

The Future of Short Films

with Lars Henrik Gass, Maike Mia Höhne, Jukka-Pekka Laakso, Laurence Reymond, Peter van Hoof conducted by John Canciani

A Debriefing of a Panel Discussion: Interview Part 1

John Canciani: What did you think when you were asked to introduce “The Future of Shorts”?

Peter: I am not so much into the big questions in life. Predicting the future is one of them. I don't see much need for it, and above all, I like to be surprised. With regards to this specific statement, it implies that there is supposed to be a present, and a past, of shorts; if you feel the need to say something on the future of shorts. All of the latter is a matter of perspective. The importance of short film lies mainly within the gated community of the art-and film world. With its main playing field, the (short) film festival, there is hardly any economic relevance to short film. Not even a main stage where a general audience is able to see the works. With a few exceptions, even feature film festivals reserve limited space for short films. And if they do, it is mainly as the necessary stepping-stone for filmmakers to bridge the gap between film schools, and becoming a director of a feature film. The concept of someone making short films the rest of his/her life seems to be a ridiculous idea. Apart from the exploiters (the people that run the festivals) no one within short film, including the filmmakers, can make a living out of it. This has been in the past, is so in the present, and I am afraid that I have to predict that it probably won't change much in the future.

Does this mean it's meaningless or unimportant? Not at all! All of us have created a beautiful environment where filmmakers of short films and curators, programmers, and a selected audience can meet and discuss film. A dense international network, of countless smaller and some bigger festivals,

that is there for the films and the filmmakers only; with hardly any hostility or competition towards one another. Why is this possible: because of the lack of economic importance of this world, and for the cinema world in general. It is being tolerated, as long as it's fulfilling its role as a breeding ground for talents that can be lured to the other side. Idealism versus industry: it's a delicate balance. A deadlock with, for now, little room for any improvement.

Jukka-Pekka: I thought that it is a challenge, also as a good reason to try to express myself as clearly as possible on things that are on my mind. Also, I was looking forward to a discussion to learn from others.

Maike: Interesting, the future is avant-garde, so, “avant-garde forever!” I think it's hard to predict the future, but I can express what I would like to see as future.

Laurence: I participated because I was asked, but didn't actually know what we would be discussing. I don't think one can predict an answer for such a question. But maybe we should also invite directors, producers, and every person involved in the making of films to discuss this topic. As a programmer we receive so many films per year, which is overwhelming and keeps us stuck in “the present” trying to find new voices. The filmmakers are creating the future, not us.

Lars: I totally agree with Laurence. The question about the future is simply an occasion to reflect on the present. It is evident that we all don't have the

slightest idea about the future. I took it as an opportunity to learn more about myself while listening to others.

John: Peter, you decided to select *De Bunker – Het Wennen – Het Wachten – Het Licht* (2011). Why did you choose it and did you have other films in mind?

Peter: It had to be no longer than 10 minutes. Which excluded many of the works I wanted to show. This is a work not by a filmmaker but by a visual artist, something you can see in both the cinematic qualities, as well as in the approach towards the subjects. It's a film you have to work for to enjoy. You can enjoy it (or hate it) in many different ways: as piece on architecture, or an essay on the prison system (more specific: a prison system of the future). You can look at it as a rare chance to see how the brain of an influential populist politician worked when she was still a scientist. It opens up an exciting dualism, without commenting on it as a scientific thesis.

Knowing that it's hard to grasp, or understand the work even as a Dutch native speaker, I was curious to see if and how the work is able to reveal itself towards an international audience. The last time I showed it was at the Rotterdam Film Festival. But it was in the presence of the artist, who was able to recreate the specific context for the audience, and was there for them as a target for their questions and irritations.

The film for me was a good example for illustrating my statement, which was "The Future of Shorts is political".

John: If you had other films in mind, what was the decisive factor to choose that film?

Peter: My second choice was the latest film by Phil Collins, *THE MEANING OF STYLE* (2011); I chose to select a Dutch work, also to make a statement about the deplorable state Dutch society has sunk to within a very short time period, while around us people still have very idyllic ideas about our cultural and political achievements.

