current politics of Macedonia at the time? Does it have something to do with the op-ed pieces that I published just a couple of weeks before the film came out?

**What did you say in those pieces?**

It was actually one piece, which was written for *The New York Times*, but they didn't publish it. Yet somehow, it made its way to *The Guardian*. When they published it, they changed the title and chopped off the end. And took out some other things. There is a journalist in Slovenia who published a parallel of the original article and the article that came out in *The Guardian*. Then I submitted it to a German newspaper - I think it was the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*. *Pravda* in Russia picked it up, as did the *Standaard* in Belgium. I don't know whether any of these newspapers published it in its original form or whether they changed anything, like *The Guardian*.

The gist of the argument was that NATO had a major (but not sole) responsibility for the spill-over of the Kosovo war into Macedonia, and that they had to act upon it. And that they had to protect the order and sovereignty of Macedonia. As they didn't. And at the time, I was comparing it to Cambodia or Laos or to Afghanistan, as examples of spill-over and blow-back (this was pre-9/11). A lot of the people who instigated the fighting in Macedonia in 2001, who killed soldiers, policemen and even civilians were armed and trained by NATO for the war in Kosovo.

That's what this article was about. And actually the *Standaard* in Belgium published the article and then published the response by an Albanian. It was signed "an Albanian student." A person I don't know. First of all, it was strange that they would publish such a response because I wasn't taking nationalistic sides. I was taking the side of **rule of law** versus armed intrusion. Also, in terms of media manipulation, I was raising the following issue: accepting that somebody can just pick up arms and kill police because they are allegedly fighting for language rights, is something the West doesn't accept at home, but can accept in the Balkans, because their projection of the Balkans is as an unruly bunch. There was a high-ranking NATO officer saying that every house in Macedonia has a gun. I want him to come and find the gun in my house. See, that's racist. (How would that officer feel if someone said that **every** house in Germany is anti-Semitic.)

So when there's fighting, in their minds it's not because somebody's killing policemen. It's because: "Oh, two ethnic groups are fighting." Wild tribes. But, that was not the case in Macedonia (and I hope it stays that way). As is becoming clear today because some of the people who were supposedly fighting for human rights and language rights two years ago are now on the list of human-traffickers and drug-smugglers, and some are government ministers and parliamentarians.

Let's put it this way: if somebody picked up arms to kill policemen in Miami because the killers claimed that they wanted Spanish to be spoken in the Florida senate, I believe those people would be shot or put in jail. NATO wouldn't come to mediate and take the situation to a point where those very same murderers sit in the parliament two years later, as is the case in Macedonia.

Anyway, what happened in the Belgian *Standaard* was that they took the article as though it advocated one ethnic side when it was actually advocating **the rule of law**. So they published a response by someone signed "an Albanian student," whom I didn't know. And that same person is the vice-president of the Macedonian parliament now, today, as a representative of the political party which came about with the transformation of the

Albanian militants. I'd be curious if he were a student at the time, since he seems to be in his late 40s.

So back to the really interesting question: is it something *in the film* that provokes some reviewers, particularly those with a chip on their shoulder? Or is it things *outside the film*? Was it the articles? Was it the war in Macedonia? Was it my earrings? (*Laughter.*) Was it the fact that this film opened the Venice Film Festival? Was it the fact that I pissed off so many people in the industry in the seven years between *Before the Rain* and *Dust*? (I refused to play by the industry rules, to accept unethical standards and the dictatorship of the oxymorons - creative executives - over the artist. The film industry both in Hollywood and in Europe stifles creativity and is an extension of repressive mechanisms. Censorship is so ingrained and often self-inflicted that no one even raises the issue. I felt it was my duty to fight it, and I made a lot of enemies along the way. The industry paid back by strangling the film in the crib, so the regular viewer never got a chance to see the film.) Was it my unpaid bills to *Screen International*? (*Laughter.*)

I'd be really curious because if it is something in the film itself, as a shrink friend of mine claims, that would be really something. That means there's something in the film

- whether it is the characters themselves (none good, none bad, most created from clichés/archetypes that have been inverted) or the actual relationships between the characters (stark), or the way I have treated violence and compassion and sex and self-sacrifice that has triggered such a violent outburst from many film reviewers and not nearly so from the very few regular movie-goers who got to see the film. Or, is it the fact that *Dust* subverts our expectation that a film has to have neat linear structure and - more importantly - simplified and uniform emotional template (a horror is a horror, a comedy a comedy)...? You could argue that it's not pleasant to be at the receiving end of bourgeois anger, or you could compare the level of animosity to the way some other artists have been received for their non-conformist works: *Rules of the Game*, Cubism, *The Wild Bunch*, Bunuel, Joyce, Nabokov...

I am interested in Cubist storytelling - when the artist fractures the story and puts it back together in a more complex (and, thus, more interesting) way. More importantly, when the artist keeps shifting the emotional tone of the film, bringing a narrative film closer to the experiences of modern art.

Either way, that's not something for me to judge. At least not at this date. Maybe ten years from now, when I have a perspective to the film, I'd be able to judge a little more clearly. Maybe I'll see it then and I'll decide that I'd made a bad film -- or maybe not - yet the value of the film doesn't justify the prejudiced and violent assassination of *Dust* by the industry gate-keepers and political pundits.

**Concerning your portrayal of storytelling in *Dust*, I don't have a specific question. I was just hoping you would tell about your preoccupation with showing the very process of storytelling.**

I think it has its roots in two things.

One is my interest in structuralist and conceptualist art. On the surface, the form of *Dust* is not that of a structuralist or conceptualist piece. But, in its own way, it picks up on what these movements were trying to tell us,

and builds it into the popular idiom of narrative film. You have to take into consideration the inherent elements (and expectations) typical for film as a story-driven and popular discipline and then incorporate them into the film.

The second thing is that, just like any artist, I'm making autobiographical work. Since I am a storyteller by interest and by profession, I became preoccupied with exploring and *exposing* the process of storytelling, but more importantly, with exploring the thirst to tell and to hear stories. I am not talking only about storytelling in film. I'm talking about writing, oral tradition, teaching, journalism, fairy-tales, myths, legends, telling jokes, bed-time stories, religion, *writing history*... it's actually such a huge part of society. And it's probably more essential than we are aware of or than we would acknowledge. It's one of the main modes for teaching and learning from each other how to behave, what life and society are about. Storytelling is the nervous system of society.

As I was making films, I became more and more interested in the essence of what it is that a viewer wants from storytelling. I realized we look at stories, but don't see the storytelling. Even when it's to the detriment of the listener. So, I went with the assumption that if I strip the process for the viewer, and then incorporate it in the story, that he or she would come for the journey into the nature of storytelling. The viewer would be involved in unmasking the process (while still keeping it somewhat part of the illusion) and maybe get a different kind of pleasure from this kind of a ride

-- as opposed to just being a participant in a ride which is *all* about the illusion, the mask, the manipulated unified feeling. Perhaps one would enjoy this complex (and fractured) ride better and learn more about this aspect of our social lives.

