

Dossier de presse trigon-film

Sonhos de Peixe

de Kirill Mikhanovsky

(Brésil, 2006)



DISTRIBUTION

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MATÉRIEL PHOTOGRAPHIQUE

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FICHE TECHNIQUE

Réalisation: Kirill Mikhanovsky
Scénario: Kirill Mikhanovsky
Image: Andrij Parekh
Montage: Adam Walsh, KD Klippning
Son: Aloysio Compasso
Musique: Artur Andres Ribeiro
Décors: Monica Palazzo
Production: Unison Films
Langue: Portugais/f/d
Durée: 111 minutes

FICHE ARTISTIQUE

José Maria Alves (Jusce)
Rubia Rafaelle
Chico Diaz
Phellipe Haagensen
Agício «Nêgo» da Silva
Antônio «Macaro» Nelson da Silva

SYNOPSIS

Dans un petit village au nord-est du Brésil, Jusce, un jeune pêcheur, plonge chaque jour dans les entrailles de la mer, malgré un équipement rudimentaire, et tente d'y capturer des homards. À la fin d'une longue journée de dur labeur, son plus grand plaisir est de s'asseoir auprès d'Ana, en train de savourer sa telenovela favorite.

Alors que Jusce est heureux de la vie qu'il mène, Ana rêve d'abandonner le village pour aller découvrir le monde. Rogerio, un ancien collègue pêcheur, revient un jour de la grande ville pour passer ses vacances au village. Accompagné de sa voiture de sport, il éveille la curiosité d'Ana. Une sérieuse concurrence naît alors entre les deux jeunes hommes. Jusce doit trouver une solution s'il compte ne pas perdre Ana, attirée par le style aventureux et citadin de Rogerio.

Originaire de Russie, Kirill Mikhanovsky a choisi, pour son premier film, de raconter une histoire d'amour particulière avec comme cadre un petit village de pêcheurs brésiliens au quotidien plutôt dur.

Habilement, le premier exercice cinématographique de Kirill Mikhanovsky démontre sa maîtrise du son et de l'image, qui s'entrelacent avec provocation tout au long de cette œuvre délicate, révélée lors de la Semaine Internationale de la Critique à Cannes.

LE RÉALISATEUR – KIRILL MIKHANOVSKY

Né à Moscou, Kirill Mikhanovsky y vit jusqu'à l'adolescence avant de migrer aux Etats-Unis avec sa famille. Il commence à tourner dans des courts métrages réalisés par des étudiants à l'Université du Wisconsin et, peu de temps après, il réalise son premier court, "Terra Terra", qui été à l'affiche de nombreux festivals. Il écrit et réalise ensuite trois autres courts et travaille sur de multiples autres projets à l'Université de New-York (NYU), Graduate Film Program.

En 2003, son court film documentaire, "Inhale, Exhale", reçoit le Prix du Public à la remise annuelle des Directors Guild of America Awards. "Auditions" est son dernier court métrage, et fut terminé juste avant de commencer à travailler sur "Sonhos de Peixe".

NOTE D'INTENTION

Des pêcheurs poussant un bateau sur les flots maritimes introduisent le leitmotiv-clé du film: l'effort. C'est à travers les efforts de Jusce, un jeune pêcheur, amoureux et travailleur, que l'histoire est contée.

Le quotidien de Jusce est de plonger à des profondeurs de 30 à 40 mètres pour capturer des homards. Le monde sous-marin devient à la fois une évasion et le cadre de sa routine. L'atmosphère éthérée du monde marin donne une impression de tranquillité. Pourtant, les pratiques illégales de la pêche au homard en profondeur sont très dangereuses, et ses protagonistes flirtent souvent avec la mort.

Jusce est guidé par les vents de sa destinée. Les mêmes vents puissants qui, quelque temps auparavant, soufflaient dans les voiles des bateaux de son père et de son grand-père.

C'est le vent, la mer, les pêcheurs du village de Baia Formosa et leur travail qui ont inspiré SONHOS DE PEIXE. J'ai essayé, le plus habilement possible, de montrer la beauté et la noblesse du travail de pêcheur, ce qui a impliqué une fine observation de leurs routines et rituels quotidiens. Le traitement visuel patient et respectueux des détails spécifiques de leur travail et de leurs relations fut critique pour pouvoir transmettre la dignité et la noblesse de leur profession et de leurs vies.