Maïke: *PARANMANJANG!* (2011) was the first film that popped up in my mind when the festival asked me for one film only. I had no other films in mind. Only the limitation of the ten minute screening time made me start to think about other films; but I soon gave up and asked if it is possible anyway to present *PARANMANJANG!*

Since I saw it in early January 2011, it was clear to me that this film was and still is, a very special one. Advanced in everything: storytelling, images, ideas, creative and free. Two free spirits, guided and directed this film. If you want to, I am very attracted to free minded people. The way they understood the freedom in the question, "hey, do you mind shooting a film on the new iphone 4?" is very rare.

And all the freedom they had in making comes through in storytelling and editing, imagination and closed rituals. Watching this film is like you have no idea which trip you will ride in seeing this film. This makes it very special!

If everyone or at least many speak about the freedom that lies in the form, in the digital form, then these two brothers really used it.

Jukka-Pekka: I had other films in mind, many of them too long for the purpose. I cannot really remember how many possible films I thought of before *LA GRAN CARRERA* (2010). *LA GRAN CARRERA* includes many things that I see as interesting when it comes to the future of cinema: hybrid, combining techniques; it has its roots in the tradition of cinema, looks like a newsreel or documentary: Content that is open to many interpretations; emotional impact, it has a capability to surprise/shock, a feeling that is strengthened by the presence of others watching it, so it belongs to cinema, watching it alone on a small screen is not as powerful. So it combines in my mind what cinema, especially screening films for audiences that live them together, is all about. When I first thought about it, the most important thing was that I remembered its impact on me when I first saw it. What I want to say is that I did not have a „grid“ of ideas I wanted to present and then looked for the film, but I first had the film and then I thought that it actually does represent many of the things I think are important.

Laurence: I decided to show *PORCOS RAIVOSOS* (2012) because I love this film. It was part of the first selection of shorts I worked for at the Quinzaine, and one of the most original films I saw recently. It navigates between the styles of documentary films, ethnographic cinema and fiction in a very graceful way. It is also a way to pay an homage to the wonderful new Brazilian cinema, which has been giving us for a few years now some of the most diverse, innovating and daring films. In the last three years we programmed 4 Brazilian short films at the Quinzaine: that says it all.

Lars: I always have considered a programmer as someone who draws attention to work that is potentially, possibly overlooked. So, once in a while I am sort of obsessed with the idea that an artist or filmmaker is not appreciated to the extent he or she should be. That's the case with Michel Klöfkorn. I also could also have selected Jesse McLean, Rebecca Meyers or others. But that sort of selection is always ridiculous in some way. It presents and unravels the programmer as a clown in the public sphere. It deals with subjectivity, but also with a private inclination. As a programmer, you are thus becoming much more vulnerable than usual. Because usually, you can hide behind a set of films and names. This is not possible here. It's a statement. To be honest, I rather like to provide statements as a set of different positions. People sometimes think that a programmer's or curator's priorities matter. I can understand that, since there is very little orientation in that field. So, people look for devices. They are searching for intimacy. But I'm thinking more and more that it is questionable to push individual work in the way star curators sometimes do. I know a star curator who pushes a name in his monthly column in a fancy art magazine, while at the same time being himself the consultant of a collector who has that name in the collection. For an audience, it is rather the conjunction of works that matters, something that makes you think, I believe.

Jukka-Pekka: Like Peter mentioned, films should be much more political. I sometimes hope young filmmakers would start a movement like in 1968. Things are really going wrong nowadays and films and shorts specially can reflect fast and make statements. *LA GRAN CARRERA* maybe doesn't seem very political on the first sight, but it criticizes the morals and values of humans and also the entertainment industry, including cinema. The time and place of the races is 30s Spain, the people shown could be imagined as those who were on the winning side of the Civil War.

Peter: I agree with Jukka-Pekka, but political filmmaking can only dream away. Until now, there is hardly anything moving. We need filmmakers who are able to provoke a different state of mind.

Laurence: I believe there is such a movement nowadays. People are on the street in many countries and it is filmed and it's shown in films. In the submissions I received, there were a few films documenting those events. And more generally speaking, I don't think that a film is political only by showing "politi-

cal events", but it is more an ethical approach, and a film can be political by many ways. According to the way you consider it, every little thing can become very meaningful.

