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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The principal purpose of p.o.v. is to provide a framework for collaborative publication for those of us who study and teach film at the Department of Information and Media Studies at the University of Aarhus. We will also invite contributions from colleagues in other departments and at other universities. Our emphasis is on collaborative projects, enabling us to combine our efforts, each bringing his or her own point of view to bear on a given film or genre or theoretical problem. Consequently, the reader will find in each issue a variety of approaches to the film or question at hand – approaches that complete rather than compete with one another.

Every March issue of p.o.v. is devoted to the short film.

p.o.v.

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Heritage

Netherlands, 2003, color, 35 mm, 24 min.



Principal production credits

Director	Arch Khetagouri
Screenplay	Arch Khetagouri, Laura van Dijk
Cinematographer	Maarten van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal
Editor	Katarina Türler
Sound design	Tom Bijnen
Production design	Lieke Scholman, Kirsty Holtkamp
Production	Eelke Pollé, Ivo Noorlander

Cast

Man and Father	Irakli Apakidze
Child	Alexander Apakidze
Mother	Dasha Laktionova
Officer	Dirk van der Pol
Sergeant	Srdjan Fink
Soldier	Hans Groenendijk

Prizes

Grand Prize, European Short Film Festival, Maastricht, 2004
Selected as Dutch entry for Student Academy Award, 2004
One of three films nominated for the Tuschinski Award, Netherlands, 2003

Synopsis

A man, roaming through his former parental home, confronts traumatic memories of his childhood during the war. In reliving those memories, he gains a new measure of freedom from them.

Arch Khetagouri

Arch Khetagouri lived in Georgia until war broke out there. He fled to Holland, was admitted to the film academy and made "Heritage" as his graduation film.

An interview with Arch Khetagouri on *Heritage*

Richard Raskin

I understand that the film is based on the personal experience of someone you know. Can you tell about the real events that were the basis for your story and whether you changed them at all in the film because of the needs of the narrative?

The important event that lead me to make this film was the beginning of the civil war in Abkhazië.

I was there on vacation together with my best friend in the summer of 1992. The political situation there was very tense at that time, but everybody was hoping for a peaceful solution. For some reason we had to return to the capital on the next morning. On the way to Tbilisi I heard on the radio that the war had started in Abkhazië. The place where I'd been the last day was now surrounded by soldiers and many people had been killed. I had a strong feeling of sorrow at that time and it remained a long time in my head. Besides that I've heard many war stories from close friends who were involved in the war. So the film is based not on one story but more on that feeling I had at that time. Most of the story is invented, but the experiences are real.

One of the first things we learn about the main character is that he is a real smoker. We see him smoking as he drives his car. The ashtray is overflowing with cigarettes. And he has his next cigarette tucked behind his ear, ready to be smoked without his even having to pull it out from a pack in his pocket. Was this something you deliberately did to characterize him in a particular manner?

The Georgians smoke too much. They smoke a lot if everything is alright, but they smoke even more if they have problems. The actor who plays the main role in the film is a real smoker too. So the cigarettes helped him to recall certain emotions. I brought real Georgian

cigarettes for him from Georgia. The specific taste of those cigarettes helped him a lot in his acting.

You certainly cast perfect actors for the two main roles in the film. Can you tell me anything about them? And their performances were superb – never overplayed, never theatrical or overly sentimental. Can you tell me anything about the way you directed them?

I saw Irakli a few years ago at the premiere of a Georgian film. I liked his expression very much. And when he told me that he was an actor I knew already then that I was going to work with him at some future time. After one year I started to write the scenario of *Heritage* and I had him in my head while I was writing.

Irakli is a really good actor. He had played in many theater pieces in Georgia. Our cooperation was really interesting and I've learned many things from him. Each evening after the shoot, we rehearsed the scenes for the next day. He is a method actor and it was really important to him to have good reasons for every movement and for finding the right emotions. We prepared the *mise en scène* in this way and his acting was really natural. Because Irakli is used to play in the theatre, sometimes he was very close to acting theatrically, so I had to pay attention to that. It was really important for this film to act in a minimalistic way, to show the inner emotions with more tension. We trust each other and that's why it worked out. Besides that he himself had experienced the civil war and this helped him in his acting as well.

For his child, it was the first film performance. He took it really seriously. Because of that I was obliged to work with him as I would work with a professional actor. So I was very lucky with the actors.

You used music very sparingly in the film and weren't afraid to have relatively long stretches of the soundtrack with very little sound. Can you comment on this restraint in your use of music?

When I was developing the scenario I knew already then that I would use a minimum of music. If there is no dialog in the film you're obliged to use more sound. But in this case I even reduced the amount of sound and therefore the film became more intimate. The silence creates unconscious tension and arouses certain feelings in the viewer.

You also worked very deliberately with certain sounds - magnifying for example the sound of the rifle butt striking the father's head, and of the ball bounced by the soldier in the house. And when near the end of the film, the boy gets out of the car and closes the car door, there is no appreciable sound of the car door closing. Would you tell a little about your use of these procedures as ways of enhancing the storytelling?

I worked very closely with my sound designer and we managed to transform some of the storytelling through sound. He understood my intentions very well and also brought his own ideas to the film. The ball bouncing is the good example of our understanding. Concerning the soundless closing of the car door, this was the exact opposite of what we had done with sound in the previous scenes.

The ball of course is given a central role to play in the story and enables the main character to perform a meaningful symbolic gesture at the end of the film, when the man returns the ball to the child he once was and from whom the ball had been taken. Was this part of any of the stories you had heard about the civil war or did you invent this part of the scenario?

No, that was really invented.

If I'm not mistaken, the boy is shot in the hand by one of the soldiers who fires from the window of the family home. You never show a scar on the hand of the main character. Had you considered this possibility and rejected it - perhaps because it seemed unnecessary or inappropriate?

Yes, you see the scar on his hand when he is searching for a radio channel. But if you miss it you won't lose track of the story and that's what counts.

Did you know from the start that the film would be called Heritage? And although I can guess what resonances the title have for you, could you describe them for me?

We had trouble finding a title for almost a whole year. I just didn't know what to call the film. We even hung a small blackboard in the production office and everybody from the crew could propose a title and write it on the board, but that didn't help either. Then I thought again about what the story was and "heir" was the name that came into my head. Later on it became "heritage" which I think fits the film very well. The main character is somehow the heir of the past he had experienced and the ball symbolizes it as well, I think.

Though I never look for Freudian symbolism in films, I couldn't help wondering whether the main character's journey through the tunnel and emergence from the tunnel entrance wasn't a kind of symbolic rebirth. Does this interpretation strike you as far-fetched?

I didn't think about Freudian symbolism when I wrote or made this film, but I'm glad that people see the journey of the man as a rebirth. We talked about this during script development and if you remember the journey ends indeed with a woman's scream and then we see the flashlights from outside the tunnel.

Is there any advice you might give to student filmmakers about to make their own first short films?

I think it is always important to think seriously about what a story makes you feel when you're going to film. As a director you have to bring every small detail to life. I like films in which these small details guide the story and touch the viewer's feelings. But I'd rather call this a proposal to the students than a piece of advice.

8 December 2004

Heritage

Mark Le Fanu

The nationalist rivalries that re-emerged on the European scene in the 1990s with such devastating results in terms of cruelty and suffering have had their effect, too, as one would expect, on the emerging film landscape: some of the best contemporary shorts take these disturbances as their theme, often (but not invariably) binding the experiences undergone into the shape of an allegory. Two years ago Stefan Arsenijevic's film *Torzija (A Torsion)*, documenting an episode from the siege of Sarajevo, won the Prix UIP for Best European Short; while the previous year, a very different film on the same subject, Ahmed Imamovic's *10 Minuta (10 Minutes)* – which in a single uninterrupted take of that length shows a boy leaving his house to buy bread and returning to find it destroyed by a mortar shell – was one of the truly memorable nominations for this award. In the post-Postmodernist epoch that we have moved into it seems that we are going back to taking “subject-matter” seriously; for, besides terrorism (to which anyway this topic is related), perhaps no subject is more serious than these wars and divisions that have sprung up in the European heartland, closer to home than such conflicts have been in most of our life-times.

The Dutch (but in essence Georgian) film *Heritage* belongs to this new wave of film-making whose sociological origins seem relatively transparent. Thus we can speculate that the director goes abroad to get his or her education, far from the distraction of gunfire. Yet, somehow, the memory of things that have been witnessed lingers on as a trauma that it is necessary to propitiate or expiate. (“Witnessed”: or imagined – it doesn't matter. The point is that the events were

close to the film-maker, and changed his/her life in some fundamental way.) Arch Khetagouri's film starts with an image of a man driving an old American car down a peaceful country track. His face has a lived-in look. His hand, as he stretches towards the overburdened ashtray, has a scar on the back of it. What decade and what country we are in are not obvious, and one immediately feels that this is deliberate. He parks the car in a wooded glade. From a grassy knoll in the distance a boy, about 10 years old, is looking at him – but no contact is possible since the child moves off as soon as our protagonist opens the car-door. He was there, and not there – like a phantom. Perhaps he was a mere flash of sunlight.

Pausing to notice the large tunnel-shaped exit of a water culvert, our hero walks down the path towards an old and deserted house: something about the way the location is photographed (and the way *he* is photographed) tells you he has been here before and that this is a place of vividly-felt, if melancholy, memories. Poking open the front door, he enters the brightly-lit hallway (the season is autumn, but sunlight is piercing: later it will rain) – proceeding upstairs to the first floor sitting room. Here he presses the palm of his hand against the mottled wall-paper, and with his forefinger wipes some dust off the remaining furniture. Looking around, his eye falls on a desk drawer with a little object in it: a child's home-made toy in the shape of an animal or bird, constructed out of acorn and fir-cone – whatever it is, it is something plangent and innocent, and he strokes it while reliving old memories.

Objects rather than words have a primary symbolic significance in this movie. A little later, when we have moved outside again, we are introduced to a rubber football whose journey is going to “carry” the story through its subsequent *peripeteia*. The ball belongs to the phantom-boy, and the boy is, of course, our protagonist who has

come back out of some secret compulsion to visit the house of his childhood. Years ago, terrible events happened there, and they happened (as they always do) out of the blue, on an ordinary afternoon when he had run off to the woods to play by himself. So it happens that it is this football which he is carrying under his arm – falling out of his grasp and bouncing down the road – that gives his position away to the three soldiers who suddenly appear out of nowhere at the foot of the path, standing chatting by their stationary vehicle. “Come here!” they beckon him, at gunpoint: it seems they wish to know how to get to a particular destination. Seated on the jeep’s bonnet, the boy innocently obliges them; but when they move off one of the soldiers (the youngest one) holds onto the ball – having previously proffered it but then snatched it back from the boy’s eager grasp.

Ominous mockery! For this very same ball, retained by the youngest of the soldiers, carries the “punch” of the film’s central scene: the rape and murder of the boy’s parents in their own house, in the very room the protagonist is now standing – witnessed (from outside through the window) all those years before on that fateful afternoon in his childhood. Of all the details that come back to him in this trauma, none is more pressing than this memory: that the soldiers enjoyed it; that they were laughing; and that during the outrage, the soldier who had stolen the football was bouncing it slowly and rhythmically in the background, as if orchestrating these terrible events, or setting the time for them in sinister syncopation.

Change of scene: the hypnotic horror of the bouncing ball is interrupted when the child is spotted through the window and shot at (hence the scar on his hand). Escape is made down a well in the garden. Pursuing him, the youthful soldier fires some rounds into the

dark emptiness of the well-shaft and then carelessly, or contemptuously, throws in the football ball for good measure.

We have arrived at Act 3 of the drama (this “short” is quite long – 24 minutes in fact – and allows us, I think, to speak in such terms). Resolution, expiation, “meaning of the events”. Again it is the ball, as symbolic object, that holds the clue towards the settling of accounts, for when our protagonist, pursuing his memories, clambers down the well, the dented ball is still miraculously there – “proof”, so to speak, that the fantasized events really happened. And now our protagonist picks the ball up and, with it tucked safely under his arm, feels his way through the dark escape tunnel whose exit he noticed earlier. Sunlight and freedom. And rebirth, in a way. (What is this tunnel except a birth canal?) Seated in the car is the boy himself, into whose grasp, wordlessly, after all these years (and with infinite tenderness) he hands over the once-treasured object.

The film’s “meaning” is obvious in a certain sense: it is transparent, as dreams are transparent. Indeed the whole movie is constructed like a dream, and maybe best understood in this way. In feature-length films there is always a push towards realism, but shorts are more like poems, and they can put up with a fair amount of symbolism – indeed it suits them, they thrive on it, perhaps because the length of an average short corresponds so neatly to the brief and fragmentary nature of the dreamwork. In either case, there is a sort of compression operating, encouraging the objects discerned or devised to resonate and to take on multiple meanings. In a properly-working short, as in a dream, everything is plangent, vibrating and charged with mysterious significance. And of course, we need to remind ourselves, dreams are also *about* something – they are not merely decorative: it is not only Freudians who say so. In *Heritage*, the gift of the ball releases the phantom-child from purgatory. The journey we

have witnessed is expiatory. The pain of unendurable memories is alleviated by the consolation of form. And this, surely, is what art is always doing.

Cock Fight

Israel, 2000, color, 16 mm, 13:40 min.



Principal production credits

Director and Writer	Sigalit Liphshitz
Cinematographer	Ehud Segev
Editor	Michal Hagi
Music	Amos Hoffman
Production	The Sam Spiegel Film & TV School - Jerusalem

Cast

Marziano	Uri Gavriel
Gabril	Dirar Sulliman
Ceausescu	Haim Barbalat
Abu Maher	Ahmad Abu Salum

Prizes

First Prize, Montpellier Film Festival, 2000
First Prize, Milan International Film Festival, 2001
Special Presentatio, New Directors / New Films, New York, USA.
First Prize, Torino Film Festival, 2001
Silver Plaque Award, Chicago International Film Festival, USA, 2000
First Prize, Munich International festival of Film schools, Germany, 2000
Certificate of Merit, San Francisco Film Festival, 2001
Special Script Mention, Munich International Festival of Film School, Germany, 2000.
Special Mention, Jerusalem Film Festival, Israel, 2000
Audience Award, Eksperimento Film and Video Festival, Manila, 2000
Press award, Bratislava Film Festival, 2001
Best Student Production Award, Melbourne International Film Festival, Australia, 2001.

Synopsis

On the way to the market, the Israeli chicken farmer Marziano and his Romanian worker are stopped at a new Palestinian roadblock. Marziano, the farmer, finds himself confronted with Nabil, a former worker in his stalls, now a police commander. In the burning heat of a merciless sun, it ends in a 'cockfight'.

Sigalit Liphshitz

Born in Israel in 1970. Studied at the Sam Spiegel Film and Television School, Jerusalem, from 1997 to 2001. Her graduation film was entitled *Expecting* (2001).

An interview with Sigalit Liphshitz on *Cock Fight*

Richard Raskin

Do you remember how the idea for telling this story first came to you? Did it remain very much in its original form or did the idea evolve in some unexpected directions as you developed the script?

In my country you hear daily reports on the news about incidents that take place at the many IDF roadblocks. A woman gave birth at a roadblock because she was detained, a man died of his wounds because the ambulance was not allowed to get through, and then of course there are the terrorist bombings. In 1997 (?) peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians initiated the Autonomy Plan in parts of the Territories, including Jericho. I thought to myself: what would happen if the roles were reversed in favor of the Palestinians, and an Israeli were the one needing a gate pass from a Palestinian soldier?

And so I started with Marciano, an Israeli chicken farmer, facing off an officer at a Palestinian roadblock that had been ordered closed. But that was not enough. The personal angle, the human connection which adds depth to the story, was missing. And then a school colleague of mine suggested, "What if the officer were Marciano's former employee?" That's exactly what was missing! This idea not only provided a twist in the personal relationship between the two key characters, it also added a historical angle which they both shared and which stems from the old dispute. In order to complete the picture I added a character to each of the key players, who would reflect his thoughts and help us better to understand him. Marciano got a new worker – a Romanian (Marciano personally imported him because Israelis stopped employing Palestinians during the first

Intifada for security reasons. And since Jews loathe this kind of work, they were forced to recruit foreign help from poor countries such as Romania and the Far East). Nabil also got a helper, a simple soldier who aged during the casting process and symbolized the older, war-weary Palestinian.

Now that I had a past and present, all I needed was an ending for the film. I felt that a happy ending was out of the question. After all, you are dealing with two people, neither of whom is willing to accept the change in the other, not to mention the fact that the change in one is due to the change in the other.

The ending I finally planned to shoot was that neither side gives in: Marciano's chickens die. He tosses them on the road and leaves. But with only three days of shooting, we ran out of time and didn't shoot this ending. When we prepared to complete the shoot, the question came up again. – How will the story end? Some of the people I consulted wanted a happy ending. Renee Shore, the School's principal was one of them. I decided to write two endings, one happy, and the other – not. I felt the happy ending was fake. I couldn't imagine any situation where these two characters would play out a happy ending; whereas a pessimistic ending was natural and called for in view of both sides' utter imperviousness, which only increased as the story developed.

I decided to put the ending up for discussion among the actors and so on the eve of the final scene to be shot, the four actors, the production team and I sat down to discuss this. It didn't take long for the discussion to turn political and the amazing thing was that each actor spoke in the name of his character – Marciano could not "give in" to a happy ending and consequently neither could Nabil. On the opposite side were Ceaucescu and Abu Maher who were actually in

favor of a positive turn of events at the end but every time they tried to voice their opinion, Marciano and Nabil “came at them” and forced them to see their side, that of the employer. We ended up going for my initial inclination and shooting a pessimistic ending, much to the relief of everyone.

Neither I nor our readers know very much about actors in the Israeli setting. Can you tell a little about the actors you cast in the various roles?

Uri Gavriel who plays Marciano is a famous Israeli actor and one of the best in Israel. He plays a gangster or a criminal in most of his movie roles. Gavriel was typecast – he is forceful and hot tempered, representing the stubborn Israeli who always has the last word. This image of Gavriel was important to me because it is a short film where the character has to be pegged very quickly, even more so when the character is about to take radical actions.

From the moment I imagined Gavriel as Marciano in the writing stage, I was able to sharpen the character. When casting began, the first thing I did was to send him a script although I did not believe he would accept acting in a student film, made by a first-time director and for free! Surprisingly enough it took him only three days to come back with a positive answer.

Now that I had Marciano, I set out to cast the Arab officer to play opposite him. On the one hand, I was looking for someone who would be tough, proud and looked respectable. But on the other hand, I also wanted to see the pain in his eyes.

The Arab actors I approached were a bit suspicious of the script which they turned inside out, searching. There are a number of extremely talented and well-known Arab actors in Israel. The problem is most of them are no longer interested in playing “the Arab”, regardless of whether he is good, bad or ugly.

I met up with Dirar after several rejections of that kind. Actually, it turned out for the best. Dirar is an Arab Israeli, a secular Muslim. His dress, lifestyle and interests are very much "Israeli" oriented and as such he truly represents the young generation, striving to be powerful and influential.

Ahmad Abu Salum who plays Abu Maher was introduced to me by Dirar Sulliman one week before shooting began. A theatre director in East Jerusalem by profession and an actor by right, Ahmad is a cultured man and a gentle soul. His casting formed the character he played, blowing mane and all.

Haim Barbalat as Ceaucescu, was a third year student in the Acting School located one floor above the Film School. Haim is a veteran Russian immigrant so the East European attitude is in his nature. In addition he was coached by a native Romanian in the use of 20 key words, 80% of which were swear words. The Romanian song he sang at the end of the film was added only in the editing.

The term "cock fight" underlines the rivalry between two masculinities - in this case the Jewish chicken farmer and the Palestinian commander. Could I ask you to comment on rivalries of this kind as barriers to peaceful relations between the two peoples?

In a cock fight, fights are decided by one rooster dying. The winner is the one left standing, feathers torn off, comb threatening to come undone, but with the bird still alive. In order to come out alive from this fight, you must kill. So far the battle waging in the Middle East is a cock fight and both sides have suffered losses. The fear is that if we keep this up, we will destroy one another. The imperviousness of both sides turns us into roosters who are only motivated by instinct. Obviously one can't avoid making the masculine comparison. The rivalry between Marciano and Nabil is based on "who's the Man", who's the toughest, where every concession equals weakness. That's the rooster's way. (I'm not sure how women play into this but the

fact is hen fights do not exist. What is certain is that every cock fight leaves a mourning widow behind.)

As the conflict within the film develops, the Jewish Israeli becomes less likeable to the viewer - spiteful, racist, too proud to accept the Palestinian's offer of free passage. And the Palestinian commander becomes more likeable – at the start rather vain, almost narcissistically admiring himself in the mirror, but ultimately turning out to be a generous person. Is this the way you see the characters as well?

I think the relationship between Marciano and Nabil represents the essence of the conflict. The personal conflict stems from the history of both peoples. Only “thanks” to the occupation was the situation created, where Nabil was Marciano’s employee (and all that that entails) and only “thanks” to the Accords, is Nabil now Marciano’s commander (political moves find actual expression in the lives of simple people). Marciano cannot stomach the fact that his former employee is now giving him orders, and despite his position and rank, Marciano attempts to boss him around as he did in the past, whereas Nabil the officer becomes blind to Marciano’s plight when he remembers his own suffering in the chicken coop. Both are unable to break free from the past and move on, so much so that that in the end, each succeeds in turning his nemesis back to his former self. The officer is once again a simple worker who does what he is told whereas Marciano resumes his role as a boss who takes orders from no one, even if it’s for his own good.

Unless I am mistaken, this film is rather critical of what might be called a “right wing” view of the conflict. Would you agree? Has the film’s political dimension been an important factor in the ways Israeli audiences have related to the film?

Because I was born into the Israeli side of the conflict I am critical of the nationalistic outcries in my society, voices which are dictated by History. They look back in anger and do not look away even when they are facing forward, much like what happens in Marciano’s

personal story – a man who will not look forward and straight ahead – beyond the roadblock. A historical mandate should not be taken lightly but not at so high and bloody a price either, and so far, the stubbornness and imperviousness have only led to war, see History for reference. The movie depicts this sad situation, as it is.

Surprisingly enough, right-wing viewers think the movie is supportive of their views whereas left-wing viewers feel the movie reflects theirs. The right-wingers are pleased that the Israeli is strong, uncompromising and successful in breaking the Palestinian whereas the left-wingers regret the behavior of the unrelenting Israeli and perceive the Palestinian's move as humane, trust-building.

Is there any advice you would give to student filmmakers about to make their own first short films?

I was taught that a short film is like a good proverb, sharp and to the point. It's enough to say it and enough said. One important thing to keep in mind – Do not be afraid to realize your dream, fully.