Kirill Mikhanovsky

ENTRETIEN AVEC LE REALISATEUR KIRILL MIKHANOVSKY

What was the ultimate reason for portraying fishermen from the northeast coast of Brazil? Which fascination is emanating from them?

While travelling up the coastal area of Brazil, I stumbled upon a fishermen's village named Baia Formosa. There were only 3 lines dedicated to the topic of Baia Formosa in the travel guide I was using and that did the trick. My instinct didn't falter – I've been wondering up to this day how a place like Baia Formosa had managed to survive the tourist invasion.

It is a fishing village that boasts the only existing bay in the Northeast region of Brazil, harboring over a hundred of the traditional sailboats and motor boats used for fishing. Fishing had been the villagers' main activity. The fishermen of that area go mainly after lobster, the most expensive meat. Lobster makes their trips worth it, for only lobster can pay for the maintenance of the motor boat and feed their families. There are few ways of catching lobster, one of them is diving for it, breathing through a tube connected to a compressor. Diving for lobster has always been considered an illegal activity. Diving for lobster is also extremely dangerous for the fishermen have to descend anywhere from 25 to 60 (!) meters deep for bigger catch.

My attention was immediately compelled to each and every aspect the fishermen's labour. I am fascinated by it. SONHOS DE PEIXE came out of fascination with their labour. Period. Not all of the fishermen are noble, but their work, no matter how illegal or bad for the environment it is, IS noble: the man and the constant effort, danger, deprivation, the burden of being alive and human – I find it all in their work and the life style this work forces upon them. I get mesmerized by their work like others get mesmerized by a fire or a waterfall.

How did you get the confidence of the people from Baia Formosa for playing in a movie? How did you find your main actors?

All (with the exception of two) actors are residents of Baia Formosa - that was the approach from the moment the script was conceived. The so-called "non-professional actors", or simply *nonactors* are by far superior in their on-screen presence than any theatre-school trained, filmindustry actors. They are capable of the degree of naturalism that can't be taught. I had known that all along and stayed faithful to the approach all the way through.

Finding the main couple was my main concern. The rest was easy – the place was "crawling" with highly watchable characters able to deliver what they know best: being themselves in a place in which they were born and raised, doing what do they best – their work.

A non-actor chosen well doesn't need to be told *how* to do, but only *what*. Minor adjustments should not be a problem with the naturally gifted people. They are fully capable of escalating their emotions to any desired level upon the director's demand.

I didn't ask anyone to do what they wouldn't know how to do *best*: whether cutting stingray, putting the boat on water, discussing the issue of illegal diving, dancing, or selling a TV – we are witnessing virtuosos at work, which is always fascinating, mesmerizing. Whether it is Paganini, Rostropovich, or a cutter of stingray. "Filming the working men work", as I believe JLG put it once.

In the film a German backpacker is trying to live and work together with the villagers. They call him "Gringo", take care of him, but the viewer is feeling that this "white man" is definitely not a part of this closed community. Is "Gringo" describing you who is trying to get closer to a strange culture of hard boiled and native fishermen living on the other half of the globe?

No. "Gringo" is not me. (Since I, myself, am a gringo, most people assume it's "me" on screen, and refuting it doesn't get me anywhere.) Gringo is a *foreigner* who comes into the village and takes the place of a *native*. I find this shift fascinating and tragic at the same time. At the end of the film a young fisherman - someone who is very important for the village, someone who represents it's future – is abandoning the village. A foreigner comes and takes his place. This is the mega "function" of Gringo in SONHOS DE PEIXE.

Tell us a little about the main actors José Maria Alves and Rubia Rafaelle, who are playing the young lovers Jusce and Ana. Are both still living in Baia Formosa?

José Maria Alves Adelino, or simply Zé Maria, at the time of the shooting was 18 and a father of a baby boy. He had been fishing for 6 years. Today he is 20 and a father of three boys. He still goes fishing, dreams of leaving the village for a big city, feels irrepressibly burdened by his wife and the flock (which doesn't stop him from producing more babies.) Zé Maria was found and

cast on the 1st day of my arrival in Baía Formosa. He was the 1st casting choice I made. With the money he made acting in the film he had built his own fishing boat. Rafaelle never did much throughout her life of 20; other than going to school, she would spend most of her time staying home or going to the disco parties to dance and flirt. Today she is a single mother of a 2-year-old boy.

During the whole film, the strong "love efforts" of Jusce to attract Ana are corresponding to the also strong efforts of the fishermen to earn money for the next day. Should we understand this narrational grouping only as a plot device?

