

TREATMENT

TITLE: SELF-ISH

SELF-ISH is a transgressive, serio-comedic documentary film that follows Anders Bramsen, a restless Danish-American filmmaker who depicts his own personal struggles with self, father and the randomness of life.

Told in an essayist style, woven together by scenarios with friends and family, using Anders' personal video diary (shot over 25 years), and also through a fantastic family archive of 90 film reels from the 1920s through 1980s. Because the film is partly based on investigative journalism it has an exposé feeling, which includes narration.

Co-participants include: John Savage (Actor, Deer Hunter), Casper Van Dien (Actor, Starship Troopers), Lewis Teague (Director, Jewel of the Nile) and Jack Grisham (Vocalist, T.S.O.L.).

SYNOPSIS

Anders begins a journey of self-examination that takes him back to his origins as he interviews family members, friends, former lovers and acquaintances about the past and the present. A major component in the film is an interview between Anders and his seemingly unsupportive father, Mikael.



Anders Interviews his father, Mikael (Copenhagen, 2015)

He learns that the lack of support or validation from his father may be the key source of his melancholy nature. Anders' father Mikael is a classic patriarch, a retired foreign TV correspondent and a former executive at the European Parliament. His father believes in "tough love" and calls his son out as a disappointment.

The film begins as a verbally abusive confrontation between the two unfolds. "Your extreme self-centeredness worries me" says Mikael, when Anders explains that he is trying to understand things better. "You're wasting your life" he repeats.

But this life is exactly what Anders is trying to fathom through communicating with his father and friends from his past and present life.

Anders' existential expedition delves into his social heritage. An upbringing with stated opinions of what a successful boy/man is. Enduring a family environment of high expectations and high alcohol consumption, that goes back several generations. Rising from a society that paints the ideal of the successful person - but fails to recognize the negative impact of the individual's roots and the culture that shape the person one will become.

SELF-ISH takes us on an organic trip exploring the labyrinthine path of a modern being in pursuit of a new consciousness. It is a film about reconciliation and love, turmoil, anxiety and anger, and how we all make mistakes in a messy world. It is both a journey of liberation and forgiveness, made possible only by the willingness to overcome one's own selfishness.

Anders meets with his father who refuses to support him. This forces Anders to look back at his chaotic childhood and descent into teenage drug addiction until finding recovery at age 26.



Anders smokes hash (Copenhagen, 1988)

His journey towards self-discovery continues as he finds himself balancing between a terrified and neurotic state of mind vs. being happy and content.

Realizing that many of his problems are self-created, he explores the capricious nature of life while trying to take more responsibility for his actions as he begins responding to life rather than reacting to it. It dawns on him that he is not a complete victim, but a thriving and productive person who has gained a toehold on humility through slow and steady ego deflation.

PREMISE

Suppression leads to rebellion and liberation.

DIRECTORS MOTIVATION

Ingmar Bergman said: "Making a movie is like undressing slowly in the town square".

So why am I doing SELF-ISH? Why should I offer the world my selfish movie and my nakedness?

It may sound weird, but I simply can't help it. I have the calling and passion to make this film or I get sick. I learned to edit film and video when I made my own short films in the late 90's and early 00's. I resigned myself to making a living as an editor, and my dreams of becoming a film director were paused. In my heart I've always considered myself more a filmmaker rather than "just" a film editor.

The basic idea for SELF-ISH initially came from recognizing my lack of understanding of why I am here. My original plan was to make a movie where a personal approach to the story would be the focal point, studying how far the self-absorbed-filmmaker could afford to go, personally and publicly exploring his own ego.

But all that changed dramatically when I interviewed my father about my birth and early childhood. After that, my project was immersed in a new light of Universality.

"Father son conflict ... I think it's Biblical", as my friend Casper says in the film.

Raised conservatively in Copenhagen, I was a troublemaker and was shamed by my father and other adults. My ADD and OCD were called idiotic and never got treated. At 13 I started drinking, smoking hash and taking LSD and I became addicted. As my friend, Jeffrey says: "Alcoholism does not discriminate - from Park Avenue to park bench - brain surgeons are alcoholics." Today I have been alcohol and drug free since February 5, 2001.

