

Nuda v Brně (Bored in Brno) (2003), directed by Vladimír Morávek

Nuda v Brně, the film debut by an experienced theatre director Vladimír Morávek, was hailed by some Czech critics as the best Czech movie of the previous decade. The film is a remarkably mature homage to the Czech New Wave of the 1960s, especially to Miloš Forman (in particular to his *Černý Petr [Peter and Paula]*, 1963 or *Lásky jedné plavovlásky [Loves of a Blonde]*, 1965). At the same time it is also a profound testimony to the Czech present, which it depicts with an understanding, full of humour and irony. *Nuda v Brně* interprets the classic Czech film heritage of the 1960s with an ironic twist. The film is a statement about how people behave in contemporary Czech society, at the same time it has a general meaning, relevant for people anywhere, that is why it is attractive even for the international public.

The fact that *Nuda v Brně* has been shot in black and white (the authors did not have sufficient funds to purchase colour film stock because the project failed to receive a subsidy by the Czech government's State Fund for the Development of Cinematography) hints at its connection with the heritage of the 1960s Czech "New Wave" – whose films were also mostly shot in black and white. However, *Nuda v Brně* looks at the same themes from the point of view of the much more cynical and much more "informed" 2000s. We realise that the insight into the personal psychology of young people, their youthful fumbings, disorientation and clumsiness was far more innocent in Forman's films of forty years ago, in spite of his alleged "cynicism", than it is now.

Apart from offering a profound insight into the behaviour of contemporary Czechs, *Nuda v Brně* is among other things, also a parody of pornography, which is now omnipresent in the Czech Republic.

Some things do not change even after forty years. The world now seems to be much tougher, much more controlled by manipulative commercial pressures and by much more sophisticated hypocrisy, yet the (young) people remain just as clumsy and confused, as documented by Miloš Forman four decades ago.

Nuda v Brně confirms that what matters most in life is interhuman relations. Without them human beings do not thrive. The absence of a satisfactory emotional bond frustrates and dehumanises people. Individuals are also often hampered by being forced to live side by side with impaired or undeveloped individuals who are unable to commit themselves emotionally, usually as a result of their fears or an inferiority complex.

Nuda v Brně argues that what people need first and foremost is to create an intimate and satisfying emotional relationship. Male weakness is a very frequent theme of contemporary Czech cinema. The Czech male is an antihero. He almost always

moves on the borderline of adulthood and infantility. He almost always disappoints all expectations of his female partners. *Pater absconditus*, absent father, is a common feature in today's Czech film. Men fail and leave their families. In *Nuda v Brně* most of the women live on their own. In spite of that, people, full of hope, keep trying, over and over again, to strike up erotic relationships.

Men are weaker than women. Women have much more energy and initiative. Yet, *Nuda v Brně* is a profoundly "male" film. Morávek sensitively analyses the most intimate human weaknesses of which, it seems, men have many. They are afraid: will I make a fool of myself if I fail during my first erotic encounter? Or else: horror of horrors, what if I am a homosexual? These male "worries" are an instrument for penetrating deep inside the souls of Morávek's heroes.

In the main narrative in this film, two young lovers are preparing for their first erotic encounter. They are both slightly mentally retarded. This is for us a humble reminder: none of us is perfect, each and every one of us who lives in this world is a blundering, imperfect individual – yet we are all endowed with humanity. Morávek bows down before humanity. The film presents itself as a "comedy" and the audiences laugh at the Formanesque irony and the absurd behaviour of many of the characters. The director makes gentle fun of them, but he does not cruelly mock them – the film elevates his characters beyond their weakness and their limitations.

Nuda v Brně examines the experiences and events in the lives of a number of characters of both sexes during a single evening and night in the Moravian regional capital of Brno. All these events take place at the same place or in the close vicinity. Morávek often includes them in the same shot. However, they are rarely interconnected.

Several couples are trying to strike up erotic relationships. Some of these attempts fail right at the beginning. For instance, Miriam Šimáková, the mother of Olga, the main female protagonist in the film, sets out to meet a potential partner in a café, a person whom she has contacted by means of a newspaper advert, but immediately she arrives she changes her mind. The story of psychologist PhDr. Vlasta Kulková-Jará is tragicomic. She teaches women how to behave assertively, but she herself is incapable of initiating a relationship. She brings an aging provincial actor Miroslav Norbacher (Miroslav Donutil) to her flat, but Norbacher fails to get an erection. The Tibetan music, a feeling of guilt towards his wife and Vlasta's exaggerated, stilted behavior (modelled on psychology textbooks) make him nervous. He feels bad about having a fling on the night of his wife's birthday.

