

**Veit Helmer**

**presents his feature film *Absurdistan* (2007),**  
a project developed through a SOURCES 2 Script Development Workshop.

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Welcome to *Absurdistan*! If you travel to Dublin, you go to a travel agency. If you want to travel to *Absurdistan*, you have to go to the cinema.

My journey took over seven years. The idea hit me during a sunny afternoon in summer 2001. I was reading a newspaper, and on the last page there was a little article that the women in Sirt – this is a little village in Turkey – started a strike. They told their husbands that if they wanted to come to the bedroom, they had to fix the water pipe first.

I knew immediately this would be my next film, actually my film after because I was in production on another film. So I finished that film, then I started developing the screenplay of *Absurdistan*, whose title changed five or six times over the course of the past seven years: *Women on Strike*, *Sex Strike*, *Bathing in Moonlight*, *Azerbaijan Dream*, and finally *Absurdistan*.

I knew from the beginning, the premise would be about a young couple who want to have sex, because I was thinking who is most affected by such a sex strike... I thought it has to be someone who had waited a long time to have sex. In the beginning, I didn't know why they were waiting, but I was sure they had to wait for a long time. I also felt that the villagers didn't want to fix the pipe for various reasons that I wasn't aware of in the beginning.

Before I went to Turkey, I was sure I didn't want to make a film about Turkey. And I was sure I didn't want to make a film about Germany because we don't have such water problems with broken pipes. It was actually a good opportunity for me to create my own universe, which is something I really love about filmmaking. I did this in my first film *Tuvalu*, and I wanted to go even further with *Absurdistan*. But even in creating a fantasy world, I wanted to base it on facts. Reality writes the most fantastic stories, and even this weird story is based on a real fact. I felt there was more behind these pipelines. So I hired location manager in Istanbul who found that village, because Sirt wasn't on any maps. He found the village and went there. He spoke to the Imam because they really didn't want me to come there.

The story behind this article is that there was a new road to Sirt. The governor of that region came with his wife, and there was a little orchestra, and they opened the road. Then the governor's wife needed to pee. So she asked the women where to go, and she found out that there was no water. And no water in the Muslim religion is something that prevents you from having sex because you need to wash yourself after having sex. So the governor's wife asked the woman: "How do you do it?" And the woman said, "Oh, we don't do it." [audience laughter]. And then the governor's wife went to a local journalist and said, "They don't do it here." So instead of writing about the opening of the road, the journalist wrote about how up there on the mountain the women were on strike.

So first the Turkish media picked up on this story in the local newspaper. And then the men were invited to a talk-show in Istanbul. The whole nation laughed at them. So they were afraid I wanted to do again something funny about them. I was tempted to drop my idea about a fantasy village and make a film about this village and this journalist. But I don't speak Turkish, and I couldn't get into it. Maybe I could write a screenplay, but I also wanted to direct it. And I didn't want to direct the film in a country that I didn't know. So I continued to pursue *Absurdistan* and develop my screenplay, but enriched with some fun facts from the village. The real strike lasted three weeks. So actually the men resisted, but they really were afraid the women would take over. It wasn't that they were afraid of not having water; they were afraid of a change in power.

I was very much inspired, but I'm not a writer. I'm a director and a producer, and I write only if I have to write. But I've collaborated with good writer, for example Gordan Mihic, who wrote several scripts for Emir Kusturica, such as *Black Cat*, *White Cat* and *Time of the Gypsies*. He was very happy about this idea. After two months I got the first draft. He works very fast. But he's a one-shot guy: he delivers a screenplay and he says, "That's perfect." He says every screenplay he's written was shot from the first draft. So when I want re-writes, I must work with other writers. His screenplays are magical. They're really wonderful, and they're full of material. Every screenplay he writes contains ideas for ten screenplays or at least characters for ten films. My original idea about the couple being victims of this strike was somewhere between the lines. This couple were no longer the protagonists. There were many, many other characters. It was like this Balkan bazaar that we know and we love the Serbian films or the former Yugoslavian films for, but it's also not my cinema. I like to have two protagonists and fall in love with them. I like to see the world through their eyes.