Is there anything else you would like to tell about "Cock Fight" or storytelling or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

A story which happened while preparing for the film, at Deres Freid Bethlehem:

In researching the Palestinian army, my contact person was Natasha, a new immigrant from Czechoslovakia who climbed over barricades during the Student Rebellion in Prague and here in Israel. She is a pro-Palestinian activist who has ties with a General in the Palestinian army now being formed. He agreed to help and supply us with Palestinian army uniforms which he sneaked across the Bethlehem checkpoint, which is the closest one to Jerusalem. Natasha and Maya, my assistant director drove to this checkpoint, located about a ten-minute drive from our school in order to collect the uniforms. Upon

arrival, they received a parcel as planned containing two uniforms. When they opened the parcel they discovered to their disappointment that the General had not included any rank insignias. They decided that since they were already at the checkpoint, they might as well ask the Palestinian soldiers how they can get their hands on some stripes. The soldiers replied that the answer can only be obtained in the military Command Headquarters in Bethlehem and that if they are interested, there happened to be a military jeep going there right at the moment. Not one minute later, Natasha and Maya found themselves driving through the narrow alleys of Bethlehem, with a Palestinian army jeep in front of them and an IDF army jeep behind. When they arrived at the gates of the Command Headquarters, a big grey building, the IDF jeep deserted them and left them in the hands of the Palestinian army. The soldiers stepped out of the jeep and one of them instructed the girls to follow him. They did so, with shaking knees, following him through a long and dark hallway while they cursed my name and searched for escape routes. Finally the soldier stopped in front of an office door, half way opened, knocked and walked in. One moment later, the door opened wide and he signaled to the girls to come. They obeyed and came in. The soldier remained near the door, standing stiffly at attention. Inside, behind a big table sat an officer, with the rank of Colonel. At the side of the table sat someone who looked like a clerk. The officer signaled to the soldier who then left the room, shutting the door behind him. The room was silent. The officer asked in Arabic, "What to you want?" And although they did not speak Arabic, Natasha started explaining in English why they came. It was difficult to disregard the excitement in her voice and it was difficult for the officer to get a word in and ask "Français? Parlez vous français?" and so in broken French the girls sat down and told the Colonel the story

of *Cock Fight*. The officer asked sharp questions, laying out his own reservations and interpretations to the story and he did so in a French befitting summit meetings. The soldier who left the room returned with a tray and steaming hot tea which was served in the customary fashion. They drank the sweet tea and when they were done, the officer asked "So what is it that you want?" The girls looked at him pleadingly, "rank insignia?" The officer broke out in loud laughter, raised both his hands to his shoulders and pulled off one of his insignias – indicating the rank of a Colonel in the Palestinian army.

A few facts:

- After the roadblock, the road continues for some hundred meters, followed by an abyss.
- When we went scouting for locations, we used to stop in Jericho and eat some hummus.
- At the same year the film came out, the Al Aqsa Intifada broke out.
- The dead chickens were collected for us in one of the local kibbutzim. They were a little bit smaller than live chickens and their combs faded. The producer had a smashing idea when she suggested coloring the combs bright red and so we did.
- At the end of filming, we donated all the chickens to Farez, a bedouin who lives in the area with his family.
- The road where the film was shot is located in the Territories.
- The filming took place during the final rounds of the 1998 World Cup Soccer matches, the Mondiale. The production team lived in a small hostel in Maale Efraim but Uri Gavriel demanded that a TV be placed in his room. He got the TV, compliments of the assistant director who dragged her personal TV from her house in Jerusalem. And so every night, at the end of the shooting day, all the actors sat in Uri's room, snacked on some nuts, watched international soccer matches and listened to Ahmad playing the *oudh*.

15 February 2004

***Cock Fight* – a short film**

Some thoughts about war and films about war

Gunnar Wille

Films about war are very widespread, which is hardly surprising, as war is a very widespread phenomenon. A general human condition that it is difficult to avoid coming into contact with. I have here four recent short films, three of which are about war. Two of these three are from Israel, one from Holland. One is about war in the future, one about memories of war, and then there is one about war in the present: this is called *Cock Fight*, and this article will be mostly about this film.

The film that is not about war is about a man who cannot make a decision, and if you analyse the other films you realise that they are also about having to make decisions. That's what these films are about, which is interesting. Decisions and the consequences of these decisions. A little batch of films on the subject of war and decisions.

In the film entitled *Draft* there is a young man who has decided to go to war for his native land of Israel, causing his father major emotional problems. I can certainly identify with that, as I too am a father, of about the same age, with two boys. In the film entitled *Heritage* we follow one man's journey back into the past, to the day when he leads a group of soldiers to his family. They appear to be soldiers from the Second World War, and we see how he/the boy escapes, while the rest of the family is wiped out. Again, a man of my age, who wrestles with terrible problems that arise due to a fatal decision on his part. Films about people and their terrible actions.

So you sit comfortably, leaning back in your Danish armchair, and look out of the window onto a world where there has been peace for almost 60 years. 60 years that cover almost your whole life. And when you then see a film about war, made by a young person living in a country that has been at war just as long, you become troubled. Because you are a person who has lived in peace and has never been in situations where small, banal decisions can have major, fatal consequences. There is a risk that you become lazy and intolerant. And it is difficult for you to understand the conflict and the symbolic layers that maybe, maybe not, are present in the film. I recall numerous films from the former Soviet Union, critical of the system, which I enjoyed yet did not appreciate in full, as I was unaware of all the secret hints contained in the films.

The same is true of *Cock Fight*. It is a very simple story. A truck laden with live chickens comes to a checkpoint in the middle of a plain. There is just a road, a shed and a barrier, otherwise just a desolate, deserted landscape on all sides. The chicken farmer, the boss with a Jewish appearance, sits behind the wheel and beside him his employee, a linguistically handicapped, very hungry, young man from Eastern Europe. At the checkpoint are the commandant in the shed and his subordinate soldier, hair combed over his bald head, by the barrier. It is very hot, probably in the middle of the day under the pitiless sun. The commandant has photos on the walls of all the key people in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. We see American presidents, Israeli prime ministers and Palestinian leaders. The chicken farmer has no interest in politics, he'd rather listen to local pop music. As the truck approaches the barrier the order is given to close it, and the truck stops in the midday heat with all its chickens. The boss tries to bribe the guard with a chicken, but in vain. The commandant is called, and it turns out that he was once employed by

the boss of the chicken farm. Formalities are exchanged, but we sense an underlying tone of hostility. The commandant refuses to raise the barrier. So the truck stands there, and it is so hot that the Rumanian employee can fry eggs on the radiator. The boss uses his last drop of water to cool down the chickens. A chicken dies, and he tries to appeal to the commandant's sympathy, but orders are orders, they cannot pass. A violent argument develops, and they try to break through. Guns are primed and the drama comes to a head. A chicken escapes and breaches the blockade. The Rumanian manages to reason with everyone, and the commandant agrees to raise the barrier. All is well for a moment. But the boss cannot bear the humiliation, and throws all the dead chickens out of the cages and scatters them across the road. He then backs away. He does not pass the border, but drives away having renewed this hostility.

A short film and a simple story, which is how it should be. Short films should not have complicated plots, but I wonder whether this is too simple. Does it have enough material to satisfy my intellect? Is there anything there that I, from my comfortable armchair, can transfer to my own experience, or do I need to have a deeper understanding of local conflicts to get the most out of it? For example, I don't know why there is a checkpoint in the middle of the desert, and I am surprised that it is manned by Palestinians. I can understand the employer-employee conflict and I can understand the power shift taking place across the border. But I can't help thinking that the employer comes from Israel and he meets a former employee, a Palestinian, who has now become a commandant. He may well be an uncertain commandant with his newly-acquired power, but there is clearly an old grudge against the employer. As I watch the film I call to mind the history of the expulsion of the Jews and their extermination down the centuries. And I think of Israel's

more recent history and injustices against a new people who are being driven out of the region. I think about historical repetitions. I think about the story's interminability and mankind's inability to improve, and it is perhaps this that the film tries to depict with its surprising, depressing conclusion. And I wonder how this film is perceived in Israel. Is it something that they perceive in just the same way as I did, or is there something that I missed that is why they are so crazy about the film?

I'm not sure. Does it contain material that can create associations with my own experiences? For example, do I suddenly think of the conscientious police officer who once stopped me from running a red light without lights? Is the film structured in such a way that it could happen anywhere in the world? Does it describe something specific yet at the same time general? I don't know, and it nags at me. I watch the film and become irritated. Is the symbolism not clear enough? Or too heavy? Is the main character too unsympathetic? Is it unreasonable that he just stands there, and stays there with his stupid chickens? And why does he sprinkle water on the chickens rather than let them drink it?

There is no easy answer, and maybe there shouldn't be, as it is after all a very good story, two men meeting in a fatuous power struggle about political principle and dead chickens. And it's not easy to experience the helpless, insoluble situation. The soldier with the comb-over is the film's only balanced, sympathetic character. He lurks around the edge of events and mirrors the plot in an amusing way. The Rumanian is irritating, eating all the time. The main character is a person you cannot like, and you find it hard to accept his decision at the end. It is a very disjointed experience. Your heart tells you that it's all incredibly irritating, but it's with the head that you come up with an acceptable interpretation of the story.

A good thing? Maybe. Sitting in my comfortable armchair with a view of all of the world's troubles, wars and floods on TV, it seems necessary. It is necessary to produce vague responses to incomprehensible events. And these extraordinary conflicts between people who share countries or villages are still there. Time after time we believe that we've found the solution, but there's always someone or other whose pride gets in the way of a solution. It seems to be part of the way people live. It exists on a microscopic level between children who inherit hostility towards children from the next street, in endless divorce cases, in inheritance cases that can have an impact on generations, and on a macroscopic level between nations who never resolve historical hostilities.

I walk down to my greengrocer, who looks wearily at me. I've not done anything to him personally and I buy from him almost every day, yet he still looks wearily at me, unlike the girl in the butcher's shop, where they smile warmly and show that they recognise me when I buy half a kilo of minced lamb. At the greengrocer they just look tired. And I tell myself that they work from early morning until late evening. The butcher closes at five thirty, while the greengrocer is there until 10 in the evening 7 days a week. He lives in that fucking shop. Which I'm grateful for, because I've always forgotten something or other or get back too late from work. And there he stands, and I know why he's tired, because I'm tired too and maybe I look angrily at him and he must have met lots of racist Danes who treat him like shit and say terrible things to him or suspect him of not declaring his income and claiming benefits. OK, OK, I know how things are and I've nothing against him being here and it's a good shop, but he could at least smile.

Maybe that's what creates all the disorder in the world. The Jews were blamed for the crucifixion of Christ, starting off two thousand years of conflict, which has ended in the mess that Israel is now at the heart of. But as far as I know the Irish cannot be blamed for murdering any saints, yet they have still been killing one another for hundreds of years. And the Swedes with whom we have had problems for several hundred years, which are only resolved on the surface. Or my mother who grew up on Østergade in Ringkøbing and my father who came from Vestergade in the same town, which also caused problems, etc., etc. There is no doubt that any attempt to create an easy solution to the problem of the chicken truck and the checkpoint would be met by derisive laughter, because we all know better. Mankind is not able to solve the problems that it has created itself.

Draft

Israel, 2004, color, 16 mm, 17 min.



Principal production credits

Director	Naomi Levari
Writer	Naomi Levari
Cinematographer	Adi Halfin
Editor	Shiri Borchard
Producers	Talya Salama and Yoav Abramovitz
Production	The Sam Spiegel Film & TV School - Jerusalem

Cast

Yoav	Avi Pnini
Guy	Yedidya Vital

Festivals

Best Film – Sam Spiegel Film School, Jerusalem, 2004
Jerusalem International Film Festival, 2004
Tel Aviv International Student Film Festival, 2004
San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, 2004
Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival, 2005
Tampere Film Festival, 2005

Synopsis

Yoav Ganer, a 60's pacifist, does everything he can to prevent his son Guy from enlisting in the Army. In the 24 hours prior to Guy's induction, an emotional and ideological confrontation evolves between father and son.

Naomi Levari

Born in Oregon in 1978. Graduate of the Hadassah College, Film and Television Department. Graduate of the Sam Spiegel Film and Television School, Jerusalem. Student at the Open University. Taught film to high school students in Jerusalem and worked as a film translator. Member of several peace groups. *Draft* is her diploma film.

Filming from the heart

An interview with Naomi Levari on *Draft*

Richard Raskin

Can you tell me how the idea for this story came to you? Was it inspired by any specific people you know?

In general, military service is a very dominant part of life in Israel, a state that exists primarily due to its military strength of deterrence. Military concepts and slang are very much a part of society. I myself refrained from military service for ideological reasons, and I often wonder how I will react as a parent when, or if, my own son/daughter enlists. The characters in the movie represent two parts of myself: the ideological part – that innocent hippie character – and the part that needs to be accepted by society and grow up by leaving home. So the idea for this story did not exactly “come” to me. The whole notion of army is a part of me just as it is a part of any Israeli. I was lucky to be able to formulate my feelings, thoughts and fears of military service through this movie.

Both of your actors delivered excellent performances. Can you tell me about your choices in casting the two roles, and also about the way in which you chose to direct your actors?

I chose Avi Pnini (Yoav) because of his face and the close-up shots he supplied. His face is pain stricken. His long hair testifies to the era he belongs to, one that has long passed. There is not very much dialogue in the film, and therefore I needed his face to speak. In many scenes, his face is the text.

Yedidia Vital (Guy) is soft and gentle. He is not the macho character you’d expect of a young man anxious to enlist. In the conflict the film portrays, it would be banal if the father was gentle

and the son was macho – too easy and just a little superficial. Things are not that simple. The Israeli reality is that gentle boys get drafted too; they even go into combat units. The 18-year-old leaves his/her parents, friends and dreams behind for three whole years, as s/he goes off to fight.

The film basically directed itself. The situation was very clear. Luckily, I was blessed with two actors who believed in the script and its message. Yedidia arrived at the shooting directly from his army base, where he is currently doing his mandatory military service. Avi has sent two children to the army. Both actors knew the moment, and they had both experienced that night in the past. Although they are not playing themselves, the transposition was quite simple for them: they knew the situation, and re-experienced the pain. The acting experience and talent were less in play here, their knowledge of the situation brought out what later appeared on screen.

There are wonderful close-ups of Avi Pnini's face. You have already commented on these shots. Is there anything you would like to add about them?

The casting and shooting were inseparable. Adi (the cinematographer) was present at all the auditions. As already mentioned, we wanted an actor who speaks through his face, who can carry the pain of the character in his eyes. The close-ups are when the viewer identifies with the character; it's an intimacy between the viewer and the character.

This is a character that is doing terrible things to his son. He ignores him, yells at him, hurts his feelings, even hits him. But the close-ups help us to understand and love him. We see through his eyes and the creases in his face. He loves his son. He is in deep pain. He is in dire straits and he does not know how to handle the situation. Godard expressed it well by saying that the simple close-up

is the most emotional of them all, because it can make us anxious about things.

I gather that Guy was not simply drafted into military service but actually volunteered, either before he would have been called into the army, or perhaps for a kind of duty that not everyone is given. My uncertainty about this is due to my ignorance about the Israeli draft system. Could you clear this up for me?

Wrong. Guy was indeed drafted. In Israel, service is mandatory for every 18-year-old girl and boy. They have no choice. Most of them actually go happily, for it is a ticket into Israeli society, a source of pride and belonging, their way to be an equal among equals. There is no hierarchy in the army: the wealthy and poor fight side by side. There are few who are drafted unwillingly, and there are even fewer who refuse to serve and are imprisoned for their refusal.

Yoav has trouble with objects. His car won't start, his lighter doesn't work, and he has a hard time pulling some part out of a transistor radio he is trying to fix. What were your thoughts on this aspect of his character?

You're right, nothing works for Yoav. The radio is only an excuse to distract him from the inevitable confrontation with his son; a way to unload some of his anger and aggression. The lighter simply won't work, and the car is his punishment for lying to his son about the car not starting, when we saw him driving it earlier that day. In the closing scene, when Yoav needs his car most, the lie comes true and the car won't start. This is his nemesis.

All these things happen because Yoav cannot seem to find the way to do things right. He can't figure out how to speak to his son. He is always choosing the wrong way. How different would it have been if he had simply asked his son not to go, holding him closely and explaining how much he loves him and how scared he is of losing him? Yoav has a hard time expressing himself in words; thus the constant occupation with objects, particularly broken ones. His

insight comes too late, as does his repentance. The child has already left.

In the final scene, as the bus drives away with Yoav running after it, you substitute an image of Guy as a boy for the adult young man. This adds to the power of the moment and although I think I can guess why you did this, how its meaning might be interpreted, I would very much like to know how you understand this substitution, in your own words.

The little boy in the last scene is the bottom line of the movie. The soldier who enlists is still a child, and this is true for all armies in the world (the United States forbids the consumption of alcohol under the age of 21, while 18 year olds are permitted to go out and kill).

I wanted to emphasize that parents who do not allow their children to go out on 5-day field trips are the same parents who proudly send their children to a place where the probability that they will either kill or get killed is pretty high. This is quite a paradox. I would like people to stop and ask themselves: why am I sending my child to military service? I won't allow him/her to smoke because it endangers his/her health, and they won't drive my car if they're tired, because of the risk this involves, so why am I agreeing to send him/her to the army? The pride that goes with sending a child off to military service stems from impotence, from the primordial fear of having to bury your child. And still, everyone goes on doing it. Parents consciously send their children to the most dangerous place in the world, and celebrate the night before with a big meal. Why?

The answers are about collectivity and nationality. "Who else will protect the country?" "What if everyone just decided to refuse, what then...?" and so forth. For me, it is difficult to accept these answers, and I find it hard to believe others do. These so-called national excuses aren't reason enough to make a parent sacrifice his/her own child. This is totally twisted! I need to put my finger on the "automatic pilot" that causes people to send their children to play

with fire, and why it is that the individual gives in to society precisely in the most dangerous area.

Am I correct in assuming that both hawks and doves in Israel would appreciate this film, even though it is Yoav's story and he is clearly an opponent of right-wing politics?

You're right. People in Israel identify with the movie regardless of their political opinions, because practically everyone here has stood in Yoav's place. This is also, in my opinion, the true achievement of the film, because it was not made for a persuaded audience. On the contrary, I'm glad I didn't antagonize people who do not share Yoav's political opinions. From the very start, my editor, Shiri, said that this film should be edited from an extreme right-wing point of view, and she was right. We would not have been able to achieve anything if the movie spoke a sectarian language, and it definitely had the potential to do so. Everyone here experiences the trauma of recruitment, right and left, and it's hard for everyone. The movie emphasizes the separation, not necessarily the politics.

The true way to make a change through films is through emotions as opposed to rationalistic speeches. It's hard to oppose emotions; they're instinctive and involuntary. It's much easier to close yourself off in face of blunt texts and agendas. After experiencing emotion, you think and you analyze, while the other way around does not work so easily. Thoughts do not translate automatically into emotion.

Is there any advice you would give to students about to make their own first short films?

The film should be real, and by "real" I don't mean realistic, but real in a way that truly reflects the creators' inner truth. Remember that there is no such thing as "too much" in cinema. Do not censor yourself because you feel your movie is "overly sentimental," "too cynical," and so on. Once you censor yourself, you sabotage the movie's truth. If you are a person who is "too sensitive," don't be

afraid to go with it. There will always be viewers who will not connect to your movie, but this is also a way to find your “soul mates” across the world. Those who feel the movie was made for them, and in the darkness of the theatre will go the whole way with you, because it’s real. Nobody appreciates fraud or forgers. Don’t stop asking yourself: what am I doing? Am I really willing to expose myself? The topic you are addressing has got to come from the bottom of your heart, and it must be one that you deal with throughout your life, consciously or subconsciously.

A script undergoes changes, and is written and re-written over and over again. The first draft, however imperfect, is probably the one that expresses your real truth. I recommend that you go back to your first draft before you seal your script. It may supply answers to questions that come up during the process of writing the final drafts.

It’s important to be coherent, and the secret is in the script. A secured and consistent text is a winning script. The protagonist and antagonist must represent two sides of you, and you must love the antagonist as much as you love the protagonist. As soon as you have that, you’ve got an authentic conflict, the conclusion of which is inspiring.

I feel that cinema should aspire to change the world and make it a better place, by arriving, with the help of the cinematic illusion, at a bigger and greater truth. This is done with one thing only. Your heart.

6 November 2004

On *Draft*

Nikolaj Feifer

"We are killing our own children". From a radio, a voice speaks these words in the very first seconds of *Draft*. A theme is suggested and the scene is quickly set. A man drives around Jerusalem in his car, parks, and walks up the stairs to his apartment, but only after removing a sticker saying "I love Israel" from the hallway. He cooks and soon after his son comes home.

This is the last evening before the son is going off to the military, their last chance to talk about the future the son is about to embark on, and the last chance to talk about the choices he has made.

But the father is upset; his son is going to participate in a war he himself can no longer see the point in. Almost as a picture of the whole political situation in the Middle East, the ability to communicate properly seems to be missing in their relationship. The son tries repeatedly to reach out, and this scene contains the first attempt. He says "I want us to do something together today", "We won't see each other for a long while". But the father brushes him off saying, "So what do you want from me? To go out and celebrate your stupidity?"

They may share the same apartment, but they live far apart, and we feel a gap that's been created by a giant loss. Near the end, it is suggested that the father has lost his wife, and the son his mother.

As the two parties in the political situation, they have both lost someone they loved, but neither seems to understand that communication is the only hope for a future less filled with anger.

When we meet the characters in the story, they stand diametrically opposed to one another, each having long since given

up listening to the other's point of view, and their continued efforts to persuade each other are utterly fruitless. The son may not have as clear a set of arguments as his father, but he can blame the father for living a life in solitude, stating for instance, "You can't stand the fact that I have more friends than principles". After this futile attempt the son gives up trying to reach his father and hurries down to the street where he is quickly picked up by his friends.

As a response, the father aggressively smashes the radio that he was otherwise so meticulously repairing. Time is running out for the father to save his son, and this is shown with a subtle visual trick, hardly even noticeable for the first-time viewer. When he sits in the room repairing the radio, a "Spielberg zoom" effect is applied, created by having the camera dolly back while slowly zooming in. This gives the viewer the experience of the back walls closing in on the father, and visually paves the way for his decision to go look for his son.

In the city, where the father is surrounded by young people partying, the visual style of the film changes from the calm interior shots in the apartment to a handheld camera that more accurately represents the father's experience of the parties as being infernal and as far from his own way of living as possible.

After failing to find his son, he sits alone and cries in the night, and the shot of him on the bench is followed by two others, showing the empty streets of Jerusalem by night. He returns to the empty apartment, and sits down on the son's bed. He glances through a flickering paper cartoon, obviously a souvenir from the son's childhood, and then opens a drawer filled with "I love Israel" stickers. These props are intelligently placed in the scene, to show the difference between the child and the adolescent, the past and the future. The boy has made a journey between these two eras, and the

father still doesn't quite comprehend that this has actually happened, that this journey has actually taken place and has been completed.

After the drunken son comes home, they have a short fight, followed by a rare shot of tenderness, when the father holds his son's head as he is throwing up in the bathroom sink. With their last night under the same roof rapidly dying out, the son makes a last attempt to reach his father.

He says "let's talk", but the father answers tersely: "Did you set the alarm clock?" The son tries again: "Will you accompany me tomorrow?" But after a brief pause the father replies simply "what time should I set it for?" The father exits, and now it is the son's turn to cry in solitude, after his final effort to reach his father has failed.

The images of the son and father are opposed as they lie, each in his own bed and alone, and the father, with his back in the dark, seems to be visually consumed by the darkness in his past, with only his face visible, and a large part of the left side of the frame set in complete darkness.

