

The election was stolen.
The battle lines are drawn.

ORANGE REVOLUTION

ORANGE REVOLUTION - Production Notes

We followed Ukraine's election campaign closely, especially after Viktor Yushchenko was poisoned in September 2004. But events unfolded quickly, and by the time we were able to move and I obtained a visa (a slow, uncertain process) it was early December. With only a sketchy idea of the story, my first trip to Kyiv was exploratory. A cameraman I'd worked with in Tbilisi agreed to meet me in Kyiv on 48 hours' notice. For him it was only a two-hour flight, and one time zone away, and as a Georgian, he needed no visa. I knew him to be a capable cameraman, with good English. That he spoke Russian was also an asset. I brought a PAL PD150 and some audio gear. He brought an interview lighting kit and a sungun.

It was after dark when we met at our hotel. We ate fast in the lobby bar, then set off on foot in the snow, heading for Maidan, the central square in Kyiv, with camera, tripod, microphones and a fishpole. In the next six days, we shot nearly 30 hours of tape, concentrating on actions in Maidan, the tent city, and a smaller tent city next to the parliament. We also shot scenes at a Pora (youth resistance) office and a few interviews at other locations. There had been no time for pre-production, but as I'd expected, there was something interesting, no matter which direction we pointed the camera.

Whenever we got too cold, or late at night, we sat in cafes with Ukrainians I'd met via email, with our translators, with anyone who would speak with us. It appeared to me that the "revolution" was within a few days of a final victory. I knew we had a film, but I realized I'd have to rely on archival footage for earlier events. Finding it was a chore for later visits; this initial venture was a time to concentrate on contemporary events.

A month later, I went back. This time, I brought an associate producer, a better equipment package, and my cameraman from Tbilisi. In the meantime, we had researched the story, arranged for a local producer, archival researchers, a simultaneous interpreter, a van and driver. We had pre-arranged meetings with key players and appointments to view archival material. In the end, I made five trips to Ukraine; we shot interviews and did archival work on all but the first.

Although we recognized that Viktor Yushchenko was not our subject, and he would not be the principal character, we decided we should try to interview him. His advisors and press secretary were unresponsive. Finally, we were offered a "four way interview" – they proposed that major productions

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from four countries should interview him simultaneously, at one sitting! It made no sense to me, and I declined, with the result that producers from three European networks called urging me to accept the four-way, but I refused. Intense back-channel maneuvering eventually yielded our one-on-one conversation, though interference by the presidential press staff on location made it a torture. But it was worth the trouble.

In hindsight, our dependence on archival footage was a virtue. It gave the film the equivalent of having something like 20 camera crews – crews that speak the language, know the locations, and understand the political, social, and cultural nuances. Even if my budget had allowed me to hire 20 crews, it would have been difficult to deploy them intelligently, to the right places at the right times. In fact, it was only much later that it was possible to know which locations were important, and at what times. Archival searches and acquisition went on for almost a year. As we came to know the story better and sifted through the interview material, our archival wish-list grew. And over time, we discovered new sources.

We made one important decision very early: the film would have no narration. The story would be told in the words, and through the eyes, of those who had made the revolution and experienced it first-hand. For me, that meant a different interviewing technique. I would not have a narrator to provide factual information about what was happening, or why. This material had to come from the people themselves. Of course, a narration-less film placed a heavier burden on the editor, Joe Wiedenmayer, but he welcomed it, and did a marvelous job telling the story with pictures.

– Steve York

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