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I like doing things that appear broken. With Petr Marek on video clips, music and the dangers of concept

Musician, filmmaker, teacher, composer and theatre artist. This is how we could summarize the scope of Petr Marek's profession. His filmography is marked by a self-confident and unconventional authorial approach, which is reflected in other artistic sectors, media and forms he uses as well. We focused on the video clip format as one that can interconnect the greatest number of means of expression from different sources.

You directed Monika Načeva's video clip *Technical Me* **(Technický já), which premièred recently. Also Ventolin, another musician you have cooperated with, appeared in the clip. How is the cooperation with other musicians from the position of a director?**

It doesn't matter who is the musician and who is the director at that moment. These are friends who are special to me and are simply nice. Most things I have done in my life were motivated by the urge to cooperate with particular people. Only then the work comes in, which is less important. I feel that when you are close to someone on an interpersonal level, he or she is also aesthetically close to you. When Ventolin asked me to make a video clip for him, I was happy as we had already been friends for a while, so it was natural.

So, you don't get a more specific assignment from an interpreter?

Ventolin sent me the song *Disco Science*, and I could immediately imagine what a video clip could be like. I was inspired by Johuš Matuš (Johana Novotná) and her rural video clips and songs. I felt that this rurality was a good fit for Ventolin as well. I first engaged Johana as the "seeker" of village locations, as she lives in the little town of Semily. But gradually, we started working on the clip together – we started shooting it together, then I was finishing and editing it by myself, then we discussed it again and finished it together. In the end, the two clicked as they started touring and recording together.

How was the cooperation with Monika Načeva?

At the beginning, there was Monika's idea to make a clip which would be funny. At the same time, Monika liked Ventolin's clip *Disco Science*; she herself wanted Ventolin to appear in her clip. But this was a later phase; before that, there had been a search for ideas. We met with Monika and Ondřej Bauer and agreed that we would make a very simple clip in production terms, which could be done in one day and released the day after. We decided there would be only one shot with a static camera and things would happen in front of it. When we met for the second time, Monika mentioned she had been on the *Sama doma* TV show and that she had felt awkward. We watched the recording, and I very much wanted Monika to be in that situation again. The ideas behind it were indeed the lyrics of *Technical Me,* which are a bit enigmatic. I was thinking about what these technical things were. How to get in things that can technically limit or destroy you. Monika said she had felt anxious and not well on the TV show. So, I thought this technical thing that could destroy a person could be the TV frame. By zooming in, we can cut away a person's legs and steal their soul, as Native Americans would say. And then we came up with the rest together with Ondřej.

And this is when Ventolin came in?

I was thinking about technical things that are positive on the contrary, and I thought of do-it-yourselfers. Ventolin is one at first sight. At the same time, it was kind of an allusion to the previous clip. A gadgeteer can mechanically put things together at home. However, it has its consequences as well – live by the sword, die by the sword. When he connected to the TV system and sent his picture there, it chopped off his head. It appeared on TV.

Your clips have gone viral on the Czech Internet. Do you think about the number of hits in advance?

If I were considering this in advance, I wouldn't have made a dozen video clips for my band, which are often not very popular with the audience. They are always on a lo-fi medium, with only one shot, fuzzy, with nothing or very little happening – this is what I quite like. The exception is *Lux* with Marek Vašut, but there is a perverse reason behind it. Using a pseudo-professional approach, we were trying to cover the stupid, weird content to make it look as "normal" as possible. I don't like using the frontal, smooth dolly shots. But in this case, we were striving for nice shots, for a parody of "professionalism".

When making video clips for other people, I feel responsible because the clip is supposed to "sell something". I invest maybe 200 times as much effort in them as in my own ones. I sometimes make my own clip using one shot made with a poor mobile phone; most of them are rather minimalist. I like the aesthetics. VHS, home video from when I was 10 years old – this is where my film heart is.

Yes, your films and video clips very much remind one of home video and VHS. Is it a style you picked because you started working at a time when there were no other possibilities for shooting? Is it a method or nostalgia?

The style picked me. When I was 10, I borrowed a video camera, thanks to which I learned some aesthetic figures. I discovered that you can shoot the sound of a dialogue first and only then shoot images for it. Thanks to this, I found out how beautiful it is when image and sound are disconnected. It is as if the atmospheric field were growing larger.

I am an ironist, and I like some subversion – when a thing is not used in full, when there are "errors". People shouldn't pretend they are better than they are.

The video clips *I Like Cooking* (Rád vařim), *Party of the Century* (Mejdan století) and *Doctor* (Doktor) are similar in their aesthetics, or at least in costumes. Do you make clip series?

The costumes are similar because I have very few clothes. The video clips *I Like Cooking*, *What you can't forget about* (Na co nesmíš zapomenout) and *Doctor* were

made in one day. It was because Monika Midriaková got an assignment at the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts – to shoot a band. So, she told me we could do it together in the studio. So, the original idea wasn't to make a series – it was only for production reasons. But the bread roll series (*Lux, Please, Where? (Prosím, kam?), Calling (Volám)* – editor's note) is indeed intentional and nonsensical. When I am creating something, a video clip or a radio play, I really enjoy when I can take a motif completely without any connection and intertextually include it in the next "episode". But there is no development with the bread rolls; it's pure nonsense. It was all because I didn't know how to go on with the lyrics to make a rhyme. But retrospectively, I see some connection there – the intentionality of a work goes beyond the intentionality of an author.

The repeated motif of swimming pools is accidental as well?

