



Solidarity for Ukraine – 01/07/2023- issue 17 – The art of being a star

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The Institute for Research and Information on Volunteering (iriv) is associated to the international solidarity for Ukraine attacked by Russia on 24th February 2022. After a pandemic that has weakened democratic countries with the disturbing rise of conspiracy theories and hate speech on social networks, we do hope this war in Europe will be an opportunity to reflect on a new solidarity, among European and international allies. This issue is the 7th for 2023 and the 17th since the beginning of the war in Ukraine. The failed putsch attempt by the head of the private militia Wagner, Evgueni Viktorovich Prigojine, on Saturday, June 24, 2023, is another episode of a bad film that has been taking place in Russia for twenty years. Once again, Vladimir Putin has a hard time taking the lead. He seemed totally overwhelmed by the situation in front of a

«villain», coming from his ranks, that he had not seen coming. The Russian president is singularly lacking in charisma in spite of deployed communications treasures and a deferential audience (his first circle). The Ukrainian president has played several roles since the beginning - as a comedian before being democratically elected president (with a large majority), and finally becoming war chief since February 2022. Casting is important for the film to be as successful as the script, according to the precepts of a master of the 7th art. Both must be convincing, entrusted to directors who believe in their main character and know how to highlight it. Cinema is a subtle art but also a demanding industry that obeys a simple alchemy – a good scenario, served by stars who live up to their reputation, supported by a distribution that plays the same music.

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* the logo was designed by Caritas Canada February 2022

The casting, a key to the success

The history of Hollywood, an international reference in the film industry, is rich in the stories of studios that have built their legends both on the success of their films and on their prestigious «stable» of «stars». Casting is the key to the success of a film, as well as the script, according to British director Alfred Hitchcock. Can we imagine «Gone with the Wind» (1) without Vivien Leigh and Clark Gable, «The Godfather» (2) without Al Pacino and Marlon Brando or «Thelma and Louise» (3) without Susan Sarandon and Geena Davis?

The search for new stars is a permanent work that can take several years. The studio identifies potential new recruits, it follows their careers, decides to approach them by following a series of tests to ensure that they will meet the expectations of demanding requirements. The investment is proportional to the expected impact. Stars are the image of studios that have no right to error. The competition is fierce. Sometimes potential stars give nothing, others reveal themselves in new roles.

Imagine that a studio sets its sights on a classical tragedy actress, who came from the theatre, an expert in drama and melodrama that made her career and reputation in Europe. The studio recruiters have decided to offer her a new “profile”. The bet is daring but the risks are part of the job in Hollywood. Before recruiting her, they proceed to an anonymous approach, sending her emissaries. The tragic actress is not informed of their tactics, but the artists are sensitive to unusual details, unexplained behaviours, and she guesses that a process is underway, which flatters her. For the first two years, she worked to make major changes in her life. It is worth the effort, she has precisely arrived at a pivotal period in her life as an artist. From the third year, the studio sends emissaries who present themselves as enamoured fans, friends or colleagues. She quickly realizes that this is a game in which she is invited to participate but which does not convince her. The character given to her is caricatural, the current does not pass with her partners, things quickly turn sour.

In artistic professions, the susceptibilities are most sensitive, and the egos are often oversized. In the French cinema of the fifties or sixties, the popular success of films was as much a matter of the leading roles as of the second. There was a feeling of complicity between the actors who were often found in several films, in the same register of French film director – comedies with George Lautner or detective films with Henri Verneuil. French actors Jean Gabin and Lino Ventura often surrounded themselves with the same cast and sometimes demanded that some of their colleagues be involved in a production. The failure or success of a film that is an important and risky investment, that never knows if it will find its audience, is based on this unique alchemy that consists in playing together personalities with different profiles but who know how to play «collective» to defend the film. False notes, too personal games, cause disaster. Casting is the key – if the personality of the “stars” is decisive, they must have the means to take the lead, with confidence and the support of their partners.

