

SOURCES 2

SCREENWRITING | DEVELOPMENT
NETWORKING | TRAINING

Sources of Inspiration

Lukas Dhont
Adina Pintilie
Torfinn Iversen

first
feature



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SOURCES 2

SCREENWRITING | DEVELOPMENT
NETWORKING | TRAINING

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SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

DOCUMENTATION

LUKAS DHONT
ADINA PINTILIE
TORFINN IVERSEN

2018/2019

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WELCOME

As any ambitious emerging writer-director knows, it takes stubbornness, stamina, and unending amounts of dedication to one's cinematic vision to successfully realise a début feature. There is much to prove on an increasingly crowded playing field, even if one's had previous success with the short form. Here, we present three dynamic personalities who talk openly and eloquently about the years-long process of writing and directing their first features.

In this issue, Lukas Dhont, Adina Pintilie, and Torfinn Iversen share deeply personal and honest takes on their creative journeys. While they do talk “shop” and share scriptwriting insights and production challenges, they also dovetail much of their own life stories into the mix since that's been part and parcel of their process. But to dive deeply into one's own psyche, exposing one's complex and private inner states of being is only the beginning. Lukas Dhont says: “I think films cannot be anything but personal even though they're not autobiographical. But there will always be elements of your life or something that happened to someone else in your life that will influence the films that you make.”

In Dhont's début his passion for dance; the angst of his own sexual identity as a young “feminine” boy confused about the potential liquidity of gender; the cinematic works of fellow Belgian makers Chantal Akerman and the Dardenne brothers; James Cameron's *Titanic*; Gus Van Sant's *Elephant*; and, believe it or not, Hollywood slasher films, have all been inspirational touchstones on his way to making the fiction feature, *Girl*. The work displays much directorial rigour in line with the way Dhont envisioned his camera moving with his characters, the choreography of the apparatus marking time with the emotional and physical minefields his lead character Lara goes through as a 15-year-old trans girl dedicated to becoming a professional ballerina.

The role of Lara is played by Belgian dancer Victor Polster in a riveting performance. Together with Polster, co-writer Angelo Tijssens and a close-knit cast and crew, Dhont could finally bring to the screen a real-life story he'd discovered and held onto for close to a decade and translate it into visuals, sound, and movement. “I knew that as soon as I was done with film school, this was to be my first film and hoped that when that time came I would be honest enough to make it.” The film took four years to make and we're very proud to say that, as part of the this long process, he participated with *Girl* in a

2016 Sources 2 Script Development Workshop in Norway.

In his talk here, Dhont admits how lucky he's been to meet the right creative partners to cinematise this complex and sensitive story, as well as finding an experienced producer who believed in the project from very early on. But there was no getting away from the fact that as a new director, he was attempting to tell a controversial and very discomfiting tale in an often times hostile socio-cultural environment. He talks admiringly of Nora, his inspiration embodied in the real-life young woman on whose story *Girl* is based. “I found out that although [Nora] had been very true to herself from a very young age, she had come to a point in life where she wanted to disappear. She wanted to fit in. She definitely didn't want to stand out, not be the trans girl that is the example or that is different. She wanted to be like the rest. I recognized myself in what she said, the ways in which I had been trying to fit into normative society. She was trying to fit into a cisgender society. That's what I wanted the film to be about. I wanted the film to be about that moment in our lives where we want to fit in way more than we want to stand out. I knew in that moment that I had been living in a way that led up to the making of this film for twenty-one years.”

Romanian artist Adina Pintilie also chose an exceedingly long and difficult road to travel for her début feature, *Touch Me Not*. Similar to Dhont's obsessions about gender and the body, Pintilie opens her talk by saying that, “*Touch Me Not* is, before anything, a research process and an invitation to engage in dialogue, which challenges you, the viewer, to question your own preconceived ideas about intimacy, sexuality, and the body.” Using bespoke casting processes, problem-solving technical and logistical methods to create as intimate a set as possible for her cast, to exploring intricate financial partnerships to find enough money for each step of the film's lifecycle, Pintilie broke new ground in blending fiction and documentary both in her scriptwriting practices as well as in the interpersonal work with her protagonists, “a wonderful group of gifted and courageous characters who ventured together with me. ...In front of the camera, they had the courage to share some of the most vulnerable areas of their intimate lives. We worked with a fusion of personal stories and fictional elements, exploring procedures such as: meetings between real characters and quasi-fictional ones, family constellations, video diaries,

re-enactments of memories and dreams, and staging reality.” One would be hard-pressed to find a more ambitious and delicate piece of cinema in recent memory. It has electrified spectators around the world.

