CHAS PIDLOTU

Time to the Target

Director Vitaly Mansky

Latvia, Czechia, Ukraine | 2025
179 min. | Ukrainian with English subtitles

Screenplay Vitaly Mansky. **Cinematography** Roman Petrusyak, Aleksey Leskov, Vitaly Mansky. **Editing** Matvey Troshinkin. **Sound Design** Jan Čeněk. **Producer** Natalia Manskaia. **Co-Producers** Natalia Khazan, Filip Remunda, Tereza Horska, Vit Klusak, Jan Barta. **Production company** Vertov (Riga, Latvia).

Synopsis

The "time to target" refers to how long a rocket needs to reach its target. Even far away from the front, the Ukrainian population is not safe from military attacks. Not safe from death, destruction and the consequences on society of a war of attrition. Lviv in western Ukraine, birthplace of director Vitaly Mansky, is struggling to retain a degree of normality, albeit without letting the daily losses of war become routine. The springtime bustle of the city's historical centre and its rush hour, city tours and rallies, school lessons and coffee house noise is interrupted by bells of mourning and minutes of silence again and again. The city cemetery fills up with flags and wooden crosses. Over one year, the film accompanies the musicians of a military orchestra, veterans and civilians in how they make it through their everyday lives – with heart, wit and the courage to face a merciless reality. One spring and one year of war later: new recruits are deployed. The circle closes. And it becomes painfully clear that peace refers to nothing but the time before a rocket hits. (Irina Bondas)

Vitaly Mansky was born in 1963 in Lviv, Ukraine. After obtaining higher education in Moscow in 1989, he became one of the most prominent contemporary documentary filmmakers. His films have been screened at film festivals worldwide and he received over 100 international awards. In 2007, he founded the International Festival of Creative Documentary Films Artdocfest in Russia. In 2014, he emigrated to Latvia. He is still being persecuted by Russian authorities for expressing his civic stance. Mansky is president of the IDFF Artdocfest/Riga and member of the American Film Academy (Oscars).

Films: 1988: Boomerang (short film). 1990: Post (short film), Etudes About Love (short film, 1990-1993). 1991: Lenin's Body (short film). 1993: Cuts of a Recurrent War (short film). 1995: Bliss. 1999: Private Chronicles. Monologue. 2001: Putin. Leap Year, Yeltsin. Another Life, Gorbachev. After The Empire. 2002: Broadway. Black Sea. 2003: Anatomy of T.a.T.u.. 2005: Gagarin's Pioneers. 2006: Wild, Wild Beach. 2008: Dawn / Sunset. Dalai Lama 14, Virginity. 2009: Beginning / Nikolina Gora. Epilogue. 2011: Motherland or Death. 2013: Pipeline. 2014: The Book. 2015: Under the Sun. 2016: Radinieki / Rodnye (Close Relations). 2018: Putina liecinieki / Putin's Witnesses. 2020: Gorbačovs. Paradīze / Gorbachev. Heaven. 2023: 2020, Shidniy front / Eastern Front. 2024: Dzelzs / Iron. 2025: Chas pidlotu / Time to the Target.

Director's Statement

No Refuge From Pain

Observing the tragic and mundane rituals of everyday life in Lviv

I was born and raised in Lviv, my homeland and source of strength. I have returned there in my films at various periods throughout my creative biography. So, I cannot stand aside when my country is fighting for its future and my countrymen face the most dramatic moment in modern history – a criminal full-scale war against the ex-istence of Ukraine and its people. I turned my feelings and understanding of this city in the rear of the frontline into a film depicting diverse and detailed compositions of everyday life as the seasons change. The routine rituals, despite their tragic nature, have become terrifyingly mundane, and there is no refuge from the deep-burning pain.

The film's structure and visual style are distinctive compared to typical news footage from Ukraine. The use of full and long shots allows the viewer to become a partici-pant in the events occurring on screen.

Vitaly Mansky

Interview

Everything is woven from this mundane, fantastic, tragic reality

Vitaly Mansky talks to Christiane Büchner and Barbara Wurm about the routine of everyday life at war, his relationship with Lviv and new feelings of home.

