

The Life of Jesus by Bruno Dumont

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Director

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The thesis will focus on analysing what “*The Life Of Jesus*” is about and how this is portrayed through the main character, Freddy. It will discuss the concept of the filmic character as a “common human being”, who does not have access to intellectual reflection and verbal articulation of emotional conflict and crisis, but who, at the same time, is capable of feeling a great deal. He feels the emotional conflict and crisis that make up the story. I will also attempt to step inside the same filmic character itself and analyse how to visualize the morals, ethics and emotions that the character can't verbalize or communicate in any direct or intellectual way. Bruno Dumont speaks about filming the inside of a person as his highest dream. I will discuss film directing using *The Life Of Jesus* as an example, but I will also draw on my own experiences as a filmmaker.

KEYWORDS: *The Life Of Jesus*, Bruno Dumont, analyse, actor, emotional conflict



AN INSPIRATION

Introduction

The first time I saw *The Life Of Jesus* was in 2006 at the Polish National Film School in Lodz. At the time, I didn't know who Bruno Dumont was and I had no idea what to expect from the film. It was just another class and another film one of our teachers thought we should see. After the screening I knew immediately that I had seen something of great importance to me. I didn't know exactly what it was but I felt that the filmic language used by Dumont communicated with me in a way superior to any previous film experience. It had to do with how the actors moved and looked. How the landscape reflected their internal state of mind that they themselves were never able to articulate. And how the characters seemed to hate themselves for

not being able to articulate whatever they were thinking. How they seemed to be prisoners of their primitive bodies and inarticulate thoughts and, without ever becoming pretentious, longed for a bigger meaning that was always present in the film's language but never through the characters' language. How the strict cinematography killed life but, simultaneously, the film actually presented much more life than most other realistic dramas. How the film tells a story of reckless youth through a language that is not at all youthful or reckless. And how that gave the film a certain depth that I had never before seen in cinema. It influenced and inspired any serious work of fiction filmmaking I directed from that day on. In this thesis I aim to dissect what it is that attracts me so much to this particular film. It is not a thesis that aims to present the complete oeuvre of Bruno Dumont and his work as a filmmaker. It is rather a personal reflection on *The Life Of Jesus* and certain theories articulated by Dumont.

What interests me is life, people, the small things. Cinema is for the body, for the emotions. It needs to be restored among the ordinary people, who don't speak a lot, but who experience an incredible intensity of joy, emotion, suffering, sympathy in death.

They don't speak, speaking is not important. What's important is the emotions. It is for the spectator to make these things conscious, it is not for me to do it... The power of cinema lies in the return of man to the body, to the heart, to truth. The man of the people has a truth that the man of the city, the intellectual, has lost. (Walsh 1997)

The thesis will focus on analysing what *The Life Of Jesus* is about and how this is portrayed through the main character Freddy. It will discuss the concept of the filmic character as a "common human being" who does not have access to intellectual reflection and verbal articulation of emotional conflict and crisis. But who, at the same time, feels a great deal. Feels the emotional conflict and crisis that make up the story. I will also attempt to step inside the same filmic character itself and analyse how to visualize moral, ethics and emotions that the character can't verbalize or communicate in any direct or intellectual way. Bruno Dumont speaks about filming the inside of a person as his highest dream. I will discuss film directing using *The Life Of Jesus* as an example but I will also use my own experiences as a filmmaker.

What is *The Life Of Jesus* about

Bruno Dumont started making fiction films at a rather late point in life. He had previously been a teacher of philosophy who also shot pre-ordered industry films. For years he was filming candy-manufacturing machines, the building of highways, real estate attorneys' congress, and other seemingly banal projects. Dumont describes how, looking back on this period, everything he was filming, no matter how dull, became interesting, "I learnt how to make uninteresting things interesting. The way I work today is completely linked to those ten years of filming nothing." (Walsh 1997) At that time he was physically able to film the inside of a machine, something he would try to adapt to his fictional work with actors. His first feature film, *The Life Of Jesus* (original title *La Vie De Jesus*) was made in 1997 and is a contemporary drama about Freddy – a boy, living in Bailleul, Flanders who, after having completed high school, hasn't

cared much to find a job and prefers to ride his motorbike with his other unemployed friends. He lives with his mother who owns a small bar. He has a girlfriend, Marie, whom he'll love to death. And that is exactly what happens when the young Arab, Kader, starts approaching Marie. Freddy decides that the "dirty immigrant" needs to be punished for daring to look at his girlfriend. But it is finally Marie who decides to leave Freddy and instead accept the love Kader is showing. Freddy's desire for punishment loses proportions and he kills Kader. Freddy is immediately caught and the film ends with him escaping from the police station and hiding in the high grass of a farm field looking at the slowly moving clouds in the sky.

The main plot line is simple and without clever twists and turns. It is even a predictable story but there is a reason for this. The story is not the most important element. According to Dumont the audience needs a simple story to be able to relate and access the more important elements of the film. The story of a boy who commits a crime because of jealousy is the access point into a world of emotions and thoughts about universal existence. It is the relationship between the film and its audience that is the most important. Being the audience should not be simple and without effort. The film doesn't finish when the end credits roll. The audience finish the film when they keep thinking about it long after the screening is over. *The Life Of Jesus* is a film about the human being's longing for purpose. Or as Dumont puts it:

I had the desire to tell the life of Jesus. Not to repeat what everybody knows but it is the significance of that life that interests me. I invented a story to regenerate the meaning, to show that there is humanism in Christianity that they don't teach in the Church or in the schools. It is concerned with the power of man. I think that man has power. Man is elevated. At the same time, I think that man is also very base, like Freddy. I think that his life is suffering, pain, sadness, love, joy, sex. Evil is a part of life. It is necessary to confront it. Perhaps in that confrontation man can raise himself. (Walsh 1997)

Rise and find purpose. At the end of *The Life Of Jesus* Freddy is in complete despair. He has killed a boy. He has confronted his own evil. Only at that moment is he ready to rise and become something better or find meaning in life. Or only at that moment is he ready for the grace of God. The film finishes just as a ray of light appears and the possibility of change to something better begins. It is the audience's job to deal with the thought or possibility of change. It is more important for the real people to feel provoked to do something rather than the film offering a solution of what is to be done.

Throughout the film there are several scenes and moments that signify this meaning of the film. Or that ask us to look for a deeper meaning than the obvious story line. The film diverges most radically from the simple story because of the treatment of its "hero". Freddy is a hero born of the same stock as Hemingway's, Eliot's, and Antonioni's: characters desperate to discover communion, beauty, and purpose in an alienating and amoral world (Hughes 2002). Other, more recent, characters from big blockbuster films can also be found carrying these elements. Think of Forrest in *Forrest Gump* who says, "I might be dumb, but I know what love is." Forrest Gump remains pure by acting on emotions in a world that is forever changing and becoming dirtier. Forrest Gump is a feeler among thinkers, and we feel more by sharing a feeling than by sharing a thought. The key to the sympathy we feel for Forrest Gump and the key to his own sympathy for others is that he is not calculative. When he acts he does so because he feels it must be right. Another fitting example is the main character in David Lynch's *The Elephant Man*. John Hurt's character, John Merrick (the Elephant Man), is pure and that's why he gets ridiculed. As part of the audience I am very sensitive to such characters because their goodness is exploited for the cruel pleasures of others. I will always remember the scene when John Merrick walks down the corridor to throw his model city in the trash bin because someone

destroyed it for fun. What always gets me is the calm with which Merrick leaves his beloved model. He doesn't cry and doesn't seem to feel the pain I feel. And that makes it so much more painful. I get the same feelings from reading about Prince Mysjkin in Dostojevskij's *The Idiot*. Prince Myshkin believes in beauty and acts on emotion and is therefore considered dumb and naive by others. This is both a handicap and a weapon but Myshkin never uses his personality in any manipulative way. He just is. It's the same with Freddy. Dumont reminds us constantly of this brutal plight by lingering on shots of Freddy's body, which appears broken and punished. Scarred by frequent falls from his motorbike and ravaged by epileptic seizures. Dumont's broken heroes personify his idealized vision of the "ordinary people", who don't speak a lot, but who experience an incredible intensity of emotion. The big difference between *The Life Of Jesus* and the previous examples is that there is no context (society or group of people) that makes Freddy stand out. We like Forrest Gump, John Merrick and Prince Myshkin because we secretly know (even if they don't) that it's the context they live in that is stupid or deformed, not them. Freddy's world is rich in grey and lacks clear blacks and whites. Still I feel sympathy with Freddy because I know that he is not a bad person and I hope for him to discover that as well. In this way *The Life Of Jesus* is an internal drama rather than an external one. A psychological drama rather than a social one.

While visiting their AIDS-sick friend in the hospital, Freddy's friend notices a small painting on the wall depicting the resurrection of Lazarus. He looks over at Freddy and says, "Have you seen this poster. It's the story of a guy who came back to life." Freddy answers "Shut up!" and walks over to their sick friend who's lying motionless in bed, looking rather dead. Freddy puts his hand on his chest and stares at him as if wanting to resurrect him. But Freddy is not able to resurrect anyone. *The Life Of Jesus* is in a way the story of Jesus (Freddy)

in a world where there are no divine powers as described in The Bible. It's rather the quest of finding the divinity of man in a world where we are prisoners of our own bodies and there is no simple, greater meaning waiting for us. The divine power is inside us and Freddy is the one who will be resurrected only at his own will when he has destroyed himself. We are only able to resurrect ourselves. It's a story about the absence of God. We are reminded of this several times in the film by characters looking up into the sky as if trying to see God but not seeing anything.

The look of longing for purpose or communion, like when Freddy is looking at his AIDS sick friend, is repeated in different ways throughout the film. Very often the landscape is used. It even becomes one of the main characters of the film. After Marie has broken up with Freddy, he finds himself standing on a deserted countryside road with his moped looking out over the open fields. They are empty, peaceful and quiet. It's as if he wants to find an answer in the scenery of what the hell he's doing on this earth and why everything seems to fail. But there is no answer. Freddy starts his moped and crashes it on purpose into the ditch falling violently to the ground, collecting a couple of more bruises on his already scarred body. Looking at the landscape is not only a longing for an answer but it also reflects Freddy at that given moment. The landscape is never just a landscape. There is no point in just filming a landscape. There is however a point in filming a landscape through Freddy's point of view because it reflects his feelings and interior state. The landscape is particularly chosen to fit Freddy at that very moment. Dumont is interested in trying to get inside characters and using the outside to represent whatever was found inside. The locations are never just locations. In this way Dumont partly manages to film the inside of his characters just like he physically managed to film the inside of a candy machine.

In another scene Marie is standing in the ruins of an old church hugging Kader and asking

him to forgive her. Kader looks up to the sky as if waiting for a sign but there is none. The clouds just move slowly. According to Dumont the landscape is the inside of the character.

My dream is to film inside of people. As you know this is impossible, even when people make love, they cannot go inside each other – this is the tragedy of humanity. So I try to represent what's inside with the outside. A Landscape is not just a character, it's THE character. They are inspired by the sky but there is nothing in the sky, they're looking for God but God does not exist. They are connected with the landscape but something is missing, you can feel something is missing. I make films to film what I don't understand. The mysteries of love and evil for example. But films don't bring answers, they're not meant to, they're mysteries too and that's what I film. I think as filmmakers we continue to make films to repair the ones before, to get it more right. I try to make it better every time. I don't know if I do but I try and that's what it's all about. (Conterio²⁰⁰⁸)

I find this extremely interesting because it is a description of what, in my opinion, is one of the most powerful filmic effects. Observing a character who is not in touch with his/her feelings and who is not in any state to articulate what emotions exist inside the body. Still the filmic language gives the audience a chance to understand these feelings just like the non-verbal and non-intellectual character feels them. It's emotional communication on a very high level and brings so much more compassion and understanding for the character than any words would ever be able to describe. It is at moments like that when I find cinema moving. It is a purely emotional moment that I am happy to never be able to describe in words.