As well, *Touch Me Not* represents the modern non-fiction cinema landscape in its social outreach modalities. Like Dhont’s creation of Lara – an amalgam of real life and fiction – Pintilie and her cast discovered that the heart of the story resides in the characters starting to move away from their painful pasts, going through private transformative processes – while being filmed – to ultimately reaching a place of freedom, the freedom of self-love. Wanting to share this with audiences, Pintilie raised – and continues to raise – funding for the project’s multiple formats, including interactive performances between some of the protagonists and viewers, fusing the life of the film into more tangible realms of experience. Many of her early aspirations for the film in terms of audience engagement have become a reality and continue to be an essential part of the project’s trajectory. “The extensive international exposure...offers a solid platform to fully develop this dialogue. It creates a context which will expand the self-reflective, transformative process the film initiates by taking the discussions beyond the cinema space, offering audiences the chance for direct exchange with the protagonists within an open debate format called *Touch Me Not – The Politics of Intimacy*.” The story continues.

Torfinn Iversen’s upbringing in an intimate island town in Norway allowed his imagination to roam. Coming from an artistic, and somewhat eccentric, family only fuelled his creative ambitions, beginning with drawing ink and-paper storyboards inspired by his mother’s original bedtime tales. But when an uncle bought him a Hi8 digital camera, an 11-year-old Iversen excitedly started writing and directing short films about the characters he saw around him. His debut, a family comedy-drama called *Oskar’s America*, taps into those childhood experiences and memories, much of them recorded and saved in a personal archive, a “treasure box” of storytelling inspiration that takes a boy’s imagination – and lots of mischief – and turns it into the stuff of cinema. “To me, originality often means dealing with an object or character placed in a situation where it normally does not belong. ...If the image stays long enough in my mind, even after many rounds of thinking about it or the situation, then I start to write out the idea. For me, writing is about creating some kind of emotional chaos for a character and, then through the writing of the story, the chaos has to get sorted.”

Here, Iversen talks in-depth about his writing process, which involves lots of active writing time of course, but much more time spent listening, observing, reading and re-reading drafts and residing

in that fallow place where not much seems to be happening on the surface – say, while you’re waiting in an endless queue at the post office. Along with his treasure box of digitised tapes, Iversen believes in maintaining a carefully organised treasure box of ideas – some of which may come to fruition only after many years of ruminating about them, taking them out and looking them over, putting them back, taking them out again – until inspiration strikes and he sits down to write. He says that, “Ideas are worth nothing unless they are placed in a context, tested out and developed”.

His banter about his process is deceptively breezy but Iversen is incredibly erudite and clever about getting inside the hearts and minds of children and teens, something that not many of the most experienced writers can do with such ease and naturalness: paying heed to the wonders of nature and family and adventure, but also to the emotional rigours of fictional cinematic storytelling. “There is something that makes me want to make films about a certain kind of unhappiness and loneliness in a character that he or she has to overcome in the story. Feeling lost – since maybe I was feeling a bit lost myself as a kid – is something that kids, especially, can identify with.” Iversen also pays homage to the importance of being able to work in short-form cinema and credits his experience of being able to make short work in his native Norway as one of the main elements that enabled him to finally make a feature when he was ready, one with enough substance and heft to sustain the longer form.

Lukas Dhont, Adina Pintilie, and Torfinn Iversen use cinema as a tool for personal discovery and we deeply appreciate their generosity in sharing some of their stories of inspiration, specifically what it feels like to fail and triumph, fail and triumph, over and over again, knowing there will never be another experience quite like this one. As Lukas Dhont expresses so beautifully: “Many say that a director’s first feature film is something he or she has been living up to all their lives so it’s a very important film in his or her life. I think that’s why many of my favorites of directors I love are their first films.”

Happy reading!