Barbara Wurm: Vitaly, it's great to see you again at the Berlinale for the second time, after EASTERN FRONT, which was shown in Encounters in 2023. **CHAS PIDLOTU** *is now showing in the Forum: a film that is so strong, effective and restrained. After CLOSE RELATIONS (2016), which was completed two years after the annexation of Crimea, and the film about the front, this is your third film about Ukraine, isn't it?*

Vitaly Mansky: It's the fourth: in 2005, I made NASHA RODINA, the international title was OUR HOMELAND or GARGARIN'S PIONEERS. It was produced by Arte and was about my school in Lviv, about 'loyalty' to the fatherland, to the party, to Lenin and so on. At the time, I travelled all over the world and met my classmates and we talked about the question of home in the most indirect way possible – I don't like direct talk at all. The perspective on Ukraine at the time was quite critical; there was no unified sense of home among the people. The question of home was somehow not on the agenda. I didn't ask it to myself either. That's quite different from today. At that time, I lived in a cosmopolitan space, but since the outbreak of the war in 2014,

I felt very clearly that I had a home that was in danger. It sounds like pathos, but I'm serious about it. Real feelings.

BW: What was the guiding idea for CHAS PIDLOTU*, which deals with so much suffering and emotionally difficult situations?*

VM: I thought about what kind of space I wanted to show and decided to film what is publicly accessible, that is, what belongs to everyday life. No professional, exclusive images. There is this idea of exclusivity in war. In war, there are things that you can't see, for whatever reason. In my film, what you describe as emotional heaviness happens on the streets, so to speak, the whole city is involved. The conversations are more or less familiar, everything is present, there are no classic interviews with heroes, everything is overheard as if in passing. For me, that's where the film's strength lies – its emotional strength, too.

Christiane Büchner: Yes, it is a powerful film that seems to focus on the question of what sacrifices war demands. You also document a sense of turmoil. How do you go about finding the scenes and protagonists that express this state of being?

VM: I'm a bit stubborn in that regard. I understand that people expect a certain camera perspective from cinema, but I wanted the images that the viewer sees to correspond to everyday life in the city. Funerals take place every day in Lviv. There are places where everyone passes by every day, where young people meet. These are urban rituals, near schools and hospitals. I didn't know that there was a maternity hospital right across from the cemetery where we were filming. I found out by chance when I was stopped in the cemetery by a woman who recognised me and began to talk about her son, whose grave she had come to visit. She stretched out her hand and said, '33 years ago, I gave birth to him in this hospital.' I didn't really understand it at first. Everything in this film is woven from this mundane, absolutely fantastic, tragic reality. The trams run through the streets, people go out on the streets, as they have been doing for three years, day in, day out, in the rain and snow, kneeling when soldiers who have been killed are driven to the cemetery, and it all somehow becomes part of your everyday life, the way you get up in the morning, comb your hair and eat breakfast. Routine.

BW: A fitting word that reflects both the banality and the normality and everyday nature, a sense of getting used to things that also justifies the length of your film in a certain way, the repetitions as well as the deviations that only come to light in the repetition.

VM: Of course, routine is also not a very appealing definition for a film... But I took the liberty of making it and working with it, and thus also taking into account the pragmatics of everyday life in war.

CB: There are also scenes where the observation is somehow arranged, resolved as a scene, and in other cases not. There are still spectacular moments in the film, but it is only in the repetition and the shifts that it becomes apparent what the war is and how it has changed everything. You show the process. Did you make this film for a specific audience? For example, for a society that has very different views of this war? Or is it a film made out of love for the people of Lviv?

VM: I think this film will only reveal its importance many years after the end of the war. Then people will probably see in it what they have experienced. A concentration of it. As long as this is their daily life, I won't make any predictions about their emotional reactions to the film. I have the European viewer in mind. Because in many respects, the image of war conveyed in the media is focused on the front line and on Soviet-designed structures. For the European viewer, this creates a distance between this war and their lives. Lviv is perhaps the most European city in Ukraine, also in terms of architecture, and in this way it offers the opportunity to feel the war in its presence, suddenly, as if 'at home'. What takes place here resembles the everyday life of other Europeans, the Germans, French, Italians, Balts. It is about reflecting on what part each of us plays in this war.