The common human being

The common human being in *The Life Of Jesus* is Freddy – a young man who does not intellectually reflect upon his own situation or existence in any verbal or communicative way. He does not have a higher education and he does not have any clear dreams of what he would like to become. He cares only about what directly affects him. But on the other hand he

feels a great deal. The problem is however that he is not able to understand or define what he feels. The longing for meaning, communion or purpose is a feeling too abstract for Freddy to ever verbalize. But he feels it and the emotion is strong. Dumont speaks of “the return of man to the body, to the heart, to truth. The man of the people has a truth that the man of the city, the intellectual, has lost.” He means that within this lays the power of cinema. But what does it mean? Most importantly his statement is underlining the importance of abandoning the intellect and giving space to emotions. This is however done by many filmmakers today and the common human being seems to be exploited by every reality show on TV. *The Life Of Jesus* presents a more complex image of the common human being. An image we are not used to but, in fact, holds more truth. In his article *Bruno Dumont's Bodies* Darren Hughes argues that:

Instead of simply turning a hand-held camera on 'real people' living 'real lives,' a manipulative fiction now broadcast nightly on network television, Dumont has rediscovered the transcendent and the beautiful in the common, by giving us stunning and often shocking images of the body. (Hughes 2002)

To provoke an emotional response from the audience Dumont has chosen to present us with images that we are not used to so that we might, to some extent, escape the image language we are used to and in that way stop using our intellect and resign to our emotions. This is a tough task, which might seem more conceptual than actual when watching the film. But I truly admire the idea of how he wants us to meet the characters of the film. While watching the film he wants us to meet on a level that is non-intellectual and non-verbal. Both the characters in the film and the audience return to the body of the common human being. A return to emotions.

Dumont has rather decided to use this kind of emotional approach towards story telling because it fits his point of view on the world and on existence. Even though audiences all over

the world have repeated emotional responses to far more accessible films than *The Life Of Jesus* this does not mean that Dumont's film would gain from using filmic elements in a different way to create emotional responses. A good example of this is when Dumont explains why he chooses to depict sex the way he does.

When I see a love scene with American actors in an American film, I find that there is nothing more intellectual. There is no sound of colliding bodies. They rather add some sweet music. The camera starts to slide over the bodies and ends up in the pillow to make us understand, without showing, that the characters are now fornicating. This is intellectual. I prefer the rawness of sex. The act of love is violent. People who love are violent. Penetration is hyper-violent. The sexual act is not sweet. It is a desperate attempt to physically enter another human being. (Pichené, Devanne 2003)

Dumont has not made a film that is supposed to be consumed as pure entertainment or to forget the bitter world outside the movie theatre. He clearly states that he has made a film that should not be complete and should therefore provoke us to finish it in our own minds. The film doesn't give answers. That is the audience's job.

All characters in the film are common people but they still have significant differences. The definition of Common People is used here as a broad roof under which characters of flesh and blood live. Freddy's mother is mostly to be found behind the bar where she, with one eye, tries, rather effortlessly, to look after her destructive son while the other eye watches the TV presenting images from all over the world. Images of starvation in an unknown African country, Tour de France and Sunday movies. The images pass through her without great effect. Just like Freddy, subjects that are not directly connected to her current situation do not touch her. She wants Freddy to get a job, but she only wants it to the extent that it won't make things more difficult between them. For example, she would never say, “*Get a job or move out.*” When Freddy and his friends molest a young girl after band practice, he is grounded by his mother.

Grounded as if he was half the age he is. Freddy is never asked to take responsibility or forced to deal with its consequences. He is never told to ask the young girl he molested for forgiveness. Freddy's girlfriend, Marie, has a job in the local supermarket. It is never clear why she loves Freddy and there probably is no good reason. Their relationship is kept together by the small town they are stuck in and by the fact that there is no better option. Marie is similar to Freddy but changes to the better. After Freddy and his friends have molested the young girl from band practice she leaves Freddy and accepts Kader's invitation. She experiences something better. Something she didn't know existed. Maybe it's tenderness. The paradox is however that this is something Freddy wanted to give Marie, but he didn't know how. That's also what provokes him to commit murder at the end of the film. Freddy wants to express himself. He wants to have sex in a violent way just like Dumont describes sex as a hyper-violent act of wanting to enter another human being. He wants to beat up Kader to the point where he depraves him of life. It is of less importance if his actions are good or bad. What is of most importance is that he wants something and that he loses control to get it. This is a greater sign of life than standing passively next to Freddy and never acting on emotions. Freddy's friends lack ambitions just like Freddy does. What keeps the group together is the small town they are stuck in, their motorbikes, the car they are fixing and band practice. The death of Michou's AIDS-sick brother shows us that they are unable to discuss the bigger aspects of life. In one scene, the gang, except Freddy, is fixing up the car and giving it a paint job. Michou says he can't be with girls anymore because he's mourning his dead brother. Gege asks Michou, "How does it make you feel?" Michou touches his black mourning ribbon that is tied around his wrist. "I don't know. I don't feel good." They are not able to discuss the subject further. This lack of verbal communication between the characters in the film gives birth to the emotional longing for purpose and understanding. They are

unsatisfied souls. However, this does not mean that the characters in *The Life Of Jesus* are doing it wrong. It does not mean that people who fit into the social groups of nobility or priesthood would get on better with life. But maybe the suffering of the common people is what Dumont calls the return to the body because the emotions are not filtered through the intellect. The death of Michou's brother is dealt with by another kind of tenderness proposed by Freddy. The gang takes a Sunday AT the beach. They do it in the name of Michou's brother but they don't speak about death. They don't try to comfort Michou with words but they take a trip in the name of it. Michou tells Gege, "Freddy thinks of everything. Freddy is a thinker." Maybe the correct sentence would be, "Freddy is a feeler." A young man, who leads a gang of apostles, has a Marie, lacks a father but has a mother, collects scars on his body as if he'd been flogged and finally resurrects with the possibility of becoming a better human being.

The *Life Of Jesus* according to Bruno Dumont. That is really what the title means. Just like the Gospels of Matt, Luke, Mark and John, Bruno Dumont has interpreted the life of Jesus. Jesus came from Galilee, a Jewish region in the northern part of ancient Palestine. In his book *Jesus The Jew*, Geza Vermes describes the region as...

populous and relatively wealthy. The reason for its economic well-being was the extraordinary fertility of the land and the full use made of it by its people. As Josephus (Flavius Josephus – a rebel commander-in-chief of the region during the first Jewish War, AD 66-70) describes it, it is "so rich in soil and pasturage and produces such variety of trees, that even the most indolent are tempted by these facilities to devote themselves to agriculture. (Vermes 2001, p. 28)

Geographically this northern district of Palestine was like a small island in unfriendly seas, surrounded by Roman Gentiles. It became known as the most troublesome of all Jewish districts in the pre-Christian century and was the core of revolutionary movements, which very much disturbed the Romans. The Galileans

were proud and fought for their independence. Their own country nourished them and they were able to live a very unsophisticated lifestyle. Jesus is to begin with

an appreciative child of the Galilean countryside. The metaphors placed in his mouth are mostly agricultural ones, as would be expected from a man who has spent the major part of his life among farmers and peasants. For him the ultimate beauty is that of the lilies of the field, and the paradigm of wickedness the sowing of weeds in a cornfield, even in one belonging to an enemy. (Vermes 2001, p. 30)

Vermes describes Jesus as a product of the Galilean society and this becomes especially interesting in the context of Bruno Dumont's film when exploring Jesus's antipathy towards Gentiles. "For not only did he feel himself sent to the Jews alone; he qualified non-Jews, though no doubt with oratorical exaggeration, as *dogs* and *swine*" (Vermes 2001, p. 31). A more concrete example is when a man from one of the Trans-Jordanian pagan cities has been freed from demons by Jesus and asks to join the fellowship. Jesus categorically refuses with the words, "Go home to your own folk..." (Mark 5: 18-19; Luke 8: 38-9). Jesus was finally, and most likely, charged, prosecuted and sentenced because he was considered a Galilean revolutionary and not because he was considered the Son of God (Vermes, Geza. *Jesus the Jew*, p. 32).

Freddy in *The Life Of Jesus* is, just like Jesus from Galilee, an uneducated youth who has grown up on the countryside surrounded by fields and farms. He has a mother but no father (if we accept the idea that Jesus was conceived by the virgin Mary and Joseph was not the biological father). Only once, during a conversation with his mother, is Freddy's father mentioned.

Freddy's Mother: When are you going to find a job?

Freddy: Stop nagging me.

Freddy's Mother: Jobs won't come to you. You have to go and look.

Freddy: I've looked but there is nothing. Stop telling me what to do.

Freddy's Mother: If I don't tell you, who will?

Freddy: My father was always telling me what to do.

Freddy's Mother: He won't like what he sees from up there.

Freddy: You're talking nonsense.

Jesus began working when he was about 30 years old (Luke 3: 23). Does that mean that he was unemployed, like Freddy, when he was in his late teens/early twenties? Was his father, God, looking down from up there, feeling unsatisfied with his son until he began his preaching? In this respect *The Life Of Jesus* could be looked at as the early life of Jesus that is by the gospels relatively undocumented.

Freddy has a girlfriend, fittingly named Marie, but he seems to be much more comfortable with his male friends (disciples) with whom he challenges the ghost rider of the red GTi (the devil or a demon) in road races. He has no respect for Arab immigrants and calls them dirty wogs. When Freddy, in the end of the film, kills Kader and is caught by the police, he is called a racist by the police officer. We, the audience, know that racism was not what fuelled Freddy's rage. It was jealousy. Just like Jesus, he is misunderstood when charged by the law. He is charged like a contemporary right wing European mostly found on the countryside. He escapes and wishes he could raise people from the dead. He wishes he could undo his actions. Is this what it takes for a person to change and become a better human being? Is this something similar to what made Jesus's family reject him while he proclaimed, "A prophet will always be held in honour except in his home town, and among his kinsmen and family." (Mark 6: 4; Matt. 13: 57; Luke 4: 24)

The Life Of Jesus shows what happened to Christianity after having been declared the religion of the Gentiles. It is a gospel of what has become of Jesus in a modern interpretation. How modern Christianity has declared war on the region that bred the religion we are now based on. How the modern Jesus is unable to heal others, and how he himself is actually possessed by illness (epilepsy). The modern Jesus is not being flogged; he flogs himself in frustration over the lack of divine powers.

New images

In an interview Bruno Dumont is asked if he considers himself a provocateur. He answers that provocation doesn't interest him at all, but that astonishment is something he finds of major importance. (Hall 2010). He wants the audience to feel astonishment. According to me this doesn't have anything to do with an astonishing or surprising plot development like a great turning point in the drama. It has more to do with the feeling we get from certain images. And I think that one of the biggest strengths of *The Life Of Jesus* is the images and not the story line. It is because of the feeling I get from the images that I am able to access the deeper levels of the film that are covered by a storyline I have encountered many times before. The images tell me to look for other meanings than the direct action present on the screen. The images need to have an impact (or be astonishing) for me to feel what's underneath the story. I have entitled this chapter New Images because I feel that *The Life Of Jesus* presents me with situations I have seen many times before on the screen but they are presented with what, for me, are new images fitted to a recognizable situation. The new images cause me to feel differently about a situation that is already known to me. The definition of an image in this chapter is a single shot but involves everything within that shot – the way the frame is composed, the face of the actor, colours, sound etc. The image exists in the context of the scene and the scene within the context of the whole film.

The first couple of images I want to analyse appear in a scene where Freddy and Marie have sex in a field. The action in the scene is very simple and very recognizable. The couple arrives on Freddy's motorbike, they park and walk out into the field. They undress and start having sex. When done, they sit together watching the landscape. Freddy rests his head on Marie's shoulder. Neither the drama nor the characters change in the scene. But the images speak of much more and when the scene is finished I feel a lot. The sex act is shown in two images. First a close up of Freddy's erect

penis penetrating Marie. The frame is filled with skin and body parts colliding against each other. Only some grass can be seen from time to time as the bodies move up and down. It feels like a hammer drill making repeated holes in some tough material. It looks brutal and there is nothing erotic about the image. Just like previously mentioned, the sex is hyper-violent. Like a failed attempt to enter another human being. The second image is a close up of their faces in profile. Again, a little bit of grass is visible in the foreground. They keep their heads over each other's shoulders and their eyes never meet. Their facial expressions are forced and they actually appear to be involved in something painful. Finally Freddy orgasms and falls down over Marie. Again, there are no erotic feelings connected to this image. The next image is a shot of a tree that has been split in half a long time ago and has continued growing in two parts. Freddy and Marie are not present in the image and in the context of the previous image it is not a clear point of view shot. The image lasts for eleven seconds and the only sound is the sound from the birds and the wind. Pure and clean nature. The next image makes us understand that the image of the tree is Marie's point of view. She is sitting next to Freddy who's leaning his head on her shoulder with closed eyes. She feels like that tree – split in half (physically and mentally). Still she is happy and smiles to Freddy.

