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Richard Raskin

An Interview with Patrick Vollrath on *The Jacket*

Do you recall how you first got the idea for telling this story? Was it in any way inspired by a real incident?

This story is inspired by a real incident. I took it as a challenge to see if I could recreate the situation and the feeling the characters had in that moment. And to see if I could get an audience to feel the dilemma the characters are in. It's a very small situation I guess, but on the other hand, for the people who are involved in it, it's huge. That was the idea for telling this story.

Can you tell about your choice of Laurence Rupp and Hanna Binder in the main roles? And of Daniel Sträßer as the bad guy?

I knew Laurence and Daniel. I had worked with Laurence on a very small thing before. He has exactly the qualities I needed for this character. He's a somewhat shy and charming guy. Not super strong and not super attractive. But kind of meek and interesting.

And Daniel doesn't really look like a bad guy. That's what I found interesting. When I thought about whom to cast, I had the feeling that he could capture exactly the attitude I wanted.

And as for Hanna, I had seen her in a play in Vienna and she was nominated for an award. And then I met her and could tell that she's a little bit crazy in a way that was perfect for her role.

The story begins with the couple's having stolen a vodka bottle, which turns out to be empty. Can you tell me why you chose that as the first beat in the story? What were the signals you wanted to send to the viewer about these two people as the story begins?

At the beginning of the film I wanted something very strong and that would be easy to remember and I asked myself: what funny situations was I in when I had just met someone and we did crazy stuff. I wanted to draw the audience in immediately and this kind of scene can tell you a lot. That they have just met, that they just did something crazy together in a very bonding moment because they both stole this vodka bottle together. It's a huge vodka bottle and very expensive. So this is a very strong bonding moment for both of them. And then it turns out to be empty. It's a fun situation like one I had once experienced. And it was a way to engage the viewer in the story very quickly.

The interaction between Paul and Kaya when they first settle at the bar is exceptionally playful and also characterized by ironic distance from the dating roles they are in. Your comments about designing their interaction in that way?

Of course, I knew when I talked to the actors what kind of situation they were in and I guess when you have met someone on a date and you like that person... We all know the feeling of shyness and how insecure you can be, and how you can work against your feeling of insecurity by being very playful and childish. We tried it out in different ways and did a lot of improvisation, a lot of takes. Standing behind the camera, I have to get the feeling that this is a real situation between these two people, and what we ended up with came close to this.

What was the motivation of the bad guy? Did he want: a) to prevent someone from wearing a soccer jacket at that bar? b) to have the pleasure of bullying and humiliating Paul? c) to have the jacket for himself as a kind of trophy? Or all of the above?

Of course I talked to Daniel about motivation. I think that people in real life don't always know what their motivation is to do something. On the one hand, it's about the jacket and that pisses him off because he really doesn't like the *other* soccer team. And he's also bored. If he had been having a great time at the bar he might not have cared that much or taken the matter that seriously. And he is a character who must get some pleasure from bullying people and he feels powerful because he's with a group and the other guy is kind of alone. Also Paul and Kaya are having fun and making out, they're having a very good time and he's sitting there, not really talking to his mates. All these things taken together are his motivation for doing what he does.

You manage the ending in a final shot lasting nearly a minute and a half. It carries a great deal of subtext and is profoundly moving as Kaya tries to understand what is happening and to restore their potential as a couple. Do you recall why you decided to do all that in one continuous shot?

For me there was no special motivation for cutting there. Both characters were equally important in that scene so why should I cut from one to the other. I want to watch both of them and see their faces at the same time. And I really like long takes that give the actors a chance to play things out. When you have great actors, it's good to let them run free for a long time and they are always doing something interesting, something new you hadn't thought of. That's why I decided to do it in one continuous shot.

I can guess why Kaya's standing up to the guy and getting the jacket back made it difficult for Paul to continue pursuing her as a potential girlfriend but would very much like to know in what words you yourself would describe this pivotal development.

It's always about being a man, being a strong person. We are raised to think that we have to be the more powerful person and make things safe for women. And

when we fail at that and see how little we are, it does a lot to our ego. If you can't get over that sort of thing, then you want to get away from the situation and the person who would otherwise remind you of it every time you look at him or her.

Were you in doubt at any point as to whether you would go for a different ending?

I wrote the ending we shot, I wrote what happens between the characters, but the actors made some very interesting choices. Like Kaya's not kissing Paul in the end, or trying to kiss and then not kissing him. That was Hanna's decision and I really liked it. She offered this to me and during the editing, I decided to use it. It was not what I had thought but it added something kind of special. We also played it somewhat differently. But it was always that kind of ending and always as a single shot. Kaya goes away and he stands there alone. But how the actors played it out was a little bit different each time.

The performances you got from the actors were extraordinary. Can you describe the ways in which you directed your actors? And did they improvise at all when playing their roles?

You know, working with actors or directing actors starts with the casting. After trying to find the best actors for the roles, I try to get to know them if I didn't know them already. And then I try to convince them not to *play* the role but to *live* it and to try to *be* that person... I try to give them a lot of freedom so they can develop something, do something at the right moment that I hadn't planned. But the main thing is casting the right people for the roles rather than directing the actors on the set.

The Jacket did well at a number of festivals. What do you personally see as its main qualities?

I don't really know and I don't think so much along those lines. I just tried to tell an honest and truthful story.

Is there any advice you would give to students making their own first short films?

Making films is always a learning process. You have to make mistakes and to see why something is not working. You have to find your own voice. When you just listen to the advice of other people, that doesn't help you so much to grow and become an interesting film-maker.

Of course it's important to be prepared, to know what you want, to put a lot of effort into the pre-production. And then I guess during the shoot you should forget a lot of what you planned during pre-production and experiment in new ways.

To find your own voice, you have to make mistakes. That's very important. You have to fail. Because you will always kind of fail in some ways even if your film turns out in the end to be very interesting and successful. You kind of feel like a failure during the process. You have to get used to that.

And I guess it's important to try not to copy too much, to try to find your own stories and your own way of telling them.

9 April 2016