Yes. Absolutely. And this is exactly how it was in the script (i.e., not an editing "trick"). The film's overture is there for a very specific reason: the film *is* about fishing – set in a fishing village, while the film's leit-motif is *effort* – «Life is an effort in time» being the underlying philosophical motto on which the film's structure is founded. The film begins with an *effort* – a physical struggle of getting the boat into water and continues with the protagonist, a young fisherman Juscelino, accompanying his daily efforts at work and his efforts in trying to conquer the heart of Ana, and finishing the circle with the *effort* of dragging a large TV set down the street all the way to the shore and onto the boat.

One of the most beautiful and at the same time most bizarre scenes in your movie is showing Jusce carrying the tired Ana on his back. While Jusce is gasping, Ana's only problem is to catch the vespertine telenovela right in time. This seems absolutely unfair and ignorant against the knightly Jusce, although he is still carrying Ana to her house. What kind of love is this?

Jusce's love story – and not Ana's – his amour fou, his blindingly mad infatuation with the «wrong» girl, is nothing but an excuse, a form of gossip if you will, a vehicle to tell a bigger story of one man's efforts that go so far that the sense of one's action is long before discernible. For me, *SONHOS DE PEIXE* is not a «love story». *SONHOS DE PEIXE* is the story of a man who is committing acts – whether «right» or «wrong». It is the story of a *modern day hero*. Jusce's path is utterly fatalistic (a true «hero» in the classical Greek sense of the word), he is carried by the winds of his destiny (perhaps the same very winds that some time ago were blowing the sails of his grandfather's fishing boat) having left to his discretion whether to be active or passive. And Jusce chooses the former by attempting to «outsmart» his destiny, while, instead, accomplishing the very opposite by assisting the destiny in bringing his own story to its pre-determined close (Jusce's herculean efforts only accelerate the arrival of his «doom»): the beautifully ignorant (in a true Oscar Wildean sense) Jusce leaves the place, the work, and the people he loves.

How exactly did you prepare the script? Or did you shoot mostly in an unscripted, improvisational method which was possibly easier while working with non-professional actors?

I got to know the location well enough to be able to write a script based entirely on the location: the script was written with Baía Formosa in mind, specifically *for* Baía Formosa. Still, for sheer lack of time and resources, I had to practically re-write, readjust the work of fiction: 75-80% of the material was filmed unrehearsed. Most extras were «cast» and placed minutes before shooting. We had no time to test people, experiment, play around, move the pieces on the desk – we were doing all that as we were rolling.

As an example, the scene in which the main character carries his love interest on his back was an on-the-spot decision (made by me; literally 10-min before the shooting – the scene/dialogue hadn't been rehearsed once) that crossed out a 7-page long dialogue accompanying a mile-long walk with multiple stops and ridiculously emotional swings, pseudo-revelations, and violent outbursts of 2 teenage characters. The 7-page dialogue was replaced with a simple, nearly silent 4-minute-long physical action that is more sublime than pages and pages of stupid words the meaning of which the characters wouldn't know, wouldn't how to say them.

The main character's friend's fight-provoking dance is the invention of the actor himself by way of ... knowing how to dance and lead a woman. He uses her as a weapon to fight another man! It's brilliant and it's subtle. We just filmed it. Andrij Parekh did solid filming it. The rest was editing.

Boat-pushing could not be rehearsed: to have the boat pulled out of the water back onto the shore into the initial position would take anywhere from 1,5 to 2 hours – the type of luxury we simply couldn't afford.

Still, I was nearly shocked to see many a scene and an image in the film to be most literal

illustrations of the script.

So the final cutting had to be really important for to combine the documentary material with the fictional story?

By “saving” time on pre-production, one ends up paying high price during both production – wasting the expensive set time rehearsing what should’ve been rehearsed, experimenting, taking expensive risks (that often turn failures), “burning” more film (+ film processing) – and during post-production, ending up re-inventing the film at the editing table.

This was my case. I was pressured to shoot earlier than I needed, and I was too cowardly to stand my ground for fear of not making the film happen, thus committing my (second) biggest mistake: going into production totally unprepared. The total of six months of editing was like walking into a horror chamber and watching over and over (14-16 hrs /day) one’s countless failures, missed opportunities, and mistakes, all leading me to believe that I was directing blindfolded.

