E.Y: So far I've seen three of your films, but do did actually make many more. Other than that I don't know much about you. Do tell us something about your present: where do you live? What are you working on? In what kind of spaces are creating these days?

L.S: I live on Kottbusser Damm, between Weser and Lenau, where I also work at the moment. I'm working at the moment on different projects.

– On Immigrants and Foreignness –

The questions I have for you today were formed directly out of watching your films. It's complex... You tend to deal a lot with immigration issues, foreignness and the existential struggles related to it. It seems that even when the protagonists are locals, for example, Israelis in *Japan, Japan* or Germans in *A Low Life Mythology*, they are still detached and estranged. They struggle to adapt and wander around in search of an anchor...In other words, there is no 'hierarchy' of foreignness for you, as though – besides rare moments of grace – foreignness is a constant personal and social state. You are an immigrant here in Berlin. Is your work a reflection of your personal experience and perspectives? Do you still feel so foreign, or does it change over time?

True, in the last film (*Low Life*) most characters aren't German. Most are foreigners. The guy is German.

He is German, but he still seems to be completely detached. The same impression I got in *Japan Japan* of Imri in Tel Aviv...is that an issue you consciously pursue, or does it just result as such?

What's the difference?

I think it's different to make a movie reflecting foreignness than making a film about a young Tel Avivi, where the end result just happens to reflects all this foreignness.

Well, I think that part of the character's initial state is foreignness, but it's not an attempt to define foreignness per ce, though it is a contemplation I have…In a very primitive manner, I do try to deliver an image of the reality I live in and in which I exist.

The reality in which you live and exist consists predominantly of immigrants or of people who are going through some kind of a similar process.

Yes. I wouldn't necessarily regard this foreignness you're referring to a temporary process, rather a natural

state. To some degree, it is even a desirable state.

Why desirable? What does one get out of it?

Because I see 'belonging' as a negative thing.

Why?

I can give you psychological reasons. Not sure there is a point, though. Personally, as an artist, it's important for me to utilize my experience, but the goal is not 'self-expression'. My personal experience is simply a mean here. A person, who lives in Israel and wishes to maintain a universal value perception, must see 'belonging' as a negative value. That's my experience. I grew up there and saw it being used as tool. A tool for what? Good question... Well, 'belonging' is almost always used as a tool to exploit or to exclude, unless it is used to create a resistance. To some extent I think it's valid for everyone, everywhere, in every historical era.

– On existence sensual experiences –

Another theme appearing often in your film is the divorce, or the existential gap between actually 'being' to the desperate yearning to be somewhere else. I asked myself what precedes the other: does the foreignness cause one to wish they were elsewhere, or the very wish to be some place else prevents from living the moment and causes the foreign feeling to settle in. In *Japan Japan* they keep planning

their dream get-aways, but constantly get stuck in the present...

The protagonist is indeed stuck. He actually admits that in the end, where he concludes that the way to live is not to live the moment. His only way to deal with life is not to search a positive sensual experience, but to go against it – against experiencing the reality of the present.

Nice. I like the connection between sensual and present.

The film's style plays on that key as well. There is almost no drama, and to some extent, the film tries to numb you up, just like the protagonist's numbness. It moves mainly in side-ways directions to stall you, so that by the middle of the film, or towards the end you'd ask yourself what was the protagonist actually doing the whole time...It's an attempt to reproduce this reality for the viewer in order to pose a certain question regarding the relationship between 'living the moment' and 'living life'. This was the films point of departure. I think I have a variety of answers to this question.

In different films you propose different answers. *Saturn Returns* comes to my mind, where the jumps between Berlin and Ashkelon are so sharp. It makes it difficult to contain the fact that these two realities exist in parallel, and they are both negative. Everyone is constantly struggling. Still, it varies from *Japan Japan* in message, as well as in atmosphere.

On the backdrop of the immigration, foreignness and situation issues in your films, there is also a lot of familiarity. You are shooting in locations one may recognize as very specific social or art scenes (Szene). You also work a lot with the same people. Is that intentional or does is somehow role in that direction out of habit or constraints?