SOURCES 2

RENATE GOMPPER	MARION GOMPPER
programme director	associate programme director

feature

LUKAS DHONT

LUKAS DHONT | CURRICULUM VITAE



Lukas Dhont

Lukas Dhont is a Belgian film director and screenwriter, born in Ghent in 1991. He received a Master of Audiovisual Arts degree from the School of Arts (KASK) Ghent. His short films *Corps perdu* and *L'infini* both received a number of international awards, including an Oscar nomination for *L'infini*.

Lukas' feature début, *Girl* – developed, in part, at Sources 2 – had its premiere at the 2018 Cannes Film Festival, Un Certain Regard where it won four awards: Caméra d'Or, Prize for Best Performance / Un Certain Regard, Queer Palm, and the FIPRESCI Prize. Other international recognitions included a nomination for Best Foreign Language Film at the 76th Golden Globe Awards; chosen as the official Belgian submission #to the 91st Academy Awards; the European Union Human Rights in Film Award; and, three nominations for the European Discovery Award from the European Film Academy. In Belgium, *Girl* received the André Cavens Award for Best Film by the Belgian Film Critics Association, as well as nine nominations at the 9th Magritte Awards where it won four prizes including Best Flemish Film and Best Screenplay.

I THINK FILMS CANNOT BE ANYTHING BUT PERSONAL.

SEVILLE, SPAIN | 13 DECEMBER 2018

LUKAS DHONT

SOURCES OF INSPIRATION LECTURE
ON OCCASION OF THE EUROPEAN FILM AWARDS
CEREMONY IN SEVILLE | SPAIN
PRECEDED BY THE SCREENING OF GIRL (2018).

DHONT Hello everyone. First of all, I have to address the fact that I feel strange sitting on this side of the stage because I've always been on your side. This is the first time I'm on this side. It's a strange feeling. I hope I will say things during this hour that will inspire you. I'm not sure, as I feel like I'm still learning so much about what it is to make a film or what it is to be an artist. I've decided to talk about who I am, why I did the things I did, and why I made the films that I made, all in hopes that there will be things in there that are inspirational.

I didn't always want to be a filmmaker. When I was young, I wanted to be a dancer. Growing up, I had this big passion for dance. When I was in school, I gave small performances for my classmates. I danced to Destiny's Child and all the popular hits.

I MAKE CINEMA BECAUSE I WANT TO HAVE AN EFFECT ON PEOPLE BUT I ALSO MAKE CINEMA FOR MYSELF.

I discovered that it was kind of awkward for my classmates when I did that. They didn't really feel comfortable with it and I saw that. That was the first time I realised that a boy is supposed to behave a certain way and a girl is supposed to behave another way. It's a stereotype that's changing and with my work I want to help that change along. That's a big part of why I make the films that I make and why I made a film like *Girl*.

Back to me dancing to Destiny's Child when I was a kid: Because I felt it was awkward for others, I stopped dancing. I took the advice of my dad to join the Boy Scouts. I didn't really enjoy it but I did it and tried to fit the image of a Boy Scout. In that moment of trying to fit in and not doing what I wanted to do, a big theme of my work developed. I didn't know that at the time, of course. I think films cannot be anything but personal even though they're not autobiographical. But there will always be elements of your life or something that happened to someone else in your life that will influence the films that you make. At that moment, I also discovered the idea of directing people, telling them what to do. For example, I really enjoyed directing my brother and also my mother and also my father to the great frustration of all of them. But I kept doing it anyway.

For my communion, I asked my mother if she would give me a camera. She said yes. That's the first time I had a camera in my hands and the first time I started filming something. I started filming my brother. And I started filming my mother who really didn't want to be filmed. A friend of my mom's edited these small films. I started trying to create narratives. My mom kept all of these and she made me look back at that material. Sometimes I'm in the frame. It was a very confrontational moment for me watching those clips together with my mother because when I looked at myself in that moment I saw a very feminine boy. Since I was a child, that femininity has always been something that neither my father nor my mother was comfortable discussing with me. It was only much later that we started to discuss it. Feeling like I was very feminine growing up and realising that the boys around me weren't like that has become an essential theme in my work up until today. It's always been there but with *Girl* I think it's the first time that I really talked about it so concretely. So I had this camera and continued filming my family. At fifteen, I started editing the films myself. I was really into slasher movies. I was really into horror and bodies that got hurt or stabbed and slashed. I bought a lot of blood and invited my friends to come over and make a version of what was a very famous movie at that



