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a film by Ilya Khrzhanovsky

Winner:

Best Feature, Rotterdam Film Festival

Best New Director, Seattle Film Festival

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CAST

Marina, prostitute
Volodya, piano tuner
Oleg, meat seller
Boyfriend of dead sister
Villagers of Shutilovo

Marina Vovchenko
Segey Shnurov
Yuri Laguta
Konstantin Murzenko
Themselves

CREW

Director
Screenplay
Based on a idea by
Camera

Ilya Khrzhanovsky
Vladimir Sorokin
Sorokin, Khrzhanovsky
Alisher Khamidkhodshaev
Aleksandr Ilkhovskiy
Shador Berkechi
Igor Malakhov
Shavat Abdusalamov
Kirill Vasilenko
Yelena Yatsura
Natalia Kochetova

Editor
Production Design
Sound
Producer
Executive Producer

Director's Biography

Ilya Khrzhanovsky was born in 1975 in Moscow, into the family of Andrey Khrzhanovsky, an influential Russian animator. He studied at the Bonn Academy of Fine Arts in 1992-93. In 1998, Khrzhanovsky graduated from VGIK, the top Russian film school, where he majored in direction under the tutelage of Marlen Khutsiev. He directed a theatrical production *What I Feel* in 1997 in Petergof. He directed a short film *Ostanovka (A Stop)* in 1998 together with Artem Mikhalkov. *4* is Khrzhanovsky's first feature film.

Screenwriter's Biography

Vladimir Sorokin was born in 1955 in Bykovo, a small town in the Moscow suburbs. Sorokin graduated from the Gubkin Institute of Petrochemical and Gas Industry in Moscow in 1977. He took up drawing, painting and book cover design, and was active in a conceptualist art group in Moscow in the 1980's. Sorokin published his first novel, *The Queue*, in 1985 in Paris. He is now one of the best known Russian post-modernist authors (his novels include *Marina's 30th Love*, *The Hearts of Four*, *Blue Lard*, *Feast*, *Ice* and others). He wrote screenplays for *Moscow* (1999, directed by Alexander Zeldovich) and *A Kopeck* (2002, directed by Ivan Dykhovichny).

**Running time: 126 minutes, color, 35mm, Russia,
Russian w/English subtitles, not rated**

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Synopsis:

Three strangers meet in a late night Moscow bar and spin incredible stories about themselves- all of which turn out to be lies. Marina, a prostitute, claims to be an advertising executive. Volodya, a piano tuner, talks about his work on a top secret Russian project in cloning or doubling. Oleg, a meat wholesaler, brags about his close ties to top Kremlin leaders. After this talk fest, the three depart and go their separate ways.

Marina goes home and finds out her sister has died. She decides to go the village where her sister lived and attend her funeral. The village is inhabited by old crones who earn a livelihood by making dolls out of bread they chew. The crones also consume vast amounts of moonshine and behave rather badly.

Volodya goes to a disco, wanders the streets of Moscow and gets picked up by the police as a crime suspect. He finds himself in prison, then forcibly conscripted and sent off to fight in an unspecified war.

Oleg visits his father, with whom he has a strange relationship. Oleg leads the bachelor's life and is a member of the new Russian middle class. He makes deals selling meat from a subterranean freezer facility. He is also perplexed about the prevalence of a new breed of round piglets.

The characters wander in a landscape that is desolate and scarred by heavy industry. Wild dogs roam everywhere, while the number 4 appears in many guises throughout the film and links the often disparate events.

Interview with the Director, Ilya Khrzhanovsky

How was this story born?

The script is based on real happenings. After dawn I and a friend of mine found ourselves in a night club, it was empty inside, except for a prostitute that my friend knew. I said I was his brother from Nizhnevartovsk. We went to have breakfast. I asked the prostitute what she did for a living, although I knew who she was. She said she was a sales manager. I told her I work in cloning at a scientific research institute in Nizhnevartovsk. The plot thickened and the girl believed everything. My friend - Mitya said that he works in the president's administration, although in real life he is a businessman. It was one of those sluggish, premorning conversations. Both the questions and answers could be predicted. People lie. Sometimes because they're bored, sometimes because they want something different, sometimes because they're shy and they want to feel themselves be someone else.

The prostitute believed that story about clones?

Yes. Then it turned out that she has a twin sister and I told her that there haven't been twins born the natural way for ages. One of the twins is always a clone. And the main problem is that they can't tell which one of the twins is a clone and which is a normal human. And then the prostitute ordered a huge portion of chicken wings. Of course there are chicken wings everywhere. Where are all the chicken breasts these wings were on? Where do they go? Who knows what the truth is? Is there cloning or not? Do you know?

I don't, but actually I wouldn't really want to.

It doesn't really matter if it exists or not on the physical level. However the cloning of conscious' and the averaging out of everything around does exist, and not only in Russia. Concerning our conscious - I think there's a lot of identicalness in the world. People listen to the same music. Wear the same clothes... It's the same with everything, and everything and everything else. I feel this. And that's why I personally experience boredom. The possibility of becoming the same as everyone else, not only in my behavior, but in my inner structure would make me unable to feel real things, and would formalize everything - this is of such great concern to me that the film turned out to be partially about this. I thought that only Sorokin could write a story about this.

So this was a direct request?

Yes. First came the plot and the idea. And a little bit later I received the text.

Why did Sorokin, a writer of such stature agree to do it?

That's still a mystery to me. We met in the Pushkin restaurant - our common friend made the arrangements for the meeting, since I didn't know him, and by the end of the conversation he agreed to do it. Although I hadn't shot anything before.

That's how the first city story appeared?

Yes. Sorokin suggested it be named "4". Then at the beginning of the shoot it became evident that the story doesn't fit. It doesn't resolve itself. Then the continuation evolved. We understood that the girl travels to the village, where locals make dolls. That's all we knew.

Why dolls?

Because each doll is different, but their faces are the same. It's about different-sameness.

How did you find that village?

We knew that there had to be a village in the story with a totally different feel and texture. And that Marina had to have a fourth sister die; our actress really has twin sisters. And we knew that they should meet at the funeral. We didn't know anything else. Then I gave the unfinished script to my friend - the painter Sergey Pokrovsky to read, he showed me some photographs taken by a photographer of a village where the locals perform pagan rituals: their main holiday is the Burial of the Kostroma. We went out to this village. We spent a few days there and straight off I understood that we hit the apple's eye. I didn't consider any other alternatives.