Mainstream narrative cinema is all about expectations, and really low expectations, to that. We have become used to expecting very little from the films we see, not only in terms of stories, but more importantly and less obviously in terms of the mood, the feeling we get from a film. I think we know what kind of a mood and what kind of a feeling we're going to get from a film before we go see the film. It's from the poster, from the title, the stars, and it's

become essential in our decision-making and judging processes. I believe it's really selling ourselves way too short. I like films that surprise me. I like films that surprise me especially *after* they've started. I like a film that goes one place and then takes you for a loop, then takes you somewhere else, and keeps taking you to other places both emotionally and story-wise... keeps changing the mood, shifts in the process, becomes fearless...

All of this needs to be unified by an artistic vision, making it a spirited collage, not a pastiche. A Robert Rauschenberg.

In the end, I'm surprised to see that it's the reviewer rather than the regular movie-goer who expects and even demands to see a film limited, predictable, subservient to expectations, a film that neatly and vulgarly folds within the framework of a genre and a subgenre. It's especially sad when the genre in question is what used to be known as "art film."

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# Independence: Art & Activism / A Conversation With Milcho Manchevski

By Keith Brown

Milcho Manchevski was born in the Yugoslav republic of Macedonia in 1959. He went to film school at the University of Illinois in Carbondale, and after graduation made several music videos and experimental short films. His first feature, *Before the Rain*, tells the story of a war photographer who returns home to his native Macedonia to find an atmosphere of intercommunal suspicion and violence. Widely distributed in 1994, when the fighting in Bosnia was at its height, the film was embraced by Western audiences as a powerful portrayal of Balkan fratricide, and also won critical acclaim, including the Golden Lion at Venice and an Academy foreign language film nomination, for its non-linear, interlocking narrative form. Manchevski's second feature film, *Dust*, was released during armed conflict in Macedonia in 2001. More ambitious in scope and form, the film jumps between continents and centuries to undercut simplistic ideas of historical truth. It was nevertheless again read as the director's commentary on the present, and was less well received outside Macedonia. Manchevski now teaches in the graduate program at New York University. His new film, *Shadows*, opened at the Toronto Film Festival in September 2007 and was chosen as the Republic of Macedonia's entry for the 2008 Academy Awards. Set mostly in present-day Skopje, Macedonia's capital city, *Shadows* is a psychological thriller which has been read as telling the story of modern Macedonia's emergence from, and reckoning with, the trauma of its history.

This interview was compiled from conversations with Milcho Manchevski in December 2002 and April 2007, both at the Watson Institute at Brown University, and subsequent telephone and email exchanges over the summer of 2007.

**Brown:** Let me start by quoting a couple of academic responses to your work. In 1997, Slavoj Žižek wrote that "*Before the Rain* offers the western liberal gaze precisely what this gaze wants to see in the Balkan war, the spectacle of a timeless, incomprehensible, mythical cycle of passions, in contrast to decadent and anemic western life." And Dina Iordanova, in 2001, wrote "The film mirrors the long standing stereotype of the Balkans as a mystic stronghold of stubborn and belligerent people..." and asserts the existing Balkan trend of voluntary self-exoticism.<sup>1</sup> What do you do with comments or reactions like this?



**Manchevski:** *Before the Rain* and *Dust* are meant to be, and I think they turned out to be, films about people. They're not about places, and not about people from particular places. The mythical and mystic in them is not about Macedonia, but rather about those particular stories and those particular people. I think these critics make the same old, same old mistake – they read a film from Macedonia as if it is a film about Macedonia.

They can't shake off their need to put things in neat little folders. That stereotyping disguised as defense against stereotyping borders on intellectual racism. A good work of art is about people and ideas and emotions, not about geopolitical concepts. I don't see why Wong-Kar Wai couldn't make films about New York or Bergman about Taipei or Tarantino about Lagos. Those films would not be that different from the films these filmmakers have already made.

**Brown:** I'm struck that Žižek sees the film as offering a gaze from outside the region, and Iordanova as a construction from within. Both *Before The Rain* and *Dust* feature characters who struggle to straddle worlds and perspectives. Do you?



**Manchevski:** I was born in Macedonia, but at the time it was a part of a country that does not exist anymore. Sort of like being born in Austro-Hungary. I was educated in the U.S. Midwest, yet I spent most of my life in New York, and my films are financed in Europe. More importantly, my artistic, intellectual and cinematic influences are international, or rather – cosmopolitan, as is the case with most filmmakers. Film heritage today in the era of globalization is transnational, and no amount of reactionary crypto-racism

will change that. As a matter of fact, I believe art has always been interested in means of expression, regardless of its origins. It is usually the outside forces that try to limit the ways in which an artist can express himself or herself.

**Brown:** In fact, *Before the Rain*, originally, wasn't going to be set in Macedonia, right?

**Manchevski:** Yes, the outline for the film, the synopsis, was set in an unknown country. I wanted to keep it free of daily politics. Yet, once you start turning a story into a screenplay it has to become more specific: the characters will have to speak a certain language. What will they wear? Is this something that people wear in Macedonia or is it something people wear in Azerbaijan? What do their houses look like? How about the streets? The landscape? The customs and habits? Do they have doilies on the TV sets? How about the couch – would the cushions be imprisoned in plastic? Even if these

1 Slavoj Žižek, "Multiculturalism, or the cultural logic of multinational capitalism." *New Left Review* 1/225, September/October 1997: p.38; Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media*. London and Berkeley: BFI & U California P, 2001: p.63.



things are not central to the film, you have to make those decisions. Of course, you can go for the “neutral,” but that often means bland. This never stopped Hollywood from making unconvincing films set in foreign places where everyone still speaks English and they dance exotic dances invented in Burbank. As a filmmaker, I need to feel the background of the place, not because it’s a statement about the place but because this will root it for filming purposes. Once I started writing, *Before the Rain* somehow took place in Macedonia. Perhaps I was lazy. But it’s not about the place, it’s about people. They could easily live somewhere else. I have had people come to me after screenings and say, “I’m from Israel. This film could easily take place there.” Or “I’m from India. This film could easily take place there.” And I was very happy to hear that.

**Brown:** But you do spend a lot of time on research—especially Macedonian ethnography and history.

**Manchevski:** I feel a moral responsibility to whatever it is we are filming to do as much research as possible. The core bibliography on *Dust* was about 160 pieces and this was mainly things written at the time, from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The film deals with the Wild West, with the Ottoman Empire, a very small bit deals with Paris at the turn of the century, and then the rest is New York City today. Now, we are never really recreating the period. It’s not a document, it’s not

a documentary. We can’t recreate it, we were not there. Narrative film takes a lot of shortcuts anyway. But since people tend to see things that way, tend to see films as if they really are documents, I would like to have as much background work done as possible. Research also helps the actual work. Even when you don’t see it on the screen, it gives you the confidence, it gives the art director the confidence, it gives the actor the confidence. It sort of seeps through the pores and pours onto the screen, and can help your take on whatever you’re talking about.