At the same time that I started working on the screenplay, I knew I had to find the village because the village in Turkey wasn't beautiful. I mean it was a beautiful village, but it was green. And before I came to Sirt, I thought this was in the desert. But it wasn't. It was near the seaside. You could even see the sea.

So I travelled through Turkey to find a nice village. There were nice landscapes, but I couldn't find the village I had in my mind. So I started taking other trips through Morocco, Italy, Greece, the Crimean Peninsula, Georgia, where I found more interesting landscapes. Then I travelled around Georgia. I went to Armenia and finally to Azerbaijan. And in Azerbaijan I found not one village but two, which together formed this village that I needed. In one village, all the interiors were nice, and the houses and the streets. But when you stepped back from the village, it was surrounded by green mountains.

So I went to the desert and I found a very beautiful village when you see it from a distance. When you get closer to the village, however, you see that it's not such a beautiful village. It's muddy and dusty. There are no shops, no cobblestones. But together, both villages formed my dream village. Part of the crew doubted that we could make that connection and thought that audiences wouldn't believe it. Later we can discuss the weak points of the film, but I think this worked seamlessly.

Actually there's even a third town in the film for the views from the top for the gondola scenes, which were very important to me. We had to construct fifteen metre high pillars. And they needed to be on concrete foundations. And we couldn't do that in either the desert village or in the mountains. So we went to a very beautiful town called Sheki in the west of Azerbaijan. And there we could go with bulldozers and the heavy equipment we needed to make the sixty metre long wire tracks to hang the gondola and have the scene from above. Because the roofs were of a similar style, we were able to integrate them in the editing.

When I found these villages, I went with a writer from Georgia to Azerbaijan, Zaza Buadze. It's very difficult to work in the former Soviet Union, especially in the Caucasus and Central Asia because most of the film studios have stopped working. Of the 2,000 employees they used to have at Azerbaijan Film, there are only twenty people left.

I had to start educating my film crew in Baku. I gave workshops and made short films with students because I knew in order to work with such a subject in a muslim country that I needed a lot of local help. I couldn't come with a crew from another country and 'invade' Azerbaijan. I had to go with people from Azerbaijan to the village so that people there would trust us, and so they wouldn't think we were doing something pornographic, which for some reason they always thought we were. But many people from my team came from neighbouring Georgia. Where still many films are made, . They came to my village, which is very close to the Georgian border. And I also asked a Georgian writer Zaza Buadze, who's also a film director, to help me write the second draft.

This was already a process of screenwriting according to the locations. We went to the villages, and opened our eyes. This was helpful. It's very hard when you're inventing a lot of absurd places, and then later you need to find them. It's much better if you find places, and then you write scenes according to

them, especially when you're writing for a small budget. I knew I couldn't build every set. So I was very happy because there were things in this village that I couldn't even imagine, like the beekeeper, the funny antennas on the post office. We didn't write these things; we found them. It was more the other way around: We saw all these wonderful locations and thought, "Where could that fit?" Like the bakery. How could that fit in the story? How could that fit in this world? That was the step Zaza Buadze took me.

And then I had a working script, but I felt that it wasn't my script anymore. The way Zaza wrote it, was according to his own way of filmmaking. This was when I applied to SOURCES 2. I came to the workshop in Budapest, where I was with Colin Tucker and other fellow screenwriters. It was a very lovely group. We fought from morning till evening. We argued a lot. We screamed and yelled and there were nearly some physical fights. I came back to Berlin very disturbed. Looking back at my notes, I see that I didn't do any writing in Budapest. I tried to write. But you shouldn't expect too much of this week in terms of what you do here. After coming back from Budapest, I didn't do much for a week or two because I had to digest everything. Then after two or three weeks, I started to write. And everything that was shaken up in Budapest became very valuable. I think until I went to Lisbon, where I had my second session with Colin Tucker, it came back to pieces. The most dramatic change was that I eliminated the dialogue. There was dialogue when I applied to SOURCES 2.