Lukas Dhont presenting his Sources of Inspiration

WE WANTED TO MAKE A FILM WHERE THE PROTAGONIST IS HER OWN ANTAGONIST, ...

time called *Scream*. My fascination for horror continued because it's a genre where effect is at its essence. The genre of horror allowed me to have an effect. I could scare people or I could be very dramatic. Looking back on that period and looking at my work now, I think that the horror of the body is something that still lingers throughout my work, not in the way of a slasher film but in a realistic way. I'll get back to this when I talk about *Girl*.

My father really wanted me to study maths and sciences in high school. He didn't like the idea of me going to an art school. So we agreed that if I studied maths and sciences, he would let me try film school when I turned eighteen. I went to a Catholic high school. Although I enjoyed being there my creativity and my personality had been put on pause. I knew what it was like this time to fit in by being in the Boy Scouts. At eighteen I was allowed to start film school and it was a big clash for me because all of a sudden I was in an environment with a lot of different people and a lot of different personalities, outspoken personalities. These were people who really knew who they were and what they wanted to talk about. I was eighteen and I didn't know any of that. I didn't really know who I was and I definitely didn't know what to talk about, or even if I had something to talk about. My entry film into the school was a slasher film in which I killed my brother. Luckily they let me in because I think they felt the passion I had for films, for

cinema. American cinema from Hollywood was the cinema I grew up with and that my family loved. It was the cinema that was proposed to me. My mom is a big *Titanic* fan; I think she's seen it more than twenty times. If people ask me what the most important movie is for me to date, I respond that it's *Titanic* – not because of the film, but for the fact that that film enabled me to see the effect that films can have on people. When I saw the way my mom talked about *Titanic* at a time when she and my dad had just gone through a divorce, I saw that the film healed her in a way. She was in need of this big love story to contradict the reality of her life at that moment and that film gave that to her. I discovered the power of cinema: being in a room, shutting down from your own reality and entering another reality for a couple of hours. It gave me the enthusiasm to try to make films. I was sure that cinema was something I wanted to continue to investigate. So when they let me into the film school, I was extremely happy. I was also a bit scared because I felt like being there was going to be a tough time for me. When the first year started, I saw that I was right.

After trying to fit in for eighteen years I didn't really have an outspoken personality like other people and I didn't really have honest themes that I wanted to talk about. So my first year was a hot mess. My teachers confronted me with the fact that they thought my films were really boring and by saying

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Victoria Fernandez Andriano
(Creative Europe Desk MEDIA Andalusia),
Ainhoa González Sanchiz
(Creative Europe Desk MEDIA Basque Country),
Alex Navarro Garrich and Maria Sol Hernandez
(Creative Europe Desk MEDIA Catalonia)



A SCRIPT IS NEVER FINISHED. IT'S NOT THE END PRODUCT. THE END PRODUCT IS THE FILM.

so, by extension, that I was boring. That was a hard confrontation. I said to myself that I would use my films to be more honest than I am in real life or that I can be in real life. I am a homosexual man and I had never talked about my sexuality with anyone. I will say now that if you want to make films, you have to be extremely honest with yourself and with the world around you. My films weren't good because I wasn't honest. I decided to talk about the themes that had been very important in my life through my films. In a way, that felt safe for me because I could talk about them but at the same time distance myself from direct confrontation. I made a short film called *Corps perdu* about a young ballet dancer.

What was important about my education in film school was that it was a program that combined documentary and fiction practice, meaning we had to make short documentaries and we had to make short fictions. I was always convinced that I wanted to make fiction. I was never really interested in documentary. I was interested in writing and creating things that didn't exist rather than being confronted with what existed. But I was required to make a short documentary so I decided to go to a house where children of immigrants lived together while their parents were away. I was there for three months watching, being with the kids. I slept there. I was filming by myself. I discovered the power of looking at something, really, really looking,

letting something exist in front of my lens. I had always been trying to narrate and for the first time I was watching reality and letting reality dictate what the film was going to be. Making that documentary taught me so much about taking the time to look, to learn about the positions of where I as the camera, as a person and as a director wanted to be and the way I wanted to show something. I never knew what was going to happen or what the kids were going to do or what would come along, so it was about the power of the moment, the power of something existing without me trying to control it. I took that and used it in my fiction work.