**Brown:** Which is?

**Manchevski:** Well, *Dust*, both in its form and in what it talks about, is about the thirst to tell stories and to hear stories. I think to a great degree, we learn how to be through stories, through stories, through gossip, through anecdotes, through history, through CNN, through jokes, soaps, myths, legends. *Dust* deals with that in a formal way, deconstructing the story. In a way, it’s a Cubist take on storytelling. It helped me and everyone else who worked on the film when we saw how much of the myths we were dealing with were actually

fake—both the myths about the American west and the myths about the fight for independence in Macedonia. For example, I discovered that that famous Western gunslinger Billy the Kid was from Brooklyn, or that most of the people he was supposed to have killed in duels he actually shot in the back. And there were a lot of black cowboys—you don’t see that in John Wayne films. General Custer was one of the worst students at West Point (which makes sense, and makes for great dramatic potential when combined with his apparent arrogance). Cowboys and Indians were pretty much never at the same time in the same place, because most Indians were driven out of Oklahoma and Texas by the time the cowboys took over as they were needed to herd cattle to the railroad, which then took them up

North. I discovered that the gunfight at the OK Corral happened just a few years before a big labor strike in the silver mines in Arizona, next door. You somehow don’t put those two together, gunfights and the labor movement; in our

compartmentalized brains we think they belong to different eras. And precisely this was one of the things *Dust* was dealing with—decomposing clichés: we have in the same film (because it happened at more or less the same time) the waning of the Wild West, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the birth of the new times as seen through Sigmund Freud, the birth of the airplane, the birth of modernism through Cubism. So, research is fun.

**Brown:** Both *Before the Rain* and *Dust* have multiple, interlocking story-lines. Do you want your audience to have to work hard?

**Manchevski:** Writing comes easy to me, and stories are easy to tell, and I can riff on any sub-

ject, and come up with stories and change them and restructure them, and maybe because of that I also find it sort of boring to tell the story in a regular, linear way, going one, two, three, cause and effect, 2 hours, plot, subplot, turns... especially in film. But if we can find a slightly more interesting form of telling that story, then we have a little bit extra in that it also engages a little bit more of our artistic muscle, both for the teller and the listener. The process is more fun, as is the result. I like comparing it to movements in painting (not that it’s a perfect comparison), but it would be like painting a portrait vs. painting a portrait in a cubist style, or like using a collage the way Robert Rauschenberg does (where it feels, very sort of modern and broken down, but it actually has very old-fashioned aesthetics to it).

Ultimately, for me it’s about playing with the story, and hearing it like music, hearing when it works well and when it doesn’t. I find it a very helpful tool when writing, or before writing, or while



writing, to tell the story to somebody, and as I'm telling it I realize that I'm honing it. I'm dropping parts that don't help the telling, and I see when people need more explanation so I start focusing a little more on those, which I guess is sort of like testing films. The difference is that here the actual artist does the testing, and not a suit with the power, but without the chops to make art.

**Brown:** And was it that playing and testing which produced the non-linearity that really caught critics' attention in *Before the Rain*.

**Manchevski:** There are many films in three parts, but telling a film in three parts where the ending of the third part could be the beginning of the first one was, I guess, relatively new. But playing with linearity is not a new invention, I mean it was done way back, in *Last year at Marienbad* (1961) and *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959), for example. I'm very curious what happens when you start playing with the story creatively. I'm happy to see that that is beginning to happen more often even in the mainstream cinema, with films like *21 Grams*, *Memento* or *Babel*. However, what was important was that in *Before the Rain* there's thematic resonance to this - violence going in circles and how to break the circle. This was in my mind, but replicating it in the structure of the film wasn't a conscious decision. And it wasn't really only about violence and war being circular: it was about how things keep coming back to us. A lot of what we do is just repetition, we put ourselves in similar situations all the time for whatever reason.

**Brown:** You mention the violence in *Before the Rain* - I've been in audiences where people flinch. In *Dust*, it feels like there's more blood, but there's also a different tone to it.

**Manchevski:** *Dust* is more irreverent, more playful, more in-your-face, more alive, and that scares a lot of people. It is violent, but if you put it next to even mainstream films like *Saving Private Ryan*, you see that it's very tame. There's a major debate about how you respond to violence in the arts, and on film. I subscribe to what Bergman has said about violence, and I am paraphrasing here from memory - he says that film is a perfectly legitimate way of ritualizing violence. Ritualizing, not glorifying. Society needs to deal with this extreme - yet integral - aspect of its existence. Ritualizing has been a central way of dealing with it since time immemorial. Film lends itself to ritualizing it for many reasons, and convincing "realism" not one of the least important. I believe that hiding violence from art or from social storytelling is not an answer—in fact, I think there's something hypocritical about all the fuss about it. Those same people who object to violence in film support many other kinds of violence. What about, say, a loyal employee being laid off after twenty-five years. For some people that's perfectly ordinary, acceptable. It is legitimate to ask, is that violence? And what does the fact that we don't discuss it as violence tell us about ourselves?

But on-screen violence in particular, I think there's room for realism. When someone gets shot, they don't just fall back, or lie down. Probably it hurts, maybe they stagger, then they look at themselves and they are shocked. Do they at some point start laughing, and say, is this really happening to me? Or do they say, damn I wish I had more sex when I could have? Or do they whine? What happens to this person during those 20 seconds or 20 minutes while he's dying? So, fortunately in a film it is all make-believe, so you can explore a little bit of that. But, if you treat violence as something without real consequences, something fun and easy, the way a Simpson-Bruckheimer film or a Stallone film or a Schwarzenegger film does, then you are doing society a disservice. I believe that what really matters in film is the tone, not the story. It is the tone that sends the message and communicates with

the viewer much more than the story. In *Dust* we were trying to face violence with our eyes open, and I think that that's perhaps why some critics had a hard time with it. I didn't fulfill their preconceptions about what I was supposed to be filming. I had somebody describe *Dust* this way, he said if watching a good Hollywood film is riding a rollercoaster, watching *Dust* is like sitting in a car with a test crash dummy. It's interesting if critics find the shifts in tone hard. The film is funny, and then it's brutal, and then it's very sad, and then it's funny again. And you say, wait a minute, what did the poster say, what did the press release say, was this a funny film or a sad film?

**Brown.** So what's the press release for the new film?

**Manchevski.** Taglines are more fun than synopsis—though of course that is a completely different category, a different format. Our tagline is "sometimes the dead speak louder than the living." *Shadows* is also a film about sex and death and a few important things in between. Or if you want a literary reference point, you can also think of it as the story of what happens if Lady Macbeth had lived today and survived to have a grown-up son. He would try to come to terms with her overbearing presence in his life, and her past transgressions.

It's actually an old-fashioned, slow-burn of a film, and in many ways it's my most personal film to date. It's scary - I love scary films, love having to face your fears, even though it hurts and we seldom really do it in real life. Perhaps that's why we need rollercoasters and scary films and tragedies. But it's scary with no jolting moments, cheap frills, sound bites or easy solutions. The terror simmers underneath. It's about a man trying to have a dialogue with the dead, and becoming more alive for that experience.

