



CHESTER FILM SOCIETY PRESENTS:

THE BOTHERSOME MAN

2008 Norway 95 mins

Director: Jens Lien

Starring: Trond-Fausa Aurvaag, Petronella Barker

I sensed a certain edge of discomfort amongst the audience at the screening of Jens Lien's movie *The Botheresome Man* (*Den Brysomme Mannen*). A lot of it certainly had something to do with the fact that you could never be sure just what world you were in and consequently had no idea where it was going to take you – not to mention that there were some pretty gruesome scenes of gore - but I'd like to think that perhaps there was some recognition that the bizarre world depicted in this darkly humorous and mildly subversive film showed us a reflection of our own rather conformist and complacent lives in a way that was rather too close for comfort.

The Botheresome Man works in this way on the same level as Terry Gilliam's *Brazil*. It depicts a world that is recognisably one that we are very familiar with, but seen through the eyes of the lead character Andreas, the values that we would normally deem as aspirational and a mark of personal success and achievement – a comfortable job, a beautiful girlfriend, a designer home straight out of a television advertisement - all take on a rather distorted and even horrific aspect.

Despite having everything he could wish for, it all seems to come rather too easily for Andreas, and all the trappings of a successful life become exactly that – trappings. Everyone at work seems to be content however, and soon he finds himself looking through furniture catalogues with the rest of his colleagues during lunch breaks, being invited to dinner parties and living in blissful domesticity with a beautiful girlfriend who works (and lives and breathes) in interior design. Still Andreas is certain that something is not quite right – there is a certain blandness to everything, but he can't quite put his

finger on just what it is that is missing from his life. He attempts a secret affair with a work colleague, but that does not give him the promise of escape he had hoped for. Even self-harm and attempted suicide fail to have any impact or bring him any kind of release from the monotony of his existence. Only one other person seems to realise that the world around them is all wrong – a mysterious man he has overheard complaining about the beer in a toilet cubicle at the bar where no matter how much Andreas drinks he cannot even get out of his head by getting drunk. This mysterious man however, living in a dimly lit basement room, seems to have made a significant discovery that could shake the bland world around them to the core.

Inevitably, there's something of a *Twilight Zone* feel to proceedings, but Jens Lien also imbues the film with that particular Nordic sense of dead-pan humour (it's probably obligatory to mention *Kaurismäki* at this point), and an unsettling manner of spiking the colour-bleed monotony with a number of shocking gore scenes of a quite literally visceral nature that may be a little too much for some arthouse cinemagoers of a more sensitive disposition. The intent however is clear and calculated - the director is aware that, even when satirised, the glamorous, glossy, television advertisement allure of the consumerist lifestyle is still potentially seductive to the viewer and *The Botheresome Man* intends to violently shock you out of your comfort zone, or at least allow you to entertain dark thoughts of silent rebellion and non-conformity for an hour and a half.

Noel Megahey, DVD Times



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