When I'm on set with my script I'm still always looking for that moment in which there will be something that I cannot control. My whole set is based on that idea. I as the director, as well as the technical team, take up as little space as possible. The people that take up the most space, the biggest position on my set, are the actors. We don't use a lot of lighting and the décor is ready made so that they can move wherever they want. That's something that I learned shooting documentary. However, after shooting that documentary, I was even more convinced I wanted to make fiction because even though I learned a lot about these things I mentioned, I also found it difficult to be somewhere and then leaving, taking something with me. I felt there was a brutality to that. It was difficult for me to handle. At the time, I didn't really



Lukas Dhont and Victor Polster
(main cast *Girl*)

IF YOU WRITE AND DIRECT A FILM, IT'S EXTREMELY PERSONAL BECAUSE IT'S COME FROM YOU.

know how to deal with that, the ethics of filming and then editing a narrative that is imposed on something or someone that exists. So I continued with fiction.

I made another short narrative called *L'infini*, *Infinity*, which was my Master's film, a film about a young boy whose father returns from prison. He's confronted with the figure of a father, a figure of masculine energy, for the first time. When I was writing the script, the story came naturally but I didn't really know why that was a film that was coming out of me. At the time I had a teacher that taught music and film that had become my mentor. She was the first one to confront me with the themes that are in my work. Now I can speak about them and go back in my timeline to tell you where they're from but at the time I really didn't know why I was doing the things that I did and showing the things that I was showing. *L'infini* is a film that shows a struggle between masculinity and femininity in a very concrete way, a struggle between a father and a mother and a young boy in between. In a more abstract way, it's a struggle between a masculine energy and a feminine energy. That had been very important for me as a child and as a teenager and also in that moment in my life as a filmmaker. Discovering all those central themes such as gender or behavior was very important for how I would continue after school. Because I grew up with American cinema, the first time I was

confronted by the possibilities of a camera or the possibilities of the medium of film was when I watched *Elephant* by Gus Van Sant. I watched that film in the first year of film school. It was through seeing that film that I found out that the camera and the way of using the camera narrates just as much as the script of the film or as much as the actors of a film do. I really saw how the position of a camera, the way we follow a character, the way we look at something, defines how we interpret it. As well, timing is so crucial. The script of *Elephant* is something like fifteen or sixteen pages for an eighty-minute film. The timing of that film is so spectacular. I watched that film so many times because I was shocked at the possibilities it showed in comparison to any other American cinema I had seen until then, films filled with explosions and sinking ships and all these things.

Through Van Sant, I discovered a Belgian artist who became extremely important to me, Chantal Akerman. Has anyone seen *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*? No? Okay, you should all watch Jeanne Dielman. She's going to rock your world. Chantal Akerman left us unfortunately but this is an amazing work of art about a widowed woman in the 1970s. We follow her daily routine and the loneliness of that, the cage of that. I think there's a lot of Chantal Akerman in *Girl* and there's a lot of *Jeanne Dielman* in *Girl*. In *Jeanne Dielman*, Chantal really tries to show those invisible cages of

a widowed woman in the '70s by the repetition of her daily routine in her house. In *Girl* I think we tried to show those cages for a young trans person by constant repetition of the ballet scenes. Here's someone in a very binary world, the ballet world, a very gender-specified world where there is constant fighting and working to fit into that world. Chantal Akerman became very important to me.