This is where my subconscious comes in; I have about 30 songs about swimming and water. My best childhood memories are of swimming pools. This is paradise and peace and tranquillity to me. When I close my eyes and hear the sounds of a swimming pool from far away, I feel good. As for the video clip *Mysterious Swimming Pool* (Koupaliště tajemné), we simply went for a swim; my friends took a shot there, and I thought it could be a video clip. The video clip to the song *To the Boat* (Do člna) also occurred accidentally. Monika was filming me at the sea, when I was deciding whether or not to jump into the water. Then we thought we could make it into a clip as it had an existential potential. So, it originated as "found footage" even though it was "made by yourself".

Do you need to like the film you make music for? Is the cooperation again based on friendships?

With Marek Najbrt, for instance, we only became friends during our cooperation. He chose me because he liked the music to my film *Love from Above* (Láska shora). We found out we had a lot in common: for example., irony, including irony in music, and conceptual approach. I haven't yet made music for a film I don't like.

When composing film music, is it important for you that you like the film? How do you work?

I function best the very evening I find out about the film for the first time. The first evening, I usually come up with the first ideas, hysterically, something like Luděk Sobota in *Let Him Face the Music!* (Jen ho nechte, ať se bojí) – quite a poor film, but I liked it when I was a kid. And then I keep working on them for the next two months. Or sometimes I use a conceptual crutch, even though I am not a conceptualist, and I actually don't like it! For example, in *Protector* (Protektor), where the plot revolves around a bicycle, I simply started recording the sounds of one. I was hitting a bicycle making rhythms out of the sounds. And then I discarded this initial concept, which is so stuck in modernism, and I only behaved as a postmodernist after that, or only "instinctively". For instance, in some films I think about what music the main characters could like. In *Protector*, they would listen to swing, so I try to combine swing with my electro. When making music for *The Life and Time of Judge A. K.* (Život a doba soudce A. K.), I was thinking about what kind of music this guy could like. I thought he certainly wouldn't like synthesizers, but rather a melancholic guitar – so I used it.

How different is your approach when shooting films and music video clips?

The ideological side is similar. Even with films, I want to cooperate with certain people and then I come up with an idea I want to "resolve" – and I combine it together. Or using Rivette's method, I first make an "all-stars band" of actors and only then do we sit down and think what it could be about. That's why, for example, once we nearly omitted the main character, who was replaced by someone else. And with this main character I was omitted as an actor as well! I think that this is the problem of a concept: it appears that you are supposed to stick to it from beginning to end. But I think that you should leave it at the right moment as the development is dynamic and in addition to mistakes, there are new inspirations as well. A concept can disappear in favour of the gears of fate. You can have a concept as a starting point, and not as an end point.

People say you are a skilled music, theatre and film improviser. What is it like when you improvise as a director? Can improvisation extend beyond working with actors? For example, to editing?

Ninety percent of things I do are improvised. I often improvise in editing. I agree with what Věra Chytilová said – that one film is written, another one shot and a third one edited. Only in the editing room do I sometimes realize the potential of some images.

For example *Peter's Movie* (Film Petra) is a 45-minute-long film, but at the beginning, I had no idea what to shoot. I analysed and interpreted every shot and then added something that was related to it. This is how I improvised the entire plot. At the same time, I couldn't go back as I had decided to edit directly in the VHS camera. It was a very strict model, which was convenient for me though. But it had nothing to do with a concept either! I simply realized that I would get a higher quality image! And I liked *Peter's Movie* best out of all my films in the end.

As for improvisation and working with actors, for example in *Nothing against Nothing* (Nic proti ničemu), even though we had quite a detailed screenplay with dialogues, I only roughly explained to the actors what should happen. And we shot a 20-minute-long section on which I then commented, and then we were shooting again. This time only 10 minutes. This went on for the third and fourth time. You then make the final piece out of the individual fragments in the editing room. It often wouldn't stick together – it is like a vase glued back together, it's a bit rough, but sometimes nothing can be done differently or better, so it's really rough. I like doing things that appear a bit broken.

Your film characters often keep the names of their actors; the same is true for those played by you. The boundaries between the film and real worlds are often blurred. For example in *My Dream's Devil* **(Mého snu čert) – is it you who is the narrator, or the character you play?**

The character is the narrator. I like "unreliable" narrators. For example, in Alain Resnais's *Providence,* you can't really rely on the narrator. He sometimes doesn't remember things or is simply wrong. It's similar in *Love from Above*. The narrator is wrong: he says things that are in contrast to what we see on the screen. Sometimes it's almost painful. When I watched the film this year after 10 years, I found a few moments I wouldn't mind cutting out. I pulled such pranks on the narrator that, in the end, they were pranks on the viewer as well. But I like pulling pranks on the film as such. I like films that undermine themselves. Those which jump in their own path to

destroy themselves. I like it when it "stumbles".

You enjoy awkwardness and absurdity both in film and music. Is it your aim or rather a by-product?

It is only a means of expression; it's not an aim. I don't think that the world is awkward in general. I don't need awkwardness in the creative process. Uneasiness is not an aim; it's a pick-me-up. The world behaves awkwardly, people behave awkwardly, and those who in their films create a sense that people are only noble can become ridiculous very quickly. That's why, for instance, I like films by Robert Sedláček – because they are a mixture of nobleness and normality, and sentiment and awkwardness.

You say about your solo music project under the pseudonym Muzikant Králíček that you were often inspired by a music style you hated or something else you weren't comfortable with. Is there a similar process for films or video clips?

I have already mentioned one – the professionalism in *Lux*.

So you hate professionalism?

I don't hate it by itself. What I don't like is pretending to be something you are not. Or trying to show yourself only in a favourable light. Trying to be recognized, to perform at my best – this isn't like me. I prefer ironizing myself. I don't want to perform at my best and exceed the limits of my self-presentation. I don't want to perform at 100 percent. I don't want to be like a muscleman who stuffs himself with pills, grows muscles and then puts on some oil and takes a picture.