**Brown.** So is it fair to say that the film presents the past as some kind of refuge from the present? I was struck by the main character's search for tenderness, and a certain stillness, in a sometimes sordid and always hectic modern world.

**Manchevski.** Absolutely. It's interesting that you would see it in that way, because that was the emotion that ended up shaping the movie - it is heavy and scary, but somehow liberating at the end as we go into a flashback. As if there is something redemptive in re-living the pain of the past. As for the main character's search for tenderness - none of his living family who surround him offer him much outside of their expectations that he deliver in a hungry rat race. The dead are much warmer to him. And yes, a little bit of stillness when you empty your mind of adrenaline might be healthy. So maybe *Shadows* offers something like a natural closure to the three films.

**Brown.** But more rollercoasters to come, I hope?

**Manchevski.** I only guarantee tomatoes.

Keith Brown is an associate research professor at the Thomas J. Watson Institute of International Studies at Brown University. Drawing on a background in classics and socio-cultural anthropology, his area of specialty is Macedonia, and he has authored numerous works on culture and politics in the Balkans, including analyses of international and domestic reception of *Before the Rain*, the construction of history in Macedonia, Greece, and Bulgaria, and foreign intervention in the former Yugoslavia.

# МАКЕДОНСКИ РАШОМОН

## ИНТЕРВЈУ СО МИЛЧО МАНЧЕВСКИ

Жарко Кујунџиски

Со Манчевски разговарав на 27 ноември 2001 година во кафулето „Бастин“. На сите ни е познато дека овој човек не е само филммејкер, иако светска слава стекна по филмот „Пред дождот“. Вториот негов филм, „Прашина“ доби разни квалификации. Во Скопје го нарекоа „македонска Герника“, Италијанскиот ромасиер Александар Барико изјави: „Ми се допаѓа „Прашина“ затоа што е едно отворено дело, има сè и сосема е спротивен на сè, комбинира

Блесок бр. 26, мај-јуни, 2002  
Галерија Осврти

### МАКЕДОНСКИ РАШОМОН

ИНТЕРВЈУ СО МИЛЧО МАНЧЕВСКИ

Жарко Кујунџиски



**ЖК:** Не знам колку е познато за јавноста твоето занимавање со хумор и сатира. При крајот на седумдесетите години имаш објавувано кратки хуморески во „Остен“, списание за хумор и сатира. Забележливи се две работи. Пишувани се во трето лице

лингвистички шеми со архетипи... Критичарите не се подготвени за вакви филмови и книги: тоа е како да одиш на планина во костим за капење, па се чудиш зошто ти е студено. Како кога првпат виделе локомотива и запрашале: А каде се коњите?“ Италијанското филмско списание „Чак“, пак, ќе констатира дека „со „Прашина“ почнува новиот милениум во филмската уметност.“ Во Азија, по успехот во Токио, филмот е споредуван со популарноста на делата на Марсел Пруст...

**ЖК:** Не знам колку е познато за јавноста твоето занимавање со хумор и сатира. При крајот на седумдесетите години имаш објавувано кратки хуморески во „Остен“, списание за хумор и сатира. Забележливи се две работи. Пишувани се во трето лице еднина, некој вид филмско бележење. Втората работа се однесува на хуморот, кој во „Прашина“ можевме да го видиме во неколку свои варијанти (иронија, сарказам, анегдота) и преку различни ликови. Во крајна линија и целиот филм е едно иронично поигрување со саративниот филм. Каква функција му припишуваш на хуморот во твоите проекти: да ја олесни комуникативноста со публиката?...

**ММ:** Хуморот има две причини. Една – го прави комуникативен. Втора и многу поважна е тоа што е дел од некоја животна еуфорија. Иако не сум јас тој што треба да го каже тоа, за мене тука е најголемата разлика меѓу „Пред дождот“ и „Прашина“. „Прашина“ е покомплексен филм. И покрај таа збогатена комплексност, сепак најголемата разлика е во хуморот, на површина има повеќе од таа животна еуфорија, а во исто време има и мачнина. Едното без другото не функционираат. Треба да ги имаш двата краја на спектарот за да ја добиеш комплексноста. Ако ја нема сенката нема да ти биде доволно јако ни сонцето. Хуморот во суштина е страшно тежок. Нешто што за тебе е смешно, за мене не е. И обратно. Особено меѓу различни култури, па затоа очекував дека тешко ќе патува. Она што најмногу ме изненади и она што ми беше најважно е дали публиката ќе реагира на смешните места.

Заклучив дека нормална публика исто се смее на смешните места и во Торонто, и во Токио и во Скопје. Онаа причина поради која почнав да се занимавам со филм е приказната, расказот полесно да искомунитираат со гледачот. Тоа тука е остварено, во спротивно тоа би било обичен текст, книга. Многу ми е интересен хуморот кога е ставен во неков контекст, како што честопати се сретнува во чешки филмови од времето на Форман и на Иван Пасер, потоа како што тоа е направено во „Среќа“ на Тод Солонс (тоа е хумор, но истовремено ти се крева косата на главата), потоа како во филмовите на Роман Полански (морбиден хумор)...

**ЖК:** Лично се согласувам дека уметноста треба да зборува за универзални нешта, дека секоја приказна, колку и да е интимна, лична, уметникот е тој што треба да ја претстави во колективна рамка. Но зошто Милчо се брани како од ѓвалов кога ќе се рече дека направил велама национален, а не националистички или, не дај боже, шовинистички филм? Тоа му се може и на еден Спилберг, на пример, со „Спасувањето на војникот Рајан“.

**ММ:** Немам ништо против национален филм. „Прашина“ во мала мера може да го сметаме за национален, малку повеќе од „Пред дождот“, но не е националистички. Јас не се плашам од тоа, но сакам да констатирам дека и да сакам, не можам сега да направам таков филм. Ако останам да живеам тука уште 15 години, можеби ќе можам. Мора да се има предвид дека јас од 19 години сум отиен одвде. Она што и како мислител и како автор го гледам не произлегува сто отсто оттук. Поинаква е приказната со еден Ларс фон Трир, кој живее и работи во Данска. Јас, ако напишам сценарио, и му го дадам да го прочита на некој другар за да дебатираме, тој сигурно би бил другар од Њујорк, затоа што сум се нашол таму. Ако го споредувам



со нешто, сигурно би го споредувал со нешто што таму сум го доживеал. Од друга страна, естетското формирање и првите 20 години сум ги поминал тука и од тоа не можам да избегам. Како и да е секој филм треба да е наднационален.

**ЖК:** Колку и да се трудиме тоа да го аплицираме, сепак заклучок е дека „Прашина“ не е цврсто врзан за едно тло и за една идеологија. Напротив, тој често ја менува теоретската стратегија, инкорпорира историски парчиња. Ритуални танци на примитивни племиња, антички столбови, византиско сликарство, кубизмот со „Госпоѓиците од Авињон“, потоа тука е целата историја на 20 век: нуклеарната бомба, прохибицијата, Индијанците, Фројд, авионот на браќата Рајт, Османлиите, Ј.Б. Тито... Може ли поставувањето на овие историски настани и личности во некаков контекст во филмот да се сфати како некој вид авторов коментар?