He looks at the picture of the mother and then starts to write a letter to his son. A letter that finally explains in written words what he had been unable to express face to face to the boy. The camera slowly moves back, and the room where the father sits becomes smaller and eventually almost absorbed by the darkness of the rest of the apartment.

The next we see is the father waking up again, his head on the desk, as he had probably fallen asleep while writing the letter that would explain everything to the boy. There is now only a short time left to act, and realizing this, he runs out of the apartment.

Three times the father passes through the hallway where the "I love Israel" sticker is posted on the mirror. Twice he angrily rips it off, but this third and last time, the mirror is totally covered by the

stickers and the father doesn't even glance at them as he hastens by. The battle he is fighting now has moved far beyond a simple sticker. He runs to the car, but symptomatically the car cannot start. He is stuck again, unable to love, unable to communicate, unable to escape the prison that the loss of his wife has put him in. But unlike the scene with the draft parties, this time the father doesn't give up. He starts running instead, and this also provides the film with the much more visually interesting, energetic and intense transportation scene for the father. He has to meet the son with his guard down, defeated and exhausted, and so the running, cleverly cross-cut with a soldier reading the names of the young boys getting on the military busses, functions as both a visual and structural climax.

This is the point where he finally gives up and understands that the only right action now is not to persuade the boy to take a different path, but rather do the most important thing a parent can: namely to love his child.

The music as a leitmotif

Throughout the film, the music in *Draft* functions as a leitmotif for the characters. On two occasions, the father is accompanied by pieces of music, both taken from the 60's, with folk lyrics about peace and love, whereas the music chosen for the boy is consistently non-vocal, aggressive techno. The music for the father is relaxed, passive, almost static; the music for the boy echoes his youthful restlessness, his lack of reflection, a life in constant movement, and a life in which he probably has not been able to find repose since the loss of his mother.

When the father is introduced, he parks his car in front of their apartment building to the sound of "Everybody I Love You", by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, one of the bands that epitomized 60's peace and loving message. In contrast, when the son is picked up by

friends to go to the draft parties, the music issuing from their car is monotonous, aggressive, techno.

The musical underlining of the gap between the two characters reaches its zenith in the scene where the father tries to find his son at the draft parties. He arrives at the inner city, only to experience a chaotic crowd of young people partying in the streets. He is as far removed from that sort of naivety, that sort of careless joy as possible, and withdraws for a moment into his own world. This is shown with a beautiful combination of filmic techniques, where the choice of music comes heavily into play. For about ten seconds, the music heard by the father is not the techno that had otherwise been filling the streets, but Joni Mitchell's: "River", with lyrics that contain the following lines:

It's coming on Christmas
They're cutting down trees
They're putting up reindeer
And singing songs of joy and peace
Oh I wish I had a river
I could skate away on
But it don't snow here
It stays pretty green
I'm going to make a lot of money
Then I'm going to quit this crazy scene
I wish I had a river
I could skate away on

This piece of music has a double function, both showing the father's need to withdraw from the draft parties, but by abruptly cutting back to the techno of the streets, it also underlines his choice when he decides to continue searching for his boy. Although he is at first lost in their world and has withdrawn into his own bubble of safety, he steps out in a last attempt to reach his son. This is where it becomes clear that he has changed. In the earlier scene where the son came home and said, "I thought we'd eat together today", the father's

response was to withdraw to his own room, closing the door behind him. Now, instead of pulling back, he decides to try again, and ends up running after a boy who looks like his son, only to realize that they just have the same shirt on. Finally he is left alone, with only the sounds of crickets and a few piano notes in the background.

Conclusion

This is a film some might call political, though it is not a film about politics as such, but rather about the consequences of war; a story as old as civilization itself and a story with a core completely separate from the Israel/Palestine conflict. The conflict that frames the story could just as easily have been set in America in the 60's, with a father who had lost faith in the government and still had to see his boy going off to fight in Vietnam. The political situation functions as an important and integrated backdrop to a beautifully told story of parental love and frustration, and a father's fear of losing his son.

The film does not take sides, but the director presents the story from the perspective of the Israelis, probably because that was the most accessible to her. However, it could just as easily have dealt with a Palestinian father, sending his son off to fight with the PLO or Hamas. This is a film about the lack of understanding, the loss of love, and loss of the ability to express love. A father is paralyzed by the thought that his son, just like his wife, may die in a war that to him has no purpose and makes no sense. After losing his wife, he cannot stand another loss, but he cannot persuade his son to act differently, and so an agonizing situation has arisen for them. They both have irrational, but human and frail responses to the mother's death. The father seems to have almost died with her; his ideology, his beliefs, and his whole world have crumbled. The son joins the

army, as he says to his father, to “protect you” but the father mockingly replies, “Protect me? You can’t even shave...”

The son seems unable to reach his father, much to his own frustration, and only in the end, when it turns out to be too late, does the father summon enough courage to communicate with the boy. He does so, as he says, the only way he can, by writing, though he is painfully aware that it is a cowardly way. But the letter is never given to the son, who is already on the bus driving away when the father finally gets to the conscription center. They spot each other and all of a sudden it is not the teenage son he sent away that he sees, but instead the little boy, which the father will always perceive him as.

The letter he never gets to bring to his son sums up in a few lines what he hasn’t been able to say in any other way:

The ideology I tried to teach you your whole life, now seems empty. The truth is that today, I believe in nothing. I am quaking with fear that you will die in vain. I hurt you. I am sorry. Dad.

A partial eclipse of the son **An analysis of Naomi Levari's short film *Draft***

Thomas Lind Laursen

At the end of Naomi Levari's film, *Draft*, a father runs through town to say goodbye to his son who has been drafted by the Israeli army and has left while the father was sleeping. The bus going to the military barracks leaves just as the father reaches the terminal. As it drives off the son edges his way to its rear window in order to wave. And in the few seconds in which they catch a glimpse of each other, the son – in the eyes of the father – undergoes a transformation from young man to small child.



This article aims at interpreting this crucial moment in the light of an analysis of a number of significant elements in *Draft* as a whole. For the meaning of the scene is by no means self-evident and any interpretation of the film must deal with such questions as: How is the ending to be understood? To what extent does the transformation tell us anything about the son? To what extent about the father?

A narrative pattern

The transformation itself visually stresses that the father does not see all things the way they actually appear. But is the image of the son as a child more or less emotionally true than the image of the young man looking out of the rear window of the speeding bus? It is of course a mental image, and therefore the question can be said to be beside the point. Yet a certain narrative pattern seems to justify it. For the father has once before had difficulties identifying his own son, Guy.

Halfway through the film he tries to find him in the downtown maze of disco tracks and neon lights. He catches up with him in a dark alley, but finds that he has mistaken somebody else for him. That the two incidents mirror each other is underlined by the fact that even the movements involved are similar. In both cases, the father turns around and runs after either the stranger or the bus as he or it passes him on the left. Seen in the light of this incident, the final scene appears to be a recurring case of mistaken identity. In other words the father has for some reason problems seeing Guy as he is.

The beginning of the film is puzzling. Familiar roles appear to be reversed. The father listens to rock music on the car stereo, makes his fried eggs look like a smiley, turns his back on his son as he comes home with groceries and obligingly asks if they weren't supposed to dine together, and then slams the door as he retreats to his (untidy) room. The scene suitably ends in a fade to black (the only one in the film), suggesting that the film so far (i.e. the first 2 minutes) is to be seen as an introduction of sorts. But since it is bewildering rather than clarifying, the purpose of the opening is clearly to confuse the spectator and thereby make him aware of the chaos and complexity of the relationship between the two characters portrayed.

The two of them live alone together, but whereas Guy is never seen unless in a scene with the father, the latter is seen on his own several times. Regarding the length, frequency, as well as the variety of shots including the father, his screen time is far more extensive than that of the son. *Draft* evidently tells us the parent's story.

Two types of images

Two types of images abound in the film: those of stagnation (including both characters) and those of solitude (including only the father).



Notice in the above examples of the first type the foregrounding of the father in the compositions. He dominates the images, as he is the focus of the story. Notice also the confining frames made by doorways and walls. These are stagnant, claustrophobic, yet tensely dramatic variations on the visual account of the selfsame relationship. An emotional checkmate, so to speak.



In these images of the father, darkness underlines the sense of solitude, which nonetheless is most poignantly evident in the last, long, naturally lit shot (showing us the exhausted father from the rear of the speeding bus). In his attempt to reach his son, the father, it seems, has broken away from his former confinement of darkness and claustrophobic withdrawal – only to find himself more alone than ever before. Therefore the ending of the film has a fixed sense of closure. Any sense of open-endedness is retrospective: How is this to be understood with regard to the scenes seen before it? What has caused this apparently irreparable separation? This great hurt?

An auditory theme

At the very beginning of the film we hear the sound of the car stereo while the camera is located beside the father inside his car. As the vehicle drives up to and parks in front of the father's apartment, our view shifts to the outside. But strangely the sound of the radio is much louder in this shot than in the previous one.



This displacement or shifting of inner and outer actual spaces, is seen once again later on in the film when the father watches Guy being picked up by some friends in a car. The pitch of the techno music coming from the car stereo is the same, regardless of whether the car door is open or closed.

In both scenes we are evidently beyond the interests of the factual. These are unrealistic sound designs made to emphasize a mental stance, more precisely the father's unbalanced state of mind. That something is actually wrong with the sound in the scenes mentioned becomes an auditory metaphor for a similar mental imperfection regarding the central focus of the film, namely the father.

That he is feeling out of balance and even out of place is further underscored by the use of music in the film. A certain piece played by solo piano is connected to the father as a theme. The sad melody is heard for the first time as he is seen sitting alone on a park bench (his misery underlined as he is left by a stray dog and furthermore finds himself unable to light his cigarette). After he starts crying the shot is followed by a series of urban images: empty streets, deserted squares. The theme is heard once again later on as a discordant (and quite harrowing) response to Guy's provocative attempt to get his father to join him in singing the Israeli peace song.

A similar use of contrasting musical pieces is heard when the close-ups of the father seeking Guy in the downtown nightlife are

accompanied by Joni Mitchell's moody song *River*, played as a contrast to the frantically fast techno beats and underlined by the use of slow motion.

However, the nature of the father's solitude cannot yet be fully understood.

A visual motif

The most significant shot in the film appears in the last scene before the father wakes up and finds that Guy is gone. It shows us the father's sorrowful face reflected upon the portrait of a young woman, which partially eclipses the photo of a little boy.



The boy in the photograph (standing in the shadow of the portrait of the woman) is later to be seen behind another sort of glass, i.e. the rear window of the bus. The woman, on the other hand, is never seen nor mentioned but in her portrait. Considering the nature of the portrayed family as well as the emotional distress of the father while viewing the photograph, it seems obvious that the woman in the

picture is the missing wife or lover, yet the consequent omission of any mention of a mother is of course painfully expressive.

The image has been seen once before: immediately after the fade to black, following the bewildering beginning of the film. Being more easily visible – but not yet readily relevant – it functions as a sort of set-up, making the later image understandable as a visual pay-off. One may note that the child in this early image is far less engulfed by the shadow of the frame containing the mother's portrait.



(detail)

The later image is crucial. It is the core of the film. Not only because it offers a meaningful context in which the solitude of the father and the dispute between him and his son can be understood. It also constitutes a concentration of the conflict in the film, a distillate of the drama, a visual mise-en-abyme.

A pun

The title of the film turns out to be misleading. Clearly this is not a film about 'a selection for military service'. It seems more reasonable to think of "draft" in terms of 'a preliminary sketch' since this correlates perfectly with the film's interest in the portrayal of a father, who himself has an insufficient impression of his son.

One could even continue this interpretive wordplay and suggest that the title also could be understood as referring to ‘a current of air in an enclosed space’, signifying the absence of the mother as a breach causing the relationship between the two remaining family members to chill and freeze.

At any rate I find the conflict in *Draft* to be psychological rather than political at its core. The conflicting views of the two characters can never to be fully understood outside the tense constellation of a disillusioned father and his idealistic son. The heated debates between the two, the ongoing game of putting up and pulling down pro Israeli stickers, as well as the misbegotten peace song duet, play more as private, interpersonal quarrels than as politically meaningful statements explored within the narrative.

Throughout the film the father’s ongoing attempts to repair a radio receiver function as a clear symbol of communicative difficulties. Surely it is significant that by the time the radio is working, Guy has left.

“We are killing our own children” a radio host quotes at the very beginning of the film while covering a recent military-related tragedy in Eilat (whereupon the father swiftly switches to a channel playing rock music instead). Within the logic of the film even this statement primarily becomes an expression of the lack of fundamental understanding and communication between the supposedly like-minded, the family members; an expression which might then – *and only then* (i.e. *after* being perceived as a private, emotional problem) – be understood and reacted upon as a political appeal.

Natan

Sweden, 2003, color, 35 mm, 12 min.



Principal production credits

Directors/writers	Jonas Bergergård and Jonas Holmström
Producer	Carina Eckman

Cast

Natan	Tomas Christensson
Viggo	Rolf H Karlsson
Woman	Kerstin Högstrand

Major Prize

Grand Prix, Festival du Court Métrage Clermont-Ferrand, 2004

Festivals

Festival International du Film Indépendant, Bruxelles, Belgium, 2003
Regensburger Kurzfilmwoche, Germany, 2003
Stuttgarter Filmwinter, Germany, 2004
Göteborg Film Festival, Sweden, 2004
Festival du Court Métrage Clermont-Ferrand, France, 2004
Minimalen Kortfilmfestival, Trondheim, Norway, 2004
Bradford Film Festival, England, 2004
Bengtsfors & Ed Filmfestival, Sweden, 2004
Festival du court métrage du Nice, France, 2004
Internationales Kurzfilmfest, Tübingen, Germany, 2004
Internationale Kurzfilmtage, Oberhausen, Germany, 2004
Festival du Court Métrage, Bruxelles, Belgium, 2004
Festival Internacional de Cinema do Algarve, Portugal, 2004
Cracow Film Festival, Poland, 2004
Internationales Kurz Film Festival, Hamburg, Germany, 2004
Festival de Cine de Huesca, Spain, 2004
Message to Man International Film Festival, St Petersburg, Russia, 2004
Aye Aye International Film Festival, Nancy, France, 2004
Revelation Perth International Film Festival, Australia, 2004
Melbourne International Film Festival, Australia, 2004
Odense Film Festival, Denmark, 2004
International Short Film Festival in Drama, Athens, Greece, 2004

Synopsis

It is Natan's first day in his new job. The employment office has sent him to Viggo's hamburger joint. Münir is trying to teach him the moves, but Natan is a disaster waiting to happen. Viggo sacks him and Natan is back on the street again. But Viggo's conscience gets to him – he grabs a hot dog and goes looking for Natan....

Jonas Bergergård

Born in 1966, Jonas Bergergård is a father of twins and lives in a red house in the Swedish countryside, near Karlstad. Both author and filmmaker, he has published two books of fiction and has made five short fiction films and one documentary. He also teaches creative writing as a guest lecturer and gives a workshop in filmmaking.

Jonas Holmström

Born in Karlstad in 1964, Jonas Holmström was educated at art schools in Gothenburg in the late eighties. He worked as an artist/painter until 1998, when he started writing film scripts and made his first film in 2000. He has made four short films to date:

- | | |
|------|------------------------------------|
| 2000 | <i>A Brother Comes for a Visit</i> |
| 2002 | <i>Izidor</i> |
| 2003 | <i>Natan</i> |
| 2005 | <i>Wrong Movie</i> |

An interview with Carina Ekman (producer) on *Natan*

Richard Raskin

At exactly what point in the development of the project did you become involved in it?

Natan was one of 80 proposals that we had to choose among for the project "8x8." I had produced Jonas Bergergård's first short *Flytten* (*The Move*) and was very interested in seeing him carry out a new project. It was also interesting to see what would happen if he worked together with Jonas Holmström who had directed *A Brother Comes for a Visit* with support from Film i Värmland. They are long-time friends. "8x8" quite simply meant that what we wanted was eight shorts that would each be eight minutes long. So I was involved from the very beginning of *Natan*, and I fought for it in the group that chose the projects. Not exactly for *Natan* but to enable Jonas and Jonas to go for their idea.

I understand that there was no definitive screenplay before production on the film began. But was the storyline fairly well established, or was that also improvised during the shoot?

The idea that Jonas and Jonas sent in was that they, inspired by a documentary workshop, wanted to start filming four different stories, just go out with a camera and use some friends as actors and try to find out which of the stories gave them the most energy. And they ended up doing *Natan*. There was a kind of script from the beginning, a short story, but it was not the same story. *Natan* has elements of that original story, but Jonas and Jonas decided to follow their characters, kind of travel with them. The end of the story was

the most difficult part, both as they shot it (I think Jonas and Jonas will tell you more about that part) and in the editing. We had long discussions about that, and we finally agreed that it was most important that Natan be the winner in the end, that he should decide to stay with the woman and do it.

Can you tell me whatever you remember of the production of Natan – any details at all, both about your own role in the process, and also about anything else that might interest someone wishing to know about the genesis of this film?

My role was to arrange everything as smoothly as possible for the two directors. I took care of the financial part, which wasn't much work, since this really is a low budget project. They used 80 000 SKR to make the DV version of the film. When it was accepted at Clermont-Ferrand, the Swedish Film Institute financed the 35 mm print, and when it won the Grand Prize we shared the costs for six more prints with the institute.

I gave them advice and looked at their edits. They had made a film before *Natan* that was a more painful story about relationships. The main character in that story was not so willing to continue with it, he was "undressed" literarily and was, I think, afraid of what he saw. The stories that they make are close to documentary, since they create the stories very much from the characters that they work with. Anyway, they put that project aside, and started to shoot *Natan*. I was also involved as an extra, it was the day they were shooting the scene in the grill bar and they phoned me and said they needed a few people to stand in line in front of the grill bar. So almost the entire staff of Film i Värmland stood there. You can see on their faces that they really are wondering about what is going on.

Can you tell me what you, as the producer, see as the special qualities of this prize-winning film?

This is a quite simple story, about a “young” man who has difficulties in getting a job, and another man who has too much to do but lets himself get involved in this young man’s life. And a woman who can see the young man as he is. It is something that we can identify with, and very important for me, the one who seems to be the loser is the winner in the end. I think if you dare telling the simple stories that you can find in your neighbourhood, and don’t try to complicate them, you will find an audience all over the world that can identify with the characters. In the provincial theme lives the universal understanding.

Jonas Bergergård is about to finish his next short film *Myra*. From what I have seen so far it has real possibilities to be a good film. We are co-producers of this film, the producer is Rickard Petrelius at Filmcompaniet, a production company in Karlstad. We have been involved in the project since 1999 when Jonas B won first prize in our script-competition with *Myra*. This is a film with a budget of 1.2 million Swedish crowns and both the Swedish Film Institute and Swedish Television are involved in the project. I think the success with *Natan* made this possible.

16 November 2004

An interview with Jonas Holmström on *Natan*

Richard Raskin

I understand that your original idea for the story evolved quite a bit as work on the project proceeded. Can you tell me roughly what the original storyline was, in contrast to what you finally filmed?

It's an interesting question. I have answered it many times. And I have always said that we knew the storyline up to the moment when Natan and Viggo arrived at the woman's place to buy the pet. Maybe not step-by-step, but as a map to follow. After that point we didn't know what would happen. But we were sure that there would be some kind of meeting between the woman and Natan. We wanted Natan to emerge as the "winner", but not some kind of hero. Not in a way that has to do with strength or success in the usual sense. We also knew that Kerstin, who played the Sabina, and Tomas (Natan) had a connection. Sharing something sensitive and wise. The same world. It's hard to explain. So my recollection is that we didn't know more than that. And that we wanted to explore the organic, improvised story from that point. Trusting that the story and the ending would surface.

But here's something interesting: Two weeks ago our producer, Carina Ekman, showed me the non-finished short story by Jonas B, that was the original idea for the storyline. It was about an insecure man, who was going to buy a dog and asked a friend for a ride. He wanted somebody to lean on, since he was afraid that the pet wouldn't like him. When I read it, I was surprised that so many details were written. Sabina asking if they lived together. (In the short story: "Are you gay?") Natan escaping to the forest is another

example. I asked Jonas B if he was aware of this when we filmed. If he had consciously guided everything in a secret and sublime way. He told me, he was not. I was definitely not aware of the original story. But I believe it lingered with us in some unconscious way.

I also understand that there were a lot of discussions as to how the film should end. What were the other endings you considered, and why did you finally decide to go with the one now in the film?

When we finished shooting we were not sure if we had managed to catch an ending on the tapes. The third and last day the actors started to get tired or impatient, so we understood that we couldn't go on one more day. We had to trust that we had an ending – but we didn't know what it looked like.

During the shoot, we tried this idea: Sabina saw that Natan was some kind of healer, and that he was helping Viggo to calm down, by some kind of “hands on” treatment. What's left in the film is when Sabina tells Natan that he has “good hands and that he is good with animals and people too”.

When cutting the film, we saw another meaning to that line. We also tried to let Viggo stay over for the night. I think that we wanted Viggo to “come home” too. We filmed a sequence where Natan and Viggo were sleeping in the same room, and Sabina entered to wish them a good night's sleep. It looked like some kind of children's TV-program. We saw pretty quickly that these endings were no good at all.

I remember discussing that what we wanted was for Natan to make a decision of his own. Which is what happens when he accepts Sabina's invitation to stay over for the night. Going against Viggo's will. To Natan this is his big change, taking control. So he would end up little bit different too.

One of the most striking qualities of Natan is the fact that the main character is a relatively weak person. Generally in short films, the character whose story is told knows exactly what he or she wants and how to get it. In your film, two other characters - Viggo and Sabina - are much stronger and more capable people. With respect to narrative conventions, your film shouldn't work at all - and yet it does. Were you aware of this issue during work on the film? And how do you explain that your film works so well with a relatively weak character at its center?

I was not aware of that "issue" when we made the film. I've heard of that theory and I can't say if I believe in it or not. We were not conscious about rules and structure when we made *Natan*. We were just very curious to see these characters in action. Playing against each other in the various situations. And of course we believed in the potential of the story!

Why does the film work with a weak main character? Maybe it's because there is another motor than the main character. The motor is Viggo. But I'm not sure.

I can't explain these things. The only thing that I know for sure, is that we were looking for life. That energy that penetrates your stomach and heart. When filming and when editing. I believe it was a non-intellectual work, from beginning to end.

Others have told us what the film is about or what makes it work!

In my ears, the name Natan sounds Jewish. But maybe in the Swedish context, it is just an ordinary name like any other. Or is it?

Yes, I agree it sounds Jewish. But that isn't anything we thought about.

It's not very common to be named Natan in Sweden. I don't know anyone with that name. But I suppose it's just an ordinary name all the same, only not so popular these days. I know of a few older men with that name.

Why the name of our main character became Natan is very spontaneous as usual. At first we called him Tony. But when Rolf Karlsson (playing the part of Viggo) heard that, he didn't like it.

– No it should be Natan, he looks like a Natan! he said.

And it just felt right for us too! We asked Tomas and it was ok with him! It was also important that Rolf like the name since he was the one who would be saying it, over and over, throughout the story.

Rolf chose the name Viggo for his own role and that is also how we usually name our characters. They pick their names themselves. We believe that they feel more comfortable then, and it's also easier for them to remember.