CB: The length of this film is very important. I see a state, a society of people, who respect what is going on, and they do it over and over again. They go down on their knees, that touched me the most, because I realised that this is a society that allows itself to express gratitude to the people who fought. I tried to imagine what it would be like in Russia...

VM: You need a sense of calm to perceive some things. It's a film that is not in an interview mode. In this film, it's as if I were in the middle of it, living in the time, but not sensing anything. I wanted to put this time into the picture, to edit and not to edit, but to rearrange it.

BW: You don't want to say anything about dying and death from a Russian perspective?

VM: That's difficult, you know, I've lived in Russia for half my life, and I don't think, for example, that this film is for a Russian audience. As for the dead and the funerals in Russia, even when the great war began, I started sifting through material on social networks. I didn't want to make a film, but I wanted to see what it looked like. I was surprised to see frightened people, relatives, mothers, wives, who were hesitant to show grief. The people who gave interviews to local television stations are not in a state of mourning, they are in a state of fear. Fear of saying the wrong thing. So there is a huge difference between them and the people I show. A few times I even tried to send Russian cameramen to military funerals in Russia, but they were given an unfriendly reception, it was not possible at all. In Lviv, there is no distancing from people's grief and fate. I'll say it again: there was and is a crazy sense of calm. I saw wounded young men without arms and legs sitting in this alley, it wasn't easy for me to talk to them, but they said, 'Come, sit with us and have a drink with us,' of course, I don't want to show that they drink because it's forbidden in the military, but they were very calm. It was different in Russia – I remember the last time I was in Russia, when the war lasted a week, I took the last train from Helsinki, I wanted to take pictures, but didn't manage to because the aggression of this military mass of spies and officers controlling this space is completely different.

BW: So you never intended to record material for this film in Russia?

VM: No. God forbid.

BW: How did you find your protagonists – the orchestra, for example?

VM: When I travelled through Lviv to make the film about the Eastern Front, funerals were already taking place every day and I looked at these people who came to the funerals with a kind of desire to recognize some of my acquaintances – from my former life in L'viv. It was always different people, but always the same orchestra. Somehow, even in silence, they became a kind of core of the film; the scenes arise from their presence, even if they don't advance the plot. After the first shoot, I went home to Riga and I was standing at the border, 15 hours or so, that was in the summer of 2023, and that very night their orchestra was bombed.

CB: You said that Ukraine must not lose this war. That's the conclusion, so to speak. But don't you think it's possible that this film could be understood differently?

VM: That is, of course, the paradox, that it is impossible to continue this war. If you transfer it from the political level to the level of art, the strongest condition in art is that you don't react

if there is no final solution. But that's the kind of simple politics that the new ruler will probably propose now.

BW: You mean the new ruler of the world? Trump?

VM: To be honest, I have no idea. Maybe for those who are sitting in offices far away from the trenches, everything will turn out for the best. But for the people who live in Ukraine, who have lost their loved ones – I don't know what is better or more correct, more noble, honest, acceptable, fair for them. I don't know. In the film, there is a thematic line of all the wars that have passed through Lviv from the First World War onwards, which is linked to the history of the land where the military cemetery is located, but basically I see my role more in depicting the tragedy than in making a suggestion as to what a scenario for a way out of the war might look like. I don't have one.

BW: Did you have any arguments with people who wanted you to convey a certain view – or who were of the opinion that presenting a contradictory reality wouldn't be helpful?

VM: Often people don't understand what a documentary is, even those you're making one with – they don't really know what the result will be. That's why it was important that we were all on the same wavelength. All those we filmed, drank with and talked to were united by the desire for Ukraine to win, that's undeniable. If I had said, you know, guys, there won't be a victory and there will be a different government, it would have been a difficult conversation. Although, as you will understand in the course of the film, people do not only change their attitude, but also their emotions are somehow wiped out. They become tired of reality in some way and are weighed down by it, as if they understand that what they dream of is probably no longer achievable. But few people want to talk about it openly, even when they are among themselves, it is a very painful topic for everyone.

