

Moderation

a film by
ANJA KIRSCHNER



 **66** Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Forum Expanded

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Moderation – Credits

Greece, Italy, Egypt, UK 2016
149min, DCP, dolby digital 5.1
Language: English

Maya Lubinsky (May, the Director)
Anna De Filippi (Ray, the Screenwriter)
Aida El Kashef (Aida, the Egyptian Actor)
Michele Valley (Michele, the Greek Actor)
Giovanni Lombardo Radice
(Johnny, the Italian Actor)

Adham Zidan (Ehab, the Egyptian Producer),
Stavroula Siamou (Patricia, the LA Producer),
Areti Seidaridou (the Oracle), Giorgos Valais
(the Waste Managment Exexutive),
Pauline Huguet (Paul, the Production
Designer), Laura Riccioli (Angelica, the
Italian Screenwriter), Adriano Saleri
(the Driver)

DIRECTED BY Anja Kirschner
WRITTEN BY Anja Kirschner with
Maya Lubinsky and Anna De Filippi
PRODUCER Theo Prodromidis
DIRECTORS OF PHOTOGRAPHY Dimitris
Kasimatis GSC, Mostafa El Kashef
EDITORS Smaro Papaevangelou, Anja Kirschner
MUSIC Dracula Lewis
PRODUCTION DESIGNER Kleio Boboti
COSTUME DESIGNER Alkistis Mamali
HAIR & MAKE-UP DESIGNERS Ioanna Lygizou,
Andrea Sorrentino
SOUND Dimitris Kanellopoulos,
Max Schneider, Giuseppe Di Lascio
SOUND DESIGN Kostas Fylaktidis,
Vasilis Zlatanous, Stefanos Konstantinidis
SPECIAL EFFECTS Yafka
COLOUR GRADING 2|35

Synopsis

Moderation, set in Egypt, Greece and Italy, revolves around a female horror director (Maya Lubinsky) and a screenwriter (Anna De Filippi), whose latest collaboration is haunted by encounters with its 'raw material' and the escalation of conflicting desires.

Faced with the disintegration of their project, the director becomes more and more drawn into conversations with the actors she has cast (Aida El Kashef, Michele Valley and Giovanni Lombardo Radice), which reflect on the way horror traverses the affective and material realities of their lives on and off screen.



Director's statement

Moderation was inspired by tendencies within horror cinema that can be thought to relate to situations of rupture and reaction, from post-war Japan, cold-war Europe, Infatigable-era Egypt, post-junta Greece to sub-prime mortgage crisis USA.

What the films I was drawing on have in common is that in them 'horror' seeps through the limits of rational analysis, connecting it materially and affectively to the trauma of the recent past and its repression and reactionary stabilisation in the present.

Departing from this material I have been asking myself if critical recourse to the horror genre could constitute an actual revolt of reason, in a desire to ultimately prevail, albeit in a heightened and by then barely legible state?

The result is *Moderation*, which seeks to answer the question through the prism of the film-making process itself.

Much of the film is shot handheld, combining low-fi special effects with HD camcorder, Skype and mobile phone footage in order to heighten the sense of immediacy and interplay between fictional, factual and genre elements.

As a result, lived experience is neither naturalistically represented nor is it sublimated by recourse to the irrational. Rather, the 'irrational' is used to externalise and to de-subjectify what 'haunts' the protagonists, in order to reground the possibility of rational agency operating at its limits.

Anja Kirschner

Anja Kirschner (b.1977, Munich) is an artist currently living and working in London and Athens. Her practise spans video installations and narrative films that create genre hybrids from pop culture references, factual research and literary sources.

She was the winner of the 2011 Jarman Award (with David Panos), which recognises UK-based artists working in the moving image. *Moderation* is her first feature film.

Kirschner's films have been widely screened and exhibited internationally, including the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen and recent solo shows at Secession, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Extra City Antwerp, Kunsthall Oslo, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart as well as the 2nd Athens Biennale, the British Art Show 7 and the Liverpool Biennial 2012.