.Putin, a B character

Several documentaries were aired during the first year of war in Ukraine in February 2023, in particular a series produced by British documentary filmmaker Nick Green in 2020, produced by the BBC “*Putin, the spy turned president*” (4). We learn edifying details about the desperate communication strategy of the Russian president to shape a star image, without ever convincing. The first documentary «The rise» evokes the first career of Vladimir Putin, his debut as a spy in Dresden, in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), which then belonged to the Soviet bloc. He did not have the physics of the character— small, insignificant but above all placed very low in the KGB hierarchy as evidenced by the numerous photographs found. A “master” spy does not let himself be photographed, the first rule is discretion - he must seduce and influence without showing it and never leaving a trace.

From the outset, Putin was not a “star”. On the other hand, he identified himself with the spy character Max Otto von Stierlitz, stage name for agent Maxim Maximovitch Issaev, the stereotypical Soviet version of the Western secret agent, James Bond. The character of Ian Fleming was created in 1953 (the year of Joseph Stalin’s death) with his novel «Royal Casino» (5). His great success inspired vocations in the West, in the middle of the Cold War. The character of Stierlitz was created by the Russian writer Julian Semenov who published a series of books in the 1960s. They were adapted for Soviet television and for the cineam entitled «*Seventeen Moments of Spring*» (6). The rosy title must not mask the propaganda enterprise that is hidden in these Manichean stories where the hero from the East always prevails over the «decadents» of the West. Television is a powerful propaganda tool still used by the Russian government among elderly and poorly connected households; the rate of equipment in television sets is higher in Russia than that of refrigerators. Another contemporary «democrat», the Turkish President, Recep Erdogan, recently re-elected, Putin’s implicit ally, uses television series as a weapon for Turkish «soft power» - Turkey even dethroned the United States for the number of viewers from China to Latin America (7).

The English documentary film director found the first filmed images of Vladimir Putin when he was the grey eminence of the mayor of Saint Petersburg, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the USSR in 1991. The images include an episode of Stierlitz, a wink and a first attempt at staring. Putin then professionalized his approach when he became president with propaganda films whose message is also simplistic- you see him shirtless, in the steppe, hunting and fishing, in a hostile and wild nature. He is in his element because he was able to remain a «simple man close to people and naturally empathic» , a soft voice reminds us of. At the 2014 Sochi Olympic Games, which were supposed to be the apotheosis of the Russian president, entirely carved out of his bounds, a formidable propaganda tool, Putin was not the star either. Against all odds, the Maidan Revolution took place at the same time in Kiev, Ukraine, already depriving him of the lead role..

Zelenski, natural hero

Since his election in 2019, but even more so since the Russian aggression in 2022, Volodymyr Zelenski has constantly taken the spotlight from his Russian counterpart. He did not seek to provoke Vladimir Putin, things and situations have always naturally turned to his advantage because he is honest and convinced. He has been lucky enough since 2019 to dodge the attacks and low blows of the Russian power. We can imagine the most basic and most abused attempts at stake in espionage. Reality is often coarser, and sewn with white thread, than fiction. In a series of documentaries directed by Jennifer Deschamps «Putin's Poisons» (8), we learn how Vladimir Putin often personally organized executions (by poisoning, abuses in prisons or by shooting) Anna Stepanovna Politkovskaya shot down in 2006 as Boris Nemtsov in 2015 in Moscow, Alexander Valterovich Litvinenko in 2006 in London . Four opponents have so far survived the poisonings: Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko in 2004, Sergei Skripal, a former Russian spy and his daughter in 2018 in the UK, Alexei Navalny in 2020 or Vladimir Kara Murza (twice poisoned). The Russian opponents of Putin have shared for twenty years the role of heroes; their example forces admiration (9)

The Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenski, has escaped poison and corruption (10). Money is a classic means of pressure. Jennifer Deschamps' documentary explains the courage of businessman Bill Browder, who succeeded in passing the Justice Law for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials (Sergei Magnitsky Law) to the United States in 2012 and Canada in 2017. Finally, in Europe, a European Parliament Resolution was adopted on July 2021 on the EU's global human rights sanctions regime (EU Magnitsky Law). It makes it possible to take restrictive measures against natural and legal persons involved in serious human rights violations all over the world by extending its scope of action to cases of corruption. The Russian oligarchs are targeted but also the Ukrainians who have benefited from Russian largesse. The anti-corruption policy led by President Zelenski since his election in 2019, and which continued in full war with Russia, is effective.