Is there any advice you would give student production groups about to make their own first short films?

Trust your own ideas and just do them. Try them just for fun! Discuss your ideas in the group first. Before you write anything. Don't sit alone and work too long on "the perfect script". I think that filmmakers are in shooting situations far too seldom. Compared to the writing and planning part.

It's a growing experience to film. It's so developing for story-telling, the writing part. There's a big risk that the script becomes far too important. That you work on it as if it was the final work of art. It's not.

Use your friends as actors and use nearby locations. Choose stories that are close to your own life.

Have fun! Don't let filmmaking become too serious!

3 December 2004

A note on *Natan* and *Dogma*

Sydney Neter

Lars von Trier and his Dogma gang should watch out! The Swedes are coming, and judging from the short film *Natan*, they have already arrived. Jonas Bergergård and Jonas Holmström are two filmmakers we will undoubtedly hear more about in the near future.

The main character is Natan (played wonderfully by Tomas Christensson, awarded Best Male Actor at Message to Man International Documentary, Short and Animated Films Festival in St. Petersburg, Russia), who's a retarded guy, hired by a local Kebab place. The only thing he can do is peeling potatoes. Viggo (Rolf H. Karlsson), the tough owner, fires him, but he suddenly feels so sorry for him, that he gives in and slowly moves into Natan's own little world. While driving through the Swedish landscape, Viggo is looking to buy a puppy for Natan. They end up at a farm, where a woman (Kerstin Högstrand) charmingly offers a young dog, but Natan seems too overwhelmed by the situation and by the overjoyed dog, and runs away. When he comes to his senses he returns to the farm, where the woman invites him to stay overnight so that he'll get adjusted to loving a dog or loving her...

The dogma style of filming fits well for this type of short film, though the camera work could have been a little less documentary style. If the film were a bit longer people may have come out nauseated. Nevertheless, the 12 minutes pass by in 5 minutes; it's well edited and doesn't feel one second too long (or too short for that matter). The absence of music during the film – besides the credits – makes the film even stronger and shows that well-chosen longer silences are not just reserved for long feature films. The short never

gets too emotional, thanks to the subtleness of the acting.

Since the film has strong visuals it will do well at international markets, both at film festivals (it has already won the Grand Prize in Clermont-Ferrand 2004) and at most TV channels around the world, where shorts may be needed.

An essay on *Natan* – a short film

Being human: character in narrative film

Brian Dunnigan

While watching a film we like to cheer for the protagonist, wanting the best for his character and wanting him or her to achieve specific goals.

Linda Segar¹

Reading and sauntering and lounging and dozing which I call thinking is my supreme happiness.

David Hume²

We shall not play charlatan and we will declare frankly that nothing is clear in this world. Only fools and charlatans know and understand everything.

Anton Chekov³

Most screenwriting manuals define *character* in terms of the classical Hollywood model⁴ where the plot is driven by the goal-oriented actions of a clearly defined protagonist. The desire of the protagonist (lit. “the one who struggles”) provides an essential focus for the audience who are drawn into the story by the broad brush strokes of sympathetic character traits, psychological motivation and the energetic engagement with the problem at hand: the drama and conflict arise from obstacles to this desire and the chain of character-driven causality offers a clear line for the audience to follow. The assumption being that we are drawn to fast-paced action and like to identify with strong, active characters who have talent or skill or sheer dogged determination to overcome all obstacles and have good reason to: we understand that something important is at stake. The revelation of character, their true motives and secret impulses is itself often central to the emotional catharsis of crisis and climax. In this narrative world

¹ Linda Segar, *The Art of Adaptation*. New York. Henry Holt, 1992

² *Letters of Hume*, vol 2

³ Quoted in Janet Malcolm, *Reading Chekov*. London. Granta Books, 2003

of clarity and action there is less room for chance or coincidence, ambiguity or uncertainty: characters lacking motivation and direction risk losing their audience.

The European art film offers a contrast to this overtly psychological model with its meta-narrative of life as more contingent and incoherent: characters are less clearly defined and goal-driven, events are more loosely linked and endings remain open: characters often act because they *have* to, not because they *want* to. The short film is a genre that can easily sustain a more existential and elliptical style but a story like *Natan* where the central character is weak or indecisive creates a challenge to both writer and audience. The solution here is to switch the narrative initiative onto another character who moves the story forward while providing an illuminating counterpoint to the real subject of concern, the inarticulate mystery of Natan himself. In the process we are forced to reflect on the work ethic, friendship, happiness and the psychology of being human: what is it to know another human being and why do we need or what should we do with this knowledge? As an audience used to a more active central character we are disoriented but forced to confront our own feelings of incompetence and hopelessness in the face of an aggressive world full of more talented, powerful people than ourselves. Like many art films, *Natan* is as interested in exploring feelings, attitudes, assumptions, ideas about life – as in telling a story. In one sense however, the film is entirely conventional: we are presented with a protagonist who does not seem to have a clear goal, whose character and motivation are vague; we're never quite sure who he is, what he is going to do next: but this very characterisation is the source of narrative suspense and surprise. In the end Natan has to take the

⁴ David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*. London. Routledge, 1988

initiative, act creatively and make a decision under pressure that is both surprising and satisfying. In other words this is a familiar story about a character who is always running away but who one day decides to stay and see things through.

Beneath the documentary stylistics of jump cuts and hand-held camera the plot is actually quite simple. Viggo, a busy kebab shop owner takes pity on Natan, a lonely, temporary employee and tries to help him purchase a dog to brighten his life, finally losing patience and driving off in his big car having failed to make real human contact with Natan – unlike the dog's owner, the lady who now invites Natan into her house. Then too there is a clear thematic conflict between the instrumental, goal-driven character of Viggo and the stubborn, inarticulacy of Natan: between *having* and *being*. This obvious clash at the centre of the film gives the film both a satisfying metaphorical resonance (about how we live in an all-consuming market culture) and makes the conventional assumption about the representation of human beings as goal-oriented, psychologically defined characters, itself the subject of reflection. This clarity of forward movement and conflict however conceals the real complexity of meaning that lies in the interplay of looks and glances between the three characters: we are involved in what they might be thinking or feeling, refracted through our own ambiguous feelings for Natan. This is an achievement to which all good films aspire: lacking the authorial voice and inner life of literary fiction, film aims to make a virtue of its relative objectivity by *hinting* at the inner world through ellipsis, suggestion, imagery, actions and reactions. The audience has to fill in the gaps and is drawn into the story.

Natan however is a difficult figure for the audience to identify with in the traditional sense: he is physically unattractive with a wandering, nervous eye, a high scarred forehead and weak mouth:

unable to finish sentences or communicate, his almost autistic behaviour suggests someone educationally backward or disabled. Yet despite the apparent usurpation of his life and the film's narrative by Viggo, this physical quality along with a certain stubborn integrity gives him a presence at once vulnerable and unpredictable: despite making snap decisions, barking into his mobile and organizing the lesser mortals around him, Viggo is a secondary figure; a catalyst, an antagonist. Natan is the still centre of the film around which our thoughts flow but it is an aspect of the film's achievement that we sense Viggo is himself on a journey.

While Viggo is a familiar type – a successful, pushy businessman, he also has a human side and an emotional life that suggests a more rounded character.⁵ His encounter with Natan clearly gives him pause for thought about his hectic lifestyle and awakens a compassion for someone less fortunate than himself. His own physicality, overweight, shortness of breath, sweating, snacking – suggests someone who might benefit from slowing down. Taking Natan to the dog lady is actually a break from all the problems of running a business. He has the opportunity but not enough time to think about his own life: he clearly wants to help Natan but in the end his impatience, his need to control and lack of real empathy make Natan's decision to stay with the woman perplexing and unsatisfying for Viggo. There's not enough time for him to reflect on what he might have gained or learned from their relationship, and you suspect he assumes it's all been one way: that finally trying to help those who won't help themselves is a waste of time: time that could be turned into money. If this were a feature film you could imagine other possibilities for Viggo. As it is, you can't help worrying that by the end of the film he is heading for a heart attack.

⁵ Forster, EM. *Aspects of the Novel*. London. Penguin, 1963

The woman called Sabina has what Viggo lacks – spiritual qualities of patience and empathy. She treats Natan with respect and speaks to him in a way that evokes his trust. He is a fellow human to be listened to and taken care of, to be allowed to discover his own way rather than to conform to someone else's fantasy of what he needs. You feel that she is not in a hurry to know or control this person who is a mystery to her. In the language of fairy tales Natan is the naïve simpleton who has instinctively found his way to a better place, to where the wise woman/mother figure is waiting for him in a house on the edge of the woods. Here he will receive the nurturing he needs because she recognizes that like a child brought up by animals, he has never learned to speak the language of men. Indeed his nervous animal qualities of grunts and running and hiding and being hunted down, apparently unable to defend himself, disturb the ironically superior spectator with memories of their own fragile animal nature. Though it is Viggo with his money, power, magic chariot and speaking device who brings Natan to the house and is a reminder that we all have to live in and negotiate with the material world, it is Sabine who is able to take Natan to a higher level: in psychological language she gives him the space to be one with the dog, the symbolic inversion of his divine self (god).

In this sense the film has the Chekovian qualities of a fragmentary Biblical narrative involving moments of grace and sudden transformation: a reminder of a more reticent approach to character than you find in mainstream narrative. Chekov's stories are often about characters whose motives are unclear and whose defining secrets are never revealed. For Sartre too, character was an idea imposed on human beings that could never match the complexity and changeability of people as they really are: life is elusive. The point about human nature is that it does not have a goal: living is enough reason

in itself whereas everything in capitalism must have a point and purpose. Viggo embodies this restless drive to know, to accumulate, to transform; the perpetual motion and the rampant assertion of individual will so important to modern society: an energy and manic affirmation of the self that pushes the weak and unqualified to the margins while defending itself against failure and death. There is a touching and revealing moment on the bench after Viggo has pursued Natan from the kebab shop where this energy seems to drain away. Natan holds the half-eaten sandwich thrust into his hand as a crude offering of charity, looking feelingly at Viggo who seems to lose momentum, as if momentarily questioning what all this activity is about. He stares into the void and the void stares back. For Chekov idleness was the only form of happiness; for the hyperactive not doing anything can be disturbing, even traumatic, an encounter with the essential emptiness of being.

Natan you suspect is more sensitive to the fragility and contingency of life: like Lear he has learned to “see feelingly”: to perceive another human accurately we must *feel* and as the new testament parable suggests the rich are often insulated from feeling by an excess of property – what are twenty shops for? The cult of the will obscures our complex *interdependency*, our need to acknowledge human frailty and failure. Sabina represents the idea that life is about taking care of each other: happiness is found in being the reason for the happiness of another. The political form of this ethic in the West is socialism⁶ and in this capacity for fellow feeling *morality* is grounded.⁷ *Natan* is a film that artfully explores this complex interdependence and realisation of our common humanity.

⁶ Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*. London. Penguin Classics, 1986

⁷ Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* London. Penguin, 2004

Natan

Morten Bak Hansen

In many ways this film is unconventional compared to other short fiction films. Typically we meet one or two central characters who aim at specific goals and have to make several crucial decisions in order to achieve these goals. In this film, however, the main character, Natan, seems completely unable to make decisions on his own, even regarding rather trivial matters. Still, I find this film to be worth watching and even find that it generates an emotional resonance within the spectator.

In this article I attempt to explain the specific qualities of this film that contribute to making the story interesting and moving. I demonstrate how the main characters are presented and how they interact, and examine the subject of the story, arguing that it can be seen as reflecting man in modern society. I also claim that through their visual appearance and actions, the characters (Viggo and Natan) symbolize the fundamental human traits of rationality and emotionality. The use of visual codes from the documentary genre enhances the notion that in a twisted way this story might mirror the society of today, perhaps also explaining why we accept a fundamentally weak main character.

The plot

The story is about a Swedish man called Natan, who has just been employed in a grill bar. He seems to be very insecure and awkward serving the customers, and the situation worsens when the manager interferes, resulting in the owner (Viggo) firing Natan. However, out of a guilty conscience Viggo catches up with Natan, gives him a hot

dog, and offers him a ride home. In the car Natan tells Viggo that he lives by himself and therefore has considered buying a dog. Without actually finding out whether Natan wants him to, Viggo takes on the task of getting Natan a dog. Viggo arranges a meeting with a lady named Sabina, who also lives on her own, apart from the dog she has put up for sale. During the entire visit Viggo controls the chain of events, with the result that Natan runs out the door and hides in a nearby forest. While Viggo is searching the forest Natan returns to the house and experiences a quiet moment with Sabina and the dog for the first time, and Sabina tells Natan that she thinks he is capable of relating to other people. Viggo returns and immediately starts to complain about him running away, and Natan tries to argue with him but without much luck. Right after this Viggo waits impatiently to drive on and constantly tells Natan to get in the car. Sabina proposes that Natan spend the night at her place and make up his mind about the dog later on. Natan accepts her offer and Viggo hurries on.

Natan

As a main character Natan is very unusual because he plays the part of the victim, evoking compassion instead of fascination. He seems slow-witted, irresolute, and to lack initiative in every way. He doesn't seem to be able to make up his mind on trivial matters like wanting/not wanting things, perhaps due to low self-esteem and uncertainty about his ability to function in society. Physically he is lanky with tousled hair; this, along with his harelip and bulging eyeballs, evokes an image of him as retarded, and throughout most of the film his articulation is very unclear, further underlining this prejudice. Natan is not able to deal with Viggo's manipulation of his willpower until the end of the story. Until then Viggo decides everything – for

instance, that they would drink coffee instead of tea and that Natan should try having the dog on his lap. Viggo humiliates him further by constantly pointing out that he should at least be able to make a decision on these simple matters. Sabina doesn't like what she sees, and she tries to help Natan by saying that he should be given the time needed to make up his mind. In reaction to the mounting pressure Natan runs away to hide in the forest, where he isolates himself from the problem (Viggo) and the pressure resulting from all the decisions he has to make. Later he returns to Sabina and the dog, managing to show an interest in the dog as well as her company. As mentioned above, Natan is socially insecure, which might explain his irresoluteness. Sabina senses this and by being able to see through this she discovers his human qualities. She shows him great understanding and lets him generate his own opinions, which provides him with enough strength to contradict Viggo when he returns, although it doesn't have much effect in the actual situation. Afterwards, however, the big trial awaits: Natan's hasty choice between staying with Sabina or moving on with Viggo. Viggo makes this decision difficult by impatiently commanding Natan to get in the car, but Natan chooses not to follow Viggo and everything he represents, turning instead towards the human values Sabina represents. This decision is the culmination of the story.

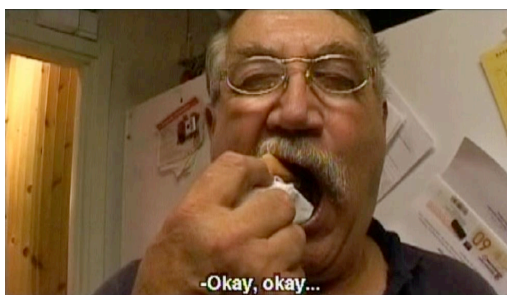


Rather than dismissing Natan as a poor retarded man whom we can only pity, it might be more interesting and rewarding to regard him as a sensuous person who for some reason is rather incompetent when it comes to rational actions and choices. One example from the film that serves to illustrate this occurs during the ride in the car: Natan is sitting in the back seat looking out the

window at the landscape rapidly passing by. We hear a brief musical motif that suggests the significance of the situation given the limited use of music in the film. He differs greatly from Viggo, who is performing several actions like driving the car and calling Sabina to arrange to stop by and see the dog. The visual composition also underlines this contrast: Natan's position in the back seat of the car reduces him to a child, as opposed to 'the parent' in the front seat making all the decisions on future events. If the two men were equal they would sit next to each other, both taking part in the journey. Through this contrast it becomes clear that Natan *is* (or simply just exists) rather than acts. And, although Natan sometimes tends to slip into a remote state of mind, as in the example just mentioned, in the scene where he is alone with Sabina and the dog we experience a strong sense of him being present in the moment. In other words, the present rather than the future characterizes Natan, while Viggo only has his mind on the future.

Viggo

Viggo differs from Natan in every respect. Viggo is overstuffed, so to speak, probably suffering from stress and, it seems, generally physi-



cally unhealthy. This unflattering picture is drawn right from the beginning when he fires Natan while eating a hot dog. The sonorous quality of his voice affected by a large lump of hot dog contributes tremendously to our negative picture of him. And his constant shortness of

breath enhances our notion of his excess weight as unhealthy. Another telling picture is the headrest in the car, which is covered by a towel, probably because Viggo sweats a lot or has greasy hair. After

this negative first impression of Viggo, we begin to think better of him when he decides to help Natan, first by offering him a ride home and then by helping him get a dog. Whether Viggo does this out of a guilty conscience because he just fired Natan or he does it out of genuine compassion for this poor fellow, we can only guess. However, the problem is that even though he invests time in helping Natan, he takes no time to really listen to what Natan is trying to say. Natan says that he has thought about getting a dog, adding, "More and more I reckon that I would like to have..."¹ Viggo interrupts by saying, "Then get one! What's stopping you?" I think the open ending of this second sentence is important to our interpretation. Viggo automatically fills in the word 'dog', but if Natan was about to say "someone", then a dog would just be a poor substitute. This situation appears crucial to our understanding of the relationship between the two men, and it demonstrates that Viggo doesn't actually hear what Natan is really trying to say. Another problem is that Viggo acts on behalf of Natan and in so doing pacifies him. Viggo also seems to believe that there is a rational and often materialistic solution to any problem: Because of the dismissal notice and the rough tone in the grill bar Natan is depressed, but it will cheer him up if he gets a hot dog and a ride home. Later, Natan's loneliness can be solved by getting him a dog.

Since Viggo is presented as strong, domineering and energetic, and at the same time unhealthy and unpleasant, we are more likely to accept a weak main character. Furthermore, Natan shows much more strength when he finally stands up to Viggo, because the power of his opponent is overwhelming. I find it obvious that Viggo is a caricature of modern man: He is energetic, successful (owns a chain of grill

¹ The subtitle in the film reads: "It's something I feel like doing", which doesn't correspond to what Nathan actually says.

bars), and he solves problems right away by using his cell phone and car, but on the other hand he has a stressful life and suffers from obesity.

Sabina

Sabina seems to be an empathetic woman who takes the time needed to listen to Natan. Maybe she mirrors herself in Natan's loneliness, and she might be less interested in helping him out of pity than relating to him as a human being. She emits a motherly warm-heartedness and calmness which gives Natan a feeling of confidence. She also appears to be a good judge of character since she sees Natan's human traits in the way he touches the dog. Sabina plays the role of helper, evoking the processes that initially give him the courage to contradict Viggo and then to choose to stay with her. She is positioned between the two men since she communicates well with Viggo at his rational level of action, but she is also able to reach Natan at his linguistically limited level of being. She cannot solve the conflict that emerges between these different levels; this is Natan's task. However, she helps him create a foundation of confidence, where he finds the strength to make the right decision at the end of the film.

Description of a sequence

To back up my previous observations and as a basis for further reflection on the relations between the characters and the meaning of the film viewed in a broader context, I will now analyse the sequence in which Natan hides in the forest and later returns to Sabina and her dog. I will begin with a shot-by-shot breakdown of the sequence.

1. Close shot of Sabina who points out the window and says that Natan is leaving.
2. Close shot of Viggo seen from behind as he goes out the door.
3. Over Viggo's shoulder with Natan in the distance. He begins to run when Viggo calls out his name.
4. Low angle close up of Viggo's face. He commands Natan to slow down.
5. Close-up of Sabina's face. She looks worried.
6. Medium shot of Natan running into the forest.
7. Low angle medium shot of Viggo trying to find his bearings. A bird cries.
8. Close shot of Viggo from behind. He complains about this silly game of hide and seek.
9. Close shot of Viggo from the left, still talking. He nearly stumbles and the camera makes a sudden movement and zooms out.
10. Close shot of Natan from the left. He is sitting hunched over with his head against a stone. Viggo calls out his name, which is only answered by a bird's cry.
11. Full shot with Natan in the lower right corner leaning up against the stone in a fetal position and Viggo walking in the upper left corner. Between them the ground is covered with ferns.
12. Close-up of Natan in the same position. His eye line runs diagonally to the lower left corner. We hear three notes from an accordion in a downward movement. When the second note of this little motif is heard Viggo calls his name again, and the sunlight flashes in the camera lens producing a star-like effect.
13. Full shot of Sabina on the sofa with the dog next to her. Her body forms a line running from the lower left corner to the upper right corner. Her line of sight runs to the right. The musical motif fades out and we hear an off-screen noise.
14. Full shot of Natan standing on the doorstep. The camera backs away a little bit and off screen Sabina says, "Come on in and have a seat".
15. Close shot of Sabina. The camera pans immediately to Natan entering the living room.
16. Full shot of them sitting on the sofa with the dog between them. Sabina asks if he wants to stroke the dog.
17. Close shot of Sabina looking kindly at him.
18. Close-up of Natan's hand shaking slightly while gently reaching for the dog. The camera moves closer to the hand.
19. Full shot of Natan alternately looking at Sabina and the dog. She remarks that the dog likes his petting it.
20. Close up of Natan's hand stroking the dog. Again the camera moves closer to the hand.
21. Full shot of Sabina saying that Natan has good hands.
22. Close-up of Sabina's face seen from the right. The camera moves down to a close-up of Natan's hand still stroking the dog. She says, "You're good with animals..."
23. Close reaction shot of Natan.
24. Close-up of Natan's hand. Sabina continues, "and with people I think."
25. Close-up of Natan's face; he asks, "You think so?", and she answers, "Yes".
26. Close-up of Sabina's face. Her expression verifies what she just said.
27. Close-up reaction shot of Natan's face showing that her words have a great emotional effect. The intimacy is interrupted by the off-screen sound of the kitchen door opening.
28. Full shot of Viggo entering and complaining about Natan running away.

Potential meanings

On the basis of this detailed description it is possible to observe some subtle yet effective compositional dispositions that create or enhance the relation between Sabina and Natan. When we see a close-up of Sabina's worried face (shot 5) clearly observing someone and then a cut to Natan running into the forest (shot 6), we understand that shot



6 is Sabina's p.o.v. Recollecting her facial expression we might conclude that Sabina has a genuine feeling of compassion for Natan and the fact that he is not able to verbally defend himself against Viggo. The juxtaposition of the close up of Natan leaning against the stone (shot 12) and the full shot of Sabina in the living room (shot 13) also suggests a relation between the two characters and thus anticipates the following scene. Natan has taken refuge in nature, away from the cultural values represented by Viggo. This is symbolized by the fetal position, which is best seen in shot 11. This position and his eye line create the impression of him looking at Sabina. Furthermore, the position of her body creates a diagonal that points back at Natan as if she is "reaching" for him, and her eye line points in his direction. If there had been a transition the effect might not have been this subtle, but even with the straight cut our short-term memory is perfectly capable of matching the images. The brief musical motif enhances our perception of a connection since it continues over the cut and as a result glues the shots together. Again, the music highlights the situation due to the otherwise rare occurrence of music in the film. In addition to this is the flash of sunlight in shot 12, which can be interpreted as a sign that Natan has found strength in nature to return to Sabina, or perhaps as a guiding star that heralds hope for Natan's loneliness.