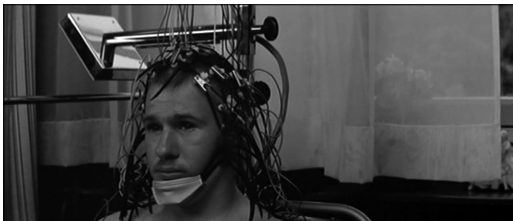
For these images (the scene) I feel a lot of beauty and a lot of sadness. Beauty because they go to a field to have sex, as if they were welcoming spring. Sadness because the sex is so instrumental and joyless. Beauty because Freddy and Marie seem to be very happy and united afterwards. Sadness because they are unable to look at themselves from where I am sitting. Maybe then they could have become more aware human beings. But on the other hand, maybe their momentary happiness is only possible because they don't contemplate their situation. Like they are both sitting in the Garden of Eden but there is no God. Both sad, beautiful and very true.



The next image I would like to discuss appears in a scene where Freddy and his friends are driving around the countryside on their motorbikes and suddenly a red Peugeot GTi comes racing towards them on the narrow road. *Last one to pull over wins* they scream and race towards the car. After the GTi has passed them and one of the boys has won they gather in ecstasy to decide who was the biggest coward and pulled off the road first. While they scream and laugh at each other Freddy falls to the ground and suffers an epileptic fit. His friends try to help him and it is at this moment that the image becomes very interesting. We watch Freddy's friend trying to help him in a full shot (we see them all clearly, full body, hunched over Freddy) and slowly the camera levitates and

slowly rises above the ground. The frame slowly loses the boys and soon we only see the wide landscape unfolding in front of us – full of fields and distant farms in a slight late winter/early spring mist and sunlight. To me it is as if Freddy's spirit is abandoning his body. The medical term might be that he suffered a Sudden Unexpected Death in Epilepsy (SUDEP). That would mean that his presence in the next frame (where we see that an obvious time jump has occurred – it is summer) is because he has resurrected. I don't mean to say that this information is directly communicated in the film. It is just my interpretation in the context of the title of the film. The camera levitating from the ground is extremely interesting because once again we are told a very different story by what the camera chooses to show. And if the camera has to be provoked by something or someone to make a move, I would guess that Freddy's soul is the provocation. The action in the scene shows Freddy having an epileptic fit and his friends trying to help him. The camera movement shows me that this moment is a transition into another, deeper layer of the film. The following image shows trees in full blossom. Summer. The camera pans down and pulls back. We still only hear the sound of birds and nature. Suddenly we come through a window and we see Freddy in a hospital bed. Chords and hospital equipment attached to his head. He is getting his epilepsy researched with an EEG. In the time of Jesus (the time of prophets) physicians, or doctors, were not looked upon favourably. "Recourse to the service of a doctor in preference to a prayer is held to be evidence in lack of faith, an act of irreligiousness meriting punishment." (Vermees 2001) In the end of the film we understand that Freddy does not need doctors, he needs redemption.

After Freddy and his friends have gone to the beach in the name of Michou's dead brother, Freddy returns home. He has an argument with his mother about finding a job. He walks outside and stands looking up the street towards where Marie lives. It's late afternoon and very warm. He sees a family with kids enjoying lazy and re-



laxing free time, eating ice cream. After a while Freddy starts walking up the street. We follow him in a long tracking shot as he passes his neighbours. Finally he arrives at Marie's house and just by looking at the windows he knows that no one is home. He turns around and looks down the street towards his own house. The camera is behind him, with his head in the centre of the frame. There is something strange about this little sequence where nothing really happens. There is a strange rhythm that slows everything down. I feel that this little journey shows the distance of how far Freddy could be from having something he desires – a family. And the distance is not great at all. It's just up the street to Marie's house. The effect when this becomes clear is powerful. At the moment, as

Freddy is standing looking down the street at his own house, it is not yet clear. But a second later, Marie comes and playfully jumps on him from behind. They walk over to the sidewalk and stand close to each other. The dialog that follows explains the rest.

Marie: Well, how did it go?

Freddy: Fine.

(pause)

We went as far as Dunkirk.

Marie: Really?

Freddy: Gégé even let me drive his car. We went really fast. We did something for Michou too.

Marie: Really? That's nice.

Freddy: My mum's driving me nuts.

Marie: Stop it! Your mum is great.

Freddy: You reckon?

(pause)

You stink of sweat.

Marie: You can be such an asshole.

Freddy: I want to make love.

Marie: And I want to go home because I'm tired. And my dad will yell at me. And you hurt me last time.

Freddy: What do you mean?

Marie: You hurt me don't you understand?

Freddy: I'll take you up the ass then.

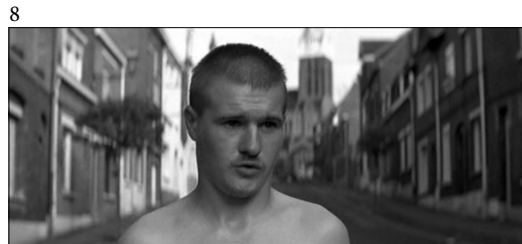
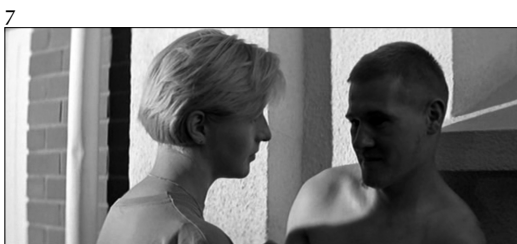
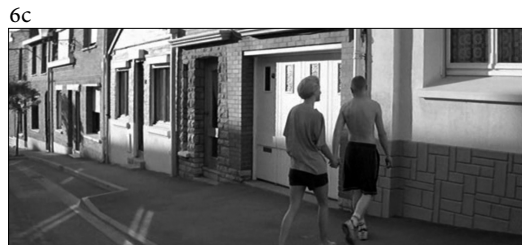
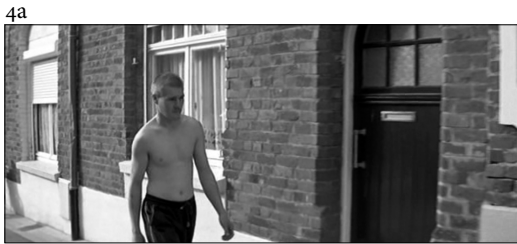
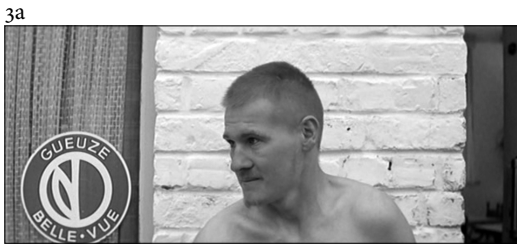
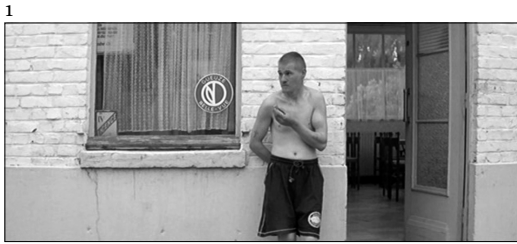
Marie: Stop being such a shit.

Freddy: I was only joking.

Marie: I hope so.

Then they kiss and walk separate ways. We follow Freddy in a long, frontal, medium close-up, tracking shot as he walks home. There is no narrative reason for this shot but I look at Freddy and see that he's not aware of the powerful dialog he just had with Marie. He's not aware of how much he needed tenderness at that moment and how much he wanted to share what he felt about the trip he just had with his friends. I find it moving and similar to the shot with the broken model I described earlier from *The Elephant Man*.

Each element of filmmaking (such as sound, frame composition, actors, location etc.) adds it's own layer to the storytelling. These elements have been chosen to appear as they appear so that they can serve the idea of the film in the best possible way and communicate this idea to



the audience. I choose to write about it because I very rarely experience this effect in cinema. It is the ultimate cinematic effect and when it is experienced everyone can feel it. It doesn't matter how intellectual or common you are. It's an emotional experience and partly what Dumont means when he speaks about return of man to the body. Similar to Rousseau's conviction that fundamental moral truth is just as accessible to the common human being as it is to the philosopher and that true happiness is to be found in our primitive state (Wood 2008, p. 53).

Hence although men had become less forbearing, and although natural pity had already undergone some alteration, this period of the development of human faculties, maintaining a middle position between the indolence of our primitive state and the petulant activity of our egocentrism, must have been the happiest and most durable epoch. The more one reflects on it, the more one finds that this state was the least subject to upheavals and the best for man, and that he must have left it only by virtue of some fatal chance happening that, for the common good, ought never to have happened. [1]

Rousseau insisted that man was born with the potential for goodness and that civilization, with its envy and self-consciousness, has made men bad. "Nothing is so gentle as man in his primitive state, when placed by nature at an equal distance from the stupidity of brutes and the fatal enlightenment of civil man." [2] Material progress undermines the possibility of true friendship by replacing it with jealousy, fear, and suspicion. In the context of Dumont's *Common Human Being* and the return of man to the body, Rousseau's argument is very relevant. In *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, Rousseau traces man's social evolution from a primitive state of nature to modern society. The earliest solitary humans possessed a basic drive for self-preservation and a natural disposition to

compassion or pity. They differed from animals in their capacity for free will. As they began to live in groups and form clans they also began to experience family love, which Rousseau saw as the source of the greatest happiness known to humanity. As long as differences in wealth and status among families were minimal, the first coming together in groups was accompanied by a fleeting golden age of human flourishing. The development of agriculture, metallurgy, private property, and the division of labor and resulting dependency on one another, however, led to economic inequality and conflict. As population pressures forced them to associate more and more closely, they underwent a psychological transformation: They began to see themselves through the eyes of others and came to value the good opinion of others as essential to their self esteem. Does Freddy's life falls to pieces as jealousy, fear and suspicion enters his Garden of Eden? Or is Freddy from the beginning Rousseau's nightmare and the product of failed society that spirals into more and more pain. Personally I think *The Life Of Jesus* has a greater depth than just a contemporary comment on France and western society. I am happy to think Freddy begins the film in something like the Garden of Eden where a certain harmony and agenda rules. The Garden of Eden is disturbed as the foreign element enters (Kader) and the woman makes her own decision (Marie leaving Freddy). Jealousy, suspicion and hate destroy Freddy and the agenda that ruled. The comment made in *The Life Of Jesus* is that The Garden of Eden is a rotten place that is allergic to life and change.

Rousseau's glorification of the natural human being should however, not be spoken about out of context. His standpoint was strongly connected to the debate on the concept of the Noble Savage – a construct of European exploration used to characterize the natives of foreign lands.

The term noble savage has a positive connotation. Those who prescribe to the concept of the noble savage believe that the native is "free from the oppressive bonds of civilizations... without social or

[1] *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1754), Part Two, pg 65 of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *The Basic Political Writings*.

[2] *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1754), Part Two, pg 64 of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *The Basic Political Writings*.

sexual restrictions". The noble savage is described as having a natural existence. The term ignoble savage has an obvious negative connotation. The ignoble savage is detested – described as having a cruel and primitive existence.[3]

Is the Noble Savage something similar to what Dumont calls the Common Human Being? A glorification and longing for primitive purity? In a New York Times interview from 1972 Stanley Kubrick said the following:

Man isn't a noble savage, he's an ignoble savage. He is irrational, brutal, weak, silly, unable to be objective about anything where his own interests are involved – that about sums it up. I'm interested in the brutal and violent nature of man because it's a true picture of him. And any attempt to create social institutions on a false view of the nature of man is probably doomed to failure. (McGregor 1972)

Dumont and Kubrick share a common interest even though they stand on completely different sides. Since none of them have made their statements as a comment on colonialism but rather as comments on the characters they film it doesn't matter if they are noble or ignoble. There is a deeper thought that surpasses constructs and classifications. Namely, that there is some truth to be found in people who are exposed in their most primitive and brutal state.