Volodymyr Zelenski remained stoic. He fully assumed the lead even before the Russian aggression of 2022. The contrast is striking with its counterpart in the Kremlin. Going from humorous artist to president of an attacked nation was not obvious. He remained focused on his commitment to his constituents- bringing Ukraine closer to the European Union and the West. The Ukrainian president has spared no effort and has made many contacts. Since February 24, he has learned the role of “war chief” by appearing in the same khaki green suit, which is not a uniform but that of a man at war, like all his fellow citizens. He protects himself (we often see him wearing a bulletproof vest) but his hand does not shake when he makes his daily video messages. His popularity among Ukrainians, and the Westerners who support him, is based on this sobriety, a simplicity in the message, tirelessly repeated, without ever changing course..

The art of being a star

Cinema is not only an industry, but a demanding art, which does not suffer amateurism. It is sometimes surprising to see experienced producers, convinced by a “star” they have selected, embark on distributions that have no chance of succeeding. The chosen actors each play their character, but the current does not pass between them, the magic does not operate. They do not defend a common project; they seem individualities gathered in an arbitrary and fake way in a film that will not find its audience. No one believes in it, not even the actors. Some overplay, others are forgotten. Conflicts can even break out between actors who do not play on the same register. These palpable tensions on the screen still weigh down a heavy impression of bad series B.

The film given on Saturday, June 24 by the sinister Prigojine is a beautiful illustration of these catastrophic productions, which have not spared their effects and sometimes swallowed up substantial budgets. Bad actors, a non-existent scenario, and an inevitable fatal outcome. In the British documentary, director Nick Green shows a scene where Vladimir Putin is in a big conversation with the former president of the Italian council Silvio Berlusconi, a great friend and unconditional support, who recently disappeared. The commentary suggests that the Russian president would have called on the same plastic surgeon as his Italian friend, who increasingly resembles a wax statue for his critics. A film directed by Italian director Paolo Sorrentino «*La Grande Bellezza*» inspired by his life, insinuates with cruelty that he would wear dentures (11). Physical attacks are unfair but for a businessman who has built his political career as a commercial ad, one can understand the scathing attack.

When he spoke on Saturday, June 25, 2023 at the time of the failed Prigojine rebellion, Vladimir Putin was pale and stammering. An amateur actor who did not know his text. His bloated face attests that he has retouched his physique. His image is artificial. He does not seek beauty, no doubt youth. He delivers a mixed message and paradoxically exposes a great fragility. It is pathetic to see him filmed, rolling from his shoulders, in the grandiose corridors of the Kremlin, where he is crushed by the scenery. During the 2012 presidential elections, which were very eventful for him (12), he also had trouble hiding his emotion, tears running down his cheeks. It is increasingly difficult to believe the crocodile tears of a bad actor and a poor screenwriter who has been playing a very bad film for over twenty years.

One may think of the last images of Luchino Visconti’s film "*Death in Venice*", inspired by Thomas Mann’s book- the tears of a real artist, an aging composer, touched by the beauty and grace of a young Polish ephebe who has all his life ahead of him (13). Putin also knows that his days are numbered. What will be the next step: a new coup or a mutiny of his army? One thing is certain: future is not in Moscow but in Kiev.