The dog is the direct connection between Natan and Sabina. It represents nature and thus forms a relatively safe first step for Natan in the process of making contact with another human being. The hand is another important metaphor in this film. We see Natan's hand stroking the dog several times in a close up (shot 18, 20, 22 and 24); the camera also moves closer, focusing our attention and emphasizing the importance of the touch. In addition, Sabina reads his human traits into the way his hand touches the dog, emphasizing this by pointing out that he has good hands and that he is good with animals and with people as well. Between the lines she is saying that he has value as a human being and therefore he shouldn't be afraid to communicate with other people. Shot 27 shows us that her words create a strong emotional resonance within Natan. The hand thus becomes a metaphor for his emotional depth and human traits. In this context the word *touch* has two meanings: on one level we can touch another human being in a tactile manner even without emotional involvement; on another, we can touch another human being emotionally, which doesn't necessarily require a tactile action (like a word or a smile). According to Sabina, Natan is able to navigate on both levels – unlike Viggo, who only navigates on the level without the emotional involvement. Another interesting aspect of the expression "good hands" is that it normally refers to an ability to create something valuable of a physical kind, but in this case good hands becomes synonymous with emotional value and depth.

As mentioned above, Natan is a sensuous person who has a hard time functioning in a modern society based on rationality. This is clearly demonstrated in the beginning when Natan is incapable of managing a fairly simple job. Here we cannot speak of good hands in the ordinary sense considering that Natan is not able to open a plastic bag without scissors. Viggo, on the other hand, clearly doesn't possess these human qualities and the ability to sense, as demonstrated when he picks up the dog – it twists and struggles in order to get down, only calming down when Viggo places it on Natan's lap. It is no coincidence, I think, that our ability to sense is represented by the hand, since as children some of our first cognitive knowledge of the world is obtained through tactile sensations in the hands. Knowledge obtained through our senses is a fundamental notion in phenomenology, one of whose leading figures is the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who builds his theory on an idea of the human body. He claims that as subjects we sense and obtain knowledge of the world through our body, and afterwards we are able to reflect upon the knowledge obtained. The world cannot be explained and understood only by means of reflection; the point of departure is information collected through our senses. Another fundamental concept is that the body is considered as 'being in the world', which means that there is no separation between the subject and the world that would allow us to grasp the world in an objective manner and thus perform a rational action. In relation to this, Natan, as mentioned above, can be seen as person just *being* and *sensing*, who after a while might act or make a decision. We might say that he demonstrates this kind of phenomenological process in slow motion. Another reason why phenomenology is worth mentioning is that it builds on a holistic concept of human beings consisting of both a

rational and an emotional dimension, and in this way it can be seen as framing the conflict between Viggo and Natan.

If we accept the idea that Natan is a natural, sensuous being representing “soft” humanistic values, then the conflict with Viggo, who represents the rational modern man, appears to be a hidden criticism of modern society. In the realm of Western ideology, rationality prevails, implying that everything can be explained in a logical way and dealt with or treated, and economic powers determine what is feasible. Time is money and therefore the film shows us some of the core symbols of modern life: fast food (hot dogs), cars, cell phones and wristwatches. Coupled with Viggo’s and the manager’s obesity, it seems reasonable to expect the film to be fairly critical concerning some aspects of modern life. The emotional values that Natan represents have been alienated in rational modern society, or at least suppressed by economic forces and the demand for continuous growth.

The name Natan is related to the Old Testament and the function as prophet or herald. With this in mind we might regard Natan as a herald with the message that we need to focus more on human and spiritual values. The film shows us the negative side of the stress of modern life, with cell phones constantly ringing and people always moving towards new goals instead of focusing on the moment. There is no room for awkward or emotional and sensuous people; yet the film expresses a tiny hope since Natan chooses not to follow Viggo, thereby metaphorically speaking jumping off the train in favour of intimacy and confidence. Consequently, the film illustrates that it can be difficult to juxtapose modern society’s demand for constant growth and development with the basic human need for nearness without the pressure of time. The sense of tranquillity and timelessness that characterises the scene in the living room is partly achieved through the way in which the camera is used. For most of the film the

camera moves hectically in a documentary-like way, but when we see Natan in the forest leaning against the stone the camera hardly moves. In the living room the camera also moves more gently, which supports the affection that develops between Sabina and Natan. When Viggo returns the camera resumes its hectic pattern of movement, thus creating a strong feeling of contrast when this tender moment in the living room is brutally torn apart. It also illustrates that time is ticking away again. So the two different ways of life represented by Viggo and Natan are illustrated in a subtle manner through



the way in which the camera is used. This conflict is also present in the composition of the picture shown here. Natan has sought refuge in nature and finds peace of mind by just being there, while Viggo is rushing on to find him. The two characters are clearly separated, and through his position in the lower right corner Natan can be associated with the element of earth (the body). On the other hand, Viggo in the upper left corner can be associated with the element of air (the mind, the rational). The film doesn't propose a solution to the dilemma just mentioned, but it lets Natan make the right decision in respect to his actual needs. This might explain why we accept his indecisiveness in the majority of the film, because in most situations he does not have to make crucial decisions, and he is not given enough time to "feel" what decision to make.

Final remarks

I have presented some daring speculations on the enunciation of the film, but I leave it up to the reader to decide how far one should proceed in interpreting this story. I might also have painted too rosy a

picture of Natan, as some viewers might consider him to be too dumb and slow for us to really care. I have also emphasized the negative aspects of Viggo's character, paying less attention to the fact that he really tries to help Natan. I find these aspects to be less important compared to the *conflict* between the two characters, which is obviously important for this story. As mentioned above, the story relates to phenomenology in some respects because it focuses on the way we sense and exist in the world. Natan has good hands, which are perceived metaphorically as good human traits and an ability to sense, but he is also able to touch Sabina (another person) emotionally.

By visually telling the story using codes from the documentary genre (handheld camera and at times very awkward elliptical cuts) the subject matter is elevated from a trivial level, suggesting that this is a story about real people with real problems. Focusing the story in a wretched character and showing it in a documentary-like style is meant to cause us to react with empathy rather than pity, which I believe to be a more detached feeling. Perhaps we will put ourselves in Sabina's place and try to understand Natan rather than just feeling sorry for him. This is an unusual kind of audience engagement compared to the normal identification with a strong and energetic main character, but as mentioned above the composition of visual and auditory elements, has a considerable effect on our experience of engagement in the story and the characters.

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Natan's hands

Cinematic poetics, moral reflections

Edvin Vestergaard Kau

Natan has been sent by the job center to a sandwich and kebab grill to work as a shop assistant. But the grill chain owner, Viggo, and the manager think he is too slow and unskilled to do the job. He is fired, but the owner offers to drive him home. During the drive Natan discloses that he has considered getting himself a dog. Immediately Viggo finds an ad in a newspaper and phones a lady who wants to sell a puppy. They drive to her house, and against Viggo's impatient suggestions to hurry up and buy the dog on the spot, Natan, instead, follows the woman's suggestion to stay until the next day and then perhaps make his decision, and, together with her, goes back into the house. Earlier during their talk she has told Natan that she thinks he has good hands and is good with dogs as well as with people.

From beginning to end

At first *Natan* may look like a modest, low-key, and perhaps even innocent film, just as its main character appears to be a peaceful and innocent man. But if we take a closer look, it is striking that certain passages are in fact articulated in an almost aggressive style, virtually jumping out at the viewer. Other sequences make use of a more subdued cinematic language, but even if they are edited in contrast to the "loud" ones, in their own way they also encourage moral reflection.

The very first scene belongs to the "aggressive" mode: From the blue title screen the sound of a hand knocking on a window pane and

a cut take us directly to a close-up of a head (shot from the left side) already in the middle of a movement to the left side of the frame. With a fairly fast pan left plus a movement forward the hand-held camera follows behind the main character, Natan, who is hurrying to the counter to take orders from the customers who have called for his service. The next shot shows him in a right panning close-up from a low angle (on his right). While he opens the screeching window, the camera is suddenly positioned to his left and moving towards the open window and the first customer. The rest of the scene continues in the same way, with very dynamic camera work and an equally frantic editing style, the dialogue being chopped up into sharp contrasts and overlapping voices.

The last part of the film, and especially the very last scene, is much more calmly articulated – appearing more like Natan's tempo. During the negotiation about the dog there are long pauses of silence in the conversation, and the montage as well as the camera work is done at a slower pace, such as when the woman and Natan are sitting on the sofa and Natan is stroking the dog, and during the last conversation outside the house, which ends with Natan's decision to stay with the kind woman – and a peaceful mood at last!

Plausible artistry

The audience's experience of the string of events and their changing impressions and moods is moulded through the orchestration of the cinematic material. From their carefully staged use of expressive form DoubleJonas create a very efficient play with the audience's attention and emotions. If we consider how the film presents different elements (things, surroundings, setting, characters, actions), it turns out that this probably could not have been done without this very careful staging, the entire *mise-en-scène*: Natan and the other

characters could not have been shown in these movements, from these angles, if everything was not so painstakingly directed; that is to say, this is *not* so-called “direct cinema”, where a fly on the wall “accidentally” and entirely without any influence on the events witnesses, registers, and reports them to the audience. The impression of authenticity is, as it were, deeply constructed and staged.

Take the film’s first three shots. A fly-on-the-wall camera could never show Natan’s movement from one end of the room to the counter in this way. The different angles, camera movements and positions, as well as the swift and impressive montage, are the result of a very artificial, artistic jigsaw puzzle. Given that *Natan*, as demonstrated, is a piece of artistic fiction, why are we left with the impression that it is very true to life? How does it create the above-mentioned intensity and almost documentary-like quality? Through conventions developed by documentarists (but perhaps also directors of fiction films?), who have been training audiences for years, and further cultivated in television news reports, news programmes, and broadcasts. We, the viewers, have learned that it “looks authentic and documentary” when the audio-visual language of moving pictures is used in certain ways: when things are done in the way I have outlined with regard to *Natan*. The camera work, editing, sound, light, dialogue (which overlaps, is “unpolished”), patterns of reactions (cut short or shown as incomplete), even pauses and silence are given a certain “raw” appearance.

During Natan’s and Viggo’s visit to the woman with the puppy we find several uneasy, almost disquieting moments of silence, the effect of which is all the stronger because they stand out in contrast to the hectic and verbally violent parts of the film. Seemingly, these silent moments are “non-functional”, at least if it were a question of having the dialogue disclose information about narrative, plot, and

story, plus maybe describe the characters and their surroundings. Even these silences and hesitations are staged in a way that gives the impression of an unplanned recording of real events. They demonstrate feelings of uneasiness and anxiety that do not seem acted, almost like when directors use reactions from actors before they even “get into character” or when they think the shooting is over and they are not supposed to act any more.

So, certain structures separate the world of *Natan* from reality. Special cinematic practices both in the beginning and at the end are demarcation lines between fact and fiction, with the montage and other orchestrations of the cinematic language establishing this story as a highly constructed, artificial “as if” and not at all some piece of reality; these strategies also demonstrate the necessary distance between narrator and story, teller and tale. Yet, oddly enough, these are the very same elements that secure the film’s intense impression of almost “entering Natan’s world”. Its *art* makes it real, because we experience the plausibility as authenticity.

This little exploratory analysis of some cinematic elements in *Natan* and of the reasons why I think it is a fine, effective, and very beautiful film shows us that the crux of the matter is this: the aesthetic command of material and cinematic elements does not play a greater or lesser role in either documentary or fiction film. It is simply a prerequisite of all audio-visual storytelling.

Moving pictures and thoughts

In spite of *Natan*’s documentary-like quality, this analysis has focused on the film as a very effectively staged piece of fiction, its artistic transformation of its material, the distance between teller and tale, and the canonical one-two-three-structure of beginning, middle, and end. It is told as a genuine piece of imaginative “as if”, an invented

fictional world. But this does not mean that the viewer can let himself “disappear” into Natan’s world of fiction without a second thought, so to speak. Along with empathy, of course, the aesthetic strategies secure a certain distance between film events and audience. And apart from this, there is one more important aspect of *Natan* that I have not mentioned yet: that it can be seen as a cinematic articulation of reflections, or even as a *provocation to reflect on very real problems and dilemmas in a broader sense*, such as social integration and the recognition of extra-ordinary people. Other films have provoked reflection in a similar way, such as *Cock Fight*, which takes a look at friendship and national/ethnic conflicts, and *Draft*, which focuses on father and son/generations and politics. The way the films are constructed with their carefully nurtured plausibility, transformed in turn into authenticity, also serves to foreground this reflective aspect of their storytelling.

At this point it is important to mention yet another element: cast and nationality. It is difficult to imagine that *Natan* (and the two other films mentioned) would have had the same impact if the cast had been entirely made up of, for instance, Danish actors. The language and the people of different nationalities playing characters from their own regions of the world are important factors in directing the viewers’ attention farther than the diegetic space and perhaps back into the social, national, and political context within which they are produced. From the symbiosis of cinematic articulation and reflection the audience can take the moral and ideological dilemmas opened up by these films with them when the projection lights go out and they leave the cinema – not necessarily to live happily ever after with these cinematically born thoughts, but perhaps a little wiser.

General note: Underlying my characterization of *Natan* and the film's playful cinematic practice in a realm between pure fiction and an impression of authenticity, are ideas that I have developed in a series of exploratory articles: a. "Shaping Meaning: On Action and Content in Unreal Worlds" (among other subjects about *involvement and distance, transmission and transformation, plausible artificiality and artificial intelligibility*. In the anthology "Virtual Interaction. Interaction in Virtual Inhabited 3D Worlds" (ed.: Lars Qvortrup, Springer, London 2001). b. "Great beginnings and endings. Made by Orson Welles" (the *function of beginning- and end-structures, separation between fiction and the real world*. In p.o.v., no. 2, December 1996). c. "Separation or combination of fragments? Reflections on editing" (ideas about *the meaning of montage*. In p.o.v., no. 6, December 1998. d. "Where's the story? Notes on telling stories cinematically" (*characteristics and structures of cinematic narratives*. In p.o.v., no. 18, December 2004).

Oh Harold: A case study of a 30-second TV spot

Richard Raskin



Anasa Briggs-Graves as the wife.



Rhonnie Washington as Harold.

Credits

Client: Georgia Dept of Human Resources/
Georgia Cancer Coalition, Dr. Demetrius
M. Parker, Director of Cancer Awareness
Education Campaign

Agency: Fletcher Martin Ewing, Atlanta

Creative Director: Tim Stapleton

Copywriter: Timothy Stapleton

Agency Producer: Alyson Watson

Production Company: Wild Scientific

Line Producer: Sally Schaffer

Director: David Wild

Director of Photography: Michael Trim

Editorial: Chris Taylor

Running time: 30 seconds

Launched February 2003

Aired approx. 182,000 times from

February to May 2003

Introduction

Short narratives of any kind are rarely given the attention they deserve. When written about at all, they are generally dispatched in a sentence or two. I found this to be the case with short fiction films and classic Jewish jokes, and tried to show in both contexts how rewarding it can be to study these narratives in greater depth.¹ And what is true of short films and jokes applies equally to TV spots, whose remarkably concentrated storytelling, combined with strategies of persuasion that are tailored to specific target groups, merit careful examination.

¹ *The Art of the Short Fiction Film: A Shot by Shot Study of Nine Modern Classics* (Jefferson, N. C.: McFarland, 2002) and *Life Is Like a Glass of Tea: Studies of Classic Jewish Jokes* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1992).

In the present article, *Oh Harold* has been singled out for close study. This 30-second PSA (public service announcement) won the Silver Mercury Award for PSA/Non-profit organization in 2003 and can currently be accessed on the Internet by using this link:

<http://go.fmeonline.com/fme/ourwork/portfolio.asp?PgID=1&Archive=Y>






This article consists of three sections, focusing respectively on:

- I. **the ad itself**, by providing the original storyboard, and a post-production shot breakdown, showing how each of the ad's ten shots is used to tell its share of the story;
- II. **five qualities of *Oh Harold*** which set it apart from a number of other public service announcements devoted to breast cancer awareness: the richness of its storytelling, its uplifting spirit, the woman's status as player in the ad, its amalgam of cultural specificity and universal appeal, and a non-didactic approach;
- III. **the making of the ad**, as described by six people who played key roles in that process, and who offer their takes as to the special qualities of *Oh Harold*. For graciously answering my questions, providing relevant materials and helping in other ways as well, I wish to thank Dr. Demetrius M. Parker (who commissioned the ad), Tim Stapleton (who wrote it), David Wild (who directed it), Michael Trim (who shot it), and the two actors who brought the roles to life, Rhonnie Washington and Anasa Briggs-Graves.

I also want to thank Lorraine Smit at Fresh Water Films in South Africa and Andy Macaulay at ZiG Inc. in Canada for permission to use texts and images from two other important ads cited in this article.











I. THE AD ITSELF

1. The Original Storyboard for *Oh Harold*

TELEVISION CLIENT: DHR/GCC TITLE: "Oh Harold" LENGTH: 30 seconds		
VIDEO		AUDIO
LONG TWO-SHOT OF A MAN IN THE DINING ROOM. WE CAN SEE HIS WIFE IN THE KITCHEN.		MUSIC: Debussy's "Claire De Lune" up and under.
CUT TO CLOSEUP OF WIFE IN THE KITCHEN.		HAROLD: And another thing, when was the last time you had a mammogram?
BACK TO DINING ROOM.		WIFE: Oh Harold, that's sweet. Are you trying to tell me that you love me?
CUT TO LONG SHOT OF MAN AND WIFE IN SAME FRAME.		HAROLD: No, I just heard, you know, you should get a mammogram every year.
GO TO END FRAME.		WIFE: Oh Harold, now you know you're trying to tell me that you can't live without me?
SUPER: SAVE A LIFE, GET CHECKED.		HAROLD: I wouldn't read too much into it. I'm just saying, you know, who'll water the plants?
		WIFE: Oh Harold, you are such a sweetheart.
		AVO: To find out about low or no-cost mammograms in your area call 1.800.FOR.CANCER.

This storyboard was provided by Tim Stapleton and is used here with permission.

2. A Shot Breakdown of *Oh Harold* (Post-Production)

Shot 1 3 sec	SFX: MUSIC (Debussy's <i>Clair de lune</i>) UP AND UNDER. A MAN IS SEATED AT A DINING ROOM TABLE READING THE NEWSPAPER. OVER HIS SHOULDER, WE CAN SEE HIS WIFE IN THE KITCHEN. WITHOUT LOOKING UP, HE CARRIES ON A CONVERSATION WITH HER. HAROLD (medium shot): And another thing, when was the last time you had a mammogram?	
Shot 2 5.5 sec	ANNA (close-up): Oh Harold, that's sweet. Are you trying to tell me that you love me? HAROLD (off-screen): No. I just...	
Shot 3 2 sec.	HAROLD (close-up): ...heard, you know, you should get a mammogram every year.	
Shot 4 2 sec.	HAROLD in medium shot. ANNA (off-screen): Oh, Harold, now you know you trying to tell me...	
Shot 5 3 sec.	ANNA (close-up): ...that you can't live without me. HAROLD (off-screen): I wouldn't read...	
Shot 6 2.5 sec.	HAROLD (medium shot): ...too much into it. I'm just saying, you know...	
Shot 7 2 sec.	HAROLD (close-up): ...who'll water the plants?	
Shot 8 2.5 sec.	ANNA (close-up): Oh Harold...	
Shot 9 3 sec.	ANNA (off screen): ...you are such a sweetheart. HAROLD (close-up) begins to smile after ANNA speaks her line.	
Shot 10 5 sec.	TITLE: Save a Life, Get Checked, 1.800.4.CANCER, GEORGIA CANCER COALITION www.georgiacancer.org VOICEOVER: To find out about low- or no-cost mammograms in your area, call 1-800-4CANCER.	

These images and texts are used here with permission.

II. FIVE QUALITIES OF *OH HAROLD*

NB. All quotes from Dr. Demetrius M. Parker, Tim Stapleton, David Wild, Michael Trim, Rhonnie Washington and Anasa Briggs-Graves, are excerpts from the interviews found in Section III of this article. CAEC = Cancer Awareness and Education Campaign; DHR = Department of Human Resources; FME = Fletcher Martin Ewing, the agency that developed *Oh Harold*.

1. The richness of the storytelling

Within the first seven seconds of this spot, the importance of getting a mammogram is stated not once but twice by Harold: “And another thing, when was the last time you had a mammogram?” (Shot 1) and “No, I just heard, you know, you should get a mammogram every year” (Shots 2 and 3). In this way, the basic message of this ad is firmly anchored in the story from the start and set up for the graphics and voice-over of the final shot to bring that message home in the form of a phone number to call.

But as the spot gets under way, that message becomes a part of a larger narrative, depicting a playful tug-of-war between a husband and wife – the wife trying to force her mate to acknowledge that his concern is actually a declaration of love for her, and the husband teasingly withholding any such admission. Each spouse believes that he or she has gotten the better of the other, the wife having had the last word in interpreting Harold’s concern for the plants as an indirect “I love you” addressed to her, and the husband smiling his “got cha” smile at the end of shot 9 (see Rhonnie Washington’s comments below), which also brings a perfect closure to the story.

The playfulness of this interaction draws the viewer into a story that has the feel of a beautifully written and produced sit-com with a life of its own, despite its diminutive duration, thereby circumventing the various distancing mechanisms viewers often experience when they know they are watching a public service announcement. In this respect, *Oh Harold* serves as an effective vehicle for delivering its

message, embedded in and remaining at the center of a pleasurable narrative.

Another way to describe this quality is to suggest that the *message focus* – to make an appointment for a mammogram – is an essential element in a far more comprehensive narrative, the focus of which is on a loving and affectionately teasing relationship between a husband and wife. In other words, the *story focus* of the ad contains but goes well beyond the *message focus*, which is why we experience a richness in the ad.

Furthermore the power and vitality embodied by the woman in the spot makes it particularly easy for the female viewer to identify with her, just as the cool and mildly teasing manner of the concerned husband enables the male viewer to identify with him. And these positive images and feelings become linked to the central message of the spot, so that phoning the number appearing in the final title becomes a kind of consequence of liking the people in the ad and enjoying the way they interact with one another.

2. The uplifting spirit of the ad

One of the guidelines suggested to the advertising agency by the DHU in Georgia, was to use “positive, uplifting images and messages to deliver education and awareness about an otherwise morbid disease” (see the interview with Dr. Demetrius M. Parker below).

The playfulness of the interaction between Harold and his wife has already been described above, and I would now like to contrast the lighthearted teasing of *Oh Harold* with a very different approach represented by another excellent TV spot, in order to set the issue of positive versus negative images in even sharper relief.

This other spot, which promotes self-examination,² was commissioned by the Cancer Society of South Africa (CANSA) and is entitled *Pairs*. The ad consists of twelve tableaux, in each of which one half of a pair of something is missing. We see successively an 8 mm projector missing its take-up reel; a barbell with the circular lead disks absent from one end; a teddy bear with only one eye; a pair of scissors with one of the handles broken off; a twin cherry stem, with only one cherry; a pair of sunglasses lacking one lens; a double-breasted suit missing a button on one side; a salt-and-pepper stand with only one shaker in place; a home-made walkie-talkie, consisting of a string attached to only one tin can; a car with one headlight out. The end text begins: "Some things belong in pairs" and continues with: "Examine your breasts regularly," followed by the end slate bearing the logo and web address of the Cancer Association of South Africa.