I think at times my embarrassingly honest portrayal of my troubled existence can be a mirror for others living complicated lives, those who struggle with addiction issues.

To me SELF-ISH is about inner conflicts, mental illness and family dynamics; about detachment, the relationship between fathers and sons (masculinity), genetic dependence through alcoholism, and at last, forgiveness.

• THE VISUAL LANGUAGE

I characterize my style as psychological realism, created through associative montage editing. I write and edit mostly from the intuitive. It is my belief that what we normally experience as cinematic realism is far from the perceived reality - that is, the reality we actually experience ...

Dad with Anders after a head trauma accident (Brussels 1978)



Inspiration of associative montage editing from, Simon Pummell's, *Bodysong*, 2003

.. a place where time and space do not exist. From a background of real-life events, the imagination spins and weaves new patterns. A blend of memories, experiences, pure inventions, absurdities and improvisations.

So I strive to describe my perception of "reality" as experienced subjectively. Like a flashback catalyst to childhood memories and dream scenarios - inspired by "Wild Strawberries" by Ingmar Bergman.



Wild Strawberries, (Smultronstället) 1957

• FILMMAKER STATEMENT

I think it is important to take good care of one's memories because they cannot be re-lived.

SELF-ISH exists somewhere between what I know and what I don't know.

Some documentaries can expand and contract our sense of time and take us to a place that's off-limits, either because the place belongs to the past or is inaccessible for other reasons.

As my film is still in production I am not 100% certain where and how the story will end, but I hope to ride into the sunset with a little more peace of mind and perhaps greater acceptance of the unknown as it is presented to me day by day.

MORE



Family archive (1927) Anders' Great grandfather



Family archive (1962) Anders' Mother



Family archive (1981) Anders with his Great grandmother at 103 she lived till 109

ANDERS' VERSION OF A PRODUCER'S REFLECTIONS

SELF-ISH is the ultimate selfie film. A film made by a talent who looks at the self in a completely exorbitant and unabashed way. A window into the psyche of a modern person and the social and cultural reality of present day.

When I first heard about the project, I thought - oh another "I'm middle-aged and have not recovered from my childhood" film. But when I saw the material, I loved it. Anders' way of side-stepping the linear and being real to the film's emotional truth worked. I could see it in the interviews and in his editing, but I also felt it in our conversations when we later met. There is a great musicality and sensuality in what he does. A kind of security, rooting in emotional reality. I experience an almost embarrassing eagerness to scream loudly and reach for the heights.

With his many and strong life experiences, Anders has a developed mind for when something is true, or at least pure in tone. He is, despite a bit of chaos, incredibly good at listening, and for me as a producer, that is one of the most important things in an artist. Another characteristic, Anders has is that he is sharp when it comes to understanding his role as a director.

PRODUCER'S MOTIVATION CONTINUED

A prerequisite for being able to create one of the most challenging films that exists - the one about oneself.

As a producer, I always look for movies that surprise and do not look like others. Films that mean something to the narrator, films that come from the heart and not least films that can challenge our understanding of reality and create a breeding ground for new insights.

It is through recognizing the complexity of things that new insights are created about oneself and others, and I am convinced that SELF-ISH can actually move something.

It is thoughtful, thought provoking and humorous and it has good opportunities to reach an international audience.

With a great deal of stubbornness, Anders has worked for more than 15 years to get to the bottom of his quest - a perseverance required by this type of project.

That said, we are both aware that development requires transparency and collaboration with colleagues who could have a different perspective and expertise.



Anders shoots 16 mm with an Arriflex 16BL during one of the first SELF-ISH productions (NYC 2005)

MORE

TIME SPEED & SOCIAL MEDIA

The film also examines time and how time seemingly expands and contracts depending on states of mind, activity and various perceptions of what we call reality.



Is the ever-growing obsession with self, through social media, merely an extension of self-portraits painted by artists for centuries?



PURPOSE

Another task is to try and better understand the undercurrents of the mental health issues that alcoholism and drug addiction often springs from, and that overall feeling of discontentment, that so many people live with - regardless of being rich or poor, healthy or sick, loved or hated.

