



Dear Krister,

I wish I didn't have to say anything about any of this, but I have to try.

I heard a story on the radio about a young man who jumped from the eighteenth floor, and while he was in the air he had just enough time to think: This is a mistake. I don't want this. It strikes me that this is exactly how it must've been for you. Especially that night when everything fell apart. And afterwards, you were floating free in the air. Like that jumper. Just enough time to think. This is a mistake.

I have this feeling that what you did was only human. Is that strange? I'm standing in line and watching people around me. Some of them are talking, listening to music. They're living their lives. But look at it another way and suddenly we're seen as the animals we are. The apes that conquered the world and came up with civilization. Lost in a perpetual waking dream.

Maybe we won't be able to forgive you. Maybe it's not that important. But if we could understand. To try and see what you were thinking. That has to be possible.

It doesn't really matter that much, my thoughts about all of this. It's yours we need.

Sincerely,

JG



THE APE

SYNOPSIS

Krister, a husband and father, wakes up to the consequences of a tragedy. Confronted with everyday reality, there is no place for escape and Krister is soon forced to face up to his actions.

The Ape is about the struggle to hold on to things around us already lost. Realizing what is left when the life you once had is gone.

JESPER GANSLANDT (born 1978, Sweden)

Ganslandt moved from his home town of Falkenberg to Stockholm in 2000, and wrote the screenplay for his debut film *Falkenberg Farewell* (2006) as an expression for the strong longing, back to the childhood years of his hometown. The film was shown at film festivals around the world, including Toronto and Venice, won the FIPRESCI prize in

Lisbon and was nominated for a number of Swedish Film Awards (Guldbagge). He has also directed the short film *Jesper Ganslandt's 114th Dream* (2008), the concert film *Skinnskatteberg* (2008) and the documentary *The Film I'm No Longer Talking About* (2009). *The Ape* is Ganslandt's second feature film.

PRODUCTION

Title	The Ape	Production company	Fasad
Original title	Apan	Editor	Jesper Ganslandt
Genre	Thriller	Cinematographer	Fredrik Wenzel
Director	Jesper Ganslandt	Sound editor	Andreas Frank
Screenwriter	Jesper Ganslandt	Duration	81 min
Cast	Olle Sarri	Year of production	2009
.....	Francoise Joyce	Camera	Red
.....	Niclas Gillis	Sound	Dolby Digital
.....	Sean Pietrulewicz	Format	1:1.85
Producer	Jesper Kurlandsky	Screen ratio	24 fps
Production designer ..	Catharina Nyqvist Ehrnrooth	Spoken Language	Swedish
Co-producer	Jessica Ask	Country of origin	Sweden
.....	Gunnar Carlsson	Domestic release	Oktober 2009

A conversation about *The Ape* with Jesper Ganslandt and Olle Sarri

JESPER

Is there a simple answer to where the idea for *The Ape* came from?

It was a combination of things. For a long time I'd been playing with ideas that in some ways were reminiscent of the universe we created in *Falkenberg Farewell*, but that approach ran out of steam after awhile and I realized I couldn't do that again, that it didn't feel right anymore. I wasn't in that space anymore where I felt that what I was working on had to be done, that it had to result in something.

You're talking about a change of attitude? Motivation for doing a certain film?

Exactly. If I'm going to make a new film, it shouldn't feel like something I'm doing just because I felt like doing a new film.

I was in Malmö at the time, living at a hotel there, and was pretty lonely there in that little hotel room. For awhile I had been hounded by instances of the horrific—terrible and tragic and violent things that are happening in the world around us, which often only get a few column inches in the back of the newspaper. For about a year or so I was spooked by and haunted by these happenings – I couldn't make sense of headlines like "*Woman raped on the way home from the subway*". I couldn't see what happened before and after, and that made the whole thing elusive. It was missing pieces.

But I was also alarmed that we were expected to know about this, and read about it, and be horrified by it, but never required to put it into a human context. Who is this person out there, this monster? It could've just as easily been me, it's not impossible. I can't really imagine that there is a difference between people and people. The thing *The Ape* started to be about was just one of these fantasies, one of them that upset and horrified me the most.

The title *The Ape* came from a story a friend told me about how one day while riding the bus during rush hour, he looked at all the people and suddenly saw how—despite the clothes, buses, and civilization—they were only naked apes who had a bit of clothing on and stood crowded there feeling miserable. It doesn't necessarily need to be something negative, but it's an image that stuck with me.

OLLE

The film centers intensely around the character *Krister*, he's in nearly every frame. How did Jesper approach you with this project?

We didn't say a word about the character when he presented the project. It started with him asking me if I could consider helping him on a pilot, and if so, helping as an actor. When he later explained what it would be about, he said it would be a *feel bad comedy*. That was the first way he proposed it, a *feel bad comedy*. He was tired of *feel good*, he wanted to *feel bad*, but as a *comedy*. There was no way I could say anything but yes.