I can't do films with dialogue. My second film had dialogue but it wasn't my signature. With *Absurdistan* I can identify very much, because I love visual filmmaking. I can work on a project for six years and earn no money. I can sacrifice my whole life because it's very unique.

I was questioned a lot in Budapest: What do I want to do? What do I like and what do I not like? And I found out that I had to go back to what I really like, which is making films without dialogue. That's what I changed until I went to the second session.

Then I went to Lisbon, and Colin in a way approved of what I'd done in the half year after the first session of the SOURCES 2 Script Development Workshop. I felt again that it was my project, even if there was a lot of Gordan Mihic and a lot of Zaza Buadze in it. But in a way I brought myself into it.

I really don't like to write. I keep hoping for the day that I open up the mailbox and there's a script inside that's ready to be shot. But it hasn't happened yet. I'm writing because there's nobody writing for me.

So I hired a third writer, Ahmet Golbol. I told him, "The script has a problem because it's about Aya and Temelko, and men and women. And now I'm starting to cast. How can I possibly offer a screenplay with fifteen men and fifteen women to actors, telling them, 'You are Man 15.' We have to do something about this." I needed to do that for attracting actors. But actually that also brought the script to another level because numbers became characters. Ahmet gave them names, professions and little stories. We gave them flesh.

I applied to the New Talent Support of the MEDIA program. I used the grant to do casting in twenty-eight countries. I wanted the best actors, to search everywhere where there were actors. In such a film, it's a different way of acting. It's not the normal way of acting; it's different. Not every actor, not every good actor can act in my film. I needed to see them acting. I needed to see them acting without words.

So I had to find casting directors – that was very difficult. In the United States or in Western Europe, you have casting directors. But in Central Asia or in Morocco you don't have them. So you need to contact filmmakers, assistant directors, producers, or someone who's eager to become a casting director. You teach them. You tell them, "I want you to take a camera, and tell the actors this and that scene. Take fifteen minutes or twenty minutes or half an hour, and tell them how they should do it." And they did it. And from every country I got one hundred actors on video. That was the contract.

So I had 2800 actors. And you can't possibly remember watching 2800 actors. Who's the best, the second best, the third best, the fourth best? I hired an editor, who also became the editor of the movie. We short-listed everything from every country. We then had five or six actors per country. And then we thought who could play what. Sometimes we changed what they should do. The village grew on video. It was a virtual

village in a way. There was still a little bit of dialogue in the casting. And then we edited them so someone from Italy was talking to someone from Moscow or to somebody from Kazakhstan.

So we created couples. We were actually marriage brokers. And some of these couples became real couples! Since the shooting of the film, I've been to two weddings. [audience laughter] And two of the couples everyone doubted. They said, "Veit, you can't have this *huge* guy and this small Spanish girl as a couple." And I said, "Yes, there's some chemistry between them, between this Macedonian guy and this Spanish girl." And they fell in love. That was kind of magic.

Then I sent out offers, and some accepted. Some actors didn't accept because I had a small budget. But I found the actors. Ninety percent of the actors were willing to go to Azerbaijan. Some also had religious problems. One Christian actress from Ukraine refused to go to Azerbaijan. I couldn't do anything. There are sometimes limits for a filmmaker.

I should also speak about the financing of the film. I found the village in Azerbaijan, which was difficult, but also good. I could do things there that would cost twice as much in Germany. I calculated the budget for one million Euros, and I was able to raise the financing in Germany. It looks like a very non-German film, but legally it's a German film. There was one partner from Azerbaijan. I asked the Azerbaijan mobile phone provider BAKCELL for help. And they gave me money. I just wanted phone cards, but they invested in this movie.