That stems from an ideological decision. I have a problem with representations of 'otherness', of artists functioning as suppliers of representations of otherness to the public; as importers of exoticRegardless if they are rich people who make movies on poor people, men making movies on women…whatever. But when you hold a camera, when you make a film, you have a certain gaze in any case. One way to deal with this problem is to remain in the place you stand, rather than travel someplace else to shoot. Not to embark on a journey to import a discovery, but to stay in the place, report what you see, and thus hope to neutralize this element, which is for me very dominant but unnecessary.

I agree. I find a lot of megalomania and pretentiousness in telling other people's stories from patronizing stance. This reminds me of the Dogma group attitude…

That's possible. But it also comes from

starting to make films in Israel and learning how power relationships function. I don't know if it changed in the meantime, but when I began, the money was coming from France and Germany and this created a certain power relation that naturally influenced the works. This piled up onto already existing class issues within Israel. I wanted to stay out of all that game. Having all that in the background, I wanted to make something which would remain loyal to the place, as well as towards the outside. This doesn't mean 'pop/populist'. I think my work isn't really 'pop/populist', but it does try to remain honest.

For me all this connected. There are relatively many female characters in your films. Many of which are problematic, neurotic, lost, cruel and who even tend to sudden bursts of madness. In my impression, the men (and I haven't seen all of the films), in comparison are more introvert. But asking generally: how do you formulate your characters? I sense much empathy and compassion in your treatment of them – the characters and their relationships. You're forgiving even in their lowest moments. Are you avoiding being judgmental in a way?

I don't know. I actually think there is an attempt to judge them all the time. Total evil or total good are not being

judged, only what's between them. My entire handling of the characters is a judgmental attempt. In *Saturn* there are highly problematic characters. I don't agree that the film is empathic towards them. The Israeli female, on one hand, is manipulative without any reason, a broken person in a way. Both characters lie to themselves constantly and the film tries to put a mirror to their faces. Maybe there is empathy in that, of a certain kind. Not a hugging one. It's dealing with moral issues. It's the same in *Japan Japan*, where the issue of responsibility is dominant.

I think I identified a moment of judgment in the last scene of *Saturn*, the train scene. Marvelous! True. It's a type of empathy calling you to look out because you're in the wrong direction. Do you think people can get themselves out of pit they fell into?

I believe it is possible to come out of pitfalls – to find yourself outside. How this happens, I'm not sure…but it often does. It's a question of what you consider an action and if action at all exists.

What is the essence of the connection you strive to establish with your audience? Entertainment isn't the impression I get…

Connection is a difficult term. I believe I try to be like a space, maybe in a utopian sense. I'll be glad to be a place where the viewer arrives and experiences his independent experience. I'm like an architect, creating the space and the viewer can

come and go as he pleases. I hope this space is good. I see this as an ideal relationship between an artwork and a viewer.

You use a relatively wide spectrum of means in your films: technical, visual and narrative-related. It transmits a feeling of over-load, of dispersed cognition, of mental edges. At the same time you play around and experiment. Aren't you afraid to lose the audience?

No. On the contrary. I'm afraid to lose them to boredom. However, I must mention that there *is* a method. For example, the cut between Israel and Germany in *Saturn* isn't just a cut between locations. There is a significant difference in the way both locations are designed: the entire manner of writing, producing and filming was especially developed for each of them individually. There is the cliché saying that every film consists of its production. Here it's acting as a hidden ideology, and not just on the dramatic level. Beyond that, the gaze meets the action and the attempt is to try and see what occurs when the point of view changes.

One knows that films aren't the reality, though there are cases in which it almost 'looks' like it. But 'realistic' representation forms are in a way a reduction, trying to take over the space and exclude any other forms of representation, under the pretense of alleged 'objectivity', which is in fact aggressive. Some films attempt to

---

represent reality in as wide as possible manner. I get that it is a certain tool…

I'm referring also to technical means.