BW: The fact that victory means something different for everyone probably also plays a part in that.

VM: I remember very well when I made the film CLOSE RELATIONS in 2014 about my family, who lived in different parts of Ukraine, when the war began. At that time, everyone talked about possible scenarios much more freely, because for all these scenarios, the price that has been paid to date was not yet as high as it is today. My niece Anka used to say: 'Let them take Donbass! Crimea – a pity...'. Today it is Anka who has a pet, and a son, who slept in the same bed with his grandmother until he was 15 years old – they have a small apartment – who has now been at war for three years, has four wounds, and who either remains silent or speaks in a kind of absolutely murderously deep baritone. Being responsible for the rocket launchers which the Russians are trying to destroy in the first place, Zhenya's life has been under the sign of death for three years now; with his mother and grandmother going to bed every night in fear that the next morning there will be news of his death.

CB: How did you go about choosing scenes and locations? Churches, acquaintances, etc. – were these case studies or rather strands of a general idea? What do you need in order to make this kind of city portrait?

VM: As I said, I walked around my city and observed scenes. I lived in the centre, above my favourite café, where I spent my entire youth. I originally studied cinematography, but I never picked up a camera for my own films until I realised that my camera was needed. Even when we didn't have a shooting day, I just walked around the city with my camera and filmed. And let's put it like this, the scenes are very important, only I encountered them. When those soldiers were filmed in the Armenian courtyard towards the end of the film, they were taking pictures for their album before being sent to the front. There was a training centre there, I happened to be passing by, and when the demonstration started and the air raid began, they said: 'Spread out, because they can make it.' I was just there with my camera. There are a lot of completely unplanned moments in the film. For example, the scene with the shooting gallery and the guy who comes there every day – I saw this picture of Putin on 1 September because we filmed it at the school. Why at the school? The school's windows really do look out onto that corner of the cemetery where they take the boys every day. So we are in this school and the image was there and I saw it for the first time, never again after that.

BW: How long did you film in total? How often were you there?

VM: Six times, usually for three weeks at a time. It took me a very long time.

BW: You had the opportunity to talk openly with your protagonists, to show what they think, what they say. You critically and precisely show the development in Ukrainian society that is the consequence of this war. Was that controversial?

VM: Not for me. On the one hand, I feel a very strong commitment in myself – this is my home country. On the other hand, I have this experience of not living in Lviv and looking at the city from the outside. It seems to me that, despite all my love for the city, I long for sobriety: For everyone who passes by, even as a shadow in the image, I still feel certain aspects that I perceive critically or ambiguously or that I want to be seen. I am even sure that someone who is not Ukrainian like me and living in Ukraine would not be able to see them because they would not 'see' them. It seems very important to me to capture this time, this pain, this confusion and this range of mutually exclusive feelings on the eve of a distinct uncertainty. If this film has any use, it is that it is a kind of time capsule, that is, a picture, a brick that you put in the wall and that will be dissected one day, that is, it is very important for the future, I don't know how important it is for today. We don't need a flattened cinema.

CB: Has Ukraine changed as a society?

VM: If you remember the soldier with no legs sitting on the bench saying that Ukraine has never been independent, then in a way this reflects the core of a man's feeling, namely that only now, through this utter tragedy, Ukraine is starting to feel independent, and that this is the beginning of the construction of a global understanding of society, the state, homeland, culture – the price that was paid for this is incredible, but perhaps without this price there would have been no situation in which this topic would have come up. Before the war, when I was asked about Ukraine, I didn't feel Ukraine was my home. I was born there, that's all. It has become my home even for me, because it has become something clear, tangible, articulated, and for the people who live there and give their lives, it is absolutely obvious.

BW: Maybe that is a feeling, and a strong feeling, that your film conveys, and we can stop at this point.

VM: I am observing all the internal Ukrainian processes, it is so important. My next stop will be Odesa.