Title: *Pairs*

Client: Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA)

Agency: TBWA Hunt Lascaris

Production Company: Fresh Water Films, Johannesburg & Capetown

Director: Mark Sidelsky

Producer: Lorraine Smit

Running time: 1 minute

Finalist in the Loerie Awards 2004

Currently accessible at:

http://www.freshwater.co.za/downloads/CansaPairs_1.mov

Images used with permission of Fresh Water Films and TBWA Hunt Lascaris.

² It could be argued with some justification that comparing *Oh Harold*, which promotes the use of mammograms, with an ad encouraging self-examination, is inappropriate. The reader is asked to bear this reservation in mind when considering the comparisons made in this and the following section.

What these tableaux indirectly evoke of course, once the end slate urges regular self-examination, is the asymmetry of a woman's chest when one breast has been removed. And the very tact and indirectness of the ad, which never shows an anatomical image that might be painful to see, is undoubtedly one of its particular strengths. In this respect, it makes its powerful point as gently as possible, and avoids the usual danger incurred by the use of negative images: namely setting off resistances to the message by frightening the viewer.

In this particular case however, a very different risk may be in play, since the ad might be understood by some viewers to suggest that a woman who has lost a breast is *like* a bicycle with a wheel missing or a pair of scissors with a broken handle – in other words, defective. Though certainly unintended, this potential by-product of the ad could well be a kind of discordant resonance within the feelings produced in the viewer by an otherwise beautifully designed and executed television spot.

In using only positive images, *Oh Harold* steers clear of both the main and possible collateral risks involved when negative images are used as points of leverage.

3. The woman as player

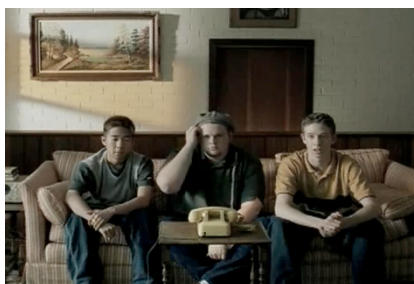
There are also excellent TV spots that use men's fascination with breasts as the initial premise for their storytelling. Consequently the status of the woman in such ads is primarily that of an object of male desire.

One ad, for example, shows a woman wearing a low-cut dress and going about her daily routines in the proximity of men in various situations, with the men gazing longingly at her breasts. She takes no

notice of this and in voice-over we hear a man say: "If only women examined their breasts as often as men do."³

In another prize-winning ad, an obliging young man named Cam offers to examine women's breasts for free:

Cam (speaking to the camera): Are you too busy to do a monthly breast self-exam? Not sure of the right technique? My name's Cam. I'd like to help. Let me examine your breasts for you – absolutely free. I'm highly trained and highly motivated. So call the number on the screen. (*"Call toll free. 1-866-Ring-Cam" flashes at the bottom of the screen.*) Call-takers are standing by. (*Three teenage boys are shown sitting on a sofa, looking awkward and not knowing what to do with their hands. Return to Cam on screen.*) So put your breasts in my hands. Let Cam do your breast exam. (*Now on a black screen, the words "They're your breasts" appear in white script, followed a moment later by "You do it."*) Again the three teenage boys are shown perched on a sofa, now grinning, waving or making a "phone-me" gesture. The end slate then appears with the tagline, "Examine yourself monthly" and the logo of the Breast Cancer Society of Canada.)



Title: *Cam Exam*

Advertising Agency: ZiG Inc., Toronto

Client: Breast Cancer Society of Canada

Art Director: Elspeth Lynn (Partner & Co-Creative Director of ZiG)

Copywriter: Lorraine Tao (Partner & Co-Creative Director of ZiG)

Production House: Untitled

Director: John Mastromonaco

Agency Producer: Janet Woods

Production House Producer: James Davis

Editor: Barry Farrell @ Smash Editorial

Music/Sound: Rosnick Mackinon

Running time: 30 seconds

International Andy Awards, 2001 (Distinction)

Cannes Lions – International Advertising

Festival, 2001 (Shortlist)

Named "Funniest Spot of 2000" by the industry website [adcritic.com](http://www.adcritic.com)

Presently accessible at:

<http://www.zig.ca/main.html>

These images and Cam's monologue are reproduced here with permission of ZiG Inc.

³ I have been unable to obtain the credit list for this ad or permission to use an image.

Here, humor is a means for capturing the attention of the viewer, who is afforded the pleasure of seeing through a delightfully transparent and outrageous ploy. And the humor also serves to preclude or neutralize anxiety that might otherwise be raised by the issue of breast cancer.⁴ The ad is brilliantly written and produced in every respect, with just the right degree of smoothness in the Cam character, in contrast to the fumbling and cruder eagerness of the three buddies on the sofa.

In focusing on the breast-fixation of immature men, this ad playfully harnesses for a noble cause an alienated mode of male sexuality that divorces the breast from the person and is essentially opportunistic. And the joke of course is on Cam and his buddies, for mistakenly thinking they are putting one over on a gullible female viewer.

In *Oh Harold*, an equally interesting game is in play, but it is one in which the woman is a key player, not only through the things she says when reframing her husband's remarks, but also in her manner and very presence on screen (thanks largely to Anasa Briggs-Graves's brilliant interpretation of her role). And although her husband (superbly played by Rhonnie Washington) withholds any explicit expression of his love for her and thinks he has won the verbal tug-of-war, she comes across in this dialogue as a strong, self-empowering woman, and a formidable player in any game in which she might be involved.

Offering this image of womanhood to the female viewer is surely a storytelling asset of *Oh Harold*.

⁴ Concerning the use of humor in this spot, initially criticized by some who felt it inappropriate to treat "breast cancer prevention with levity," see David Menzies's article, "Cut Through the Clutter," Feb/March 2003, at: http://ms.profitguide.com/sales/issues_article.asp?id=1231

4. Combining cultural specificity with universal appeal

Oh Harold was part of a campaign aimed primarily at an African-American audience in Georgia and as Dr. Demetrius Parker explained:

Many ads in the United States, including health-focused ads, feature only Anglo Americans. Our studies revealed that African Americans desired ads that included them. We stressed with FME cultural diversity of message and image for the CAEC.

This of course was a key consideration in casting the superb African American actors Anasa Briggs-Graves and Rhonnie Washington in the two roles,

However, the script by Tim Stapleton was inspired by his Anglo-Saxon family background in that the dialogue was

Loosely based on the way all of the uncles on my mother's side of the family would talk to their wives. Very sarcastic, never giving them credit for anything. But you could always tell behind all of that caustic humor that they were genuinely in love.

The cultural factors in this situation became even more interesting when Anasa Briggs-Graves read her part. As she put it, she and Rhonnie Washington “were encouraged to embrace the dynamics that exist between mature men and women in our culture,” and this accounts for her giving a special twist to her performance. As Tim Stapleton stated:

In my head the script didn't read the way she performed it, she did that on her own. I originally had it in mind for the woman to be very sweet and happy that her husband was trying to tell her that he loved her. Suddenly this very strong Black woman turned it completely around and very forcefully told him that he was, in fact, telling her that he loved her. It was a terrific moment during casting and had us all on the floor. They were both sensational.

What happened here was that lines *written* Anglo-Saxon were *delivered* in an authentically African-American manner, with the result that people in the primary target group could experience the spot as tailor made for them, while members of other cultural groups

could recognize themselves in the ad as well. Again, in Tim Stapleton's words:

This situation was based on my family, which is Anglo-Saxon, but since it is an honest portrayal of human emotion, it appeals to any race or religion. This would've been a very funny execution with a Jewish couple. (I actually wanted the Cartoon Network to do a version with Fred and Wilma Flintstone using the same script, but they wouldn't allow it.

Dr. Parker also agreed that FME "captured elements of human nature that are recognizable by all cultures and ethnic groups with the *Oh Harold* ad," which he further considered to be free of the stereotypic images often found in other ads "that include non-Anglo actors."

Communicating in a way that is experienced by audiences as genuinely culturally specific *and* universal may be a widespread ambition in the advertising industry, but few TV spots bring that combination off as successfully as *Oh Harold*.

5. A non-didactic approach

Perhaps the most obvious quality of the ad is the degree to which it differs from public service announcements in which an expert or authority – whose name and title are superimposed at the bottom of the screen – looks into the camera, explains relevant facts to the viewer and prescribes the proper course of action. See in particular Tim Stapleton's account as to why this approach was dropped, after disastrous results from focus group studies showed it would be utterly useless in this campaign.

III. THE MAKING OF *OH HAROLD*

1. An interview with Dr. Demetrius M. Parker⁵

Director of the Cancer Awareness and Education Campaign (CAEC) with the Georgia Department of Human Relations (DHR)

I understand that you commissioned the production of the Oh Harold ad on behalf of the DHR. Can you tell me in your own words what you see as the special qualities of this TV spot, in relation to the guidelines you gave to the ad agency, Fletcher Martin Ewing (FME)?

- A. The cultural diversity of the ad. Many ads in the United States, including health-focused ads, feature only Anglo Americans. Our studies revealed that African Americans desired ads that included them. We stressed with FME cultural diversity of message and image for the CAEC. The *Oh Harold* ad captured this directive.
- B. DHR also directed FME to use positive, uplifting images and messages to deliver education and awareness about an otherwise morbid disease – a disease that up until the past few years was referred to as the ‘C’ word. The *Oh Harold* ad dealt with the fear factor of cancer by using humor.
- C. Often, communications agencies use stereotypical images and messaging when attempting to create ads that include non-Anglo actors. FME captured elements of human nature that are recognizable by all cultures and ethnic groups with the *Oh Harold* ad. They captured a man’s struggle with being caring and sensitive about a woman’s health issue. They captured a caring relationship between a couple, as each of the actors went about their routine activities.

⁵ See also “Georgia’s Cancer Awareness and Education Campaign: Combining Public Health Models and Private Sector Communications Strategies,” by Demetrius M. Parker, available at: http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2004/jul/04_0030.htm

Is there anything else you can tell me about the arrangement you made with FME?

One of the strategies we included in our contract with FME was that they use their clout and professional network to leverage the CAEC budget dollars. FME excelled at this charge. The agency was able to coordinate work they were doing on a separate account with the work they were doing for DHR. They developed the *Oh Harold* ad without incurring the traditional costs for producing a first quality television advertisement and passed the savings on to DHR.

4 January 2005

2. An interview with Tim Stapleton

Writer of the ad, Chief Creative Officer at Fletcher Martin Ewing

Did the Georgia Cancer Coalition give you any storytelling guidelines when you were asked to develop a concept for this ad? Can you tell me anything about how the idea for this ad came to you?

This is a bit of a long story, and no, I didn't receive any guidelines when it came to storytelling. We really weren't even asked to do commercials, since we didn't have money to produce them. Instead, we thought we could find some cancer spots that had been produced by other states and put our own tag at the end. After searching through hundreds of commercials, I didn't see anything that I really liked, so I thought that we should just create little thirty-second audio stories and punctuate them with camera cards. That treatment would cost about as much as it would to retag an existing commercial and we could say exactly what we wanted to.

The first spot I did featured a little boy asking his grandmother to get a pap test. I wrote *Oh Harold* and intended to produce it in the same manner. But at the same time I was preparing to shoot a new

campaign for Piccadilly restaurants and the director, David Wild, asked me what else I was working on. So I told about the *Oh Harold* spot. He said, "Oh, you've got to put that on film." And I said, "I can't, I don't have any money." And he said, "Oh, you've got to put that on film." And I said, "I don't have any money." And he said, "Oh, you've got to let me shoot that." And I said, "Ok, but no money means no money."

The reason I insisted on telling David I had no money is because almost every director I've ever shot with has offered to shoot something for free. But in every instance, in almost twenty years of doing this, I've run into a wall called the executive producer. This is the person who is responsible for how money is spent on a shoot and they usually want you to pay for the hard costs of things like camera rental and film stock. David is the first director I've worked with who's ever actually done it all for free. He asked everyone to go on overtime after we wrapped the Piccadilly shoot. He asked the casting director to cast Harold and his wife. He asked the location scout to find a setting that was suitable for *Oh Harold* and the Piccadilly spot. If I had just bid the commercial with David and not asked for a freebie, it would have cost \$188,000. That also goes for Chris Taylor, the editor, who did all of the post work. They did it all for free. When you consider how many people are involved in such a production, it's an amazing gesture.

But long before all of this, I should tell you how our strategy came about. We went into focus groups armed with about 25 positioning statements, most of which asked people to get checked for cancer. The groups were an absolute disaster. What we found out was that our target absolutely did not want to be told to get checked for cancer. And they especially didn't want that message coming from the government. It was very depressing. But then we noticed some

interesting little conversations that people were having in the room before the moderator came in. All they could talk about was a beautiful son, or a wonderful nephew, or a granddaughter who was the light of their life. It dawned on us that for this segment of the population, down to a person, the most important thing in their life was their family. Well, if we weren't going to get permission to tell these people to get checked for cancer then we were going to enlist people who didn't need permission: the family and loved ones of the people we were trying to reach. So we shifted the focus of the campaign a little so that we never ask anyone directly to get checked, but we show entertaining ways in which a friend or family member talks to a loved one about cancer. By taking ourselves out of the equation and empowering others to deliver our message for us, we raised the number of calls to the center by 800%, including increases in every zip code in Georgia.

So, in answer to your question, all I did was think of an entertaining way a man could tell his wife to get a mammogram. I don't even mention the "C" word in the spot.

Oh Harold is loosely based on the way all of the uncles on my mother's side of the family would talk to their wives. They were always very sarcastic, and wouldn't give their wives credit for much of anything. But you could tell behind all of that caustic humor that they were genuinely in love. It was a strange thing, but very honest. When I presented *Oh Harold* to one of the clients, she just kept shaking her head laughing and saying, "Oh no! Oh no! NO. NO. NO." I thought she was killing the spot, but she really loved it and thought it was hysterical. I think everyone knows someone or is related to a couple that communicates the way the couple in the commercial do.

The issue of getting a mammogram is a key factor in the story, explicitly from the very start. Yet the dramatic center of the story lies in the relationship between the husband and wife. Do you see the ad that way? And would you agree that the story's dramatic center is to some degree independent of the service the ad promotes and that this is one of the qualities that make this such a satisfying experience for the viewer and such a successful motivating strategy with respect to cancer awareness?

Yes. You're exactly right. I never really analyze my work this much, but your logic is correct. It's simply a man telling his wife he loves her in his own way. Whenever I write a commercial, I try to make the story impossible to tell without the product I'm trying to sell. I know that sounds elementary, but you'd be surprised how many people don't do it. In this case the product is the mammogram, so it was very easy to make it central to the dialogue. But the story we're telling is really about the relationship of the couple. I think what's satisfying about the spot for the viewer is that it's a situation that everyone can relate to.

Was the casting of Black actors (whose performance is superb, in my opinion) a part of the concept from the start? Was this related to the target groups the ad was designed to reach or the result of any other considerations?

Yes it was. I always saw it as a Black couple because that was the largest segment of our target audience. But I've always included all races in my casting sessions because I don't want to miss out on the performance of a gifted actor. But it's an interesting topic to me and underscores something I've always believed. This situation was based on my family, which is Anglo-Saxon, but since it is an honest portrayal of human emotion, it appeals to any race or religion. This would've been a very funny execution with a Jewish couple. (I actually wanted the Cartoon Network to do a version with Fred and Wilma Flintstone using the same script, but they wouldn't allow it.) Something else that I think made it very genuine was the performance of the wife. In my head the script didn't read the way she performed it, she did that on her own. I originally had it in mind for the woman to

be very sweet and happy that her husband was trying to tell her that he loved her. Suddenly this very strong Black woman turned it completely around and very forcefully told him that he was, in fact, telling her that he loved her. It was a terrific moment during casting and had us all on the floor. They were both sensational.

This ad differs considerably from other breast cancer awareness ads. How would you characterize what sets it apart?

The thing that I found to be refreshing about this whole campaign is the fact that we never tell anyone to get checked for cancer. We don't even mention cancer in most of the executions. I didn't see this approach in any of the hundreds of spots I looked at. They all said things like, "imagine how hard it will be for your family when you're gone." Or, "If not for yourself, get checked for them." And they all seemed like tired executions, which were easily ignored. There was nothing out there that said "make sure your wife gets a mammogram." It was an exciting road to explore.

8 December 2004

3. An interview with David Wild

Director of the ad, Wild Scientific

Were you involved in the development of the concept for the ad, or was that already pretty much worked out by Tim Stapleton when you got the assignment to direct the film?

It was pretty much worked out by Tim by the time I was involved – although Tim does allow a lot of flexibility once I start.

The issue of getting a mammogram is a key factor in the story, explicitly and from the very start. Yet the dramatic center of the story lies in the relationship between the husband and wife. Do you see the ad that way? And would you agree that the story's dramatic center is to some degree independent of the service the ad promotes and that this is one of the qualities that makes this such a satisfying experience for the viewer and such a successful motivating strategy with respect to cancer awareness?

I see the ad the way you've described it. It's kind of funny to see it analyzed like that. To me it's a healthy couple with a good sense of humor. The husband's poking a bit of fun in his wife's direction. He might not come right out and say he loves her – but he definitely knows what he's doing. I think it's kind of close to real life – at least to my experience.

The dramatic center is independent of the service the ad promotes. I think that's what makes it successful. People don't talk that much about mammograms. And to have a bit of fun with the cancer detection – "who'll water the plants?" – I'd never seen a script like this before.

One of the hardest things about directing commercials is getting great scripts. It's really not that often that a great script or concept comes through the fax machine, and when they do, it really makes you want to do it.

Was the casting of Black actors (whose performance is superb, in my opinion) a part of the concept from the start? Was this related to the target groups the ad was designed to reach or the result of any other considerations?

The actors were superb. We knew it when we saw them in casting. The actress actually added that little bit of wiggle. We just cracked up when we saw it in the session. They were both professionals and really fun to work with. They got it. I love the husband's little smile at the end. As far as I know, Tim wanted African-Americans because they were the audience that we wanted to attract. Evidently in the U.S., many African-Americans are reluctant to go to the doctor. Tim can probably talk more about that – he's heard the research. In my case it didn't make a difference. These actors were great. And I'd rather see more minorities treated with respect and like the real people that they are. Sometimes in the U.S. the advertisers tend to go a little overboard – but that's a whole other topic...

Is there anything else you can tell me about the making of the ad – the way you directed the actors, the design of the setting, the shoot?

We were able to get a lot of range out of the actors (there's that professional thing) so that the performance could really be fine tuned in the edit. I really liked Tim's addition of the Debussy piano track. One of the things that I am proudest of is a suggestion that came from the director of photography, Mike Trim. He suggested that we frame in such a way to keep the actors back to back – on the opposite side of the frame as you would normally have them – even with the negative space in the singles. You know from screen direction that people are usually talking face to face from cut to cut. Not that this was a radical suggestion, but it's something nice for the film students. What appealed to me in Mike's suggestion for the 'back-to-back' framing was that it helped to physically illustrate a part of the couple's relationship. This was minimized a little in the final telecine – but it looks great in the first wide shot. Since the whole crew had volunteered to stay late and shoot this I wanted them to have as much creative freedom as well. And Mike had a great suggestion.



The opening shot of *Oh Harold*, showing the 'back-to-back' framing suggested by the director of photography.

3. An interview with Michael Trim

Director of photography

One of the things both David Wild and Tim Stapleton mentioned was your idea about framing the husband and wife back-to-back. Can you tell me how that idea occurred to you and why you felt it was appropriate in this particular case?

I had actually forgotten about the framing of the couple back to back. I remember that after watching a rehearsal of the actors doing the scene, it occurred to me that these were two people who were very comfortable with each other. Being married myself, I know that you don't have to be looking at your wife to be speaking to her and it felt very natural to have them not face one another. It seemed much less "stagy" if you know what I mean. I thought the idea of them being so comfortable with each other would reinforce the idea of their love for one another while at the same time not bashing you over the head with it. And I was fortunate enough to be working with Mr. David Wild, one of my favorite directors to work with. He is always open to an idea or thought about what we are shooting. And Tim Stapleton is a joy to work with from an agency and a personal standpoint.

Would you agree that Oh Harold stands out from many other breast-cancer awareness spots?

I don't think I've seen many other breast cancer spots, and if I have none stand out. This particular spot is appealing to me because of the undercurrent of warmth and the affection displayed by the couple without being schmaltzy. It's just about two people caring for one another.

Is there anything else you would care to add about Oh Harold?

I can't think of much else to say. It's always a pleasure to work on something that isn't trying to sell some useless thing to people who don't need it. This commercial had a purpose and hopefully it

connected with a few people and made them more aware of breast cancer and the importance of being tested.

Also, I had forgotten that this was a spot that we shot after a regular day of shooting another commercial. I have been asked many times to shoot something for nothing for a director and usually it is some spot for their reel, something they consider special that will get them more work. I don't think any of us thought that way about this spot. We all felt as if we were doing something worthwhile with our time.

31 December 2004

4. An interview with Rhonnie Washington

The actor playing Harold

Can you tell me how you understand the interaction between your character and the character of the wife, in this story?

I think that this is one of the ways that Harold expresses his love for his wife. She thinks it is really sweet that he was concerned enough to mention the mammogram. While sweetness is not beyond Harold, it is not one of his primary characteristics, at least not one he seeks to cultivate or to exhibit often. He doesn't want her to interpret this "sweetness" as a change of heart. If she got that impression, then she might even expect him to say the "L" word. Checks and balances must remain in place. "If you give a woman an inch, she'll think she's a ruler."

Your smile just before the end of the spot is a great moment. I know that the director also loves that moment. Is there anything you can tell me about that smile during the shoot?

To me, the smile says, "Got cha!" She is clearly pressing for some kind of declaration of love, "You love me, you can't live without me." Harold deftly sidesteps declaring his love for his wife by offering an

alternative point of view. He offers her something to think about that is so powerful that it almost shuts her mouth. Perhaps, his concern was not any more for her than it was for the plants. Technically, Harold wins, but actually they both win. They use this game that they play to momentarily bask in each other's affection.

This is an extraordinary TV spot. Can you tell me what you think sets it apart from so many others?

For me, the writing sets this spot apart. I know that I identified with Harold immediately. I thought that I knew him. His relationship with his wife reminds me of my relationship with my father. I'm not sure that he ever told me that he loved me. I knew that he did, but stuff like that was hard for him to say. I think he figured, "Talk is cheap." If your love is not manifested in any way other than talk, then what good is it?

Is there anything else you would care to tell me about the shoot or any other aspect of "Oh Harold"?

I liked the way the writer cultivated the duality of Harold. We get to see his cool exterior as well as his warm, creamy center. And, maybe I like the spot for the same reason that I like *The Lion in Winter*. Henry never professes his love for Eleanor, nor Eleanor for Henry. However, they are clearly desperately in love with each other. Do they love each other more than power? Perhaps, that is the major dramatic question?