JESPER

These ideas about the incomprehensible, the horrific – how did they come together into the story told in the film?

It's hard to say. I wrote the story in one night, more or less, and I focused on a person who finds himself in the middle of the normal, everyday world, but who carries with him so much aggression at living this life he never imagined himself living – he can't understand how he ended up like this. Then the details filled themselves in almost automatically – that he was a driving school instructor, that he had a family, that his car was in the shop. The everyday details were easy to fill in. The day the film takes place on is the day after the dramatic event, not the day where everything happens. I thought it was much more interesting. In the resolution you can see the person, and then maybe, maybe you can start to understand, to make sense of what has happened. That was my ambition with this film – to maybe make sense of that kind of action, at least a little bit, through the resolution.

There's an interesting discussion of dramaturgy here. Usually when the resolution of a dramatic moment is portrayed, it's often about solving a crime, for example, or a kind of suspense story that leads up to the climax. In *The Ape* the catastrophe has already happened. Is there a point in that also, from a storytelling point of view?

I think so. I've never really seen a broken psyche portrayed so closely through film as we've done here. There's a point





to it, a real reason. You can see the lead up to it in many, many films, and you can see investigations everyday on TV if you want, but this is a little more unusual, and a little more difficult to watch sometimes.

Can you explain how the manuscript was used during shooting? Olle Sarri never got to read it.

I wanted to keep him unprepared, in the dark, so that he didn't start an intellectual process around the character and plan him to pieces. So it kept him away from interpretation. It was an experiment in the beginning, but it was exciting to see that it worked so well.

OLLE

When did he tell you that you wouldn't be allowed to read the manuscript?

Right away. First he said I wouldn't read the script, then that I wouldn't know anything about the script at all. It sounded super exciting – strange, but very exciting – not knowing. Much later I understood that one of the reasons for this was that he simply doesn't really trust actors. I'm pretty sure I was a contributing factor. I haven't really confronted him with it, but I think it's a given. In film, it's so hard to get away from making it theatrical or whatever you want to call it – I'm just speculation about all of this, but I've heard Jesper mention it.

Was it aggravating that Jesper didn't show any trust for traditional acting? A lot of actors probably wouldn't appreciate working under so unconventional methods.

I'd describe myself as an open actor, I'm curious about new things. The main thing is that the result is good. I'm usually very careful about who I work with. I usually know what's going on, and get involved with most aspects surrounding a project, even beyond my own role. In this project, I knew that Jesper wanted me to forget all that, that none of the other stuff was my concern. The important thing was focusing on my part, and my part was Krister. And that's how it was. It was nice to be able to focus completely on what I was there to do, and only that.

JESPER

There's a kind of distrust here against traditional acting techniques.

Yeah, I think that's right. I watch a lot of film, but rarely do I see convincing acting. But when it's good I want to know how they got there. I think those successful moments are grounded in a humility for what they're doing, a sensitivity for the situation, the material.

Personally, I never thought this method could be seen as a gimmick. But I did think it would be a really exciting thing for us to try, and also necessary. Partly because my confidence in actors is very low, but also partly because I couldn't see how I could plan all the nuances of the trauma without losing the intimacy and intensity in Olle's performance, in Krister's actions. Everyone in the team could focus on the present, and what happens right now, which I think

creates a immediacy and presence which would be hard to get any other way.

OLLE

Certain directors would see this as an ideal situation, where they have full control over the actors, who are just used as instruments in their hands, while certain actors maybe would see it as a nightmare. That they're completely vulnerable to the director's whims and without the chance to influence the outcome or prepare themselves.

It's worth speculating about, but for me it was just the opposite. It was an ideal project for an actor. A role of a lifetime. Even if some people think it seems scary, I think there are a lot of actors envious of this opportunity. Right after we wrapped, I felt like I would never be able to work again, that I'd have to do something else now, because as an actor, I'd never be able to top that. I thought, I can't work more now, not after I've done this.

Was there any concern during the process that the method would be seen as a gimmick?

After the second day of shooting, we took a moment to discuss whether we'd continue with the method or not, and we established very quickly that we would. The most important thing was that the film turned out good, so as long as we thought it benefited the film, we were going to go for it. After a few more days, there wasn't any doubt that it worked and that we'd continue. I felt really awful a few times during the whole thing, but at the same time it was really fantastic. I've never felt as much for a character as I did for Krister – I didn't know anything, you know? So the whole time I was hoping that it would end well for him. Before each scene, I hoped for the best possible scenario I could think of. That's just human nature, I guess – to hope for the best for yourself and for the people you care about.