- (1) Victor Fleming (1939), “Gone with the wind”, Etats Unis
- (2) Francis Ford Coppola (1972) “He godfather”, Etats-Unis “
- (3) Ridley Scott (1991) “Thelma et Louise”, Etats Unis
- (4) Nick Green (2020) “Putin, a spy become president », a series of 3 documentaries (« The rise », « Enemies and traitors», « Putin for ever ») produced by the BBC - <https://www.france.tv/documentaires/societe/poutine-l-espion-devenu-president/>
- (5) Ian Fleming (1953) « Royal Casino», London
- (6) Tatiana Lioznova (1973) « Seventeen Moments of Spring» , Soviet TV series in 12 episodes inspired by novels by Julian Semenov (who wrote the scenario)
- (7) «Yassir GUEZIM, 23 avril 2021- Television : Why do Turkish series work so well?- <https://www.lecourrierdelatlas.com/television-pourquoi-les-series-turques-marchent-elles-autant/> -
- (8) Jennifer Deschamps (2023) « Putin’s poisons» , broadcasted by Arte, Tuesday 16th of May 2023
- (9) Kristian Kähler and Saskia Geissler (2022) « Ukraine : Putin and the propaganda war » broadcasted by Arte , Tuesday 14 February 2023
- (10) Numbers 14 to 16 of our newsletter documenting the many anti-corruption actions taken by the Ukrainian president since his election in 2019
- (11) Paolo Sorrentino (2013) « La Grande Bellezza”, Italy
- (12) Dorine Goth « Vote in Russia : the 2011-2012 elections , the scarecrow of Russian power», Le Monde, 18 March 2018 - https://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2018/03/18/vote-en-russie-les-elections-de-2011-2012-l-epouvantail-du-pouvoir-russe_5272721_3214.html
- (13) Luchino Visconti (1971) « Death in Venice », Italy, inspired by Thomas Mann, music by Gustav Mahler

L'Aide médicale et caritative France-Ukraine - envoi de convois d'aide humanitaire, des soins aux blessés, des échanges de savoir-faire médical, une aide psychologique et organise des colonies de vacances pour les enfants orphelins - HelloAsso - <https://www.helloasso.com/associations/aide%20medicale%20caritative%20france%20ukraine/collectes/aider-ukraine-amurgence-help-ukraine/don>

Le Comité d'aide médicale Ukraine - réfugiés en transit dans l'ouest du pays, et collecte fonds, médicaments et équipements pour l'hébergement et les soins via ses partenaires français, l'association SAFE et l'organisation FONDEMOS. - <http://www.cam-z.org/en/news/121/>

JeVeuxAider.gouv.fr est la plateforme publique du bénévolat, - une page dédiée Mobilisons-nous pour l'Ukraine. - <https://www.jeveuxaider.gouv.fr/engagement/benevolat-ukraine/>

Les Banques alimentaires - une aide d'urgence à apporter aux frontières de l'Ukraine, dans les pays frontaliers accueillant des réfugiés - <https://www.banquealimentaire.org/urgence-ukraine>

La Protection Civile et l'Association des maires de France ont établi une [liste](#) (lits de camps, sacs de couchage, lingettes, conserves, pansements hémostatiques, solutions antiseptiques ...).

L'Association des maires de France a dressé les [lieux de collecte](#) à travers toute la France. Les Maires de France appellent à la [solidarité avec l'Ukraine](#). De nombreuses villes de France organisent des collectes de produits de première nécessité - <https://www.amf.asso.fr/documents-les-maires-france-appellent-la-solidarite-avec-lukraine/41122>

La plateforme officielle « *Je m'engage pour l'Ukraine* » lancée le 8 mars 2022 par le gouvernement pour accompagner les Français souhaitant héberger chez eux des Ukrainiens réfugiés et accueillis en France. - <https://parrainage.refugies.info/>

Les associations, fondations, entreprises et collectivités territoriales peuvent utiliser ce [formulaire en ligne](#) pour renseigner leur capacité d'hébergement. - <https://www.demarches-simplifiees.fr/commencer/hebergement-personne-morale-ukraine>

Bibliothèque sans frontière (BSF) - Depuis le début de l'offensive russe en Ukraine, BSF se mobilise et déploie, partout en Europe, des solutions d'urgence pour l'accueil et l'intégration des populations réfugiées. « Bonjour France » est une application pour smartphone innovante et totalement gratuite, qui propose un apprentissage accéléré du français depuis l'ukrainien, disponible depuis le 19 octobre 2022.

<https://www.bibliosansfrontieres.org/2022/10/14/bsf-lance-bonjour-france-une-application-innovante-dapprentissage-du-francais-pour-les-refugies-ukrainiens/>

La mission catholique de l'Eglise polonaise en France suggère également le lien suivant : <https://mission-catholique-polonaise.pl/polska-we-francji/pere-brzys-la-mcp-lance-une-initiative-nationale-pour-aider-lukraine/> - **Source** : conférence des évêques de France