Azerbaijan had some trouble with the title. They thought I was mocking them.. I like the title and I don't want to change it just because the ambassador of Azerbaijan asked me to change it. So I kept the title. Azerbaijan is a post-Socialist country with a president who passed on his position to his son. But they have freedom in terms of art. They read the screenplay, but there were no comments except for the title.

In the village it was a little bit more difficult. We had to speak to the Imam quite often, and finally he agreed. I not only educated young filmmakers in Baku to work on the film, I also hired a lot of people in the village. So when my art director raised the question about renting an excavator to dig a hole, I said, "Don't rent the machine. Hire ten people with shovels." And that's how half of the village was on my payroll, which was very good because if someone disagreed about something, half the village scolded him. We rented lots of rooms in the houses, we installed lots of showers in the village. It was a mountainous village, and they had lots of water. But they suddenly had a water problem because their pipe didn't bring enough water to the village to deliver water to all the showers because the villagers enjoyed taking showers very much. The reality overtook fiction!

So the financing. It was German financing made with a sort of television money. It's public television: ARD, the first channel. Because we have so many different regional stations, you can go to ten different broadcasters, and if they don't choose you, you can go to the eleventh one. It's very good. It's a difficult system, but if you understand it, you can work quite well with it. Also there was some public funding. We don't have one big public film fund like the Irish Film Board. We have a film board in every region. They don't give as much money. You have to combine them. You have to find two or three. So that was the second source of money. 350,000 Euros came from television, 350,000 came from public funding, and then I had some little sources including my Azerbaijan phone company, which delivered the rest of the money.

The most difficult thing in Germany about the financing is to find a distributor. It's not that the distributor gives a lot of money to a film, but the distributor is the gatekeeper to the financing because they need to give you not only a letter of intent, but a contract before you start shooting. And if you have that contract, then you can go to the state film funds. And if you don't have that contract, you cannot go. Maybe with a short film or with a first film you don't need a distributor, but if you have a budget of one million Euros, you need to have a distributor attached. And that's very difficult because in Germany to release a film costs at least 200,000 Euros. Someone needs to commit even if he doesn't give you money. He needs to commit just on the basis of the screenplay to invest 200,000 Euros two or three years later. And he doesn't know

what the film is going to look like. That was one of the most difficult things with this project. It's not a normal, standard project. It's a film with very little dialogue and shot in Azerbaijan with no stars attached.

Finally we went to Azerbaijan – my Georgian crew, one Iranian, one Ukrainian, and very few German people. We rented the equipment in Tehran, an old camera from the 1950s, still running very smoothly. We smuggled the generator from Georgia. We transported the Kodak stock in an old, run-down catering truck from Germany. That was the only thing I couldn't find in that region – a catering truck. So they drove for over eight days through Europe and Turkey and Georgia. They got stuck at the Georgian border for three days. The driver got arrested because he smelled so bad after two days and was taking a bath in the border river. He had to pay a big bribe to get out of that. But then we made the movie with all the difficulties and all the magic that comes with making movies. People got married. People made babies.

The post-production took a long time, but I expected this. I know I'm a slow filmmaker. It took me seven, nearly eight years to make this film. But it's not something that's a burden; it's my life. And I like my work, and I like to take my time. I think it's good for me and for the project. I also try to have long shooting periods. We shot for fifty-eight days. And I try to have long editing periods. I think we edited for six or seven months, then another four or five months for the sound, which is very difficult. Unfortunately, we couldn't hear the sound at its best here. But just because the film has no dialogue doesn't mean it's a silent movie. It's quite the contrary. Dialogue is something very simple to fill a soundtrack with. You just add a bit of ambient sound and then the sound is finished. If you take away dialogue, you really have to create a lot of sound effects and foleys to fill the void. Plus you have to compose music. Music's also very important.