Dumont and Bresson

Truth in the primitive is something used very widely in filmmaking and any kind of art form. Bruno Dumont and Robert Bresson share not only this but also very many other similarities in their approach to filmmaking. They have a similar idea about the power of cinema and in what way it should be used according to them. To show this similarity I have decided to juxtapose quotes from Robert Bresson's *Notes on cinematography* with *The Life Of Jesus*. I believe this method will spread light over Dumont's way of working and put his method in a (film) historical perspective.

"DIVINATION – how can one not associate that name with the two sublime machines I use for my work? Camera and tape recorder carry me far away from the intelligence which

complicates everything (Bresson 1977, p. 72). Dumont means that cinema is for the body and for the emotions just like Bresson means that cinema takes him away from the intellect and it's analytical nature. The intellect destroys the emotion by naming and describing it. I feel very closely connected to this idea because it has to do with the big question: Why cinema? Why should a story be told through cinema and not written down in a book or debated in an article? Cinema is necessary to show emotions that we can't describe in words but that we can feel. Feeling what the character on the screen feels is powerful. Even more so if we can't identify the emotion but we know that we experienced a sudden connection. And if someone asks us why, we are unable to describe it with anything more than "Sometimes I feel like that as well." This feeling is divine. And what's even more divine is that Dumont lets his characters in *The Life Of Jesus* experience the same feeling. They are looking for us, the audience, who feels with them.

"To think it more natural for a movement to be made or a phrase to be said like this than like that is absurd, is meaningless in cinematography." (Bresson 1977, p. 4). However obvious this might sound it is still very rare in cinema and this quote goes hand in hand with another statement by Bresson. *Nine-tenths of our movements obey habit and automatism*. "It is anti-nature to subordinate them to will and to thought." (Bresson 1977, p. 11). This is all about letting life corrupt and infiltrate the sterile blue print of a film production. There is no escaping that we as viewers have certain expectations in cinema. We expect a certain reality on the screen however much it might derive from our natural behaviour in real life. It's a silent contract between audience and screen. When one character looks at another one it has to be a marked look, often very unrealistic from how we'd behave in reality. Another reoccur-

[3] Borsboom, Ad, *The Savage In European Social Thought: A Prelude To The Conceptualization Of The Divergent Peoples and Cultures Of Australia and Oceania*.

ring example is when a character lifts an object for closer inspection. In real life we probably wouldn't even touch the object, we'd see right away what is wrong or right with it. But for the sake of camera movement and suspense we accept this movement as believable. I'm not trying to argue that dramatic quality goes hand in hand with the ability to mimic reality. That is not the case. But very often certain movements or behaviour are removed from the actor's behaviour because it looks "weird" or "strange" in the camera. Unattractive movements. But once we see these unattractive or complicated movements that have no extra meaning we are surprised and fascinated by them. It's a fine balance between allowing strange life to enter the shooting but at the same time being aware of the audience reading meaning from everything shown. A good example of this is when Freddy in *The Life Of Jesus* has just left the hospital after having had an Electroencephalography exam (EEG). He takes his motorbike and leaves the hospital area only to, after a few meters, stop the engine, park on the sidewalk and take off his helmet. He then starts kicking the wall surrounding the hospital. His kicking is methodical and never out of control. There is something strange about this behaviour but I don't really know what. I actually think that it only looks strange on screen. In reality I'd say it's completely understandable. But since the screen doesn't show me how Freddy exits the hospital and slams the door shut and how he's breathing heavily before starting to kick the wall, I immediately react and look extra close. Whatever his behaviour, the action is concrete. Freddy kicks the wall. He hates his sickness and he hates the hospital. I just feel that this film is trying to tell me something in a way that maybe I haven't seen so many times before. This brings me to another Bresson quote. "Things made more visible not by more light, but by the fresh angle at which I see them." (Bresson 1977, p. 22). According to me this has not only to do about single shots but also about complete scenes and in the end the entire film. The quote can be followed up by: "An old thing becomes new

if you detach it from what usually surrounds it." (Bresson 1977, p. 26). I have discussed this earlier while describing how Dumont shoots sex scenes in *The Life Of Jesus* but it is also useful while discussing the example when Freddy kicks the wall because it's so simple. There is a close up of Freddy in the hospital. He's staring out of the window, observing the gardeners working the bushes on the hospital grounds. A nurse enters and tells him it's time for his EEG examination. The next shot is a wide shot of Freddy leaving the hospital gates on his bike. He stops on the road and gets off his bike and starts kicking the wall. After a while there is a medium shot of him where we see his face while kicking. It's so simple but I understand the atmosphere and the feeling of the whole film. Aggressions are hidden and they burst out when we least expect it. We have seen such scenes a million times before. Someone is unhappy with something but instead of showing it he/she hits the wall in the other room. But the way this sequence is shot, directed and casted makes it become fresh, new and unexpected.

"An actor needs to get out of himself in order to see himself in the other person. Your models, once outside themselves, will not be able to get in again." (Bresson 1977, p. 23). Bresson called his actors models. He was not interested in actors acting something they were not and reappearing in several films as different characters. He casted normal people who had a natural fit with the characters he had composed. Sometimes, probably often, the characters changed because the real person was so much more interesting. He never wanted his models to act. He just wanted them to be. "Model – preserved from any obligation towards the art of drama." (Bresson 1977, p. 29) Dumont uses a very similar technique. For him casting is the most important and time-consuming element. It's never about finding someone who can act the part of Freddy; it's always about finding a real Freddy. "I directed them based on what came from within them... I observed their body language and composed my shots around it." (Hughes 2002). There are no real actors in *The Life Of Je-*

sus, there are just normal people modelling as themselves because they fit the part. I find this approach very interesting because it touches the core of filmmaking. It erases the borders between documentary and fiction. It's about finding a person that is, in the best possible way, able to communicate what the director wants to say. It's about real people and real emotions meeting an audience made up of real people and real emotions. The effect, when successful, is difficult to describe but it's there, in the gut. "I can only form or shape what already exists. I need someone's truth to push him/her to be the character. I can't teach somebody how to be my character because I don't choose someone to be a character. I choose my character to fit the person acting, it's like a sculpture, the character springs from the person I've chosen to act and the actor makes his/her own character. It's very philosophical you see." [4] Bresson says more or less the same thing. "It would not be ridiculous to say to your models: I am inventing you as you are." (Bresson 1977, p. 14).

"To shoot extempore, with unknown model, in unforeseen places of the right kind for keeping me in a tense state of alert." (Bresson 1977, p. 12) I believe that one of the most important duties of a director is to push every artistic element outside the circle of safeness. By safeness I mean the comfort of repeating what we have done before, and know well enough, to not get too nervous or out of control about. A director needs to push an actor because the actor would by intuition and reflex choose a safer road if in charge. The difficult thing for the director is to push him/herself into unsafeness. The audience will only feel unsafe if the character on the screen is unsafe. And it's impossible to fake unsafeness. Dumont elaborates on this in the context of set design.

The most difficult is to make the set designer understand he/she shouldn't touch anything on location. After a long location scouting, the right place imposes itself and should be preserved intact, thus dismissing all the intentions mentioned in script. Any accentuation, characterization is out of question. The scenes will adapt to the real location instead, to

maintain the authenticity and truth of a living space with genuine history. (Pichené, Devanne 2003)

This is not a safe way of working because they are not in complete control. Dumont prefers the ingenuity of non-actors who do not resort to performance tricks. They don't bring in a "prepared colour". Non-actors convey with their real-life personality (which belongs to the story) everything that is needed for the film credibility. Acting virtuosity is prohibited. "I expect nothing, I wait for a miracle to happen, an accident," (Pichené, Devanne 2003) he declares. He knows exactly what he wants from the actors, so improvisation is not welcomed. And he makes sure the actors do not know too much about the action planned in a scene to preserve spontaneity and surprises. He's very demanding with actors, pushing them to their limits, against their resistance. And then being able to give up when it fails to happen, dropping the scene altogether. There are a lot of wasted out-takes. He's not constrained by script imperatives. He lets chance and accidents rewrite the course of the story, according to what succeeds or not during shooting. What he likes is to work where the sense is gone. Reality offers the presence of things that do not imply a narrative construction. Dumont struggles against construction. Dissipate sense. Prevent an actor to formulate meaning. Make the auteur (ego, gaze) vanish. Because the non-neutral audience is there, coming in with their own emotional load (desires), and a need of sense. The viewer is "full". The heart of the work is in the story (conveyed by actors and scenes), the goal is to carry this story. Takes can be or should be mediocre, unfinished, spontaneous and real. They should move away from the overstated stylization. He says "cut" when he feels the exposition of the audience was sufficient. Cinema is in the montage, that's where Dumont gives meaning. Associating banal shots that will surge with an extraordinary exposure on the editing table by ways of confrontation with another flat shot. The film is a "viewer montage". What is edited

[4] Conterio interviewing Dumont

isn't what is seen on screen but the sensations, culture, experience, sensibility inside the audience. (Pichené, Devanne 2003). The thrill is generated by an alteration of the viewer's habits by projecting something unusual. The film is a go-between, which leads the scenario and mise-en-scene to operate from the audience.

Directing

My film is not cinema of reality. Reality does not interest me. The representation of horror and love interests me.

Bruno Dumont

For the director to be able to push the artistic elements outside the safe zone, he/she needs to be able to resign to intuition and emotions. This is only possible if extensive preparations have been made before the actual shooting and directing begins. It's arriving on set knowing exactly what you want and need to shoot and then allowing to improvise and loose yourself to intuition and emotion because there is always a safety net to fall back on. All the intellectual work has been done earlier so during the shooting life and surprise is allowed to re-enter. Filmmaking is about confrontation and allowing confrontation to happen. The confrontation between the film and its audience, between what has been planned and what happens, between words written in a script and the actions of a casted actor. It is impossible to predict all these confrontations, and trying to control them is not only boring but it's also an attempt to prevent life from entering the art we are trying to create. Art that is eventually about life. Bruno Dumont explains that he has always liked working with people who contradict him. That he prefers working with strangers. "Almost all my DOP's normally shoot comedies. I'm not interested in the guy who drank Pasolini all his life. I like confrontation because it's really rewarding." (Pichené, Devanne 2003). I have always found this contradiction amazing because filmmaking, as I know it, is a production that requires a very high level of control. Finan-

cially it requires huge amounts of money from many different sources tied to a crew of many different people with different responsibilities who are all trying to pull the production in one direction as smoothly as possible. And at the same time there is the director who fights to bring life and surprise into this controlled machinery. *The Life Of Jesus* and Bruno Dumont's directing is a good example of this conflict because in its visual and audial form the film is very controlled but the actors are not. Well, the actors are controlled and directed but this life that we so desperately seek shines through them and not through the improvisations of intuitive camerawork. This is eventually what allows the camera to tell a different story from what the actors' actions are telling. Dumont means that the actors hold the truth of the scene so he, as the director, is there to make sure that they do not deviate from who they are. "It is she (in this case an actress) who has the truth to her tears, not me. I will not tell her to weep like this or like that. She walks like she wants and she cries like she wants." (Pichené, Devanne 2003)

The emotions are always very clear and direct. The spectra of manners in which they express themselves are not covered by irony, sarcasm or emotional manipulation. Behind these clear emotions, in the unconscious there is a backdrop of existential doubts and urge of meaning. But that backdrop never makes them analyse their own behaviour further or question their actions. They never become aware of the backdrop. So for directing actors the whole idea of the unconscious backdrop is uninteresting and shouldn't be presented to the actors as something they could use. The backdrop will exist in the final film thanks to aware and good directing, camerawork, sound and editing. After having found a good cast for the character of Freddy, the actor only needs to follow the narrative storyline and be himself in an artificial situation. After Freddy has escaped from the police station he lies in the grass of a field and watches the sky. He's there because he doesn't have anywhere to go and he doesn't know what to do. The sequence is moving and

profound on the screen. It shows how Freddy is touched by the sun from the sky and is now finally able to become a better person since he is becoming aware of himself. But the actor never acts anything of this. He's just on the ground looking at the sky. Since the character is not yet aware of the deeper layers of his situation, the actor shouldn't be so either. One of the trailers to *The Life Of Jesus* shows interviews with the actors. A cameraman asks if they know why the film is called *The Life Of Jesus*. Marjorie Cottreel who plays Marie says, "I'm not too sure. But I don't think it has anything to do with the film." David Douche who plays Freddy says "It's called *The Life Of Jesus* because it's about good and evil." Steve Smaghe who plays Robert says, "Why *The Life Of Jesus*? Well, I don't know... There's a lot of violence in the film and all. I'm not sure I understand the title." Kader Chaatouf who plays Kader finishes the trailer by saying, "It's about everyday life. About what happens everyday." At a quick glance and based on these answers it feels as if the actors are very similar to the characters they portray in the film. There is footage from the making of *Mouchette* (Bresson 1967) and the cameraman asks the actor Jean-Claude Guillbert about his experiences as an actor working with Bresson. "It's mindless work. I take no initiative. I don't have to use my brain at all, assuming I have one... It's a tiresome work, but we often do tiresome things if they pay well. It's nothing to be ashamed of, it's just mindless." According to IMDB (www.imdb.com) David Douche (Freddy) has never acted in another film. There are only two actors that I have seen in more than one Dumont film. From rumours I've heard that most of Dumont's actors never wished to work with him again.