I also started watching the work of another very famous Belgian pair of filmmakers, the Dardenne brothers. Has anyone seen any Dardenne brothers' films? Yes, okay. They released a very interesting book about their work. They spoke about how they used choreography as a way to build their films, using the camera as a choreographer, as a dancer that moves around the characters in very long shots. The mise-en-scène is extremely important. I thought, wow, they're using dance to make their cinema. I want to use dance in my cinema. I want to use the thing I quit doing because I felt uncomfortable doing it. I want to find a place for dance in my films. So I went looking for a way. I watched a lot of modern dance shows. There was a choreographer, Jan Martens, that became very important for me. I would call Martens a very cinematographic choreographer. He builds pieces around different relationships between people by just showing movements. He has a very famous piece called *Victor*, a dance performance between a grown man and a child. The tension between the two of them

changes and as the dance goes on, the relationship changes from father and child, to one of being friends, to one of being lovers. The power of changing those tensions just by the way these people moved around each other or with each other allowed me to see the power of visuals, allowed me to see the power of movement. It allowed me to discover that as a filmmaker, I really wanted to base my films on movement rather than dialogue. There are so many filmmakers that are powerful with dialogue. I can enjoy those films so much. But I knew that it wasn't my forte. When I start writing dialogue it doesn't feel good. It doesn't feel like how people really talk to each other. I have so much appreciation for people who can write great dialogue. It's like people who direct comedy. They should be up here on the stage because people who can direct comedy are extremely talented.

So I discovered I really wanted to work with visuals and movement. Chantal Akerman and Gus Van Sant were examples of that, makers for whom movement is the central thing – movement and sound. Sound has become very important in my films. I wanted to work with visuals but I also wanted to make cinema, supported by its sounds and its music. I discovered that sound can shape a completely different world, shape something completely different to that image. The teacher I mentioned that was my mentor, Martine, she taught sound and music. She taught me to be aware that if you add

WHEN THE CHARACTERS START HAVING A LIFE OF THEIR OWN, SOMETHING IS BEING CREATED.

Girl by Lukas Dhont,
still featuring Victor Polster (main cast)



music or sound you can create tension, emotion, so many different things. When I made *L'infini* I really wanted to experiment with all that. In a way, it's an unfinished film because it's an experiment. *L'infini* also means unfinished. But the fundamentals are there in that film of what *Girl* became because it was the first film I made after school. I didn't continue making shorts because the idea of *Girl* was already in my head.

In 2009 when I was eighteen and about to start film school and still not very honest about who I was, I discovered a story in a Belgian journal about a fifteen-year-old trans girl called Nora who wanted to become a classical dancer. Her school did not allow her to change from the boys' class to the girls' class. I cut out that article immediately and kept it with me. Its importance was in its confrontation for me, this fifteen-year-old that shows the truest version of her self in an extremely honest way and in an ambitious way. In this article were all the elements I had been confronted with as I was a kid. There was the dancing that I had quit and she had continued to do. There was a confrontation

to be about that moment in our lives where we want to fit in way more than we want to stand out. I knew in that moment that, for twenty-one years, I had been living in a way that led up to the making of this film.

Sometimes in interviews people will ask me: As a cis director can you talk about trans people? Can you really talk about trans subjects? I answer in a polite way because you get media-trained to do so. But here I'll be more honest. I'm always extremely upset when someone asks me that question. This film is about a very personal subject. Yes the character is trans and I am not trans but we are both human beings that go through emotions and phases in our lives. We understand each other even if we are not exactly the same. I have always seen cinema as a bridge. I make cinema because I want to have an effect on people but I also make cinema for myself. I want to get to know someone. I want to understand people better. By doing so, I understand myself better. Now I will steal the words of Sebastián Lelio. This is a life lesson that doesn't come from me but from a much more advanced

I WANT PEOPLE WHO COME TO WATCH THE FILM TO HAVE A PHYSICAL EXPERIENCE.

between man and woman and gender biology. There was this theme: Who am I? Who do I want to be? How do I get there? I knew this was all going to be important in my work. I knew that as soon as I was done with film school, this was to be my first film and hoped that when that time came I would be honest enough to make it.

I contacted Nora during film school and told her how much I admired her. I asked her if she'd like to meet with me to see what we could do. She refused because she was in a very difficult moment in her life and because the media had been very eager to write about her story and about her school not allowing her to dance as a girl. I was sad that she refused but I said okay. A year later I tried again. My persistence made her want to meet me. When we met, I told her that I wanted her story to be my first film. I wanted to write something about her and luckily she agreed. We started talking about her life and her desire of becoming a classical dancer. I found out that although she had been very true to herself from a very young age, she had come to a point in life where she wanted to disappear. She wanted to fit in. She definitely didn't want to stand out, not be the trans girl that is the example or that is different. She wanted to be like the rest. I recognized myself in what she said, the ways in which I had been trying to fit into normative society. She was trying to fit into a cisgender society. That's what I wanted the film to be about. I wanted the film

director. He says that cinema should not be a wall. People ask me can I make a film about a trans woman. I say yes. Yes, if I do it with respect and if I put the work in because I make cinema in order to try to get to know the world and let that world be seen by other people.