17 December 2004

5. Comments from Anasa Briggs-Graves

The actress playing the wife

Most marriages survive if there is a playful tension between husband and wife. I saw "Harold" as a character who was dry and if opposites attract... Tim [Stapleton] and David [Wild] created a vehicle that is authentic, has texture, utilizes a realistic environment, an important message and rich production design.

My fellow actor/ 'husband' and I both are married. Additionally we have extensive theatrical backgrounds. Finally, we were encouraged to embrace the dynamics that exist between mature men and women in our culture.

27 December 2004

Concluding note

The reader has now had a chance to consider *Oh Harold* from a number of points of view: with respect to the story it tells, to the ways in which it tells its story, and – thanks to the comments of key people involved – to the story behind the making of this exemplary spot.

In my own discussion of five specific qualities of *Oh Harold*, particularly in comparison with other excellent PSAs, I have tried to point out some of the special storytelling assets of *Oh Harold*.

This study will be one of a number in a forthcoming book devoted to the art of the public service announcement – a format with extraordinary challenges and possibilities, and that deserves closer attention as a form of cinematic storytelling than it has received to date.

A Thematic Typology of Anti-Tobacco TV Spots

Richard Raskin

Objective: To make 'not to smoke' into a brand just as cool as Marlboro or Camel...

Byron Smith, describing a Florida anti-tobacco strategy¹

Introduction

Of all public service announcements, none meet a bigger challenge than those attempting to discourage smoking. In order to get their messages across, these TV spots have to overcome formidable resistances in the smoker – some stemming from the consequences of addiction, others from the hip image tobacco companies have managed to sell for their products, often with the aid of the film industry (though this appears to be tapering off). While a great deal of thought goes into the storytelling of all effective PSAs, the extra challenges involved in delivering an anti-smoking message that will not simply be dismissed, require tactical thinking of another kind, and the results are sometimes 30 or 60 second marvels of persuasion, which make full use of the narrative strategies and cinematic resources in play in the best short films.

Health authorities and public service foundations regularly commission the making of anti-smoking spots, typically seeking fresh and more effective approaches in collaboration with advertising agencies that in turn bring specific story ideas and storytelling know-how into the equation when new campaigns are designed. The number of anti-tobacco ads currently in circulation – either broadcast or viewable on the Internet, for example in the creative portfolios of advertising agencies' websites, or on ad-compilation websites – is

staggering, and anyone wishing to study these ads could easily feel overwhelmed by their sheer number and diversity.

Although there is relevant information available on the Web – concerning, for example, the goals and effectiveness of specific smoking prevention and cessation campaigns – my searches have not turned up what I needed most to gain an overview of this important area: namely a viable typology of anti-tobacco ads.

Typologies of a more general nature, dividing television ads for example into *didactic*, *narrative* and *lyric* meta-genres, the first of which is sub-divisible into such categories as the testimonial, expert spot, demonstration, promotion and spokesperson,¹ are available and are unquestionably useful in other connections. But as a means for charting the territory of the anti-smoking spot, a thematic typology – focusing on the leveraging issues dramatized by the ads – would be far more meaningful as an overview.

The present article is an attempt to provide a typology of that kind, describing ads in relation to four major issues, in which the storytelling dramatizes respectively:

1. the harmful effects of tobacco
2. the foolishness of the smoker
3. the cynicism of the tobacco industry
4. the process of quitting

¹ <http://www.bandt.com.au/news/cd/0c0064cd.asp>

¹ These terms are borrowed from Lars Pynt Andersen's thesis, *The Rhetorical Strategies of Danish TV Advertising*, published by the Copenhagen Business School in 2004. This impressive work includes an up-to-date survey of previously proposed typologies as well as a provisional genre matrix of his own (p. 54). See also David Ogilvy's description of "ten kinds of commercial which are found to be *above average* in their ability to change people's brand preference" [Humor, Slice of Life, Testimonials, Demonstrations, Problem solution, Talking heads, Characters, Reason why, News, Emotion] and "three kinds which are *below average*" [Testimonials by celebrities, Cartoons, and Musical vignettes]. *Ogilvy on Advertising* (New York: Vintage, 1985), pp. 103-110. Danish readers might also want to consult Lennard Højbjerg's *Fortælleteri 2 – Musikvideo og reklamefilm* (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1996/2000), *Reklame – kultur*, edited by Jens F. Jensen, Tove Arendt Rasmussen and Jørgen Stigel (Aalborg: Aalborg Universitetsforlag, 1998), and Per Helmer Hansen's *TV-Reklamer. Moderne minimyter* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2004).

Any given ad can of course dramatize more than one of the above-mentioned leveraging themes, but that doesn't make this thematic grid any less useful as a means for characterizing any given ad.

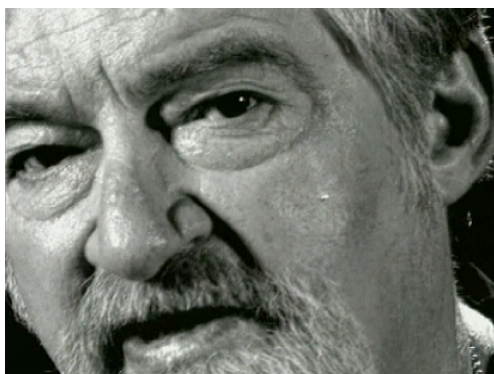
The reader is asked to bear in mind that the present article is an initial attempt to chart the thematic territory of the anti-tobacco TV spot, and in the process, to present a number of exemplary ads – some just in passing, others in greater detail, sometimes with storyboards, transcriptions of all spoken lines, and interviews with key people involved in the making of the ads. Even in these fuller treatments, the reader should expect no systematic analysis of the ads presented in these pages. Several of these ads will however be singled out for analytical study in a forthcoming book devoted to the art of storytelling in the public service announcement. But in the case of “Marker Man” and “Live Longer,” I am delighted to be able to include in the present article the informative comments made by those who commissioned or designed the ads.

A number of people were extremely helpful in providing copies of ads, permission to use images from them, permission to cite spoken lines, and/or in replying to my questions. I wish to thank Shawn King and Shelly Dwyer at Extreme Group; Aaron Greene and David Neinstein at Spank Films; Nancy Hoddinott at the Office of Health Promotion, Province of Nova Scotia; Jac Coverdale and Kristen Suys at Clarity Coverdale Fury; Caroline Nicolay at The Cleveland Clinic Foundation; Monique Veillette and Adam Svatek at Ground Zero; Kurt M. Fowler at the California Department of Health Services; Terry Reid at the Department of Health, State of Washington; Paul Nelson and Kelly Shrader at Arnold Worldwide; Phillip Graham at the American Legacy Foundation; Nadia Flusche and Laura Burke at Sedgwick Rd; and Lou Ann Flatgard at Maris West & Baker.

1. The harmful effects of smoking

As already mentioned, one form that anti-smoking PSAs can take is that of a testimonial made by a victim of throat cancer. The victim may be a celebrity, and one case in point is a set of three 30-second ads made for The Cleveland Clinic Foundation in 2003, in which the screenwriter, Joe Eszterhas,² speaks to the camera in an effort to persuade the viewer that smoking is harmful. This is what he says in each of the ads, which were directed by Tony Kaye (director of *American History X* in 1998):

HOLLYWOOD



Hello. My name is Joe Eszterhas. I'm a screenwriter. I've always glamorized smoking in my movies. I used to think smoking was so cool. Then I got throat cancer. Maybe that's my punishment. Please: don't let Hollywood sucker you into smoking. Please don't let people like me kill you. Please: don't smoke.

Image and text used with permission of The Cleveland Clinic Foundation.

HIP, COOL

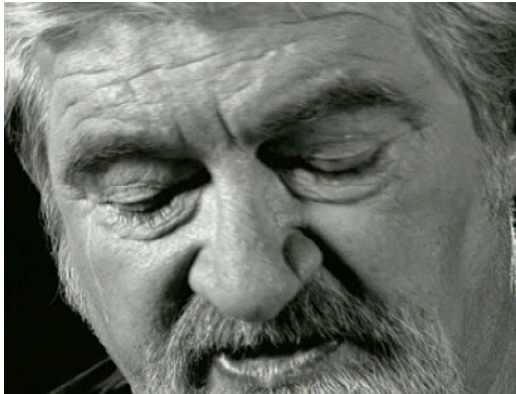


My name is Joe Eszterhas. I'm a screenwriter. I used to think smoking was so cool, so hip, so rock-and-roll. Then I got throat cancer. Cancer isn't cool; cancer isn't hip; cancer isn't rock-and-roll. Cancer hurts, cancer makes you cry, and then it kills you. Please: don't smoke.

Image and text used with permission of The Cleveland Clinic Foundation.

² The following films are among Joe Eszterhas's screenwriting credits: *Flashdance* (1983), *Jagged Edge* (1985), *Music Box* (1992), *Sliver* (1993), *Showgirls* (1995), *Jade* (1995), *Telling Lies in America* (1997) and *One Night Stand* (1997).

ONE HUNDRED YEAR OLD MAN



My name is Joe Eszterhas. I'm a screenwriter. I thought: I'll quit some time. It ain't gonna get me. I'm gonna be that 100 year old man that you read about [who] still smokes. But I got throat cancer. They took out most of my voice-box. Cancer hurts, cancer makes you cry, and then it kills you. Please: don't smoke.

Image and text used with permission of The Cleveland Clinic Foundation.

As the images show, the shots are made in extreme close-up, enhancing our sense of nearness to the speaker and striking a note of intimacy, as he confides to us the bitter lesson he has learned. And perhaps the use of black-and-white photography further underscores the documentary or un-staged quality of the spots in this "joinjoe" campaign.³

Authentic testimonials of this kind, emphasizing the potentially fatal consequences of smoking, do not have to be made by celebrities to be effective. See, for example, four heartbreaking ads concerning women and smoking made by Arnold Worldwide for the American Legacy Foundation,⁴ as well as some hard-hitting ads recently made for the National Health Service in the U.K.⁵

Other ads demonstrate the harmfulness of smoking by showing its effects on the body, as is the case with an uncompromising Australian campaign launched in 1998 with the tagline: "Every

³ Use this link for further information about the campaign as well as the third of these ads: <http://www.clevelandclinic.org/joinjoe/> The following websites that might also be consulted: http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/spotlightthehealth/2004-02-10-eszterhas_x.htm and http://www.traditionalmountaineering.org/News_Smoking.htm

⁴ <http://www.arnoldworldwide.com/arn.cfm>

⁵ http://www.givingupsmoking.co.uk/CNI/Current_Campaign/advertisements/tv_ads/ See in particular the ad entitled "Colleen."

cigarette is doing you damage.” In one of these ads, a portion of the aorta that had been removed from the body of a deceased 32-year old smoker, is pressed by rubber-gloved fingers, and a prodigious clump of fatty deposits emerges from one end of the severed blood vessel. This has been aptly described as “perhaps one of the most disturbing images even seen on television.”⁶

There are also ads that focus on the harm done by tobacco, not to the smokers themselves, but to innocent bystanders who are exposed to the toxins in the smoke and suffer the consequences. See for example an ad called “Emily” in which a little girl apparently addresses her mother, pleading with her to stop smoking because the smoke makes her little chest ache (a title then explains that “Smoking around children can cause asthma”). The final shot reveals that the little girl is speaking to herself in a mirror, either rehearsing what she intends to say, or saying to herself the words she lacks the courage to tell her mother.⁷ In another ad in the same campaign, a little boy named “Mark” looks out his window and complains that his new little brother hasn’t come home from the hospital. He wonders whether something may be wrong with the newborn brother (a title then explains: “Smoking during pregnancy can cause birth defects”).⁸

And there are ads that depict the lethal harm done by cigarettes by showing what smokers may miss out on. A powerful ad entitled “Ghost” shows a middle-aged man encouraging his baby grandchild to run to him (“Come to Grandpa”), only to find to his dismay that

⁶ Sean McKibbin at <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/health-archive-mediarel-1998-mwsp980422.htm>. The ad itself can presently be seen at: <http://www.quitnow.info.au/movies/artery.mov>. For information about the campaign, see <http://www.quitnow.info.au/fact/factc.html>.

⁷ This ad, made for the California Children and Families Commission, can now be seen at: <http://www.methodstudios.com/mot73>

⁸ <http://www.methodstudios.com/mox171> “Mark” and “Emily” are both 30-second spots, launched in 2000, designed by the ad agency Asher and Partners and produced by Palomar Pictures.

the baby runs *through* him, his daughter saying “I wish Gramps could see it,” and a title urging: “Be there tomorrow. Stop smoking today.”⁹

I would like to end this section on a lighter note by describing another ad that brilliantly dramatizes the effects of passive smoking, this time in a parody of the rugged, smoking cowboy seen in numerous Marlboro-man ads. This TV spot is called “A Man and His Horse,” and shows a cowboy either lighting up or puffing on a cigarette already in his mouth as he performs a number of chores, such as saddling his horse, herding cattle, chopping wood, mending a fence, leading his horse to water, etc. Ultimately, when he lights up for the last time, striking a match on one of his spurs, a loud thud is suddenly heard, and when he turns to see what has happened, the camera pulls back showing his dead horse sprawled on the ground before him. A title then explains: “Second hand smoke kills.”¹⁰

A MAN AND HIS HORSE



Client: American Cancer Society
 Creative director/ Art director: Jean Robaire
 Copywriter: Mark Cohen
 Director: Aaron Greene
 DP: David Darby
 Editor/Sound designer: David Checél
 Production Company: Villains
 Executive producer: John Marshall
 Producer: Elizabeth Cunningham
 Actor: Eric Lawson
 Shot: December 1997
 Launched: 1998
 Running time: 38 seconds

⁹ This ad, made by Clarity Coverdale Fury for the Minnesota Partnership for Action Against Tobacco, can be seen at <http://www.claritycoverdalefury.com/nav.html>

¹⁰ To see this ad, go to the website of Spank Films at <http://www.spankfilm.com/frames.html>, click on “Directors,” then choose “Aaron Greene,” after which “A Man and His Horse” will appear as an option. For more information about “A Man and His Horse,” including the story behind the making of the ad, use the following links:

http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0DUO/is_n25_v39/ai_20869348 and
http://www.cancer.org/docroot/NWS/content/NWS_5_1x_Come_to_where_the_irony_is.asp

2. The foolishness of the smoker

Though some of the testimonials already mentioned in the previous section touch upon the foolishness of smoking, a number of ads make that issue their central focus, typically by offering a basis for comparison with other bad choices.

<p>MARKER MAN</p> 	<p>Client: Minnesota Youth Tobacco Prevention Agency: Clarity Coverdale Fury Creative Director: Jac Coverdale Copywriter: Troy Longie Art Director: Jac Coverdale Agency Producer: Jenee Schmidt Production Company: A Band Apart Director: Martin Granger Post Production: Uppercut Editorial Launched: 2003 Running time: 60 seconds</p>
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This image and the spoken lines transcribed below are used with the permission of Clarity Coverdale Fury.

One such ad is called “Marker Man,” and consists of an interview in which the interviewer is barely heard and remains off-camera so that we can focus our full attention on the strange phenomenon portrayed in the ad. Here are the spoken lines, some of which are heard as Marker Man – bare from the waist up – goes about his daily chores in his apartment:

Marker Man: I have been blue for approximately 18 years.

Interviewer (off-screen): I guess the first question is “Why?”

Marker Man: (Laughs). Uh... Yeah... You’re a kind, know what I mean? You get all these crazy ideas in your head. So I start doodling away. And my friends are with me and they’re going you know “Go! Go! Go!” I’m crazy and different, you know. The rebel. This was like “Dude, it’s so cool.” And it was like “Dude!” (Sighs as we see a photo of him taken before he was blue.) I should have known that “permanent marker” meant permanent marker.

Interviewer (off-screen): That must be tough to live with.

Marker Man: It’s hard to get a solid job. I’m not... normal. But I’m not like weird in a fun, cool way.

Interviewer (off-screen): Sorry.

Marker Man: (Shrugs.) It’s not the worst decision I’ve ever made, I suppose.

Interviewer (off-screen): What’s the worst?

Marker Man: (Taps a pack of cigarettes on the table before him. Cut to black and an end title as Marker Man, now off-camera, ads:) And then it would be the permanently altering my skin forever.

The following interview with the creative director, Jac Coverdale, cleared up a number of questions I had about the ad.

INTERVIEW WITH JAC COVERDALE (January 10, 2005)

Did the Minnesota Youth Tobacco Prevention people provide any specific guidelines for the ad, or was its conception entirely your own idea?

JC: It was part of a campaign that was moving away from our 3-year strategy of exposing the greed and manipulative tactics tobacco companies use to hook teens into a lifetime of "brand loyalty". So it was really a new direction we brought to the client to "denormalize" cigarette smoking by portraying smoking as an immature, loser thing to do.

Is it an authentic story that "Marker Man" tells or a fiction staged for the spot?

JC: It was, in fact, a fictional account used as a metaphor for doing daring things as a teenager that seem fun at the time, but hold long-term consequences (such as starting smoking).

There are no cues to indicate that it is a fiction. Did you deliberately design the spot this way?

JC: Yes, but teens are so media savvy, they decode it as a slightly cynical and outrageous metaphor.

There are a number of other anti-smoking spots that play on comparisons of stupid things, but this one stands out from the others. Can you tell me in your own words what you see as the special qualities of this ad?

JC: It's bizarre, but since our audience is very impulsive, there's a certain "it could happen" aspect to it. Here's an adult guy, who has become a loser because of the long-term implications of something he did impulsively as a teenager. (Few teen smokers want to become adult smokers.) But I think the tone is what makes it work. It's not "broad" or loud, and it doesn't cram the message down your throat. It's not overtly judgmental or preachy, it lets teens feel like they draw their own conclusions.

Is there anything else you can tell me about the conception or production or effectiveness of the ad?

JC: It was part of a series when conceived, along with a woman who goes through life with a javelin stuck halfway through her head, and a guy who is only a head, both caused through impulsive acts that appeared harmless as teens, but which ended up with results (like a smoking addiction) that these people were stuck with the rest of their lives. A bit dark, yes.

Another noteworthy ad that offers a comparison as a point of leverage for gauging the foolishness of smoking, is called “Barber.” In this ad, a barber gives a young man a haircut that leaves him looking like the elderly customers awaiting their turn, as well as like the middle-aged barber himself. Having shaved off the healthy growth of hair on the young man’s crown, the barber combs some of the hair from the side of his customer’s head over the now bald pate. We then hear in voice-over: “You wouldn’t want their haircut. Why would you want their lungs?” after which a title delivers the tagline: “18-year-old smokers have 50-year-old lungs,” along with the logo of Questionit.com. In two other ads in the same series, called “Bingo” and “Teeth,” the line spoken in voice-over refers to the nightlife and teeth of 50-year-olds.¹¹



BARBER

Client: Questionit.com
 Ad agency: Maris West & Baker
 Production company: Palomar Pictures.
 Director: Rafael Fernandez.
 Executive producer: Laura Howard
 Launched 2000.
 Running time: 30 seconds.

This image is used with the permission of The Partnership for a Healthy Mississippi.


A related series of 30-second spots, represented by “License” (2000), “Cow Tipping” (2001) and “Gas Station” (2001), shows teenagers doing outrageously stupid things that get them into trouble, after which a voice-over comments “That’s one way to screw up your life early. Smoking’s another,” followed by a title reading “9 out of 10 people killed by tobacco start smoking in high school,” and the Questionit.com logo.¹²

¹¹ “Barber,” “Bingo” and “Teeth,” can be found at <http://www.methodstudios.com/mox281>, <http://www.methodstudios.com/mot163> and <http://www.methodstudios.com/mot226> respectively.

¹² These three ads can be found at <http://www.methodstudios.com/mox164>.

In addition to these comparison-based ads, another and more recent approach (2004) dramatizes the foolishness of the smoker through dialogues in which two archetypal losers take turns in justifying their smoking habit with off-the-wall, jaw-dropping arguments. The ads in this “Great Reasons to Smoke” series target 19- to 24-year-olds, and the overall task was “to de-normalize smoking in a target market that feels invincible.”¹³ The actors chosen to perform in six of these eight spots, Paul J. Spence and Dave Lawrence, enjoy a unique status in Nova Scotia, stemming from their success in playing Deaner and Terry in the mockumentary *Fubar*¹⁴ (2002), now a cult film in a class of its own.

One of the ads in the series, “Live Longer,” will now be singled out for an extensive presentation.¹⁵

<p>LIVE LONGER</p> 	<p>Client: The Province of Nova Scotia – Office of Health Promotion Ad agency: Extreme Group, Nova Scotia Creative director: Shawn King Writer: Shelly Dwyer Production house: Spank Films Director: Sammy Ray Welch Agency producer: Mike Hachey Executive producer: Joel Awerbuck Launched: 2004 Running time: 30 seconds</p>
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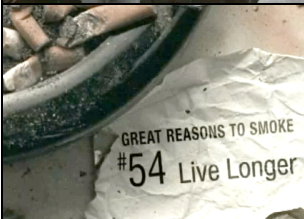


First a shot breakdown, with full dialogue, will give the reader a chance to appreciate the kind of reasoning in play when these characters explain the advantages of smoking.

<http://www.methodstudios.com/mox224> and <http://www.methodstudios.com/mox225>

¹³ <http://www.extremegroup.com/index.htm>

¹⁴ The title is an acronym for “fucked up beyond all repair.”

¹⁵ Live Longer,” as well as the seven other ads in the series, can be found at <http://www.spankfilm.com/frames.html>, under the name of the director Sammy Ray Welch.

	<p>Shot 1 (6 sec.)</p> <p>TERRY: The way I see it is like, I have to go and have smoke breaks three, four, five times a day.</p>
	<p>Shot 2 (5 sec.)</p> <p>TERRY: And you add that up over a whole year, and then you see it's like I got three or four days off.</p>
	<p>Shot 3 (4 sec.)</p> <p>DEAN: Not only are you getting more fresh air than everybody else. But you're also working less.</p>
	<p>Shot 4 (3 sec.)</p> <p>DEAN (lighting up): Work leads to stress, right, and stress...</p>
	<p>Shot 5 (4 sec.)</p> <p>DEAN: ...takes time off your life (spits). TERRY: Yeah, so like just relax and smoke.</p>
	<p>Shot 6 (3 sec.)</p> <p>TERRY (off-screen): I could possibly, you know, live <i>longer</i> because I smoke.</p>
	<p>Shot 7 (3 sec.)</p> <p>DEAN: (coughs) I wouldn't say possibly (coughs). I'd say (coughs again)...</p>
	<p>Shot 8 (2 sec.)</p> <p>DEAN (off-screen): ...for sure. TERRY (off-screen): Maybe. DEAN (off-screen) coughs again</p>

Three interviews – with the client, Nancy Hoddinott at the Office of Health Promotion (OHP), Province of Nova Scotia; the creative director, Shawn King at Extreme Group; and the writer, Shelly Dwyer also at Extreme Group – will close this section.

INTERVIEW WITH NANCY HODDINOTT (28 JANUARY 2005)

Did the Office of Health Promotion give Extreme Group any specific guidelines for this campaign? Was it a surprise for you to find the Terry and Deaner characters in the ads or was that part of the plan from the start?

NH: I wouldn't say we gave specific guidelines. What I did share with Extreme was the best info I had in terms of what kinds of messages worked with youth/young adults and my best advice given my limited experience. I would say we had more information about what didn't work, i.e. approaches not to repeat, and avenues of promising practice.