This kind of directing works almost exclusively with amateur actors and not with professionals. It works where the actor doesn't feel a great need to invest personally and provide creative input. The rules are more or less what Jean-Claude Guillbert described his work to be on the set of *Mouchette*. The effect is sometimes amazing because there is a certain detachment in the actors face. As if they didn't understand

the drama, just like they don't understand the title. It is very closely connected to the visualization of the inarticulate mind not being able to make sense of intense emotions. Workwise it's a complete dictatorship where the director provides the purpose and the actors follow orders without questioning them or even knowing the greater purpose. It's a paid job. It's providing a service and then someone else does something else with that service. At the same time Dumont says that "I feel I have a political duty to reach out to the general public. I want to make films that the people want to see. So if the people want to see Johnny Depp or Tom Cruise, then it is really my job to incorporate them into my films." I wonder if that kind of collaboration would be possible?

I guess the paradox of Bruno Dumont is manifesting the return of cinema to the common human being but at the same time being very far from that same commonness. In his latest films I feel that Dumont is more and more letting his storytelling change. From simple stories with divine undertones (*The Life Of Jesus*) to divine stories with few undertones (*Hadewijch*, *Outside Satan*). Dumont's main interest is religion but when his storylines become too religious the religious comment becomes too accessible and loses its mystery and thought provoking power. At the same time the storyline becomes much less common, less accessible and more extraordinary. The power of his cinema is filming faces that truly don't understand or even see the bigger drama that we, the audience, feel thanks to the filmmaking. When the faces have to understand the bigger perspective and emotions, because it is part of the storyline the effect disappears. We no longer feel that there is a hidden communication that is not mentioned directly on screen. Or it becomes slightly too exaggerated like in Dumont's latest film *Outside Satan* when a detached face (similar to Freddy) is a prophet able to perform miracles. I personally feel that Freddy's hidden and very subtle signs of prophecy in *The Life Of Jesus* are much stronger and more emotional because they never take centre stage. The directorial style and

the theme of the films remain the same but the choice of story has radically changed. I think Dumont was right when he said that the deeper meaning of the film needs to be covered by a banal story so that the audience can access the film. But when his storyline stopped being accessible I find myself struggling to even see the deeper layers. Or maybe there are none.

Inspiration

The main goal of this thesis is for me to be able to connect its content to my own practical work. By studying and writing about *The Life Of Jesus* and Bruno Dumont I help defining and understanding my own field of interest. The emotional and thought provoking effect *The Life Of Jesus* has had on me is an effect similar to what I want audiences to have while watching my films.

Currently I am writing a feature film script called *The Here After*. John, 17 years old, has just been released from jail after having served a juvenile sentence for a murder he committed when he was 15. He returns home to his father who has done everything to set up a new beginning for his son. A new beginning with no room for the past. Only when John accidentally encounters the mother of the girl he killed does it become impossible for him to ignore the fact that his crime is still very present in the community. Still John tries to live according to his father's expectations and plans. He starts school, tries to spend time with old friends and even gets a new girlfriend. But pretending to move on makes John become violent and self-destructive and his behaviour provokes a lynch-like atmosphere in the small community. And when finally the true feelings of hate and fear surface in the people surrounding him John understands what needs to be done. He returns to the scene of the crime and confronts the mother of the girl he killed, seeking what he's been lacking – punishment.

The idea that continuously attracts me and that I want to explore through *The Here After*, is the story of a teenager, almost a child, that has committed a murder and after having served his

sentence is persuaded to return to his old community and 'normality'. What no one knows is that the boy does not yet feel he has been punished for his crime. This is a feeling buried deep inside the main character and it takes the whole course of the film for him to understand this brutal emotion. The journey of the main character is a journey into himself. An exploration of a painful inner conflict where one side of the main character unconsciously strives towards destruction and the other side intuitively seeks love and someone who can save him.

The *Here After* will be a realistic, contemporary and unsentimental film. A story told with cold images portraying characters that all suffer from numbness and the inability to express their true feelings. Images that, even when events are extreme, will keep cool and ruthlessly leave the audience to judge the characters by their actions. In other words: a camera that doesn't cry. This idea is connected to the location in which the story takes place. The countryside and its nature will be used to portray the inner state of the characters. The countryside will exist like a vacuum, almost devoid of people, silent and reserved on the surface, but filled with paranoia and fear underneath. However, through nature the main characters also find comfort. Irrational nature becomes a sign of life being too complicated to always rationally understand. The camera will, like the nature, look at the characters without the moral and ethical system we base ourselves on. We are part of nature and not the other way around. We are part of something bigger that doesn't understand the human confusion over awareness and existence. Our prison is realizing that we will never get an answer and we can only save ourselves – something the main character eventually understands.

Music will be used sparsely and never in an emotionally suggestive manner connected to the main character. The countryside is already filled with sound that will be used in a creative way. An airplane passing by, trees falling in a distance or the wind suddenly changing can equally strongly serve the drama in a scene

without drawing attention to itself like music does. This idea goes hand in hand with the visual use of the countryside and the location taking the place of a character in the film. Music will be used at very specific moments when there are no human beings present. It will be used in small intermezzos as the seasons change and nature takes on different colors. At those moments the music will make itself heard and not try to be unnoticeable.

The Here After is a film that aims to find humanity in places where we least expect it. A film that encourages its audiences to take a second look at people we'd rather not be compared with, because sometimes it hurts to understand that we are all very similar. The difference between "us" and "them" is really very small.

Themes dealing with evil and destructive parts of human behavior have attracted, moved and fascinated me for a long time. I have explored it in two of my earlier short films: *Echo* and *Without Snow*. It was very much *The Life Of Jesus* that inspired me to keep on exploring the complicated relationship and co-existence between good and bad. It also made me understand how good the non-verbal, non-intellectual character (the common human being) works on the screen and in emotional connection with the audience. For *The Here After* it is extremely important that the main character does not understand his own feelings. That he suppresses them instead of dealing with them. Actually this is something most characters in *The Here After* suffer from. The intellectual explanation to this is that they are too scared of what they might find if they start digging into themselves. To me it is a vital entrance point for the audience to connect with the film's characters. We are drawn to search for meaning and explanation. We wish for the internal conflict to be solved because then the character gains insight and can change by own force. The internal conflict is emotional. We can relate to an evil act but we can't relate to evil. Evil is finding pleasure in hurting others, mentally or physically, only for the sake of personal satisfaction. An evil act can, however be committed by anyone. The con-

science makes the difference and we can relate to the internal conflicts that might follow. Am I evil if I committed an evil act? Will I repeat what I did? Is it easier to do evil than good? The journey for the main character to find out makes us look at ourselves in relation to what's happening on the screen. In this regard I have been strongly inspired by Freddy in *The Life Of Jesus* – a boy who commits an evil act but is not evil. The evil act is a result of the confused mind unable to deal with feelings. This is of course not a character exclusively to be found in *The Life Of Jesus*. But it's where I found him.

I have chosen to set *The Here After* on the countryside where nature, isolation and distance can play a central part in the story. There are many reasons for this. Some of them are inspired by *The Life Of Jesus* and some of them are not. First of all it's important and crucial for *The Here After* to present a small community where everybody knows each other and everybody knows that the main character has committed murder. Without this plot element I wouldn't have a story. Mainly because it is not a story about the main character escaping from society or not wanting others to find out about his past. It's a story about the main character dealing with what he is and eventually accepting himself. Just like in *The Life Of Jesus* I want to tell my story and portray my characters in the context of nature but I have no wish to make a religious comment or have my characters searching for a non-existing God. The paradox of nature is that it plays such a big part in our lives but at the same time we are unable to connect with it. Our consciousness and awareness allow us to not feel part of nature even though we are dependent upon it. Nature doesn't judge us so we have to judge ourselves. In *The Here After* the main character finds comfort in nature because it doesn't judge him. But at the same time this means that he has to judge himself. There is something religious about this argument but it's not forced. To some this might be the definition of the presence of God within us as a moral standard. To some it might just be the way it is. Our own little mental prison we struggle with

till we die and no one except human beings will have any understanding for it. Following is a sequence from my script between John, his mute grandfather and his younger brother that I feel catches these ideas.

Int. Martin's farmhouse / Living room. Day

Bubbly saliva has gathered all around the dog's lips and nose. Some of it has landed on the carpet forming a small and pathetic puddle. The eyes are wide open and looking in all possible directions as if trying to escape from the skeletal holes they are stuck in. The breathing is heavy but the mouth still closed. TINY, a big Rottweiler, is lying on the living room floor, stuck in a motionless position she will never get out of. The panic in the animal is horrible just because the unawareness of the concept – panic. For this Rottweiler it is just another unexplainable emotional state. Tiny just is.

BOSSE (80 years old) is sitting in his resting chair, watching his pet. He does nothing. He just stares. JOHN (17 years old) is sitting in the sofa, not really doing anything differently from what Bosse is doing. But John doesn't have the same emotional calm. It's like he'd want to do something but does nothing. Or maybe he's just ashamed of watching this kind of suffering. FILIP (13 years old) is sitting next to Tiny, gently stroking her over the ribcage and stomach. He puts his head close to Tiny's face and kisses her.

Filip: Should we call the veterinarian?

He looks up at Bosse. So does John. But they get no answer. Filip continues with the impossible – trying to calm Tiny down.

Filip: How old is she?

Bosse wakes up for a second and looks at Filip. He shrugs his shoulders and tries to say something but no words come out. He signals with one hand. Something like 20 years old. But in the end it's difficult to tell if he's just flipping dirt from his fingers or actually trying to communicate the age of his pet.

Filip: I'll call the veterinarian. They can come with a car. I've seen it.

Filip gets up when he gets no reply.

Filip: I'll just need to google the number.

He leaves the living room. A moment of nothing passes. Suddenly Bosse gets up and walks over to Tiny. He kneels down, with difficulty, and tries to

lift the big dog. It only becomes possible when John helps him. John doesn't ask any questions. He can see that Bosse knows what he's doing. The animal finally rests in Bosse's arms and he starts walking towards the main entrance. John follows him but stays in the doorway when Bosse walks out into the garden without putting on his shoes. He carries the dog to the field that starts where the garden ends. The old man takes a step over the small ditch and is only able to, as gently as possible, throw the dog to the ground. He then starts walking back towards John and the entrance of the house. Filip comes running and joins John.

Filip: I have the number. It's in Backa but I think that's the closest one, right? Dad doesn't answer his phone.

Bosse enters the house and walks past them.

Filip: What's he doing?

John puts on his shoes and walks out into the garden...

Ext. Martin's farmhouse. Day

...and towards the field. Filip stays behind. John finds Tiny in the high grass. Still breathing and behaving like when she was on the floor in the living room, but now in a much more uncomfortable position. Slightly on her back with one paw involuntarily reaching towards the sky. John just stands watching her until he hears Filip screaming from the house.

Filip: Grandpa! Stop it!

John turns around and sees Bosse approaching him with a shotgun. Bosse arrives, closes the weapon and points the barrel towards Tiny. John only blinks when the shot is fired. Filip screams from the house. Tiny is dead.