JESPER

Did the technique offer any surprises that you took advantage of? I'm thinking that Olle was put into scenes where he doesn't know the full context – was that something you consciously played off of? Were there many scenes you got in the first take?

There was absolutely an element of surprise, but we ended up doing a ton of takes anyway – up to fifty takes of certain things. But that had a lot to do with Olle being so incredibly faithful to the method. Trying to keep up the energy, the vague disorientation, is not easy.

Do you think this method can be used with a lot of other actors? Is that something you'd consider doing?

I think so, absolutely. I'm pretty interested in testing it out.

OLLE

With the manuscript situation the way it was, you had only Krister there to base your performance on. How fully realized was he when the project started?

His character wasn't really fully carved out when we first started. I remember getting a single sheet of paper with a brief description of Krister that Jesper had written. A nicely balanced paragraph of information. When we tried on the clothes, some of the pieces fell into place. When we did the first scene, even more came together, and then we constantly discussed who Krister was. Because of the nature of the shooting we often spoke in riddles, where I made suppositions about Krister, asked questions – sometimes I got answers from Jesper, sometimes not.

JESPER

Did Krister turn out to be the way you imagined him to be in the end?

He was exactly the way I imagined him. Krister was created during many dark summer nights when I was there in the hotel in Malmö writing the manuscript. I knew that bit by bit he would end up in the hands of someone else, an actor who would supply his personality to the role, and that felt good.

What does Olle Sarri bring to the role? What as it about him that made you want him for the main role? In Sweden he's best known as a comedic actor.

Part of the fun is that he's a comedian. It's done more often abroad, but I haven't seen it happen so much here in Sweden, that a comic actor is cast in a more serious role. I'm thinking about Jim Carrey in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* for example, where it works out really nicely because I know that the flipside of comedy is sorrow – it's a crying clown at its best. I felt that with Olle, that he carried a lot of experiences that could be expressed here.

How was it working with Olle?

Really good. He is not acclaimed at all but also goes deep into the character. No affectations, just a disciplined, devoted hard-working actor.

How much of the film was shot chronologically?

Pretty much all of it. But we also got to a point in the production where the story sort of winds up and afterwards there weren't as many secrets to reveal to Olle. That's when something new happened that had to be careful about.

Up until a few weeks before you started shooting, you thought of shooting *The Ape* yourself, but at the last minute you handed over the responsibility to Fredrik Wenzel whom you've worked with earlier. What did Fredrik bring to the feel of the film?

He brought a lot. He and I have come to the point where we can come together as professionals – as director and cinematographer – which we couldn't really do before. Already in the planning stage I thought it would be fantastic if Fredrik could film it, but I didn't know if we were ready for that, neither of us. But it went well. Fredrik also brings a consistency to the visual narrative which makes it possible for me to suggest different scenes and he always finds a consistent solution – something I wouldn't be as good at. I think he's masterful.

OLLE

Were there any mottos or principles you had during production to maintain consistency in the storytelling?

Jesper asked me to surprise him, that was a constant thing. But just as I was given those directions, he asked me to surprise myself too, and that's what I tried to do the whole time during shooting – which was very hard, but fun when it happens.

I obviously didn't really mean all that about never working again – I'm already working on something else now – but the thing with *The Ape* has been, and is, unique for me. It's something I'm only going to be a part of once in a lifetime, and it's fantastic. I feel very fortunate.

JESPER

Now about the form of the film. We're always very tight on Krister the whole time, he's hardly an arm's length away though the whole film, and he very rarely leaves the screen. At the same time, we're not in his head, it's never strictly his perspective that's being shown.

No, we're right behind him, just to the side of him – partly because it's really exciting to see him, but there's also another reason for that. It's harder to push him away.

You use a highly realistic style in the film, even the music – it's only existing music that's heard, from the car stereo, etc.

All application of music and retouched imaging would mean putting a kind of "cinematic gloss" over the film which would make it easier to lean back. The whole point of the film is to sit at the edge of your seat, tilted forward, and it doesn't work to use music in that case. It would give it a kind of romanticism, the music becomes a narrator, and I didn't want that.

Back to Krister. You wondered earlier what the difference was between him and you or I. So we can ask ourselves: Is the Krister character important? As an individual? Or can he be anybody?

It was like that at least in the experiment: he is anybody. On paper, that's how it is. But later I expected the whole time that a very specific person – Olle Sarri – would leave his mark on Krister. But for a long time in the manuscript, he was only called "a man". It could've been anyone you pass by on the street.

I had a very clear internal picture of Krister, but was very reluctant to let it out too much. Partly for Olle's sake, but also for my own – to reveal too much about him would be to say: This is how he is. Something I wasn't willing to do. In some sense, the film is about not being so quick to label things, even if something is horrific, there's also another side.





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