Terry and Deaner weren't part of the plan from the start, but through focus groups and testing of concepts Extreme had an image of the kinds of characters they wanted to present - Terry and Dean they felt fit the concepts perfectly. I will admit, when they first presented this idea, it made us somewhat uneasy, however, the development of this campaign has always been a partnership between the OHP and Extreme and my approach has been if the agency could provide a clear rationale for an approach, and one that did not contradict what we knew about the issue, I would support it moving forward.

While all of the ads in the series are brilliant, the "Live Longer" one stands out for me as the ultimate one in the series. Do you happen to agree?

NH: I personally agree, however, when we met as a team to review the eight GRTS [Great Reasons to Smoke] ads, what suddenly became evident was different people responded to different ads. That was the beauty of the series, better chance of resonating and impacting a broad spectrum of people.

I assume you are pleased with the success of this campaign. What do you see as its special qualities? What sets it apart from other anti-smoking campaigns and accounts for its effectiveness?

NH: I am pleased. We never imagined when we began this work with Extreme, what we would eventually achieve. It has been fun and I have learned a great deal. An evaluation of the campaign will be completed in a few days – that will be the real measure of success and I am looking forward to its conclusions.

I think what this campaign has done is change how, in this province anyway, we communicate health messages. I hope it has elevated the position of social marketing within health promotion strategies, and has paved the way for innovative campaigns in other areas (healthy eating, physical activity, injury prevention). Hopefully, and I think this has occurred, we have enhanced understanding of the breadth of social marketing and helped remove some of the barriers to effective campaigns.

INTERVIEW WITH SHAWN KING (13 January 2005)

Did the Office of Health Promotion give Extreme Group any specific guidelines for this campaign? And was it their idea to use the Terry and Dean characters or was it yours?

SK: Yes we had some pretty specific guidelines. Our challenge was to "de-normalize" smoking among a youth market. So first we had to get them to listen and then we had to get them to hear the message. Very different things. We knew from research that we shouldn't preach (they wouldn't listen) and that the continued "smoking is bad for you" message no longer resonates with that target. So we had to find a new way to reach them. Our idea was "Great Reasons To Smoke". As far as Terry and Dean were concerned; Shelly and I had used them on numerous occasions as character references for the directors. The director we chose (Sammy Ray Welch) suggested we simply ask them if they would do it. They loved the idea and jumped on board. We then sold the idea of using them to our client.

Where does Live Longer fit chronologically in the series? Was it by any chance the very first ad made in the series? While all of the ads in the series are brilliant, this one stands out for me as the ultimate one in the series. Do you happen to agree?

SK: A series of eight ads in total ran in this campaign. They ran in two flights of four. The ad *Live Longer* ran in the second flight of the series. We wanted to be careful about how sensitive people would be to the "Great Reasons To Smoke" message and make sure the audience understood we were telling people not to smoke. We felt that a message about living longer might be best aired after the audience understood the context of the campaign. *Live Longer* and *Better Manners* are two of my favourites. They are such insane justifications for why people smoke and to me, really make the point clear.

Did Paul Spence and Dave Lawrence participate at all in the development of these spots? Was there any improvisation during the shoot?

SK: What Paul and Dave do such a great job at is improvising. With these ads, we gave the guys a script only to discover very quickly, the way to get the best performance was to allow them room to work. We made sure they hit certain "hot buttons" in the script, but allowed them to get there however they wanted. We got some terrific footage that way. Some we used and some we couldn't, but it was a great way to get the guys into character and get the best out of them.

The images are given a somewhat distinctive look - rather pale, low-contrast, with a slightly greenish tint. What considerations went into choosing that look for the ads?

SK: As I mentioned before, the object of the campaign was to "de-normalize" smoking amongst a youth market. In other words we had to make smoking "un-cool". Unlike Hollywood features that portray smoking characters as cool, or the Marlboro man which was all about male "machismo", these spots needed to feel unhealthy. There was a risk that the kids would think the spots were funny and cool, so we made sure we had footage of them coughing, looking disgusted and basically unhealthy. We've dubbed these spots the "anti-Marlboro" man spots and the look was part of that.

What do you see as the special qualities of the campaign? What sets it apart from other anti-smoking campaigns?

SK: As far as I know this is a completely new approach to the anti-smoking message. We did research to find out how and why people justify their reasons to smoke. You can imagine some pretty incredible excuses and stories came out of those sessions. Some of the ads were a direct result of that. This was about holding up a mirror and demonstrating to the audience how ridiculous those reasons are. The execution has been able to tap into pop culture. We've heard stories of students dressing up as the characters for Halloween, and doing skits of the commercials at their school. That means they're listening – and to me that's a pretty special quality.

It doesn't preach and it isn't all about the "health-risk" message. But it's all there, in a way that is interesting and relevant to the target.

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the conception or meanings or making of these spots?

SK: Well I think it took a lot of courage for a client to understand the merits behind this idea and buy into it the way they did. There were a lot of questions and doubts along the way, but we had such a great working relationship that allowed it to get done. You can't underestimate the importance of that to allow great work to get done.

INTERVIEW WITH SHELLY DWYER (13 January 2005)

Did the Office of Health Promotion give Extreme Group any specific guidelines for this campaign? And was it their idea to use the Terry and Deaner characters or was it yours?

SD: The guidelines were to try and find a new way to get youth to pay attention to anti-smoking messages, considering the research showed that they tune out anything that sounds like preaching and that they are de-sensitized to scare-tactics, things like graphic photos of rotting lungs, etc. Research also showed that one thing that did seem to make them pay attention and actually upset them was their relatively new stigma as social pariahs, or the "unattractive" "undesirable" element of society. I remember in one focus group, a girl quietly whispered to a guy beside her: "I wish they wouldn't make us look dumb". Well, smoking is dumb and we picked up on this fear of being forced to look in the mirror.

The idea to use Terry and Deaner, the actual "characters" came from the director. However, during the concept and script development, they were always our sort of reference for the "undesirable" or "anti-Marlboro man" characters we had in mind. When the director actually suggested them, we knew we had found the right person to shoot the spots.

Where does Live Longer fit chronologically in the series? Was it by any chance the very first ad made in the series? While all of the ads in the series are brilliant, this one stands out for me as the ultimate one in the series. Do you happen to agree?

SD: *Live Longer* was not one of the original "scripts" but was one of the original "reasons" we developed. There was a radio campaign developed for this concept that talked about "fresh air" and "making life easier" and there were gems we gleaned from the focus groups about how: "if you smoke you work less 'cause you're always out for smoke breaks" etc., but there was no actual script for the

Live Longer spot. It was just a series of elements that, luckily, the talent brought together and built on. It is definitely the boldest "reason" and the one that perhaps hits home the hardest the ridiculous degree of denial that smokers shield themselves with. It was the one that we worried most about in terms of controversial language.

Did Paul Spence and Dave Lawrence participate at all in the development of these spots? Was there any improvisation during the shoot?

SD: Paul and Dave didn't participate in the development of the concept or the scripts, until the day of the shoot, which answers your second question. These guys had everyone's jaws dropping at their ability to improvise but not just for pointless fun, but because they truly understood what we were trying to do and added only the language and moments that strengthened the message. There was a lot of improvisation. And we have no problem whatsoever acknowledging that these were great spots, made brilliant by what the actors brought to it in terms of their remarkable ability to improvise.

The images are given a somewhat distinctive look - rather pale, low-contrast, with a slightly greenish tint. What considerations went into choosing that look for the ads?

SD: Again, the point was to strip away any hint of "glam" or "cool" that the tobacco industry had layered onto to smoking for decades. So, the look was as important as the message and the talent. We wanted the look to almost make you "smell" the smoke if you walked into their house. We wanted it to look like the smell is in the carpet, the curtains, everywhere. Again, the off-putting smell of smoking is another thing that smokers don't like to admit, but know it's something others find offensive. So yeah, we were going for a look that suggested smelly as well as a generally unhealthy environment.


What do you see as the special qualities of the campaign? What sets it apart from other anti-smoking campaigns?

SD: Well, simply that we came out and suggested that there are "Great Reasons to Smoke." That's a pretty startling message at a time that is seeing the strongest anti-smoking legislation being passed around the world. A time when tobacco companies are facing and losing class-action lawsuits. A time when there is no one on the planet who doesn't know that smoking is bad for you. To hear or see a message that challenges that and actually suggests smoking helps you Live Longer, well, if that doesn't make you stand up and take notice, nothing will.

3. The cynicism of the tobacco industry

With respect to shaping an unflattering image of tobacco industry executives as a way of discouraging smoking, two ads stand out above all others.

One is entitled “Industry Recall,” and is remarkable both for its elegance and its simplicity (it consists of a single, unbroken shot, with no camera movement whatsoever). A man who looks and acts the part of an executive, appears on screen and is identified by a text superimposed at the lower left-hand corner as “Robert Fitzgerald, Tobacco Industry Chairman, April 1, 2001.”

<p>INDUSTRY RECALL</p> 	<p>Client: The Truth.com, American Legacy Foundation Agency: Arnold Worldwide, Boston Chief Creative Officer: Ron Lawner Creative Director: Roger Baldacci Group Creative Directors: Pete Favat, Alex Bogusky Copywriters: Bill Hollister, Ari Merkin Art Director: Lee Einhorn Agency Producer: Amy Feenhan Production Co.: Playback Inc. Director: Pete Favat Editor: Deb Luchini Sound Designer: Mike Secher Launched: 2001 Running time: 60 seconds</p>
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This image and the spoken lines transcribed below are printed here with the permission of Arnold Worldwide and American Legacy Foundation.

This is what he says, in a sincere and utterly convincing manner, which needless to say leaves the viewer in a state of growing perplexity as the monologue continues:

Hello. With the mounting evidence linking cigarettes to cancer, addiction, emphysema, heart disease, and premature death, I want you – the American public – to hear directly from me what the tobacco industry is doing to take responsibility for this very serious problem. Effective immediately, we are issuing a cigarette recall. Every single cigarette in America is being pulled off the shelf and will remain off until we can with a clear conscience offer the American people a cigarette that poses absolutely no health risk. Because if there are two things the tobacco industry cares about, it is your health and your trust. Thank you.

The image is then cut to black, and our puzzlement is suddenly dispelled by the words “april fools” now appearing on screen and whispered in a woman’s voice-over, followed by a title bearing the “truth” logo and web address and the words “sponsored by truth.” We may now remember the date that had appeared along with the name and title of the speaker at the start of the ad.

This idealized image of the tobacco executive, as a caring and refined gentleman for whom the health of the public is *the* overriding concern, inevitably calls to mind its polar opposite: the image of “loathsome persons motivated by cynicism, greed and malevolence,” to quote a complaint filed in a California court by tobacco firms objecting to the picture painted of them in anti-smoking ads.¹⁶ In evoking an idealized picture by having an actor speak with such genuine decency the words no one will ever hear a tobacco executive pronounce, the “april fools” ad snaps into focus the mind-set and values driving the tobacco industry.

The other outstanding ad to be presented in this section, makes its case against smoking by likening tobacco executives to cancer cells. This ad is called “Growth” – the title referring both to uncontrollable industrial expansion, greedy for new markets, and to a tumor in the lung.¹⁷

¹⁶ “Tobacco execs launch attack on anti-smoking ads,” *USA Today*, June 9, 2003. Accessible at <http://www.smokinglobby.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=13>

¹⁷ This ad can be seen at: <http://www.methodstudios.com/mot508> And comments on the making of the ad by the cinematographer, Curtis Clark, can be found at: <http://www.kodak.com/US/en/motion/students/filmtech/30seconds.jhtml?id=0.1.4.7.4.10&lc=en>

GROWTH

Client: California Dept of Health Services
Ad Agency: Ground Zero
Executive creative director: Court
Crandall
Creative Director: Arty Tan
Art Director: Shawn Brown
Copywriter: Gregory Lane
Producer: Monique Veillette
Co-producer: Michelle Price
Production Company: MJZ
Director: Dante Ariola
Cinematographer: Curtis Clark
Executive Producer: Jeff Scruton
Line producer: Nadine Brown
Editorial Company: Cosmo
Editor: Katz

Asst. Editor: Tommy Immer
Post Producer: Tania Thiele
Post Exec. Producer: Yvette Cobarrubias
Telecine: Rushes
Colorist: Chaz Tucker
On-line & EFX Editorial: Method Studios
Visual Effects Artist: Russell Fell
3D Artist: James LeBloch
Apprentice Artist: Brandon Sanders
Inferno Artist: Chris Staves
Visual Effects Producer: Justin Lane
Visual Effects Executive Producer:
Neysa Horsburgh

Launched: 2004
Running time: 30 seconds

At the start of the ad, three executives are seated at the far end of a table in a large boardroom. The chairman says to his two colleagues: "Despite these obstacles, we've had a strong year... with tobacco revenues surpassing expectations." A new clone of himself suddenly bursts forth from his chest, and his colleagues also begin to produce clones, a multitude soon filling the boardroom as snatches of their conversation about expansion and markets can be heard. Soon there is no longer sufficient space for them in the boardroom, the windows of which eventually shatter from the pressure. The hundreds of clones gather down on the sidewalk outside the building, pressing forward in a concentrated mass that finally morphs into a tumor on a chest x-ray, over which is superimposed the title: "As they continue to grow, we continue to die." A follow-up title then appears over the x-ray, reading: "undo tobacco now."



These images are used with permission of Ground Zero and The California Department of Health Services, Tobacco Control Section.

4. The process of quitting

Most of the ads that focus on the difficulty of quitting the smoking habit use parodistic imagery of one type or another.

Some characterize the rejected cigarette as a threatening and intrusive presence, imposing itself on the quitting smoker like a jilted-lover-turned-stalker. This is the case with a brand new ad called "Suspense," made in the spirit of a Hitchcock thriller, and as the following storyboard clearly shows, the heroine ultimately triumphs, to the viewer's relief:

"SUSPENSE"

MUSIC: A tone of impending doom/horror movie style

Open on a woman, in her office. The phone rings. She picks it up.

WOMAN: Hello? (puzzled) Hello?

RACK TO A PAYPHONE OUTSIDE THE OFFICE, WITH ITS RECEIVER OFF THE HOOK, LYING ON SHELF. NEXT TO THE RECEIVER IS A SINGLE CIGARETTE.

Cut to the woman driving her car down the road at night

WE SEE THE WOMAN'S FACE, HER EYES DARTING AROUND – SOMETHING IS WRONG - SHE CHECKS HER REARVIEW MIRROR. HER EYES WIDEN...

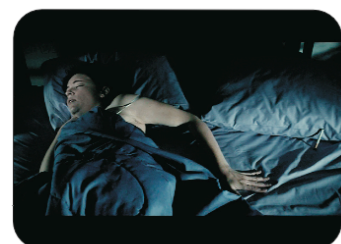
CUT TO HER POV OF THE REARVIEW MIRROR. THERE, PROPPED UP ON THE BACKSEAT, WE SEE A SINGLE CIGARETTE...SHE QUICKLY TURNS TO LOOK IN THE BACK SEAT AND WE SEE A SHOT OF THE EMPTY BACKSEAT. SHE TURNS BACK AROUND AND WE SEE A SHOT OF HER EYES DARTING AROUND.

CUT TO THE WOMAN, ASLEEP IN BED, FACING TOWARD THE SIDE OF THE BED AND TOWARD CAMERA.. HER HAND REACHES ACROSS THE BED TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BED, AND WE REVEAL A SINGLE CIGARETTE LYING ON THE BED. HER FINGERTIPS TOUCH IT AND HER HAND RECOILS IMMEDIATELY. CUT BACK TO A SHOT OF HER FACE AS SHE SITS UP, WIDE AWAKE AND SCRAMBLES TO THE EDGE OF THE BED.

CUT TO A SHOT FROM UNDER THE BED OF HER HAND SEARCHING TO FIND A HEELED SHOE ON THE FLOOR. SHE GRABS THE SHOE FROM THE FLOOR BY THE BED AND HITS THE CIGARETTE WITH IT TWICE, IN A STABBING MOTION, SMASHING IT INTO A PULP OF PAPER AND TOBACCO SHAVINGS.

CUT TO HER FACE AS A PROUD SMILE BEGINS TO APPEAR.

VO: For free help fighting your urge to smoke, call the Tobacco Quitline.



Used with permission of Sedgwick Rd and The Washington State Department of Health.

SUSPENSE¹⁸

Client: Washington State Dept of Health
Ad Agency: Sedgwick Rd
Creative Directors: Zach Hitner, Forrest Healy
Copywriter: Steve Payonzeck
Art Director: Eric Peterson
Agency Producer: Jenn Pennington

Production Company: Headquarters
Director: Eric King
Producer: Darrin Ball
Editorial Company: Cut & Run
Editor: Jeff Grippe
Running time: 30 seconds
Launched: January 2005

Other ads also depict the quitting process as the breaking up of a love relationship, with the woman taking the initiative to sever the bond, and the male/cigarette desperately clinging to a now defunct romance. A series of ads called “Smokeopera” tell this story, defining the cigarette as an infantile pest who won’t let go, and whose wining “you need me” and taunting predictions that she won’t be able to keep away from him for long, clearly motivate the viewer to root (playfully of course) for a clean break.¹⁹ The tagline is: “Need help getting out of a bad relationship?”

Yet another approach is to depict smokers using the wrong methods for breaking their habit, some of which are as elaborate as they are useless. In “Wolf,” for example, a fierce white wolf is stationed beside a table on which a pack of cigarettes has been placed. When the would-be quitter weakens and tries to grab a cigarette, he is chased away by the ferocious animal. In “Remote,” a man has a remote-controlled toy truck drive toward him with a pack of cigarettes, while his wife is stationed next to him with her own remote that guides a toy fighter plane to its target to bomb the toy truck. In both ads, after a title reading “What’s your plan to quit

¹⁸ Both the ad itself and a script are currently available at <http://www.quitline.com/tvads.php> Other ads on the same website dramatize the point that it generally takes eight attempts to quit smoking before success is achieved.

¹⁹ “Breakup,” “Packing” and “Stalker” – the three ads constituting “Smokeopera” – were commissioned by the Pennsylvania Department of Health and designed by The Neiman Group.

smoking?" a voice-over announces: "Quitplan experts help you develop a better way to stop."²⁰

Summary

What I have tried to provide in this article is a framework for charting anti-smoking TV spots, and an introduction to recent ads that are worthy of attention because of their inherent storytelling and motivational qualities and the clarity with which they represent a particular anti-tobacco strategy.

The following table, listing most of the examples cited above, may be useful as a schematic reminder of the contents of this study.

Harmful effects of smoking	<i>Joe Eszterhas</i> <i>Artery</i> <i>Emily, Mark</i> <i>A Man and His Horse</i> <i>Ghost</i>
The foolishness of the smoker	<i>Marker Man</i> <i>Barber</i> <i>Live Longer</i>
The cynicism of the tobacco industry	<i>Industry Recall (April Fools)</i> <i>Growth</i>
The process of quitting	<i>Suspense</i> <i>Smokeopera: Breakup, Packing, Stalker</i> <i>Quitplan; Wolf, Remote</i>

²⁰ These ads were made in 2003 by Clarity Coverdale Fury for the Minnesota Partnership for Action Against Tobacco.

Contributors

Brian Dunnigan

Born 1950. MA Sociology University of Edinburgh. Writer and journalist for BBC radio and various UK publications. Author of *Scottish Burghs* (Longmans). Graduate of the National Film and Television School. Award-winning short films include *The War Begins* (1983) and *Shark* (1996). Commissioned feature projects include *Eastwind* (1986), *Alice* (1993) and *Flight* (1997). Formerly Head of Screenwriting at the Northern Film School in Leeds, he has written for several journals and magazines including *Sight and Sound*, *The Journal of Media Practice* and *POV*. He runs storytelling workshops and seminars on an international basis most recently in Norway, Ghana and Cuba. Senior Lecturer in Scriptwriting at the London Film School. dunnigan@blueyonder.co.uk

Nikolaj Feifer.

Born 1981. Film director. Made several shorts, before directing his first feature in 2002. Teaches film history, theory, and editing in various public schools and high schools, and has given workshops on directing at the university level. nikolaj@feifer.dk

Morten Bak Hansen

Born 1974. MA in Music Studies and Film and TV Studies with a master thesis on film sound. Teaches film aesthetics and culture at the department of Aesthetics and Culture, Aarhus University and music at Marselisborg Gymnasium. Writes music for documentary and short fiction films. Has taught music composition on a feature film project and at the European Film College in Ebeltoft. mortenbakhansen@hotmail.com

Edvin Vestergaard Kau

Born 1947. Ph.D., assoc. prof., Department of Information and Media Studies, University of Aarhus. Teaches film and television theory as well as media analysis. Has written books and a number of articles on film theory, history, and analysis; multimedia; literature. Books include *Filmen i Danmark* (Danish film industry from the advent of sound till the 80s, with Niels Jørgen Dinnesen, 1983), and *Dreyer's Film Art* (1989, English edition forthcoming). ekau@imv.au.dk

Thomas Lind Laursen

Born 1972. Co-founder of the internet movie magazine 16:9. Teaches Danish Literature & Language and Film & Television at a high school in Aarhus. Previous writings on film have been published in *P.O.V.*, *Tidsskrift for børne- og ungdomskultur* and 16:9.

Mark LeFanu

Born in 1950. M.A. in literature (Cambridge University). Teaches film history at the European Film College in Ebeltoft. Contributor to *Positif* and to *Sight and Sound*. Author of *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky* (BFI Books, 1987). A new book, *Mizoguchi and Japan*, will be published by the British Film Institute in spring 2005. lefanumark@hotmail.com

Sydney Neter

Born in Amsterdam, 1965. Has been working in the film industry since 1989. Owns international shorts and documentary sales company, SND Films, since 1994, and heads Dutch shorts promotion foundation, House of Shorts. Works as the fiction shorts commissioner for the National Dutch Film Fund.

sydney@sndfilms.com

Richard Raskin

Born 1941, New York. Ph.D. and Dr. Phil., assoc. prof. Teaches screenwriting and video production in the Department of Information and Media Studies, University of Aarhus. Books include: *The Functional Analysis of Art* (1982), *Nuit et Brouillard* (1987), *Life is Like a Glass of Tea* (1992), *Kortfilmen som fortælling* (2001), *The Art of the Short Fiction Film* (2002) and *A Child at Gunpoint: A Case Study in the Life of a Photo* (2004). His articles have appeared in such journals as *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, *Film History*, *Folklore*, and *Minerva: An Internet Journal of Philosophy*. raskin@imv.au.dk

Gunnar Wille

Born 1946. He has been working with film, theatre and television since the early seventies. He has written, designed and produced six different television series. Written, designed and directed thirteen animated films. Written and dramatised eight series for radio. Written and illustrated twenty-two books, read by most children in Denmark. Written and directed nine theatre plays. Written and made voice-overs for eight audio tapes, all dramatised versions of his books. Since 1992, he has been head of the animation department at The National Film School of Denmark and a member of the board in The Danish Artist Committee. Member of Board of Directors of Cartoon, chairman of Cartoon Denmark and member of the Cartoon selection committee. Member of The National Film Board of Denmark. gunnarwille@gunnarwille.dk