In fact, what kind of society the villagers live in: in patriarchal structures because on the boats only men are working, or rather in matriarchy because ashore the women are ruling life and behaviour?

My feeling would be exactly how it looks: the men reign out at sea, while the women reign in their homes. But only *would be* if I didn’t know the reality.

The ratio of men to women in Baia Formosa is 1:10, i.e. there are 10 women for each man in Baia Formosa. Which gives many men the idea of being a hard-to-find item: many, if not most, of them cheat on their wives, have babies on the side, leave their wives for other women. Cheating is rampant, is a norm. Most women don’t work; they are staying home, spending their lives withering quietly and “decently” at home breeding and raising numerous children of their foreverfree fishing husbands, cooking, cleaning, washing, and – naturally – watching TV, novella being the “prime rib” of the Brazilian television, their only entertainment and window into the world outside of Baia Formosa. Their daughters take after the mothers, growing up watching novellas and learning the urban sophisticate ways.

For Ana, the daily TV show is the day’s only blowoff. How important is the TV for this people: only a brainwashing consumption tool or in fact a kind of open window to another, maybe to a better world?

Ana is inexperienced, infantile, and not in touch with “reality.” The walls of her house and the backyard are the frontiers of her universe. Her imagination excursions are hosted by TV. Outside of her experience as an adolescent mother, TV is her only “real-life” experience.

Jusce is very young yet, and doesn’t know much. He doesn’t own a TV. Nevertheless, it doesn’t stop him from being taken away from the place and the people he loves, carried away by the wind of his blindingly mad infatuation. Which, one way or another, was a product of the universal infatuation with TV.

Ten years ago there were just a few TV sets in the village. Today, absolutely every family in the village – no matter how poor it is – has a TV. Television has long since been serving for the villagers’ as both main source of entertainment and the source of information about the rest of the world. For most of the villagers it is the only “real” contact with the outside world. No matter how poor a family is its house is crowned with the umbrella of a parabolic antenna. The new generation is shifting their attention away from fishing towards other professions brought to the village with the current development of tourism.

Every night, the whole village is glued to their TV sets to follow a most recent soap opera (and so does the majority of Brazil).

The wasting everyday life of the fishermen has nothing in common with the popular cliché of the easy Samba style at the Copacabana. On the other side, your film is presenting amazing impressions of the maritime nature and the herb beauty of the people. What was your approach for using this arrangement?

I would try coining a new term: *Magic Naturalism*. Many scenes in SONHOS DE PEIXE have a strong documentary feel to them. The goal was not to criticize, comment, or exploit, but to *observe, document, and arrange* in accordance with the narrative line of the script/film.

From the outset and throughout the making of the film, I had and maintained respect toward the people, their lifestyle and their place. It didn’t mean I approved of everything, but it did mean I was always genuinely interested in and many times fascinated by them, their lives, and their ways about life.

Reality resists one's desire to have it filmed (filmed *intact*). The closer we approach to the reality the more resistance we confront. It is a form of collaboration – through resistance. Just keep on trying to get closer – and you may get lucky to capture a glimpse life. I got lucky: my interest and attitude are evident in the filmed material.

The combination of beauty and poverty, of "simple life" and archaic drama reminds of the Italian neorealistic school and also of Pasolini's stunning street drama "Accatone". By which filmmakers you are truly inspired?

Thank you – it is a huge compliment. "Accatone" is one of my all-time favorites. The works of Pasolini, Ioseliani, Cassavetes, Eisenstein, Godard, Olmi, Aleksei German, Kurosawa would make the list. The regular bunch. My teacher, Russian director Boris Frumin. Also, Leo Tolstoy and Vladimir Nabokov – I consider them filmmakers. Writing filmmakers.

Music seems really important in your movie, and you have chosen a combination of Bach and Brazilian folk songs. Can you tell us a bit about the compilation and the composition of the score?

I see Bach and fishermen as a perfect match. It was not a post-production decision: I was listening to Bach while writing the script. Bach doesn't have to *blend* into their lives and the ambience of the location. It *is* a part of their lives. At least it had been. Bach and the work of

fishermen...is the same to me: *noble, biblical and timeless*.

Many a scene were asking for the bare minimum of sound, nothing of the over-the-top hyper-realistic quality of the multi-million dollar boys.

The film boasts many a scene of "silence": the palpable silence of the main-character's house, the pacifying suspenseful silence of the open sea, the high-pressure silence of the under-water darkness.