It's also important to understand the cultural and psychological environment of the perpetrator and the victim, (in this case somewhat the same person). To this end, medical professionals such as Dr. Joel Silbert, Former Deputy Director of Manhattan Psychiatric Center and other recognized experts in science, physics, anthropology participate.

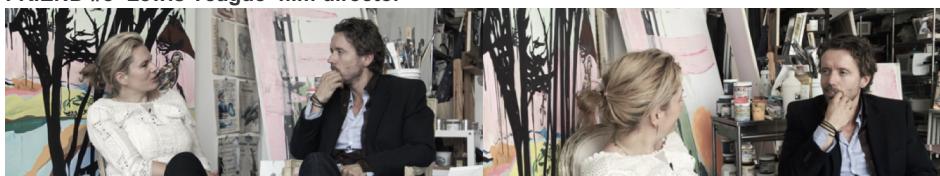
THE DIFFERENT LAYERS

- PEOPLE LAYER

Anders' neuroses are at first the driving force of the conversations with his male friends. Here a rare masculine vulnerability occurs, where men talk openly about their life experiences and relationships to their fathers. Girlfriends are also interviewed and a variety of specialists providing both a personal, humors and professional perspective - giving some hard truths about Anders.



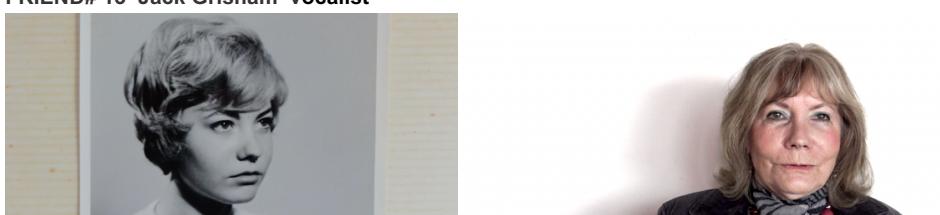
FRIEND #8 Lewis Teague film director



FRIEND #29 Sophie Staerk fine arts painter



FRIEND# 13 Jack Grisham vocalist



Anders' mother, Elisabeth



FRIEND# 37 John Savage actor



FRIEND# 100 Bianca Rodriquez family & addiction therapist

- THE PHILOSOPHICAL LAYER - CRUISING WITH CAMUS

In which Anders questions the big mystery (why we are here to begin with) and tries to embrace "The Absurd". He asks: What is the meaning of life in this immediate random world?

In philosophy, The Absurd refers to the conflict between the human tendency to seek inherent value and meaning in life, and the human inability to find any in a chaotic and irrational universe. The universe and the human mind do not each separately cause the Absurd, but rather, the Absurd arises by the conflicting nature of the two that coexist.



Sisyphus, symbolizes the absurd about human existence



FRIEND #0 Dr. Joel Silbert (former deputy director at Manhattan psychiatric center) and Anders talks about, Leonardo da Vinci's theory, that there's a direct link between the function of the body and the way the universe functions. And how the navel in, da Vinci's: Vitruvian Man is placed in the middle of the drawing as a symbol of the creation of the universe. Anders wonders while, Mr. Silbert exclaims "He (da Vinci) was also out of his mind."



Crop of da Vinci's: Vitruvian Man

- **THE FATHER / SON LAYER**

In which Anders interviews and confronts his father, Mikael. (Or maybe the other way around?)

Mikael tells Anders about his forgotten childhood and his later disappointment that he became addicted to drugs and alcohol. Along the way, he states that he would not be interested in him unless, Anders was his son and that he no longer feels love between them. Anders is shocked and later shows him the scenes. The confrontation causes more damage than good.



Anders interviews his father, Mikael about an earlier interview (West Jutland 2015)



Dad loses his cool over additional lame questions and smashes the camera (West Jutland 2016)



Dad jokes around during an interview setup (West Jutland 2019)

Over time, there is a shift in their relationship. The scenes between them undergo a dramatic development and a new and humorous (serio-comedic) language opens up allowing, Anders to finally open up as he begins to move on from the past.

LOCATIONS

The film takes place in: Jutland, Los Angeles, Mumbai, New York City and Copenhagen.

FORMAT

Principal photography is shot in 4K using a: SONY AX6400, Sony FDR-AX33, and the iPhone.