**ММ:** Нив ги користам како дел од колажот. Тие се дел од реживизатата, дел од палетата. Пак ќе направам споредба со тоа како Раушенберг користи некои елементи. Сето тоа се моменти кои се делови од нашето колективно минато и од индивидуалната психологија. Јас сум свесен за атомската бомба, за кубизмот, и не можам тоа да го избегнувам. Како може да правам филм за комитите, а да не го познавам кубизмот. Може нема да го споменам, но естетиката на кубизмот е станата дел од мене, исто онака како и естетиката на дадаизмот, на структурализмот, како и старовремени естетики. На пример, кога цртаам од нив ја користам перспективата. Прашање за себе е колку сето тоа ќе биде видливо, колку ќе го покажеш или нема да го покажеш. Јас цело време поаѓам од некоја претпоставка на искреност. Со тоа го поканувам гледачот, ајде заедно да го креираме овој филм, ајде заедно да си играме. Дел од таа искреност е да му ги покажам шевоите во правењето на костумот, што не е нешто ново во уметноста, но е ново во наративниот филм. Му ги покажувам шевоите со тоа што му велам „Јас ти раскажувам приказна, значи те лажам, меѓутоа сложи се со тоа тло и давам до знаење дека раскажувам“. Тоа не го правам рационално, смислено, туку како дел од играњето. Ако играњето е консеквентно, направено со талент, тогаш тоа ќе функционира и ќе биде подложно на анализи. Хирошима беше еден од тие битни моменти од 20 век, кој нè дефинира нас, па дури и тој дел од нас кои живееме во Штатица. Од друга страна сето тоа временски е толку блиску. Целата таа историја која изгледа дека се развлекува во период од илјада години е всушност страшно блиску. Илајда, кој во оваа приказна тргнува од Оклахома во 1900 година како млад човек, а во Македонија доаѓа во 1903., сосема е можно да биде во Њујорк во 1945. кога паднала атомската бомба. Ние сме подложни на клишеа. Размислуваме на овој начин: Отоманско царство – 16 век, каубојци – 19 век, атомска бомба – е, тоа е 21 век!

**ЖК:** За почеток: колку си задоволен од тоа како е прифатен „Прашина“ надвор од Македонија? Сметаш ли дека неговата фокусираност на одредени историски и културни детерминанти ја намалува можноста да биде разбирлив за оние што не ја познаваат историската рамка на филмот?

**ММ:** Мислам дека секој филм треба да функционира на неколку нивоа и во случајов ова што го спомнуваш е едно од нив: како се вклопува во културата и во историјата за која зборува. Меѓутоа, филмот не треба да функционира само на тоа ниво. Луѓето треба да го разберат и без да знаат нешто за оваа култура. Така е со секој добар филм. На пример, за да го сфатат и за да им се допадне „Граѓанинот Кејн“ не мора да знаат нешто за Америка во првата половина на 20 век. Тоа е мое мото: секогаш кога нешто работам – се обидувам да видам најпрво кои се луѓето. Станува збор за човечки судбини, односи, стремежи, страдања и главно е тие да се постигнат. Сето друго само ќе ја надополни сликата. Кога се снима филм за историјата и за културата на едно место не се добива класичен игран филм. Тоа е или документарец или телевизија – Сиенен. Инаку, јас не сум најповикан да ги коментирам реакциите. Како автор ги гледам субјективно, огра-

ничено. Од тие неколку места кај што сум бил увидов исклучително добри реакции. Тоа е сосем спротивно од дијапазонот на некои критичари во Венеција. И сега, откако гледам како го примаат публиката и критичарите во Токио, Тајпеј, Торонто, па и во Солун, заклучувам дека она што се случи во Венеција беше атентат врз „Прашина“. Вистинско мерило ќе биде тоа како понатаму ќе го пречека публиката во светот. Тоа секогаш е единственото вистинско мерило.

**ЖК:** Во неколку наврати во домашни и странски весници и списанија се јавуваш како автор на колумни со политичка конотација. Сметаш ли дека тоа е причината што некои ултранационалистички критичари реагираа така во Венеција, или, пак, сметаш дека беа истражувачи од фактот што Милчо Манчевски, режисер од филман, филман земја Македонија, дојден од Дивиот Исток направи таков да не кажам уметнички безобразен филм како „Прашина“?...

**ММ:** ... И се обидува да им дели лекции како се прави естетика, а не да бара помош од меѓународни невладини организации. Мислам дека има и од двете нешта што ги спомна. Не сакам да верувам, и долго после Венеција не можам да поверувам дека едното може да има врска со другото, но по сè изгледа дека уште долго ќе учам некои работи. Доволно бев наивен да мислам дека луѓето ќе се занимаваат со естетиката на делото. Заклучувам дека таквите реакции не биле толку случајни. Ваквите мислења ги базираам не само врз реакциите, туку и врз истражувањата што ги спроведоа други луѓе. Германката Ирис Кронауер, која беше гостинка и во Скопје, пишува книга за реакциите на „Прашина“. Ирис нашла текст во Германија, рецензија, каде што критичарот вели дека два дена пред да го видат филмот се договарале како ќе го рецензираат. Има други рецензии, кои велат дека филмот е само илустрација на еден новинарски текст во кој го напаѓа НАТО за неговите пропусти. НАТО, de facto, не ни е крив за тоа што се случува, ама делумно тоа е последица и на некои негови пропусти. Според таквата хипотетичка ситуација што некои ја поставуваат, излегува дека „Прашина“ е направен за еден месец. Жал ми е што заклучив дека цел сегмент од културата – критиката, за која мислев дека се занимава со естетика, всушност се занимава со политика. Увидов дека за европските филмски критичари политиката е еквивалентна на трачот во Холивуд. Не е важно кој со кого спие (како во Холивуд), туку кој какви политички мислења има.

**ЖК:** Мис Стон (камен) Неда ја нарекува Мис Рок (карпа). Таквото метонимично заменување на означителите на знаковите е многу често во народниот говор, го користат и футуристите, а потсетува и на детската игра ‘расипан телефон’. Дали навистина го сретна и тоа име при истражувањето?

**ММ:** Не, не го сретнав. Мис Рок го употребив токму од такви асоцијации за кои зборувааш ти и затоа што не сакам да спомнувам вистински настани и вистински луѓе, иако некогаш мора. Повеќе настојував да го избегнам тоа, зашто мислам дека го немам моралното право да зборувам за нешто што со свои очи не сум го видел.