Filmography

2003: *Supernumeraries* (21'), 2006: *Polly II – Plan for a Revolution in Docklands* (30'), 2008: *Trail of the Spider* (Co-director: David Panos, 54'), 2009: *The Last Days of Jack Sheppard* (Co-director: David Panos, 56'), 2010: *The Empty Plan* (Co-director: David Panos, 78'), 2011: *Living Truthfully Under Imaginary Circumstances* (Co-director: David Panos, 33'), 2012: *Ultimate Substance* (Co-director: David Panos, 34'), 2013: *An Exchange for Fire* (Co-director: David Panos, 13'), 2013: *Uncanny Valley* (Co-director: David Panos, 10').



matter horribilis

Matter is a force (if we believe the current shift to a discourse amalgamating materialism, ontology, new ecology, the philosophy of science and contemporary social anthropology); or the Force matters (if we believe Obi-Wan Kenobi: “I felt a great disturbance in the Force, as if millions of voices suddenly cried out in terror and were suddenly silenced. I fear something terrible has happened”).

Anja Kirschner’s film *Moderation* is a hybrid of such matter and its force, and one already manifested as such in the sober mode established by the title’s choice of language and the swirling horror substantiated at the opening frames.

The short-circuiting of time space-references, the gradual, factual undermining of realities (political, anthropological, social, psychological) creates a ‘fictional’ which integrates reality and includes horror as a perpetual, lurking *horribilis*; its mixes are diluted, allowed to seep through the cracks of the real to unleash what is unreal about it and vice versa.

Through a languid delaying and an ambiguous prolonging/repetition, through stretching (to the point of ripping) its scenes, facts and storytelling, *Moderation* morphs: into what each one fears and desires as unveiled in the quasi – real dialogues and exchanges of the key figures; into an all pervading disquiet bordering to a call for revolt (albeit transmitted in the rumbling infrasound frequencies); into the giallo-colored haze of the khamaseen which makes the urban body corrode and evaporate with seasonal precision; into the *terrible* questioning of the fabric of reason in the pandemonium raised within the domestic (and the homescape’s desertification) and throughout the public (as with the found footage of the young boy lucidly dissecting political absurdity); into the heartbreaking certainty of the human body performing order, ordering chaos in the film’s very last scenes.

In Kirschner’s research the horror genre is called upon as the one which is drastically probing the real, daringly exploring its fissures and surface, glories and failures. Her curiosity is directed to the way that horrors (as history, politics, climate, circumstance) grasp the age old, rich and complex cultures of the Mediterranean shores – where the film is made – and throw them in a whirlwind of changes; yet her attention is tuned to the sheer energy released in such cases; the possibilities unearthed in this excess of the abject, the raw and the wasted; the networks jumpstarted by such possibilities.

Which is the residual value of collective experience? Can lives be possessed by commitment? Is ideology contamination more dangerous than emotional insulation? What is the estimated toxicity of buried desires and power surplus?

The film’s moderation – in method, means, performances and overall mood – questions the very possibility of moderation exercised within a desire-heightened reality circuit suffering from glitches of the unreal kind.

Moderation, in its subtle tuning with this reality’s *hyle* and its fundamental weirdness is thus a work as well as the tool for, and matter of, this work’s undoing (the film films to exhaustion). It may come across as a filmic piece of feticriticism and certainly feels as something ultra organic: rooting, growing, genre-branching, disintegration and all.

It’s skin and organs are intermingled, equally present and simultaneously spent; depth and surface are just identity-in-shape shifting, mnemosyne is a window with a view to a graveyard, the film is horribly alive and life feels like a ventriloquist’s act. In the context of “everything is real and nothing is what it seems”, *alarm* is introduced as a coagulating agent: it creates black humor pools in the midst of the most unexpected scenes, it fixes the Barbarella-floating sensual scenes as post psychedelic gore, it betrays the quiet mushrooming of several subgenres within the principle one, it turns music into decomposing flesh and leaves us in the grip of uneasy yearning.

NADJA ARGYROPOULOU





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