

Interview transcript

The interview with Robert Cambrinus was conducted in writing by Lorenzo Rossi for the Cortopotere Short Film Festival in Bergamo, XI edition 23-29 October 2011.

Question: The idea at the origin of your film, the live commentary, is a very simple, but a deeply original one. How did it come to your mind? What have you thought first, the story or the way to tell it?

Answer: I am interested in exploring new ways to personalise (my) filmic expression. The idea to play with genre by using an existing format, the classic DVD commentary, and make it into the feature by reversing film and commentary, came first. I was looking for a new form of immediacy between author and audience.

Q: It's like looking at a DVD movie with the director's commentary, as you also said. The film seems to tell us how new technologies have changed the relationship between the author and the audience. Do you agree with it? What is your opinion about?

A: New technologies (the ability of the audience to pause a film on DVD/BD or digital TV sets at will, play back scenes, repeat them in slow motion, and the ability to download movies and even re-edit them etc) have profoundly changed the relationship between author and spectator: They have transferred power over the image to the audience. Only in the sanctity of the darkened film theatre can traditional authors be reasonably sure that their films are seen in the way they were originally intended. But each viewing context presents a film in a new light. This also encourages repeated viewings in different settings.

In my work "Commentary" I intended to create a space in which audience and author meet eye to eye. The author joins the viewer and abandons his authoritarian voice. New technologies open up such spaces (just think of social media!) They should be embraced as additional playing fields to tell stories in new, personal ways. The film theatres will continue to exist but there will be more ways to watch films (and approach an audience) than ever before.

Q: The loss of identity, the sense of loss in a foreign country, a mother who doesn't recognize her child as legitimate. They are all universal themes and metaphors. Is there a specific reason for choosing Muslim characters to speak about these themes?

A: Every author tells personal stories to some extent. By transposing my story to a Muslim environment (which I got to know during my ten years in London with its large and vibrant Muslim community) I chose a scenario as far removed from my personal circumstances as possible. I wanted to remove any obvious links to my biography. Thus only a commentary would be able to bridge the space between my personal experience and the story told to my audience. The commentary both closes the gap and tells a new story.

Q: What are your future projects?

A: I am currently developing a feature film project together with my collaborator Tom Nerling, which explores the fear of the future; not some concrete threat (like global warming etc) but this fuzzy feeling of uncertainty - an abstract concept. In our story we follow an idealistic architect who wants to contribute something worthwhile, something meaningful to his homeland. Fear of an unknown future made his father emigrate from the collapsed East German state shortly after 1989. The son returned but now starts to question the value of his work. How can we have faith in the future when we keep re-building on the same old foundations? Sometimes it may be necessary to tear everything down before we can make a fresh start.

I also keep working on short films exploring and developing my own personal cinema.