Ext. Forest. Day

John is carrying Tiny's body in a black plastic bag. He's walking on a small path together with Bosse who's carrying a shovel.

Cut to:

A hole has been dug in the ground. Tiny's body is uncovered and thrown into the hole. John looks at Bosse for confirmation before he starts covering the body. It's a peaceful place. No human life in sight. Bosse looks kind of bored and seems more interested in the noise from a bird that can be heard from somewhere up in the trees.

Even though John is not very active in this scene it has a huge effect on him in the context of the film and the murder he committed. For the first time he sees a person (his grandpa) who acts concretely out of what is necessary. The dog has no function anymore and should die. This is something John finally believes should be his fate as well. Bosse represents the cruelty of life. We are born alone and we die alone. He is mute just like nature and doesn't feel judged by anyone.

This way of thinking and discussing my own story makes it very easy for me to understand how my camera should work. As I previously stated, the camera will take the role of the non-judgmental nature. To me it is about visualizing that thought and being able to use it for more than just theory. It's an extension of the thought. Still it doesn't yet tell me where exactly the camera should be placed but I don't need to know that yet. I can feel the rhythm and I can see the temperature of the images. I know that the moment when Bosse shoots the dog should be shot like he was just giving the dog a piece of candy. The drama is in the scene and the camera does not need to underline it. Actually I believe that by not underlining it the dramatic effect becomes even stronger. The camera speaks the language of the characters (Bosse and John) and the language of the non-judgmental nature.

The choice of actors and the work executed with them has to be as intuitive and organic as possible. I don't believe that there is any strict theory that can be taught. Knowledge and theory of how others work or have worked with actors can only be used as a door opener to a room where intuition and gut feeling is the essence. Trying to apply the way Bresson or Dumont work with actors to my own process would be a huge mistake and a ridiculous attempt. That would be like trying to Google the answer to people's feelings instead of trying to co-exist with them. I need my actors to want to act. They don't need to be actors but they need to want to make a film with me. I don't want them to be indifferent models that have little

understanding of what it is they are taking part in. I want to rehearse a lot and I want to discuss the story with them. Maybe not in the way I am discussing it with myself but in a way where we can understand it together. I believe in building a trustful relationship with the actors so that I can later push them as far as I want knowing that they will not leave the set even though the set is ugly and painful. In comparison to *The Life Of Jesus* I am looking to put the actors in a more emotional state. Bruno Dumont can't make Freddy cry because I don't think the actor who plays Freddy would ever do it. He doesn't know how to cry on demand so Dumont makes the story by only using behavior that the actor is familiar with and ready to share. I very much respect this way of working but I wouldn't feel comfortable with it. I want my actors to do things they would normally not do in front of other people. But I don't want them to fake it. Just like Dumont, I believe that casting is key and the person casted holds the rights to his/her tears. I am not allowed to ask them to cry like this or like that. They cry like they cry. But by building a trustful relationship I can push them to experience their tears for real even though the camera and the team is watching them. Still they will know that it is for the good of the film. We should all do what's best for the film and not what is best for us. Kill the ego and serve the film.

A couple of years ago I made a short film about an 18 year old boy who murdered a teenage girl and must relive his crime during a crime reconstruction led by a psychologist and a meeting with the parents of the murdered girl. I wanted to make a short film that would explore the darkest sides of the human being that were not to be connected with psychopathic behavior. In other words, I wanted to make a film about the darkness that exists in us all. I strongly believe that everyone is able to commit horrible acts of pain, mentally or physically, towards themselves or other people. I believe that this is in our nature and that we very rarely are in control of this side of our behavior. It's a side we do not feel

is part of us because we cannot control it. In the film's last scene the main character, Arek, meets the parents of the girl he murdered in a prison visiting room, which results in Arek having a complete break down. Arek's break down was to show his own inability to understand what he has done. His own inability to logically deal with his emotions of guilt and fear. As if there was nothing left in him except animalistic fury, childish innocence and guilt. This was the scene I was most scared of doing. I knew that this scene had to be a surprise to me and I couldn't control it. I knew that I couldn't rehearse this scene because then it would be controlled and uninteresting. The scene would take place one time and one time only, and that would be during the shooting of it. But one very important thing for me was to check if my 19 year old actor, Arek, was able to get to the emotional level that results in a complete break down. I decided to test him without any other actors present just to see how far I could push him. We sat down in a room and started talking about the scene first. I explained to him how I pictured it and what emotions I thought were going through his characters head. When he said that he more or less understood I told him to take a seat on a chair in the middle of room and show me those feelings. I very coldly asked him to try to reach these kinds of emotions. He looked surprised at first but then sat down and started concentrating. While he was doing this, I turned on my computer and connected a pair of loud speakers to it. In a sound program I had already prepared a sound file with a woman who, in a very monotone voice, is reading the lines of the mother in the scene. I also had another sound file with the sound of a man who is choking on his own blood. I got this sound from a video I found on the internet of a man who gets beaten in the head several times and receives internal bleedings in his throat and starts choking on his own blood when he tries to breath through his mouth. It sounds more or less like a pig. When I saw that Arek was ready (that he was seriously pushing himself towards painful emotions) I told

him to imagine himself watching his mother being raped. Then that he is raping a young girl and his parents are watching him. I kept telling him to imagine other similar scenarios and suddenly start playing the sound file from my computer of the female voice reading the mothers lines. I saw that this worked well on Arek and I started mixing her calm voice with the sounds of the man choking on his own blood. I mixed it and played it for him during 20 minutes and then I stopped. Arek was now suffering. I went over to him and started screaming at him to show me more. To show me more fear. I slapped him over the face and screamed at him repeatedly to show me more. I wanted him to show hate towards me. At the moment when I saw he was about to hit me back, I jumped at him and threw him to the floor. I held him violently and told him to cry like a child. And he did so. He broke down. He was able to go from a little child crying to very aggressive emotions if I just pushed him a bit in either direction. I let Arek rest for a few minutes and then I read some other scenes from the script with him and it was amazing. Because of his break down he single handedly managed to hit all the right emotions in scenes that were not physically connected to the scene we had just rehearsed. At that moment he discovered, on his own, what was the most important things for him in the film. After this I knew that Arek was able to do the last scene of the script. But I also knew that I was never to rehearse that scene again and not even talk about it. It would work by itself. The one rehearsal we had was to give Arek a trauma. To plant a trauma he could return to when we shot the scene. Now he would be very scared that he wouldn't be able to return to his break down, and this I discovered was the best energy for him, because then he would truly break down. And he did. On the set before we started shooting he was laying on the floor outside the room where we shot, not wanting to go in because he was so scared he wouldn't be able to return to the emotions he once had. At the end of the day I knew that I had shot

something amazing. The actor knew it as well. By having established a relationship of trust we were able to resign to such extreme behavior. This method can only be used with actors who are ready to give everything for a single project. I find this to be mostly common among amateur actors and acting students. But I'm confident that the same way of working can be used with any actor as long as they feel the project is worth investing in. I will always fight for the actor to be personally involved with the character. The actor fights against being hurt (getting too involved), even subconsciously, and I think it's the directors work to push actors into the unsafe.

One final thought

I honestly want to make films that have an equally strong effect on its audience like *The Life of Jesus* had on me. Films that push the language of film forward and focus on pure emotions even though the stories touch on themes that can be dissected and discussed for hours. To me the greatest challenge of filmmaking is to be able to look at my project (my film that is developing through screenwriting, shooting and editing) with a certain amount of distance. This certain amount of distance is equal to the experience one person has while watching my finished film without having heard earlier what it is about or without knowing who I am. In the end it's a 90-minute experience and no one cares about the years it took me to finish it or what I intended. What stays in that person after the screening? What impact has my film made? As I mentioned in the beginning of this thesis, I watched *The Life of Jesus* without having heard anything about the film or its director. What stayed in my mind after the screening were images and not the story. Images of bored faces looking at the empty landscape. Freddy and Marie having sex. The continuous riding on mopeds without any clear destination. I keep telling myself that I will never do anything lukewarm. I will keep pushing myself just like I push my actors. In the end, the audience remembers images of moments

that moved them or made their bodies extract liquids. Be it tears, sweat, urine or vomit. It takes guts and bravery to dare the audience to feel and remember.

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Odyseusz z Ithaki

Profesor Don Lawrence Fredericksen 1946–2015

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ABSTRACT. Hendrykowski Marek, *Odyseusz z Ithaki. Profesor Don Lawrence Fredericksen 1946–2015* [Prometheus of Ithaca. Professor Donald Lawrence Fredericksen (1946–2015)]. „Images” vol. XIX, no. 28. Poznań 2016. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. Pp. 323–329. ISSN 1731-450X. DOI 10.14746/i.2016.28.24.

Written on the first anniversary of his death, this article profiles Professor Don Lawrence Fredericksen, the renowned Cornell-educated director and a great friend to Poland and Poles.

KEYWORDS: art of film, psychoanalysis, Carl Gustav Jung, Ingmar Bergman, Polish cinema, Donald Lawrence Fredericksen, homage, Andrzej Wajda, Krzysztof Zanussi, Cornell University

Pożegnaliśmy Profesora Dona Frederickse-
na, który odszedł od nas przedwcześnie w wie-
ku zaledwie sześćdziesięciu dziewięciu lat w po-
łowie maja ubiegłego roku. Wiadomość o Jego
odejściu pogrzyżała w głębokim smutku wielu
naukowców na całym świecie, w tym grono
polskich przyjaciół profesorów, między inny-
mi: Alicję Helman, Krystynę Węglowską-Rzepę,
Miroslawa Przyłipiaka i Jana Reka, których ser-
ca zaskarbił sobie i na trwałe pozyskał podczas
swoich licznych pobytów i spotkań w Polsce.

Don Fredericksen był wybitnym amerykań-
skim uczonym, filmoznawcą i psychologiem
analitycznym w jednej osobie. Przede wszyst-
kim jednak ci, którzy się z nim bezpośrednio
zestknęli, pamiętają Go jako niezwykłego forma-
tu osobowość łączącą w sobie wiedzę, mądrość,
ciepło wewnętrzne, kulturę i otwartość na
drugiego człowieka. Artykuł niniejszy zawiera
skromny z konieczności szkic do portretu tego
niezwykłego uczonego, który ma swój osobisty
udział również w rozwoju polskiego filmoznaw-
stwa i polskiej humanistyki.

Maturę uzyskał w roku 1963 jako absolwent
Mapleton High School w niewielkim mieście
Mapleton w stanie Oregon. Położony na pół-
nocnym zachodzie Stanów Zjednoczonych,
Oregon był miejscem szczególnie Mu bliskim:

rodzinnym stanem i małą ojczyzną Dona. Tam
się urodził i wychował, tam też, ilekroć tylko
rozliczne obowiązki akademickie na to pozwa-
lały, wracał – mimo wielkich odległości, jakie
dzieliły jego strony rodzinne i dom dzieciństwa
oraz wczesnej młodości od miejsca pracy.

Swoje naukowe losy związał wkrótce po
studiach z miejscem szczególnym. Jego wybór
padł na Ithakę w stanie Nowy Jork – miasto
uniwersyteckie będące siedzibą słynnego na
cały świat Cornell University, jednej z najpotęż-
niejszych i najlepszych uczelni wyższych w Sta-
nach Zjednoczonych. Nie chodzi tylko o to, że
Cornell to ekstraklasa akademicka, tak zwany
uniwersytet bluszczowy (*Ivy University*) – pre-
stżowa uczelnia o międzynarodowej renomie,
zaliczana od wielu dekad do najściślejszej elity
najlepszych uniwersytetów w rankingach ogół-
nościowych.

Niezależnie od zaszczytnej przynależno-
ści do Ligi Bluszczowej (*Ivy League*), Cornell
University to o wiele więcej: bezpieczna przy-
stań intelektualistów, emigrantów i rozbitków
życiowych, którzy trafiali tu już po pierwszej
wojnie światowej, a potem bardzo licznie po
kataklizmie drugiej wojny światowej i Holocau-
ście. Znajdywali tu swój duchowy azyl – miejsce,
w którym można swobodnie wyrażać swe po-



glądy w całkowitym poczuciu bezpieczeństwa. Genius loci tego ośrodka od dawna przyciąga też uczonych, dając im nie tylko zasobną we wszystko bibliotekę i najnowocześniejsze laboratoria, ale także warunki skupienia niezbędne w pracy naukowej.