I found my composer in Japan. It was a magical thing because I didn't dare to call him for my previous film because I thought he was too famous. Shigeru Umebayashi. He made the music for *In the Mood for Love*, which is my favourite soundtrack. For this film, first I asked Alberto Iglesias, whom I like very much. But he was busy. So then my assistant called Shigeru Umebayashi and asked him if he was free. And he said, "Free? Who is it?" And she said, "I'm the assistant of Veit Helmer. I'm calling from Germany. And it turned out he knew my first film and he's a fan of it, and he was really happy to work for me.

So the next day I went to Tokyo, and we made a deal for the music for *Absurdistan*. The film was finished last autumn, and we entered it to Berlin and to Sundance. Berlin rejected it and Sundance accepted, and we happily went to Park City in January – twenty of us. I was very generous in my email and wrote whoever wanted to come, I would pay for the apartment. I thought only three or four people would come. But then twenty people said they were coming, which was very expensive because in Park City you pay \$500 per night for a small place where three or four people can stay. Everyone in town makes a fortune during the festival. But somehow we managed and presented the film at Sundance. Now it's going to play in competition in Moscow in June, and we've been invited to 30 more film festivals. We have a very good sales agent. We've got a contract with Beta Cinema, which also distributed *The Lives of Others* and did this year's Oscar-winning *The Counterfeiters*. So they've been selling the film to many countries,

I used to say my babies are my films. But now I can't say this anymore because I'm now making real babies. [audience laughter, looking at pregnant girlfriend] I'm very interested in hearing your questions.

**WOMEN IN AUDIENCE:** What happened to all the children in the film?

**HELMER:** There are a lot of children in Kindergarten and in school in the flashback scene in the beginning. They're playing, and then they run to the church. But then the bus leaves, and all the young people are sent to the city to study. When the bus returns four years later, Temelko is the only one who comes back. It's a brain drain. It's the reality in developing countries. People go where they earn money, where there's work. I mean I wouldn't stay in that village. I love this village, but as a young, ambitious teenager I wouldn't want to stay. I think in the last fifteen years, Bulgaria has lost one million inhabitants from ten million. Azerbaijan has lost one million of its six million inhabitants. What do you do if you want to work but can't find any work? You go somewhere else. The village is like in Italy. People told me, "Go to

Italy. You'll find beautiful villages to shoot your films." But they were *deserted* villages. It wasn't what I was looking for. In Southern Italy, you can find ruins. I didn't want a deserted village. I wanted a *run-down* village, but not a devastated village. So that's the reason why there are no children in this village.

WOMAN IN AUDIENCE: Did you film what happened during the shooting?

HELMER: I gave a workshop in Georgia, and there was one student I trusted to make the good documentary. But she wasn't courageous enough to keep the camera running when the situations got really intense.

I can talk about some of the problems during the shoot, and then tell you why the documentary is a little bit difficult. The biggest house on the village square, which I loved, is the mosque. I didn't want to place my film in the Muslim environment. I preferred to have it on the edge. We have the scene in the church at the beginning with the wedding. That's a church in Azerbaijan. So what can we do with the mosque? The biggest house? That will be the tea house, the 'chai hana.' So we spoke with the owner and he said, "No problem." But I forgot to ask about the bucket. I didn't dare. So when the bucket was thrown against the door, all the men in the village came to the square and stood next to each other. It was morning time. It was our day off, and I had to go outside and stand in front of all the village men and I thought they were going to do what I was most afraid of – they're going to throw us out of the village. I even had all the crew members sign in their contracts that they'd never look at the women or talk to the women in the village because I was so afraid that something would happen and they'd throw us out of the village. And now, in the middle of the shooting, I had to go out onto the square, and I was like peeing in my pants.

