

-how did you conceived the film? what propelled you to make it?

This is my third film about communist and art—what one festival called "Utopian comedies." I saw footage of the Mass Games, which got me interested in North Korea. I knew Kim Jong Il was a film buff and ordered his book *On the Art of Cinema* from a store I found on ebay. That's where I got a bunch of the North Korean melodramas to watch as well. The films are DVD's dubbed from VHS dubs of English-subtitled 16mm film prints. The *Juche* films, as they call them, are a little different than the typical socialist realist films of the 70's and 80's. The North Korean system was much closer to the Stalinist system of the 30's and 40's than to the *detente*-era mellow Dictatorships of the Proletariat of Eastern Europe. I wanted to make my own *Juche* film. The idea was to create a film as if I had been invited to North Korea. But they would never have allowed an American guy in to make a film there. So I invented a character—a Korean communist who grew up in Japan—who was invited to North Korea to bring fresh energy into the film and video industry. Now we don't know what happened to her exactly. Did she ever come back? If still there, is she there against her will? It's loosely based on the story of the filmmaker Shin San Ok and his wife who made films in North Korea against their will.

-did you know much about north korea and juche idea before you make the film?

I knew a fair amount about communist ideology, and I am interested in politics and political control. So once I started researching the North Korean system, it was not too difficult. For example, nearly every movie has a criticism session that is integral to the plot. The workers all sit around and talk about their faults and then one character admits to a major fault—like revisionism or being an unknowing capitalist wrecker—and then there is a resolution. The North Korean system is a bit more intense since they use this Kim familial cult of personality as well as Confucian ideas of family honor that can doom a person. One film, for example, had a son beg forgiveness for his father's crimes against the state. Now this is not just a minor plot point, but a genre rule. I wanted to learn those rules and make a film based on them. Sort of.

-what changed your perception about north korea(kim jungil, people, and the idea called juche)?

Well I certainly don't idealize the situation there. I think the country is a family dictatorship and basically a disaster for its people. But the way the West behaved when the Eastern Europe and Soviet systems collapsed deserve a good part of the blame. Millions of people lost their savings; young girls dropped out of college and technical schools to become prostitutes; diseases that were controlled went out of control. And all of the national resources were stolen either by multinational corporations or the same elite that ran the country before. This behavior, even if it has been mitigated since then, validated the paranoia of the North Korean political elite. Now my film doesn't show any of the paranoia of the North Korean elite. The reason for that is because Yoon Jung, the main character, would never have been allowed or allowed herself to make a movie that was openly critical of the state. I wanted to make a film that would look as if it came out of that system.

-why did you decide to make the film with the unique genre, not a pure documentary?

I used elements of documentary, propaganda and even musicals to make a movie according to the rules of an updated *Juche* ideology. It was as if this character had made this film and changed the rules of *Juche* filmmaking. If Yoon Jung went to a North Korean art residency, she couldn't just make a normal documentary there. Also she has mixed feelings. She's a communist; so even if she doesn't agree with their system she is afraid of giving capitalist countries propaganda against communism. So the film is made up in part interviews of her from a Bulgarian documentarian mixed with the propaganda films she edited at her *Juche* residency mixed with an excerpt from the sci-fi film she made in Pyongyang. Now her propaganda is a bit different than the normal North Korean propaganda since she was infected by a lifetime of capitalist irony. But nevertheless she also brings the criticism back to the US with the segment of the life of Ronald Reagan for example. Reagan, like Kim Jong Il, built his image in the film industry and used that image to consolidate his power within the political system. Both men used the threat of an external enemy to distract the public from unpopular economic and political decisions.

-how did you meet the video artist?

I created her.

-how was the filmmaking in north korea? were people and government very helpful?

I filmed the movie in upstate New York and western Massachusetts. The North Korean government would never have allowed an American to make a movie about *Juche* ideology in country. I have made a number of movies about communism that are quite critical of capitalist systems. So I keep expecting to be feted by some communist government somewhere. But it never happens. The ultra leftists think I'm a rightist. And the right-wingers think I'm a leftist propagandist.

-how did you get the film clips?

The internet.

-what kind of music did you use?

Some of the music is from North Korean movies. And some of it was created for the movie by musicians and sound artists Pauline Oliveros and Alex Chechile as well as the San Francisco art band Neung Phak.

-have you shown the film in korea? how was the response?

I have tried to get a screening in Korea and usually festivals there do not even write me back, which is strange since the film has screened all over the world and is screening next week at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. But I think that they might see it as an American making fun of or glorifying North Korea. That's not what the film is, but sometimes these things take time. The film only came out in the spring of 2008.

-have you got different responses from the audience from different countries? can you tell me a few interesting feed backs?

The movie has screened a lot in Europe and Latin America and a bit in the US. It has screened in four countries of South America and audiences there seems to really like it. I think it is partly because audiences there know and like politics and appreciate an irreverent sense of humor. The Scottish audience was great as well. Lots of laughs. A number of former Stalinists came to my screening in Poland and felt that Kim Jong Il was perhaps unjustly criticized. I am not sure if they thought my film was part of the criticism or defense of it. Orthodox Marxists generally don't like my work because they feel that I should use my talent to take on the great beast (capitalism or US imperialism). But I feel that I am taking on the great beast of capitalism along with patriarchal social control and media manipulation and having some fun as well. I have built up a small but growing audience in the US from my short films and my three features. The underground film and experimental film crowd is with me as well. I am ready to make the jump across the Pacific to meet my future audience in Korea.

<personal>

-when and where were you born and what did you study? where do you live?

I was born in St. Louis in 1968. I studied Creative Writing and Electronic Arts. I have been making movies for over 10 years now. I am living in Providence, RI and teaching at Emerson College in Boston.

-what is your korean connection? have you been to south korea?

I have never been. I lived out of the US in Chiapas and in Spain for a couple years so I do not have a totally insulated American ethnocentric background. I was studying in upstate New York, when I met Jung Yoon Lee, an artist, who played the lead character in the film. She knew of my interest in Marxist systems and found a bunch of material for me. Then she and some other Korean friends at the engineering school where I studied helped with translation and voiceover and whatnot. Even though North Korea is a totally isolated and unique country, the Stalinist political ideology allows me an in. And since part of their propaganda is that Kim Jong Il is one of the Great Thinkers of the world, they translate nearly everything into the imperialist lingua franca, English.

-what is your next film project?

I am working on a socialist TV pilot for Venezuelan television.

-why you make film?

I love it. Even though it puts me in debt, I love it.