LIOR SHAMRIZ

Interview by Yorgos Krassakopoulos

You seem to work in a feverish temper. How do your films come about? What sparks them? How do you know that it's time to make a new one?

Well, the temper goes up and down, it's not always so feverish. And it also depends on the type of work. If this is a short film, it can often be made in a short time - could be a couple of weeks since inception until fine cut. But with the longer works the process can be a lot longer.

The last long work I finished, "A Low Life Mythology" was a result of a long process of writing texts, making films, re-writing and re-editing them for about 4 years. It is a film about filmmakers with their works shown as part of the film, so alongside the texts of the film, I started in 2008 to make short films that the characters would "create". But after a while I realized that these short films I made for the characters, don't fit story I wanted to tell. So the films were left alone, outside the canon of the "mythology" (these include "The Magic Desk", "The Vacuum Cleaner" and also many non-narrative short films I call "The Orphan Stories"). Then I started working the other way around - first shooting the "meta" story and only afterwards the characters' short films, for which I collected texts that I wrote since I started working on the film.

Many times I write for specific actors I already worked with, or for people I know, and this makes the process a lot easier and fulfilling for me. Sometimes I can know only with whom I want to work, already set dates for shooting and only then write them the script. This was the case with "The Magic Desk" for example. I met Carola Regnier at some dinner and we decided that we should make a short work together. I knew I wanted to work with her and with Imri Kahn with whom I worked many times. Then I prepared a plan that was not really a script of a story, but rather instructions for experimentations and improvisations. In one part Carola had to simply repeat my words while Imri is mocking her from behind, while she knew neither what I was going to say nor what he was doing behind her back.

With "Before The Flowers of Friendship" the process was quite opposite. I came home from a meeting with an old friend and it was late evening and I was alone in the house. My thoughts were running in my head, I was frustrated by certain things, and I felt a need to express them, so I started recording myself into the computer, not really knowing what shape the work will later take. I was recording myself talking in my normal voice, and then recording my answers to myself in voices that were distorted (I distorted them already while recording, so I heard myself talking in these voices). Then I played some music to the dialogue on my midi keyboard, all in the same sound software, and added some sounds, atmospheres and some composed music. At the end of the night I had quite a constructed seven minutes soundtrack, an audio dialogue piece for three characters. So I started looking for performers that will lip-sync my voices in the prepared dialogue.

It's very difficult to describe your work in a few words. Even the more narrative-heavy of your films seem to create their own language of images. Could you talk about the points of origin of your visual aesthetic?

I think that quite often I find myself in a state of confusion and doubt as to the question of what film language / art form I should conform to. I keep feeling unfit to commit to one set of established codes, and I'm often in an internal fight with certain film languages and traditions, spartan realism, flamboyant irony, textuality, stream consciousness, et cetera. These struggles find their way to be

represented in the films, either as part of the concept or just "on the way". Many of the films are an account of a battle that was fought during their making.

In motion pictures it's consider usually pretty illegitimate to represent a formal multiplicity. Cinema in particular maintains a faux-communal worship of an imaginary uniformity. Luckily we have music history to refer to. For example when looking at so-called "classical" European music, it's easy to see how the perception of unity and multiplicity is always changing and evolving (for example, Schubert's symphonies, and later Shostakovich work, and there are so many other examples).

I see this relationship with film languages goes beyond "pastiche" and "camp". I commit to a different relationship with irony - allowing its parallel existence, sometimes moving to the front and other times remaining in the background only as one option from different possible interpretations.

Your films are pregnant with all kinds of ideas; they seem like your own way of exploring (together with the viewer) recurring themes and ideas. Do you see cinema as an intellectual exercise above all?

I see life as an intellectual dance above all, and this includes films too. I love to dance mindlessly in a club or even at home by myself, but to mummify entertainment on film seems to me a crime against nature. So I'm trying to construct some sort of trips, to look at stuff together and then either I'm saying this or saying that or I just want to ask you what you think.
Of course there are all types of thoughts, verbal and visual. But it's the verbal ones that command to act, so you have to include them in your trip, otherwise you will just ride straight all the way unfulfilling your potential relationship with the space-time around you.

When I was a young teenager I was interested in philosophy, I read Plato and Lao Tse and then got a little into Hegel and Wittgenstein. Cinema came a bit later, around 17, but I feel a little guilty for choosing a somewhat sensual medium to communicate with world.

How difficult is to work outside the mainstream? To make films that they not comply with the norm of even what we consider art house cinema these days? Does your feedom come with a price?

Of course, the "freedom" of the independent filmmaker means that you have so many restrictions: less time to shoot your film, smaller choice of locations, you're less capable to control the frame.

Since the beginning of my filmmaking it was important for me to remain in a live ongoing dialogue with the reality that's "happening" when I'm capturing my films, rather then make a comment on a reality that was there long ago, or proclaim being a re-creator of life from scratch. So I embrace these restrictions with love. But I don't fetishize DIY, and there were many ideas that I had to scale down or give up on due to the fact that I hardly work with any money.

I enjoy working with actors, composers, sound designers or cinematographers when the connection is good and fruitful, and I'm sure that my work can benefit by cooperating with producers too. This has not yet happened, but I'm still relatively young, I want to believe.

Working in Germany without a European citizenship also means that I'm excluded from many development grants, scholarships and film funding programs (such as the many funded through MEDIA), but so far I'm managing to do my work and find good people to cooperate with.

Do you make your films with a specific audience in mind? And what would you like them to know about your work before they enter the theater?

An ideal viewer should know everything that one can know, including everything about my work. Then, while watching the film she/he can simply nod. This ideal viewer will find out that my films are actually part of her/his body, no more and no less. And they were always parts of her/his body. She/he will acknowledge the film like we acknowledge our fingers. Watching the film will resemble a visit to a room he/she never left.