Now talking about the documentary, she didn't shoot that. I don't know why. I told her to shoot it. The situation was so tense that I thought she was shooting it. But the whole situation deescalated very quickly because they weren't angry at me. They were angry at the Imam because they thought the Imam approved this. So all I had to do was say, "I did it without telling the Imam." And they also felt that the Imam was getting a lot of money for this. I had to tell them, "No, the Imam got 300 Euros from me to paint something. That was in the contract." And they thought he got additional money. Once I told everyone and showed them this contract, everyone in the village was happy. I apologized for the bucket, and from that day on, we could shoot again in peace.

That's what I miss. We have a documentary. I even brought it. If you want to see it tonight, I can show it to you. It's like *Lost in La Mancha*. [audience laughter] The only difference is that my film was shot, but Terry Gilliam never shot *Don Quijote*.

There was another intense scene in the village. We asked for permission that Aya can go on the roof and undress. We did this on one of the last shooting days. We did it very early in the morning before daybreak. It was sunrise. We thought all the villagers were tired after six weeks of shooting. But some of them were there, even though nothing was happening. The football World Cup was going on, but they still preferred to watch our boring film shoot! As I told you, most of them were on our payroll. I brought the heads of departments into a separate room, and told them, "I have to shoot that scene. Please give everyone who's there a job." When the sunrise came, I said, "Okay, let's put up the HMI." None of the villagers understood this. They'd never put up an HMI. Now all my heads of departments went to the Azerbaijan employees and said, "Can you bring this costume?" "You need to put away that shovel." "Can you pack this?" Etc. So all the villagers were gone, and I had five minutes to shoot that scene because I knew they would then come back.

So we ran out, she undressed, she ran back in. Then the first person came back. I didn't have a chance to shoot that scene twice. I just hoped everything was right because I didn't look at that scene. I was just looking to see if any of the villagers were coming. Then I asked the cameraman, "Did she come out?" He said, "Yes." "Did she undress?" "Yes." "Was it beautiful?" "Yes, very much." [audience laughter] "Was it in focus?" "I hope so," he said. But it wasn't in the documentary. I don't know, she was also so nervous.

I'll write a book about it now. That's what I'll do: I'll write a book. It's a book where the documentary's at the end. So some of the stories will be on the DVD and some of them will be in the book.

**WOMAN IN THE AUDIENCE:** Who was the cameraman and how did you find him?

**HELMER:** The cameraman is Giorgi Beridze. He shot *A Chef in Love* by Nana Dzordzhadze. He got an Oscar nomination for it. He's the best in this region if not one of the best cameramen in the world. Before I had the budget, I went to Georgia and met him. We got along really well, and I signed a contract with him because I was so afraid that by the time I shot the movie, he'd be with someone else. So I gave him \$1,000 and said, "You have to be available until April 2006. We'll shoot in July – August 2006, and until April you have to keep yourself available." I didn't know if I would make this film, but I paid him \$1,000 out of my pocket, and by April I had the money [to shoot the film].

We went to the villages, and drew a storyboard with 1,000 frames. I don't believe so much in storyboards. I had them for my first film. I didn't use them for my second film. But it was very good for getting familiar with Giorgi Beridze because we talked about every shot a long time before the shooting started. And he never looked at that storyboard again. Most of the scenes don't look like the storyboard. Before every scene, he knew what I wanted. And I remembered what he wanted. And then we saw what the location looked like on that day in that light with the actors and what they wanted to do.

When I tell young directors how to work with actors, I tell them there's no method for working with actors because every actor's different. What I do is I give them one chance, and I don't tell them anything. They know the script, the scene. I tell them what scene we're doing. I tell them where I think the camera could be. I tell them what the real set is, what they can touch and what not, really just the most basic elements. And then I watch the rehearsal and the cameraman watches the rehearsal. Sometimes they use the space according to their own personality.