**ЖК:** Веќе го спомнавме терминот безобразлук во позитивна смисла. Особен впечаток остава позицијата на раскажувачот. Михаил Бахтин би рекол дека вршиш извесна детронизација на позицијата на раскажувачот. Во усното пренесување на приказните, пред стотина години неговата позицијата е позиција на неприкосновен авторитет. Дистанцата слушателраскажувач не е голема, но точно се знае линијата. Токму едно такво парче – сцената со ценкањето околу бројот на војниците е еклакант пример за безобразно мешање на слушателот, кој, иако првпат ја слуша приказната, интервенира во неа. Тоа говори за уште една работа: релативноста на сè што добиваме како податок од минатото. Дали таа интервенција, не на сведокот, туку на авторот, на оној што ја пренесува информацијата, може да стане толку голема што нешто што денес примаме како апсолутна вистина, всушност е чиста фикција. Зар не се брише така границата меѓу фикцијата

како жанр и историјата од учебниците како факт? Се вршат ли такви фалсификати и во време кога светот е глобално село?

**ММ:** Тоа е повеќе од очигледно и веројатно секогаш било така. Денес повеќе станува збор за намерна манипулација од политички, психолошки причини или од причини што се сведуваат на некоја форма на себичност. Онака како што јас ја гледам стварноста така сакам и тебе да ти ја наметнам. Фалсификатите на информациите се прават независно од тоа колку нам ни се тие информации достапни. Мислам дека тоа што се достапни за јавноста не ги прави помалку подложни на фалсификат, туку само го прави фалсификатот поочигледен за оној што го интересира вистината. Следно прашање во такво нешто е колку вистината може да биде објективна, затоа што ние двајца можеме да му пријдеме на еден ист настан сосема објективно, ама бидејќи поинаку сме го виделе, бидејќи го поставуваме во поинаков контекст, нашите вистини може да бидат различни. Меѓутоа, ако сепак појдеме од претпоставка дека постои објективна вистина, факт е дека таа најчесто е манипулирана од раскажувачот и главната цел, главната тема на овој филм, е да се каже тоа на еуфоричен, пријатен, безобразен начин. Немојте да ми верувате мене и, по инерција, немојте да им верувате на раскажувача во филмовите и на самите филмови. Уживајте во нив, но не верувајте дека се чиста вистина. Значи, не верувајте им ни на „Солунските атентатори“, ни на филмовите со Џон Вејн, ни на Сиенен. Барајте ја самите својата вистина. Кога можете, отидете на лице место, кога не можете – прочитајте два или три извора. Да се навратам на едно претходно прашање. Можеби тоа е третата причина која потсвесно толку ги возбуди професионалните оценувачи во Венеција. „Прашина“ им ја руши структурата по која тие работат веќе 30 или 50 години.

**ЖК:** Еднаш спомена дека „Прашина“ е кубистички филм. Во некои делови се чувствува влијание и од т.н. руски формализам, кој и самиот е наследник токму на кубофутуризмот. Ејзенштајн е под големо влијание на тој формализам. За „Прашина“ се зборува дека е претерано крвав филм. Виктор Шкловски, еден од основните теоретичари на формализмот, ќе каже: „во уметноста крвта не е крвава... Таа е граѓа за уметничката конструкција“.

**ММ:** Апсолутно се сложувам. Тоа Хичкок го има кажано понародски кога Ингрид Бергман се раслакала при работа на некоја страшна сцена. Тој ѝ пришол и ѝ рекол: „Еј, па ова е само филм“ (се смее).

**ЖК:** Двете сцени со стрипјунакот Корто Малтезе. Повторно ќе ги споменам формалистите, овојпат Данил Хармс и неговиот познат расказ за црвенокосиот човек. Тој како автор најпрвин внесува лик за кого убаво вели дека е „еден црвенокос човек“. Веднаш потоа ги негира сите негови атрибути и едноставно го брка својот главен јунак од наративата, доаѓајќи во таква незгодна ситуација што нема херој. Ова секако е автореферентна постапка. Имаше ли и Малтезе слични причини за појавување, една игра со функцијата и со позицијата на филмските ликови во структурата?

**ММ:** Знаеш како, тоа не се рационални одлуки, туку интуитивни. Јас прво конструирам приказна со измислени ликови. После правам истражување каде црпам материјали со историски личности кои помагаат во доградбата на веќе измислените. После анегдотски вметнувам ликови кои навистина постоеле. Тие играат улога како Џ. Ф. Кенеди во некое платно на Роберт Раушенберг. Тој е тука, но платното не е насликано заради него. Така е и со Фројд во „Прашина“. Следен чекор: ако во тоа време кога постоел мојот измислен лик, Лук, се шетал и еден вистински лик, Фројд или Пикасо, зошто да нема уште еден измислен лик, но од друг автор. Тоа е Корто Малтезе, кого ние каде не го крштем по име. Го препознаваат само тие што го знаат. Корто во тој првем одел секаде каде што било најинтересно, најгусто, па сигурно, иако реално не постои, бил и во Македонија (се смее).

**ЖК:** Во „Пред дождот“ Милчо беше жртвата на српскиот војник, во „Прашина“ беше мајката на Лук и Илајда. Значи ли

тоа дека вршиш надоврзување на поетиките на Алфред Хичкок и Орсон Велс кои имале навик да се појават во некој кадар од своите филмови?

**ММ:** Апсолутно. Идејата да влезеш во мал кадар од свој филм е измислена од Хичкок, јас само го преземам, правејќи варијанта на тоа – се појавувам само во фотографии (се смее). Тоа се фотографии кои играат прилично битна улога во филмот. Во „Пред дождот“ фотката беше важна оти таму е ембрионот на целото дејство, тука му пукал филмот на Александар и затоа се вратил во Македонија. Оттука се одмотува прикаската. Во „Прашина“, пак, фотографијата со мајката на Лук и Илајда, е можеби најстарата фотографија од целата колекција на Анцела. Од мајката всушност тргнале објаката. Тоа е повторно играње. Сметам дека кога се бавиш со креативни работи треба многу да играш и да се отепаш од работа. Треба да се биде крајно консеквентен во тоа играње и за мене секогаш најтешката работа била како да се постигне тој баланс. Како тоа да биде и играње и како да останеш одличен ученик во смисол дека со својата одговорност ќе обезбедиш да се заврши планот, да се биде фер кон екипата, да се вратат парите...

**ЖК:** И „Пред дождот“ и „Прашина“ започнуваат со домотите и завршуваат со слични кадри во кои влегуваат небото, облаците, условно и птиците. Честопати „Прашина“ несвесно го нарекувам втор дел на „Пред дождот“. Може ли да зборуваме за извесна суштинска поврзаност меѓу нив, можеби за некаква трилогија?

**ММ:** Веројатно постои трилогија, но третиот филм сè уште не се кажал. Треба да си се каже. Претпоставувам дека третиот ќе биде неверојатно едноставен, аеродинамичен. Првиот имаше три дефинирани приказни, вториот во суштина се две, а третиот можеби ќе има една. Инаку, домотите се појавија многу интересно. Имав еден професор по продукција кој постојано велеше „првиот кадар ти го дефинира филмот“, а татко ми, пак, викаше дека по музиката на шпигата ќе познае каков ќе биде филмот. Кога размислував каков да биде првиот кадар во „Пред дождот“ се прашував што е она што е најтипично за оваа земја. Заклучив дека патлицианите се единствена работа во која Македонија е супериорна од кое било друго парче земја. Во вториот филм прашањето беше како тоа да го врземе, а да биде Њујорк. Многу логично излезе дека истите тие патлициани што ги собираа во „Пред дождот“ сега стигнале на тезга во Америка.

