

Interview transcript

The interview was conducted by Dr. Siegfried Tesche for FilmFestSpezial during the European Media Art Festival in Osnabrück on 29-04-2011.

Siegfried Tesche: Welcome to Osnabrück.

Robert Cambrinus: Hello.

ST: First let me ask you, there are videos or DVDs with Making Of's and there are many commentaries that you can optionally play while watching a film, but that was not on your mind when you conceived Commentary?

RC: Not at all but it was, of course, the trigger - that's clear. The question is, why do these commentaries exist? There must be a demand. Maybe because people want to have a film explained, because they might believe they may otherwise not understand it - the expert commentaries. Or maybe - in case of Hollywood blockbusters - to hear some gossip, what the film stars do off-set. But what interested me was to create quasi a genre through this reversal; to make the commentary, normally found among the bonus features, into the main film, thereby making the filmmaker into the protagonist and then to see what happens. It is part of a wider concept. This was just an occasion to use form to pursue a concept which I also explore in other films. It's plainly about the destruction of illusion. Film is illusion – that's a common cliché. Clichés have to be destroyed.

ST: But you consciously choose not to build in (obvious) mistakes. You could have said, I panned a little too far and we accidentally see a gaffer or the sound guy to show that something went wrong, that you have to do better next time, so that you put your own fallibility into the picture.

RC: That's what it is about. That's exactly the difference when you consider the voice-over in a documentary. That is problematic because it is the voice of God that explains everything and by doing so manipulates, devalues, and changes the moving image. In my case it is deliberately set up in such a way that the filmmaker admits his own fallibility. So it is not the voice of God, this all knowing power that tells the audience what to see, but rather the filmmaker joins the ranks of his audience. He watches his own movie. And he does not explain everything. He admits that he does not understand this or that; that also chance played a part in making the film. The viewers have to

answer their questions themselves at times. This means that a totally different space is created in which the audience and the filmmaker effectively come together and develop a kind of communication.

ST: If I can briefly interrupt you, at the very end you say that the end wasn't originally planned that way, that you find it too sentimental. Is that supposed to create curiosity in the sense of "I would have liked to see the other, the real ending"?

RC: No, it's exactly like it was. Well... Let me give you two answers to that. The first answer is: there was indeed an accident during the last scene, the camera somehow malfunctioned, the scene was lost; and that is what I mention in the commentary. The other answer is: of course, no matter how honest I am in my commentary, what you end up seeing and hearing on the big screen is also always just an illusion. That means, in the end I just substitute one illusion for another. But first I have to destroy the original illusion to create that free space. In that sense it is, of course, questionable if everything happened like that or not.

ST: Commentaries on DVDs are effectively PR (public relations). There wouldn't be an admission of an actual accident, for example, rather "That was a difficult scene but we managed it with great aplomb". That's how the PR department would put it. Would that also happen in your case, that you stick with an official line, or would you admit something along the lines of "At that point I was in a particularly bad shape, and that's why I shot a lousy take"?

RC: Well, I am very truthful in my work and the commentary is, of course, meant to be candid. But it would be absurd to demand from the audience that they have to believe it. That's what's so great, the viewer finishes the film, not the filmmaker. He only delivers a product to the best of his abilities but the completion of the film takes place in the head. Look, some film festivals screened my film in the comedy section. That is not what I expected but it is totally alright with me. If someone sees it that way... Who am I to tell them: "No, you have to see it differently"?

ST: What's the phrase? The film is created in the head of the viewer.

RC: That's it.

ST: Many thanks, Robert Cambrinus.