That's also how I feel about acting. Victor plays a trans girl. He's a teenager also and we all know that's when we really try to get to know who we are. He doesn't identify as trans at the moment and sometimes that's led to controversy. That's always really confused me. Of course we want to see trans talent on screen and we want to listen to trans voices. That's one of the reasons we made this film. But we don't want to fight for inclusion by exclusion. We don't want to limit performers to their identities. We want to open up the barriers, tear down the cages. When we see Victor's performance in *Girl*, we see how much empathy he evokes, one of the greatest strengths an actor can have, trying to connect to the world and to other people. When I was writing the script, the dialogues that I had between Nora and myself were at the heart of the script. I didn't want to write alone and put myself through that solitude. People who write alone – wow! You're also heroes to me. I can't write alone; for me, it has to be a dialogue. But the dialogue becomes too interior sometimes and that's a very lonely place for me. I worked on the script with a writer, a theatre maker, called Angelo Tijssens.

Lukas Dhont working on *Girl* in a session *Map Story Logic* with Paul Tyler at Sources 2 Script Development Workshop at FilmCamp/Norway 2016



He makes very funny theatre; he's much funnier than I am and a really nice guy. We both wanted to talk about these subjects. After making my short films and experimenting with movement, now I faced having to build this tension in a feature, to engage people for an hour and a half, or longer. In the beginning that was very tough because I was still conceptually writing my movements and my dance things. I thought I could try to do as Van Sant had done and only write thirteen pages and then film it. But people didn't really respond to my thirteen pages so I had to learn to understand the tension of a feature film. I knew I needed help and so I decided to enroll in script workshops so that I could have other people respond to what I was writing and to see how they reacted and allow them to teach me things. That's how I ended up at Sources 2 in Norway where I got to know Marion. I was confronted with many other filmmakers who all had very good ideas and who were all trying to write

them out, trying to make them into feature films. There, you get a lot of reactions because a lot of people are reading your stuff. That can be very confusing, but it's also extremely helpful. You start to see which reactions keep coming back and which ones you resonate with and those you don't. You learn more about the film you want to make as well as the film you don't want to make. I also did *Ateliers d'Angers* at the *Premiers Plans* festival as well as participated in *Cinéfondation*, the Cannes Film Festival's six-month residency where you get to stay in an apartment in Paris together with five other filmmakers. You get to talk a lot about films. I would recommend this.

While I was writing *Girl*, many people told me that the father needed to be the main character because he's the audience's way into the story. Although I doubted the truth of that and maybe that would have been a great film but it wasn't the film



Lukas Dhont and his FilmCamp work group led by Michael Seeber:
(l to r) Fons Feytaerts Bram Crols, Camilla Roman, Lukas Dhont,
Manuel Siebenmann, Emilia Putkinen

I WANTED THE FILM TO BE ABOUT THAT MOMENT IN OUR LIVES WHERE WE WANT TO FIT IN WAY MORE THAN WE WANT TO STAND OUT.

I wanted to make. I didn't want to go through another character to arrive at the trans character. I wanted the trans character to be the lead. I wanted it to be about *her*. At the time, there weren't that many concrete conflicts around this trans character so people wondered if we didn't need more characters that refused her or accepted her so that there would be something for the audience to react to. We felt like all these things could be valid but again, our reaction was that it wasn't the film we wanted to make. We wanted to make a film where the protagonist is her own antagonist, where we see the relationship she has with herself, with her own self-image. The ballet world was used as a metaphor for the much bigger society that thinks in a very binary way, one that thinks in fairy tales, that thinks in roles for men and those for women. We're confronted with this young trans character trying to find her way in that world. All the people that disagreed or thought differently were as valuable as the people who told us it was a great idea. For me, the people that don't necessarily agree teach you maybe sometimes even more than the people that agree. That's become essential for me up until right now. Not everyone likes *Girl*. People sometimes react to it in a shocked and very negative way. I listen to those people just as much as I listen to the people who love *Girl*. It's not to torture myself. Although making something and

putting yourself in a very vulnerable place and then having people come along and destroy it is, in a way, destructive. But I feel like I'm able to see it as an opportunity for me to learn more about my filmmaking and how I want to continue and to learn more about the films I really want to make. That's a calming and comforting idea for me because when there's criticism, I'm able to use that. That's in theory, of course, because in practice your reaction is always one of hurt and you want to shed a tear and call your mom. But I try to see it as something useful.