Norbacher pays for his attempt at adultery by losing his life. Drunk, he makes his way home in the early morning walking in the middle of the carriageway through a

road tunnel. A bakery delivery van, driven by Bed'ura and Velička (Pavel Liška and Filip Rajmont) knocks him down and kills him. Maybe, Norbacher's death is just an unlucky coincidence, as so many things in life.

The narrator tells us about Norbacher's death in advance, thus fulfilling the role of an ancient Greek chorus. The film's narratives thus acquire a subtext of inexorability: everything is "fixed in advance". The message of the filmmakers seems to be: This is a semi-ironic testimony to the life of people in contemporary society, based on an analysis of their attempts to create relationships. Most of our characters are behaving ridiculously because they are afraid. Nothing can be done about their imperfections. Everything is fixed, we cannot change it, all we can do is report on the current state of affairs.

As far as relationships are concerned, the character of Jaroslava is also in trouble – she always picks up a "failure". Her latest discovery Richard Klech, unsurprisingly, also has problems with getting an erection. Men are horrified by women. This is underlined in the film by the frequently repeated visual motif of various ways in which penis-like shapes are being destroyed. A Czech bread roll, *rohlik*, functions as a fallic symbol in this movie. At the beginning, *rohlik* is being used as an erect penis during a training session where one brother shows the other how to put on a condom, then we see *rohliks* being energetically cut up to pieces when canapés are being made for a party, an old woman eats a *rohlik* with ham on a coach in which the brothers Pichlík are travelling to Brno, after the accident in the Brno tunnel which kills actor Norbacher, the tyres of passing cars crush *rohliks* which have been scattered all over the carriageway. "Emasculation, the film concludes, is the truth of sexuality and this emasculation seems to be particularly related to the fact that all women will, one day, become the castrating mother that nearly scuppers the one positively presented sexual relation," [says David Shorfa](#). Jaroslav Pichlík gives his younger brother Stanislav (Jan Budař) detailed instructions how to use a condom and pretends in front of him that he is a sexually experienced man. But he isn't. Even he ends up on a window ledge without anywhere to escape when he is trying to run away from a woman who demands sex.

Collectivism, a very familiar feature of life in communist Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 1980s still survives in this film into the 2000s. We see one of a regular meetings of female friends in the tenement in which Standa and Olga are preparing for their first erotic experience. The "team" of female "experts" gives Olga a lot of advice, in a way which parallels the instruction "seminar" given by Jarda to Standa before they set out for Brno. On arrival in Brno, Standa is duly introduced to the group of Olga's friends and "evaluated" by them. In spite of all this "advice",

Standa's and Olga's relationship turns out to be the only authentic and satisfying bond that comes into being in this film – it is lyrical, unpretentious and fresh.

An absurd, fictitious Czech Television play is a point of departure for *Nuda v Brně*. At the beginning of the film, scenes from this play are being shot (not terribly successfully) in a TV studio. The play is an affectionate parody of some of the most stupid programmes put out by Czech Television. In the play, the hero puts a light bulb in his mouth and then cannot take it out. En route to a hospital's emergency department, people talk in the taxi about the fact that approximately 150 000 sex acts allegedly take place in Brno in a single night. Actor Norbacher who is supposed to say this in the shot, cannot: he thinks the number is exaggerated. The scene must be filmed over and over again. The filming of this scene functions as a kind of motto in *Nuda v Brně* - thereafter, the film examines the encounters of several couples, trying to find out whether at least some sexual liaisons did indeed take place.

A couple of young men who deliver bread rolls to bakery shops in the morning drink in a local bar and complain to each other that they cannot pull a girl. Only as a consequence of the drastic experience of the car accident during which they inadvertently kill actor Norbacher, they realize that they are in fact homosexual – and that they have fallen hopelessly in love with each other. (Earlier in the film, one of the young men has given clear indications that he is homosexual.)

The structure of the film is compact as a result of the fact that the film observes the classic unity of time and place. All the narrative strands take place at the same time and in the same locality, the small and photogenic city of Brno.

Nuda v Brně is valuable as a study of contemporary mores in the Czech Republic where the imperfect nature of humanity has been seen for many decades as a major characteristic of our existence. It is as a result of this humanity, perfect or imperfect, that people manage to survive even in contemporary times.