**ЖК:** Како и да се претставени Македонците, Албанците, Турците, Американците, Англичаните, и во двата твои филма, и војниците, и мувите, и овците, и пушките во нив се едно исто. Ќе бидеме нефер ако не кажеме дека повикот за космополитизам и почитување на Другиот победува во твоите филмови. Дали тоа може да се постави во релација со општиот процес на глобализација или е тоа твоја лична определба како уметник и како човек, пред сè?

**ММ:** Хуманизам, не глобализам. Тоа всушност се апсолутно тврди хуманистички и пацифистички убедувања и стојам сто отсто зад тоа дека луѓето секаде се исти, дека имаат исти страдања, љубови, проблеми, измами, лошотилак. Сето тоа зависи од човекот, и од моментот. Може уште еднаш да се вратиме на она претходно прашање и можеби тоа е она што на многу луѓе во Венеција им пречеше. Тоа го обработува Марија Тодорова во *Imagining the Balkans*. Тоа е синдром според кој својот расизам, своето насилство го проектираш на други и тоа на други таму некаде далеку, на некои човекојадци на Балканот. И кога ти ќе им понудиш дело кое е апсолутно против тоа, им го реметиш скриениот расистички концепт. Имаш ситуација кога ќе чуеш новинар како го дефинира „Прашина“ како расистичка. Истиот тој е член на парамилитарни организации во Северна Ирска. Конкретно за ова прашање, иако тоа никогаш не е свесна теза, моето авторско кредо е дека сите сме луѓе и дека каде било и секогаш ќе има и добри и лоши луѓе. Прашање е како ќе ги раскажеш.

## The “Dust” Files: One Example of How Macedonia Lost the War for Truth

### The West with a Skeleton in the Closet

**The Venice critics agreed on how to welcome the film two days before they got to see it!**

**An English critic – Alexander Walker – comes up with a brilliant thought: he claims that the goal of “Dust” is to block Turkey’s admission to the EU!**

**The German Der Tagespiegel declared the film anti-Albanian and Neo-Fascist, saying: “Instead of the Albanian Muslims we have here the Ottomans as the ‘untermenschen’ and the Macedonians are as innocent as lambs, which are slaughtered during the film numerous. And the black boy whom the old woman explains the Balkans to, is nobody else than the West, who has to be waken up by the sounds of the fanfare and fight against the everlasting Ottoman Islam.”**

**Western critics tried to fit a Macedonian film into their own inaccurate picture of the events “down there.”**

For the first time ever, a country under attack by imported and local gangs declaring themselves a “Liberation Army” while carrying out ethnic cleansing, murder and outright plunder has been declared racist because it tries to defend the law and order. The US and EU political elites embraced the position of the terrorists in Macedonia, pronouncing them fighters for human rights; consequently, the image of Macedonia in foreign media reports was seen from that perspective. The US and the EU, in fact, used this story in front of their own constituencies to help them hide their responsibility for the spillover of the Kosovo crisis over the border into Macedonia.

Macedonia, its political establishment in particular, failed to produce an articulated response to this political and media behavior of the EU and the US. Whatever our politicians told us, they were not heard by the world. The battle for the truth about Macedonia was, and still is, fought outside institutions. It is fought on web sites, such as [www.realitymacedonia.org.mk](http://www.realitymacedonia.org.mk) or [www.ok.mk](http://www.ok.mk), it is fought by countless personal protests and letters to foreign journalists regarding their reports, letters to European and world politicians and institutions...

Ultimately, the only one who called to task the West and asked for accountable behavior in this dangerous situation was Milcho Manchevski. This he did in his article “Just a Moral Obligation” and in numerous interviews he gave before and during the Venice Film Festival for the foreign media. His case is enlightening.

At the end of August, a week before “Dust” opened the Venice Film Festival, Manchevski published an opinion piece in the eminent Sueddeutsche Zeitung entitled “Just a Moral Obligation”. The London Guardian and the Skopje Dnevnik printed the same text; it was also widely distributed on the Internet. (Manchevski did not offer his article to The Guardian. The London-based paper downloaded it from the Internet, changed the title, cut off the end and made several modifications to the body itself. The Slovene film critic Miha Brun published a comparison between the original and the text “fixed” by the editors of The Guardian.)

Several lines of Manchevski’s commentary sum up his view: “Macedonia is collateral damage to NATO’s involvement in the Balkans. Body bags are not sexy, so NATO chose to let the militants keep their western weapons. NATO’s Kosovo escapade did much more than arm and train the militants who now execute a classical blowback. It escalated the conflict in the Balkans to a higher level. The psychological effect of the entire world putting itself on the side of the Great Cause (as seen by the Albanian extremists) has given a boost to their armed secessionist struggle. Ethnic cleansing and occupying territories is an advanced

step in redrawing borders. The US has a moral obligation to stop the Albanian extremists from turning Macedonia into another Afghanistan (the article was written in July, two months before September, 11) or Cambodia, two sad examples of blowback and collateral damage from American involvement”, – Manchevski writes in “Just a Moral Obligation”.

The Moscow Pravda also published this commentary, as did the Belgian De Standaard. The latter paired it up with a “response” from an Albanian reader. De Standaard thus shifted the emphasis of the article from an argument for re-establishing peace to an inter-ethnic debate. In other words, Manchevski’s article echoed around the world as a “defense” of the Macedonian position during a war, much louder even than the voice of the Macedonian government itself (Macedonian government officials’ statements and press-conferences rarely – if ever – received this much attention by the global press).

#### “Dust” or “Saving Private Ryan”

To what extent his expose affected western culture analysts and political analysts became clear in the initial western media reactions to Manchevski’s film “Dust.” They did not argue directly with his commentary, but instead projected their prejudices concerning Macedonia onto the film. In case we forget – “Dust” was the first Macedonian-made product unveiled to the world on an equal footing during the war. It was our film that opened the Venice Film Festival.

Hardly any regular moviegoer expected the charged reception of the film. Here, however, we are not discussing whether the film deserves good or bad reviews. The reviews of “Dust” were not, in fact, aesthetic evaluations of the film. They were, rather, reactions to a high-profile and ambitious product coming from Macedonia and – what is even more disturbing – reactions (negative) to a well-researched and proud view on one’s own history. In other words, western critics reacted instinctively and negatively because someone dared show the Macedonian history – and by extension, present – differently from their own perception of Macedonia. Furthermore, Manchevski did so with an extraordinarily self-assured artistic hand (and with no excuses whatsoever).

The German critic Fritz Gottler implies in the high-circulation Sueddeutsche Zeitung (the same paper that published Manchevski’s commentary) that many of the international critics in Venice discussed how to welcome Manchevski’s new film two whole days before it was screened. The critics decide how to welcome the film before they actually get to see it!