W Ithace znalazł się Fredericksen po ukończeniu studiów w roku 1971. Jedno z licznych mniejszych miast rozrzuconych po wielkim terytorium stanu Nowy Jork wyróżniało się spośród innych właśnie tym, iż od bardzo dawna stanowiło siedzibę znakomitego, sławnego na cały świat uniwersytetu. Uniwersytet ten ufundowali w roku 1865 Ezra Cornell i Andrew Dickson White. Efekty ambitnego przedsięwzięcia przerosły najśmielsze oczekiwania. Ciesząca się ogólnoswiatową renomą uczelnia przez dekady skupiała w swoich murach wiele naukowych znakomitości, szcząc się galerią noblistów w dziedzinie nauk ścisłych, ekonomii, medycyny.

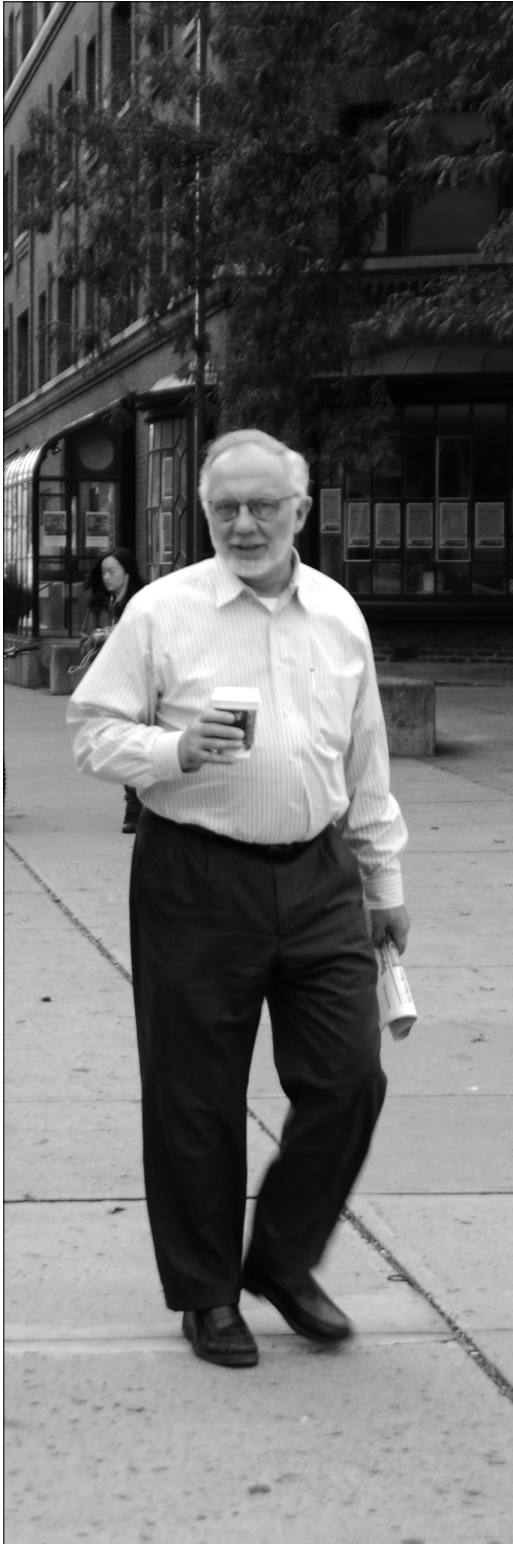
To niewielkie, ale pełne uroku amerykańskie miasto od ponad stu pięćdziesięciu lat żyje w organicznej symbiozie z uczelnią i jej środowiskiem. Jego specyficzną atmosferę i duchową aurę bodaj najpełniej i najbardziej sugestywnie opisał Vladimir Nabokov na kartach *Lolity* (1955). W okresie powojennym przez dziesięć lat Nabokov mieszkał w Ithace i pracował jako wykładowca literatury na Cornell University. Tu również w latach 1947–1953 pisał swą powieść. Właśnie jemu Ithaca zawdzięcza nieśmiertelny literacki portret miasta oraz środowiska akademickiego z połowy lat 50. XX wieku.

Cornell University stało się znane z bardzo wysokiego poziomu uprawianych na nim dyscyplin naukowych. Z powodzeniem konkuruje z najlepszymi z najlepszych: Harvardem, Cambridge, Columbia, Princeton, Stanford i Yale. Nic dziwnego, że po dzień dzisiejszy przyciąga znakomitości z Ameryki i całego świata.

Uważając siebie za duchowego ucznia Carla Gustava Junga, Don Fredericksen w swoim podejściu do zagadnień psychoanalizy konsekwentnie unikał postawy apologety, dzięki czemu ustrzegł się pseudonaukowego doktrynerstwa, zachowując jednocześnie zdolność twórczej kontynuacji nauk mistrza w odniesieniu do filmu i sztuki filmowej. W Polsce amerykański uczyony został odkryty stosunkowo wcześniej dzięki prof. Alicji Helman, która pierwsza omówiła jego nowatorską koncepcję związku między kinem a psychologią na łamach miesięcznika „Kino”, a następnie dokonała przekładu na język polski (Fredericksen 1992, s. 109–134)[1] klasycznego studium noszącego tytuł *Jung/Sign/Symbol/Film*, którego pierwodruk ukazał się w roku 1980 na łamach czasopisma „Quarterly Review of Film Studies” (Fredericksen 1980).

Uwagę badaczy, a zwłaszcza znawców wczesnego kina i specjalistów zajmujących się studiowaniem najstarszych początków teorii

[1] Druga część tego studium w przekładzie Małgorzaty Owczarek, poświęcona analizie *Pieśni Cejlonu*, ukazała się w tomie zbiorowym: *Interpretacja dzieła filmowego*, pod red. Wiesława Godzica, Kraków 1993, s. 93–100.



filmu, zwróciła również rozprawa doktorska Dona Fredericksena, poświęcona w całości analizie i reinterpretacji słynnej rozprawy jego kolegi po fachu, psychologa i filozofa Hugona Münsterberga. Pionierskie studium Münsterberga zatytułowane *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* ukazało się po raz pierwszy w roku 1916 w nowojorskim wydawnictwie D. Appleton and Company, nie wzbudzając w swoim czasie większego zainteresowania.

Po reedycji dokonanej przez Richarda Griffitha, czyli tak zwanym „wydaniu doverskim” z roku 1970, Fredericksen odkrył dzieło Münsterberga na nowo, dokonując ponownego odczytania jego doniosłej wartości intelektualnej i kulturowej. W gruncie rzeczy jego rozprawa stanowi rodzaj twórczego dialogu z wielkim poprzednikiem, który skądinąd jako reprezentant racjonalizmu w psychologii w poglądach swoich zdecydowanie negował istnienie nieświadomości. Mimo tej podstawowej różnicy stanowisk, a może właśnie dzięki niej, *The Photoplay* stał się dla współczesnego badacza z Cornell University punktem wyjścia i ważnym układem odniesienia w Jego dalszych studiach nad filmem i sztuką filmową jako symboliczną formą doświadczania liminalności.

Pierwsza wizyta Dona Fredericksena w Polsce była właściwie krótkim rekonesansem. Po nim nastąpiły kolejne pobyty. Wkrótce dała o sobie znać rosnąca fascynacja naszym krajem, jego kulturą i ludźmi. Fredericksen nie znał języka polskiego i nie czytał po polsku. Ale za to z rosnącym zainteresowaniem i pasją czytał o Polsce i o Polakach wszystko, co ukazywało się po angielsku: od Witkacego, Schulza, Gombrowicza i Miłosza, poprzez Karskiego i Korbońskiego, do Lema, Kołakowskiego, Bartoszewskiego, Kapuścińskiego, Zagajewskiego i Barańczaka. Wymieniam tutaj jedynie te lektury, na które osobiście się powoływał w korespondencji i rozmowach ze mną. Z czasem nieznanym mu wcześniej kraj, z którym nie miał uprzednio żadnych kontaktów, stał się jego namiętnością.

Przez blisko dwadzieścia lat profesor Donald Lawrence Fredericksen ściśle współpracował

z kilkoma ośrodkami akademickimi w Polsce: Uniwersytetem Łódzkim, Uniwersytetem Jagiellońskim, Instytutem Psychologii Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego[2] oraz, last but not least, z Katedrą Filmu, Telewizji i Nowych Mediów Uniwersytetu Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu. Wielokrotnie gościł we wszystkich tych ośrodkach jako profesor wizytujący, zapraszany na seminaria i wykłady dla studentów. Brał aktywny udział w organizowanych w Polsce międzynarodowych sympozjach i konferencjach naukowych: w Łodzi, Wrocławiu, Toruniu i Poznaniu. W zależności od tematu występował na nich w dwóch rolach: jako filmoznawca i jako psycholog.

W końcu października 1996 roku, w Łodzi był uczestnikiem międzynarodowego kongresu z okazji setnej rocznicy początków kinematografii, gdzie wziął udział w panelu dyskusyjnym zatytułowanym *Film w kulturze XX wieku*, prezentując własny oryginalny punkt widzenia na film jako medium komunikowania, dziedzinę sztuki i rodzaj społecznego doświadczenia. Drukowana wersja wypowiedzi ukazała się w tomie pokonferencyjnym *Kino ma 100 lat: dekada po dekadzie* pod redakcją Jana Reka i Elżbiety Ostrowskiej. Mówił wówczas między innymi:

W prezentowanym wystąpieniu chciałbym zwrócić uwagę na pewną funkcję filmu, której tu jeszcze nie omawialiśmy, a która jak najbardziej warta jest poważnego potraktowania. To, co zaprezentuję, jest częścią większego projektu, którego realizacją zajmuję się od mniej więcej piętnastu lat. [...] Chciałbym zająć się dość szczególnym wykorzystaniem filmu do osiągania indywidualnych celów, które – paradoksalnie – ma głęboką wartość psychologiczną ponadindywidualną czy ponadjednostkową. Spróbuję zatem odpowiedzieć na pytanie, którym Siegfried Kracauer zakończył swoją *Teorię filmu*. Pytanie to, zadane w latach 60., było wówczas niezwykle istotne, a myślę, że i dziś nie straciło ono na wartości. Mianowicie: jaki jest pożytek z przeżycia filmowego? (Fredericksen 1998, s. 290).

Związanie problematyki filmoznawczej z problematyką psychologiczną pozwoliło Fredericksenowi otworzyć nową perspektywę badawczą i uzyskać unikatowy wgląd w dzieło filmowe jako specyficzną postać międzyludzkiej komunikacji. Przeżycie filmowe w jego ujęciu

nie było już migotliwie przebiegającym i niepoznawalnie wariantywnym strumieniem wrażeń, zależnym wyłącznie od indywidualnej psychiki widza. Stało się ono – w przymierzu z koncepcją Carla Gustava Junga – przeżyciem wspólnym.

Jest oczywiste – stwierdził w cytowanym powyżej wystąpieniu – że uprawiając historię filmu próbujemy odnaleźć w grupach dzieł pewne wzory rozwijające się w czasie. Wzory te można określać z wielu punktów widzenia. [...] Wzory historyczne, ustalone w tego rodzaju analizach funkcjonalnych, mogą nie przystawać do zmysłowej konkretności poszczególnych filmów bądź nie zgadzać się z tym, co stanowi o specyfice medium filmowego, jako że funkcje psychologiczne i antropologiczne, które wykorzystuje się w historii filmu, często nie są swoiście filmowe. Uważam więc, że słusznie postępujemy oczekując, by w opisach wzorów funkcji psychologicznych czy antropologicznych w filmie brano pod uwagę właściwości estetyczne tego medium, przejawiające się historycznie zarówno w strukturze, jak i w teksturze dzieł (skorzystać można z uwag Tarkowskiego, który w swoich esejach podkreśla znaczenie tych spraw). Mówię o tym, ponieważ mam świadomość, iż perspektywa Jungowska, w ramach której od piętnastu lat rozważam funkcje filmu, nie wyklucza możliwości abstrahowania od struktury i materii estetycznej. Być może ci, którzy zajmują inne stanowiska, również zmagają się z tą akademicką skłonnością do uciekania w sferę czystej abstrakcji, chętnie podyskutuję na ten temat, jako że wyjaśnienia, którymi się posługujemy, mają swoje własne wątki psychologiczne i estetyczne.