I think magic can only happen if you accept everything that happens during a shoot. And accidents make the film much richer than what you have in your mind. That's something that comes with experience. With my first film, I was too blocked. I was carrying my storyboard with me, and looking at each frame. I wanted to make it as it was. And if an actor stepped out, I would push him back. I would tell him this is how it has to be. But the more experience I get, the more I can understand that when an actor does something that's not even in the screenplay, it might be better because he understands the character better.

For me, an actor is the lawyer of his character. He knows the character better because I have chosen him because I think an actor *is* a character. I choose actors not because I think they could perform a certain role, but because they *are* these characters. I treat them as these characters. A good actor for me is someone who comes to the casting in character. I don't want to know who they are personally. I never go out with them. I don't want to know who they are because I have this perception that they are these characters, and I love them.

I've worked a lot with insane actors like Denis Lavant in my first film. He didn't want his family to come with him – twelve weeks in Bulgaria – because no, during the shoot he *stayed* this person. And sometimes my actors fall in love because they are *supposed* to fall in love. If they're married, hopefully they can let go of their affairs. If they're not married, they get married after the shoot, which is also beautiful. And there have been no divorces so far.

Also the visuals. I wanted to hand paint the print, hand tint it. I did this with one of my short films. But the colours came out so beautiful that we said, "No, it would damage the film."

**WOMAN IN AUDIENCE:** Did you do digital colour correction?

**HELMER:** Yeah, we did a little bit. It was shot on 35mm, then it was scanned and went through digital colour timing like all films today, what they call a digital intermediate, which gives you more freedom not only to eliminate mistakes, but also to do things which are artistic. It's a new tool. You can compare it to

Photoshop. Before in the cinema, you had a photo, an image, and you could correct it – brighter, darker, more red, more green, more yellow. That's like all you had. But always for the whole image. Now with the digital intermediate, you can do not only darker, brighter and everything else I said, but you can touch every part of the image differently. It's a lot of work if you've got 1,000 shots. Before we did the colour timing in three days. Now it takes two weeks. You don't look at the shot as a whole. You look at the shot as a collection of many different things. The face of the girl gets a different colour correction than the sky in the window. You can sharpen things and you can make things less sharp. You can zoom in, re-size. And if you re-size, you can do a pan. What you can do in post-production cannot make a bad film good, but if you have something, you can do something more.

But the production design is not fake. We found all the interiors in that village. They had hand-painted wallpaper. It was a rich village. It's 4,000 years old, Lahic. And if you don't have holiday plans I recommend Azerbaijan.

The food isn't so exciting: You get shashlik and salad or salad and shashlik. But apart from that, it's a very beautiful country. The Caucasian Mountains are beautiful. And this village is an old blacksmith village. Everywhere they have boxes with porcelain, carpets they collected. They don't collect money, they collect treasures. For me, the village was like a treasure, I felt, and through this small film, I've brought it to the world.

MAN IN AUDIENCE: Why did you include the voice-over?

HELMER: In *Tuvalu* [Helmer's first feature], where I didn't have dialogue, there was something missing.. But it's very important to hear someone.

Sometimes you meet someone and you think, "What a charming person!" Then he starts to talk and you lose all sympathy for him. And it's not the same for everybody. Someone's voice is like chemistry.

In *Tuvalu*, I had very lovely characters, but it was very difficult for the audience to love them because they spoke only a few words in the film. In *Absurdistan*, I wanted to solve this problem. I didn't want them to talk on screen, but I wanted you to hear them talking. That's why I created the voice-over. I think there's a problem with the voice-over. Sometimes it's not necessary. There's a downside to each solution. Taking all unnecessary voice-over away would mean you wouldn't hear the voice-over for long periods of time, which sometimes makes it surprising when it comes again. So we wanted to put it in every now and then, but sometimes we maybe weren't creative enough because there are some dumb sentences like, "The next day they met at the blacksmith's." That's still one of the weak points of the film.

MAN IN AUDIENCE: I don't have a question, but I'd like to congratulate you on your wonderful film.

HELMER: Thank you.

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