Now that the film has been applauded in Toronto, Macedonia, Tokyo, Taipei, Thessaloniki, it becomes evident that the critics had an agenda of their own.

David Stratton, the critic for Hollywood Variety implies that “Dust” is replete with violence, so that it’s hardly believable that the western audience will accept it. Right here is the real reason for the negative reactions emerges (reactions rebuffed by Alessandro Baricco and by many regular viewers evaluating “Dust” on film web sites). It was the western cinema that invented film violence to satisfy the needs of western viewers. The Indians, or Russians, or Poles, or Japanese, or Macedonians did not invent film violence, and it is never put up on the screen for their sake. When an experienced critic attributes excessive violence to “Dust,” it cannot be a coincidence. In fact, there are 7 or 8 minutes of violence in “Dust,” as opposed to the

45 minutes of brutality in “Saving Private Ryan,” brutality that in Spielberg’s (excellent) film goes as far as hands and legs exploding all around; not to mention films like “Pulp Fiction,” “Schindler’s List” or “Seven,” Shakespeare’s bloody plays, or even the Bible for that matter. David Stratton feels free to employ double standards – one set for the Holly-



wood/western films, and another set for the films from other countries, i.e. "eastern films."

The arrogance of the western pseudo-critics goes so far that they do not even try to conceal their racism and political agenda. The TV audience had the opportunity to see Alexander Walker from the London Evening Standard accusing Manchevski that he had made a racist film, showing the Turks "as herd of a corrupt people who gibber like apes in red fezes, and are more violent and far less responsible than Macedonians". Walker then asked Manchevski: "I wonder what you think the effect will be upon contemporary Turkey which is at the present moment trying to enter the European Union. Do you have a political agenda by this film?" (Manchevski only said: "Thank you for your statement.") Those who have seen the film (a few thousand at festivals on three continents, and more than 70,000 in Macedonia, the only country where the film has opened in the theaters) can assess for themselves whether Walker's claim that the film is racist is substantiated, or whether it is but a brazen forgery and callous attack. The viewers can see for themselves if "Dust" is a racist piece of art, or rather a film featuring both good guys and bad guys, blood-thirsty and innocents on all sides (of the ethnic divide). The film, actually, does not deal with ethnic issues at all; it deals with sacrifice and selfishness, regardless of ethnic colors. Anyway, even if it were a racist film (?!), it is unconceivable that a film may, even if it seeks to, stop a country from being admitted to the European Union.

The British got carried away the most in the political showdown with the Macedonian co-production. Apart from Walker, Peter Bradshaw refers to "Dust" in *The Guardian* as "a special pleading for Macedonian nationalism." In Macedonia nobody took up arms on seeing "Dust." On the contrary, many had already taken up arms paid for with *The Guardian* journalists' tax money. Those who'd taken up arms had been trained by *The Guardian* journalists' fellow citizens. These reporters display knee-jerk negative reaction to a film trying to portray the relativity of recounting history when it's written by the mightier, a film stating loud and clear the historical fact that Macedonians have suffered at the hands of ravaging Albanian gangs.

Macedonian philosopher Katarina Kolozova had a similar experience with her renowned colleagues. A philosophical article she wrote was unexpectedly blasted by an eminent Paris professor who referred to it as "nationalistic." After one looks at the topic of the article, things become clearer. Kolozova argues for equality of the intellectual discourse and ideas coming from the small countries and those in the West. Kolozova is among those theoreticians (such as the Bulgarian Marija Todorova and the Slovene Slavoj Žižek) who contend that small countries are entitled to independence in assessing their own image, and who oppose the patronizing attitude of the West. Many highly acclaimed western minds are not ready to come to terms with this attitude of the "natives."

### Innocent Lambs and Blood-Thirsty Murderers

Why did western journalists fail to see an apolitical film (which tells tales of adventures, cowboys, speaks of history, love, suffering and of the power of storytelling)? Why did they interpret this film as a contemporary political parable on the situation in Macedonia? Several Italian and German critics contend that all westerners in the film are shown as bad, as if the good Angela and Elijah are not Americans, and the blood-thirsty Major and the Teacher are not from the Balkans (one a Turk, the other a Macedonian). Maybe this is but a reflex which has to do with the old skeleton in one's closet.

Things finally become crystal clear when put in context. The German "critic" Jan Schulze-Ojala in *Der Tagesspiegel* says that "Dust" is an illustration of Manchevski's newspaper article "Just a Moral Obligation," as if the director could write a screenplay, shoot and edit a film in two weeks, a process that usually takes two years at least (in the case of "Dust" it took as many as seven years; as a matter of fact the film was conceived – AND FILMED before the war in Macedonia even started).

The same critic further claims that the film is anti-Albanian because "Instead of the Albanian Muslims we have here the Ottomans as the 'untermenschen' and the Macedonians are as innocent as lambs, who are slaughtered during the film numerous. And the black boy whom the old woman explains the Balkans to, is nobody else than the West, who has to be waken up by the sounds of the fanfare and fight against the everlasting Osmanic Islam. The killerface aesthetic with which the Turks are portrayed does have - and that is the scandal - something (neo) fascist about it." Talk of projecting!



Claiming that Manchevski with "Dust" illustrates the war in Macedonia, the critic of the London Times, James Christopher, says: "Manchevski hits important nerves but his politics, like twin stories, are all over the place. True, *Dust* is not a piece of 'realist' cinema, but having placed his film in the teeth of a deadly serious conflict can he really shrug off the responsibility?" He, however, does not mention that the conflict the film speaks about is over 100 years old, and that this new war in Macedonia, which is different from the one a century ago, happened AFTER the film was made.

The Croatian Jutarnji List, one month before Venice, published vitriolic criticism written by the prominent Bosnian writer Miljenko Jergovic (who had fled Sarajevo when it was under siege), accusing Manchevski of "Macedonian nationalism, failure to understand the historical situation of the Albanians..." Jergovic did not note that he himself had not been to Macedonia.

As if to continue the political fuss engulfing the film, the most frequent questions in the numerous interviews Manchevski gave in Venice (at least 120 for several countries) had to do with the political crisis in Macedonia. The film was seen through the prism of politics. Even at the gala entrance preceding the opening of the festival, an occasion generally used for glamorous show-biz fluff, Manchevski was asked about the fate of NATO troops in Macedonia (whereupon he answered that those who distributed arms to the militants are now collecting them back). The day after the opening night of "Dust" in Venice, the Associated Press agency released the (erroneous) information that Manchevski was retiring from directing.

Finally, has Macedonia learned its lesson from this battering? Has it learned that the mighty play dirty, and that they punch below the belt, and that when your fate is being tailored by the bigger and the mightier it is very important for the world to hear your side of the truth, no matter what the consequences?

The case of "The 'Dust' Files" is telling because the western media gave its bias away – and because the rest of us failed to use the opportunity to speak in a public place about our problems and about our truth. This distortion then becomes only a small piece in the mosaic of a political struggle.

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