Po czym, wchodząc w polemiczny dyskurs z koncepcją poetyki historycznej filmu w wydaniu Davida Bordwella, wypowiedział znamienne tezę:

Istnienie w historii filmu psychologicznych i antropologicznych wzorów funkcjonalnych jest faktem. Fakt ten musi być uznany, w przeciwnym bowiem razie każdy opis dzieł mediów będzie niekompletny, choćby poświęcał najwyższą uwagę właściwościom estetycznym filmu. (Fredericksen 1998, s. 291)

[2] Temat wieloletniej współpracy na polu teorii praktyki psychologii głębi, jaka łączyła prof. Fredericksena z tą placówką, kierowaną przez prof. Krystynę Węglowską-Rzepę, zasługuje na osobne opracowanie w innym miejscu.

W roku 2001 prof. Fredericksen na zaproszenie organizatorów współorganizował z ramienia Cornell University polsko-amerykańską konferencję naukową „Music and Film”, stanowiącą część międzynarodowego festiwalu pod tym samym tytułem, który odbył się w Poznaniu. Wysłuchaliśmy wówczas szeregu niezwykle interesujących wystąpień znawców tej problematyki, wśród nich: prof. Klaudii Gorbman z University of Washington (autorki klasycznej książki *Unheard Melodies*, 1987), prof. Alicji Helman, Charlotte Greenspan, Krzysztofa Kozłowskiego, Tadeusza Szczepańskiego, Iwony Sowińskiej oraz Krzysztofa Zanussiego, który w swoim utrzymanym w bardzo osobistym tonie wystąpieniu wprowadził słuchaczy w perypetie debiutanta przy realizacji *Struktury kryształu* oraz tajniki osobliwej alchemii późniejszej wieloletniej reżyserskiej współpracy z Wojciechem Kilarzem. Don Fredericksen mówił podczas tamtej konferencji o związkach filmu i muzyki w twórczości filmowej Vikinga Eggelunga. Materiały pokonferencyjne *Music and Film* ukazały się drukiem w postaci anglojęzycznego tomu zbiorowego (*Music and Film... 2002*).

Don Fredericksen zaprzyjaźnił się wówczas serdecznie z poznańskimi filmoznawcami: Miłkołajem Jazdonem, Anną Śliwińską i Julią Michałowską. Nawiązane nici przyjaźni sprawiły, że kilkanaście miesięcy później – jako recenzent wewnętrzny i doradca, a także członek rady redakcyjnej – został ojcem chrzestnym nowo powstałego międzynarodowego czasopisma „IMAGES”, którego inauguracyjny numer ukazał się w roku 2003. Łamom „IMAGES” pozostał wierny przez wszystkie następne lata. W jego profesorskim gabinecie na Cornell University komplet numerów „IMAGES” stał na półce usytuowany na wprost wzroku gospodarza.

Don lubił Wrocław, Gdańsk i Poznań, doceniał niezwykłą urodę architektoniczną Torunia i unikatowy w skali światowej urok historycz-

nego Krakowa, ale jego wielką pasją stała się Warszawa, zwłaszcza zaś hekatomba miasta w roku 1944. Kiedy chodził ze mną ulicami stolicy, krok po kroku odkrywając tragiczną historię powstania warszawskiego, projekt naszej wspólnej książki poświęconej w całości filmowi Wajdy dopiero zaczynał się rysować. Nie spodziewaliśmy się wtedy obaj i nie mogliśmy nawet przypuszczać, że – zaintrygowany naszym pomysłem amerykańsko-polskiego spojrzenia na powstanie z obu stron żelaznej kurtyny – Andrzej Wajda napisze do monografii *Kanału* nie tylko Wstęp, ale i Posłowie (Fredericksen, Hendrykowski 2007)[3]. Premiera książki odbyła się w pięćdziesiątą rocznicę premiery filmu, którą uroczystie obchodzono w murach Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego.

Powróćmy jednak do wcześniejszych pobytów amerykańskiego badacza w Polsce. W roku 2002 Don Fredericksen gościł po raz kolejny na Uniwersytecie Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, gdzie wygłosił wykłady o Mai Deren i o *Swobodnym jeźdźcu*. Był znakomitym mówcą. Od pierwszej chwili zjednał sobie studentów, odsłaniając przed nimi aspekty i motywy psychoanalityczne od dawna obecne w kinie amerykańskim. Pytaniom nie było końca. Spotkanie z gościem zaplanowane na dwie godziny przeciągnęło się do niemal pięciu i skończyło późno w nocy. Całe szczęście, że w grafiku zajęć w sali wykładowej nie zaplanowano tego dnia niczego więcej.

Warto w tym miejscu dodać, iż został również zaproszony do jury Międzynarodowego Festiwalu Sztuki Operatorskiej Camerimage w Toruniu oraz jury Międzynarodowego Festiwalu Filmów Krótkometrażowych w Krakowie. Tamte pierwsze pobyty pozwoliły Mu bliżej poznać nasz kraj i kulturę. Już nie z filmów i lektur, lecz w bezpośrednim kontakcie. Podczas jednego z nich dziennikarz telewizyjny Michał Chaciński nagrał z Nim długą rozmowę o Polsce i polskim kinie emitowaną na antenie TVP Kultura.

Z jego wiedzy obficie czerpali również polscy psycholodzy. Na Uniwersytecie Wrocławskim prof. Fredericksen gościł kilkakrotnie,

[3] Anglojęzyczna wersja monografii ukazała się pod tytułem: *Wajda's Kanal* w tym samym roku.

prowadząc seminaria i warsztaty praktyczne z zakresu psychologii głębi. Materiał ilustracyjny demonstrowany podczas nich stanowiły w znacznej mierze filmy. Wybrane utwory lub też ich fragmenty traktował na zasadzie modelowej ilustracji analizowanego przypadku bądź wzorca. Czerpał je z własnych doświadczeń kinomana i psychoterapeuty w jednej osobie.

Jeden z filmowych obrazów zajmował w jego pamięci, jak się zdaje, miejsce szczególne. Jest nim słynna scena ukazująca reakcję Elżbiety Vogler na telewizyjne zdjęcia aktu samospalenia mnicha buddyjskiego w *Personie* Ingmara Bergmana[4], o której pisał jako autor monografii książkowej tego dzieła. Książka o arcydziele szwedzkiego mistrza zatytułowana *Bergman's "Persona"*, pisana w Ithace w latach 2003–2004, zainaugurowała dwujęzyczną serię *Klasyka Kina/Classics of Cinema*, na którą składają się monografie książkowe poświęcone analizie i interpretacji wielkich filmów kina polskiego i światowego.

Przywołana przed chwilą scena z *Persony* stanowi modelowe przedstawienie w dziele artystycznym wstrząsu afatycznego, jakiego pewnego dnia nieoczekiwanie doznaje żyjąca dotąd w ochronnym kokonie splendid isolation bohaterka filmu. Można tu mówić wręcz o porażeniu osobowości, przed którą – w jej dotychczasowej normalnej, uporządkowanej, nastawionej na siebie, wygodnej egzystencji, w spontanicznym akcie odzyskania wrażliwości na świat i kontaktu z nim – nagle otwiera się otchłań bólu, cierpienia i współczucia dla drugiego człowieka. Wstrząsająca wiadomość. Objawem wywołanego przez nią zaburzenia staje się niemota (symboliczna utrata języka przez Elisabeth Vogler) i odmowa dalszego funkcjonowania jak dotąd w obojętnym na wszystko świecie. Istnieją takie wieści, po których – jak twierdził filozof Theodor Adorno – nie sposób wyobrazić sobie ludzkie życie obojętnie toczące się dalej, tą samą co dawniej drogą.

Dzieło Bergmana nakręcone w 1966 roku, podobnie jak *Powiększenie* Antonioniego, odegrało prekursorską rolę w inspirowaniu ogólnoludzkiej refleksji nad znaczeniem me-

diów w życiu człowieka. Od tamtego momentu w dziedzinie komunikowania bardzo wiele się wydarzyło i zmieniło. Doniosłość udziału elektronicznych środków przekazu we współczesnej cywilizacji jest dzisiaj faktem tyleż powszechnym, co oczywistym. W różnych krajach rozwój refleksji badawczej nad mediami przeszedł znamiennej ewolucję: od nie tak dawnej euforii nad dynamiką niebywałego postępu technologicznego do coraz bardziej wyrazistego sceptycyzmu wobec przerostu i zalewu wszelkiego typu informacji.

Warto zwrócić uwagę, iż dziesiątki lat temu amerykański uczyony z Cornell University dostrzegł już potencjalne zagrożenia i niebezpieczeństwa wynikające dla milionów użytkowników z bezkrytycznego korzystania z mediów elektronicznych w życiu codziennym. Pisał o tym i mówił wielokrotnie. Także na podstawie własnego doświadczenia. Sam osobiście przeszedł w pewnym momencie głęboki kryzys wewnętrzny, będący skutkiem niekontrolowanej inwazji informacji docierających za pośrednictwem sieci. Sprawa wymagała zastosowania autoterapii. Zaprzyjaźnionych z nim korespondentów uprzedził wówczas o okresowym „resecie” psychicznym, jakiego musiał dokonać, by czasowo zamilknąć wobec świata i tą drogą odzyskać utracone panowanie nad zaburzonym metabolizmem informacyjnym.

Obok *Kanału* Wajdy ulubionym polskim filmem Profesora, na który często się powoływał w swoich wykładach dla amerykańskich studentów i doktorantów, była *Iluminacja* Krzysztofa Zanussiego (1973). Odnalazł w niej wiele bliskich mu wątków psychologicznych i psychoanalitycznych. Zwłaszcza modelowy wprost przykład liminalności (progowości) zapisanej przez twórców scenariusza i przez reżysera w sposobie ukazania losów i kolejnych przeżyć bohatera. Bohater *Iluminacji*, Franciszek Retman, w poszukiwaniu osobistej prawdy

[4] Zob. znakomitą pogłębioną analizę psychologiczną filmu Bergmana zaprezentowaną przez Dona L. Fredericksena w jego autorskiej książce: *Bergman's "Persona"*, inicjującej serię wydawniczą *Klasyka Kina/Classics of Cinema*. Poznań 2005.



przechodzi na naszych oczach fazę pośrednią między sobą jeszcze nie odnalezionym na nowo, a już nie dotychczasowym. Wielka strata dla nas wszystkich, że nie powstanie monografia *Iluminacji* autorstwa Dona Fredericksena, nad którą pracował od pewnego czasu z myślą o serii „Klasyka Kina”[5].

Był wspaniałym ambasadorem kultury polskiej i promotorem polskiego kina w Cornell University. Promował je nieustannie, z głębokim wewnętrznym przekonaniem i zapałem. Na prowadzonych przez Niego zajęciach nieustannie pojawiały nasze filmy, między innymi: *Kanał*, *Eroica*, *Popiół i diament*, *Zezowate szczęście*, *Pasażerka*, *Rejs*, *Iluminacja*, *Trzy kolory*, *Dekalog* oraz dokumenty: Krzysztofa Kieślowskiego, Marcela Łozińskiego, Marka Piwowskiego i in. Z czasem miało się to przemienić w oddzielny, poddany akademickim rygorom, dwusemestralny kurs wykładów o historii polskiego filmu.

Pamięć o Profesorze Donie L. Frederickse- nie będzie trwała w wielu sercach, które zjed- nywał sobie otwartością na ludzi, rzadko spoty- kaną empatią na dzielące ich różnice obyczajów

[5] Swoistą zapowiedź powstania monografii książkowej poświęconej „*Iluminacji*” stanowi szkic interpretacyjny Dona Fredericksena: *Iluminacja*” Krzysztofa Zanussiego: *psychologiczna forma i duchowa diagnostyka*.

i kultur, umiejętnością przełamywania dystansu, głęboką mądrością, życzliwością a także bezpośredniością kontaktu i, last but not least, niezrównanym poczuciem humoru.

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Fot. Justyna Sulejewska