Films try to represent reality by the positioning of various acceptable representations. Commercial cinema, video art, music videos and stills are all acceptable representations of reality.

In the last film you brought the entire film-making process onto the screen.

True. It's a film about filmmakers. About a screen.

But in this respect it's different from the other two. Seems as if there are less 'tricks' and the narrative is more coherent.

Its an illusion. The reason it seems this way is because the 'tricks' are shown inside a screen, but in fact, about a third of the film is non-narrative and experimental. It's simply a trick and that's part of it.

I see. You mean film within film, play within play. You just load it onto the diegesis. True, but for me as a viewer the experience is different.

You know, it happens when the separation is not along the timeline, but rather in space. As if within the same frame you have a realistic dimension, but in fact you sit 5 whole minutes and watch an experimental piece. The camera never 'goes in', so you keep feeling that you're still in reality. But that's how this game works.

– On filmmaking, teamwork and improvisation –

Cinema as a theme appears often in your films – from it serving as a daily reference to the graphic presentation of a 'making of'. How does filmmaking look like for you? Does it come easily? Do you often improvise – in directing as well as in camera work and editing?

It all varies from film to film, including the level and extent of improvisation. I don't know how to explain it. I made a short film, *Before the Flowers of Friendship Faded Friendship Faded* for which the soundtrack was entirely prepared, including dialogues. The picture was filmed onto it, meaning that everything was meticulously planned to the seconds' level. There are films like *Saturn* where entire pieces are improvised. There too I try to bring together different styles of filmmaking. Does it come easily? I'd say no…

To what extent is your film crew involved in the creativity? Or, how much freedom do you grant the people involved in the project?

I love working with people; love working with good people; love collaborating and love to pursue a dialogue

So how does the set look like? How much do you prefer to plan and how much do you include other's creative work?

I really don't know what it looks like. It's not always the case. When there is something planned and has to be done, it will be done. But its two different things: you may be planned

and still use other's creativity into the process. It's just done in different ways. I think I prefer many times not to be planned. Regarding people I work with, if there is someone I enjoy working with, I'll want to work with him again. It's natural, but it's really hard to say because it changes all the time. I just finished this film where there were improvised parts and it was done in a certain manner. The budget was tiny but compared to the previous times, we had a bit more and the production was more complex. I'm between productions right now and I'm pretty sure I'll want to make the next one differently. It would actually be easier to answer this question for each film in particular.

Your last film is based on a book. How did you come to making a film mostly in German? Did you want to direct in another language?

I live here and didn't have a choice. It interests me, but I would have been happier if the Germans spoke English and not German and we could shoot in English.

Did you learn anything new about making films here and about the local industry?

I'd rather not answer that…my experience is personal and I can't define the local industry through it. I don't even have the means to compare with how it's done in Israel these days. Or, I'd rather simply not answer…

Is there something you want to say in general? About the festival? What is it for you?

I'm not a Zionist. And I'm aware of the fact that if you make today such a festival outside Israel, under this title, you necessarily, whether you want to or not, show support to a problematic political agenda. But I know Jürgen and I know that it's not the reason he is making it and that he is a very critical person. The program he put together is very critical. If you ask me personally, I'd be very happy if geography rather than nationality would be represented, i.e., if the festival would be held under the title East Mediterranean Festival and not specifically Israel…

I myself am deliberativly asking, if it's possible to relate to the Israeli culture without forming a political detachment? I mean, for us as immigrants, whose language is Hebrew and the culture is Hebrew. It carries some significance.

In this respect I see myself a cosmopolitan. I'm not ashamed of it. My native language is Hebrew and I lived in Israel 28 years. I might also live there in the future. But that doesn't bind me. How can I put it? I'm an independent entity with a culture of its own.

Who is the most influential director for you? I've noticed the Nouvelle Vague, Dogma

I'm not answering that. I like the good stuff and don't like the bad stuff.

What good movie have you seen lately?

Bob Carol Ted and Alice. It's a comedy from 1969. Well, it's not such a 'wow', but it's a comedy. I really enjoyed watching. ◆