Maïke: Absolutely and there is such a movement - there are many movements. People go out on the streets again. Your question even became history already, if you compare it to the situation in Istanbul last year. The need for a Global change is obvious. The need for being political is very urgent to the people as individuals - there are people that like to receive first hand information via film, there are others that want to politicize in another way. Again, many films, many ways to speak about what happens. The *HOTEL DIARIES* (2001–2007) by John Smith and *WHY COLONEL BUNNY WAS KILLED* (2010) by Miranda Penell are two ways of reflecting politics and giving the viewer the chance to jump on. Very different aesthetic approaches but still - both leading into what is happening today and why!

Lars: That's true, there may be many more so called "political" films now. However, I sometimes wonder how political they really are. I am rather suspicious about a romantic reading of 1968 and activist filmmaking in general. I have seen very little interesting artwork on 9/11 for instance. So, what can be more political in this world than sitting patiently immobilized in a cinema and being forced to follow an unseen world that is unfolding its secrets? Being forced to think differently is something that only cinema still can impose on us.

Laurence: I agree with Lars. The power of cinema also lies in the fact that people go out of their homes, gather in a theatre and share a human experience on top of watching a film. This is already "political". And this is where people can start to share things and maybe believe that things could be different. This is one great thing about festivals, people are there to share things. Not only films.

John: I would like to come back to Maïke's statement that one can say what they would like as the future of shorts and I must say it's the part I'm more interested in. How you would like to have the future of short film in terms of your vision at your festivals, as a private person, as a film aficionado?

Maïke: To make a wish concerning the future of films... I wish that we, including myself, think beyond budgets. A budget is not what restricts a film- it is the thinking that creates borders in what-

ever is important in making art. So going beyond borders, developing situations, images, stories, ideas that deal with complexity and simplicity on the same hand - this is what really interests me. Our world is structured through images of how to do something, how to deal with something, how to live etc. A man has to be... a woman has to be... as a couple you have to... you see, where I want to go... So making films is stepping beyond constructed images - decoupage. "Ich will die Welt durch deine Augen sehen - emanzipiert und korrigiert. Ich will die Welt einmal durch deine Augen sehen", sings DJ Koze, and I think he is right. I want to see, but really see, feel the world through other eyes and be touched- in what ever way. As I mentioned- the future of shorts is a journey into emotion - it is emotion which is change - in whatever way. The future is change. I really love it when I get films that go far beyond the idea of a budget. The future is difficult in filmmaking, because as the making of films takes so long a film will always be a little late for the future. So the future of filmmaking might be its present and in the present it is pretty much about a thought through film. I love it if I feel a free spirit behind the images and ideas, stories or excerpts. Most important for me is that I feel very close to films that enter a particular moment in time and examine it very carefully.

Jukka-Pekka: What I want is to be surprised. In cinema in general what I want to see is ambition, seriousness and experiment. In shorts you can find this, but way too many shorts made are not of the kind I want to see. And also what I do want to see are films that use the tools well. Intention is not enough if one cannot express it in cinematic ways.

Lars: As long as there is cinema, there is hope.

Laurence : The Same as Jukka-Pekka and Lars, both.

Do you think that feature movies will also go in that direction, meaning that filmmakers use shorts for experimenting?

Jukka-Pekka: I wish, but what I see happening is that cinema is seen more and more as part of the industry and the only measure to assess them is money. And experimenting, seriousness and issues rarely fit in this. But because making films is always possible also "outside the system", there will always be serious cinema too.

John: So you think the advantage of producing shorts is that there is no box office pressure and therefore filmmakers should have the possibility to risk and experiment?

Jukka-Pekka: Yes indeed. Without pressure from the box office or indeed any possibility of making money, one is more "free". But of course one is also often incapable of producing the work one wants. Cinema is dependent in most cases on money created by more or less "commercial" channels (sales to TV, whether they are state owned or not). That also means that one must please a multitude of gatekeepers. That means most of the time a conservative approach is chosen. But as exceptional works, short films have a possibility to be seen at festivals and thereafter maybe elsewhere, and because there are so many festivals, exceptional works that are "new" and "interesting" or "good" can find a life. Of course the art world has different rules.

Biographies: See introduction



Leonardo Sette, Isabel Penoni
Porcos Raivosos (2012/Brazil)