To me the soundtrack of the film is a non-stop symphony – the ambience of the location is *music* in its own right: the idiosyncrasy of the sound of a knife being sharpened against the sting-ray's skin, the sound of the knife driven through a sting ray, the sound of fish-peeling, fish-cutting, the sound the main-character's love interest whispering the lines of a popular song: her dry lips parting; the music (not a metaphor!) of the voices of the villagers as they embark upon their heavily-dialected discourses. The wind! The wind! The wind! The thick, sweat-soaked, choked up silence of the fishermen pushing the boat in the water. The bare minimalism of the soundscape contributes to the subtlety, to the very non-obvious but ever-present poetry that permeates the air of the location and the story.

I refer to the pieces of music in the film as *musical "interventions"*, sometimes barely discernible, the blend into the natural ambience and the mood of the moment, while retaining the power enough to affect the viewer's senses. I hope it feels as if the moment breathes out a puff of a musical phrase that is akin to the sensation of wind.

The technique of strongly marked contrasts between the "noise" and the "silence" – dramatic, abrupt shifts between the two – is aimed at sustaining the element of surprise throughout the audio-visual discourse.

SONHOS DE PEIXE is a Brazilian-Russian-US co-production. How difficult has been developed the international managing for this "provincial" enterprise?

The most difficult part was keeping the US-based investor making the instalments in timely fashion, as well as making this US-based investor understand that, despite the Brazilian status as a third-world country people who work in Brazil must get paid and paid on time, that the services in Brazil were not for fee. It was also important to respect the specific nature and the work ethics to which the Brazilian production companies and the free-lance technicians adhere. As a result of investor's amateurism, the lack of very basic understanding of how the films are made, no post-production money had been set aside and the film was stalled for months. The lack of financial discipline and understanding of how filmmaking operates were our major obstacles all the way through the final print. The fact that the film survived, came to the light of day, and is now represented by BAVARIA seems to be a string of miracles.

One "star" in the film is the brilliant camerawork of DOP Andrij Parekh. How complex and elaborating was the photographing ashore and under water?

Andrij Parekh, our director of photography, an American-born – of Ukranian mother and Indian father – an NYU Graduate Film School colleague of mine – was my greatest creative and

emotional support on the set throughout the shoot. Andrij also happened to be one of the most experienced film technicians in a predominantly first feature crew. In this heavily underproduced, often improvised shoot with non-actors and ever-shifting light and weather conditions a lot depended on Parekh's speed, quick reaction, experience, and instinct. Parekh did his job really well. He was my closest ally on and off the set. He is attentive, patient and sharp-eyed. He never complains. Parekh is a warrior. My friend, my comrade – we were down there fighting for the same cause, looking through the same lens, so to speak. Technical and financial limitations were compensated by the mobility of Andrij's camera. I will be happy to work with him again. The underwater photography was done by Roberto Faisal, the most experienced and celebrated Brazilian underwater photographer. He was great, but, naturally, his services were expensive: we could afford very little time of his. Shooting underwater was difficult: 24 meters deep the water is cold and constantly moving; it is hard to keep the balance and the photography is usually done with at least one assistant underwater with the photographer, taking care of the cables. Faisal had no assistance down there. Also, Roberto Faisal was used to the waters that were much calmer, warmer and clearer, like in the Caribbean, for instance, and I needed the conditions of the Baía Formosa waters: the colour, the movement, the danger, and the stingrays they offer are hard to imitate in the calm and comfortable waters of Rio de Janeiro, where Faisal was suggesting we'd shoot. The 50-year-old cinematographer could descend only 3 times a day: each rolls gives about 4 minutes of usable material (at best!). We had little time, little money, 5 rolls of film, and a stormy weather. We ended up with the total of 18min of footage, most of which was usable. Faisal's experience and instincts paid off handsomely: some of the material looks spectacular. I am grateful to him for his work and his patience.

At the end of the film, Jusce and Ana are leaving their village by boat in beautiful and peaceful scene together with the big 61-inch-television. What do you think will be the future of the two young people as representatives of most of the youth in so called "Third World countries" torn between traditional commitments and modern comforts?

There is no "happy end" in it for me. This is a story of a hero who falls for the "wrong" girl, the story of a place that loses its "hero", in which both are doomed, both the hero and the place. To me the prospect of their future looks bleak: the hero will stay in the big city with the girl, ending up – just like you noted: trading the traditional commitments for modern comforts.