Throughout all the workshops and during the writing of the script, I never thought it felt like it was finished. A script is never finished. It's not the end product. The end product is the film. A script needs time to take the right shape and needs attention but I think the pressure of making it perfect is sometimes what kills a film. I have a lot of friends around me that also make films. Some have been working on scripts for a short time and others for a much longer time. I've observed that when you overwork something, the script becomes too important. It has to be seen as important but it also has to be seen as a tool. It's a tool that you go on set with and shape the thing that's there, something new, a time to also try to let go of the scenes that you wrote and see what is in front of

you, what's working and what's not working and see life existing in front of your eyes. That's what excites me the most about making a film. When I see my actors do something I did not expect them to do, I get the feeling – and this is maybe a bit arrogant to say – but I really get the feeling I'm creating. When the characters start having a life of their own, something is being created. That's so exciting.

We spent four years actively working on this first film. Filmmaking is the work of a team. I get credited a lot because I'm the one going to places to talk about this film. Yes, it came out of me and it's super personal and I was at the steering wheel but the film is the work of so many other people. I recognise all the people that worked with me on the film. My cameraman Frank van den Eeden, my editor Alain Dessauvage, my first assistant Siel van Daele – everyone behind the scenes has an element in this film. That was one of the biggest lessons for me as a first-time feature director, to give everyone the trust that they deserve. If you choose the people you work with, you also have to allow them to breathe and do their own thing and have their element in the end product. I knew I wanted to make films at the age of twelve so there was a lot leading up to this moment. I wanted to control every single thing. Besides allowing my actors to do what they wanted, I wanted to be in control. I wanted to act like I knew everything. But I know so little. That's also why I'm talking to you about my life. I know so little about what it really

really come because I always felt like there could be something more. I also discovered that other directors felt that way and that's how I discovered Darren Aronofsky talking about abandoning a film because I felt like I abandoned *Girl*. Strange feeling in the beginning but at a certain point it also felt liberating. It felt liberating to abandon her. Many say that a director's first feature film is something he or she has been living up to all their lives so it's a very important film in his or her life. I think that's why many of my favorite films of directors I love are their first films. I have a feeling with *Girl* that that is absolutely true. I hope my next film will be better but I have mixed feelings about it. I'd like now to talk about the music in the film. Has everyone here seen *Girl*? Okay, that's nice.

I have to talk to you about my composer, Valentin Hadjadj, who I also worked with on *L'infini*. I got to know him at a festival in Aubagne. Someone there told me that he was the new Mozart. I was like, o-kay? I listened to what he was doing and it was extremely powerful. We started to work together on the basis of the script for *L'infini* and he started to make music based on the script. It was so nice because before I created something, Valentin attempted to concretise my thoughts and my writing. We played that music on set. I played it for my actors and I played it for myself and it was a very powerful thing because we felt like he had enabled us to enter the atmosphere of the film. I knew I wanted to collaborate with him on *Girl* as

TRUSTING ALL MEMBERS OF THE TEAM YOU WORK WITH AND ALLOWING THEM TO HAVE THEIR OWN ELEMENTS IN WHAT YOU'RE DOING IS THE LESSON I HAD TO LEARN WHILE MAKING THIS FILM.

takes to make a film. That's not a bad thing. The fact that I don't know certain things is why I want to continue doing what I do so I can get to know them. It's exciting to get to know them. Trusting all the members of the team you work with and allowing them to have their own elements in what you're doing is the lesson I had to learn while making this film. Sometimes I felt like I tried to control it too much. It was okay when I'd say: "I don't know what to do with this now".

Darren Aronofsky said this beautiful phrase. He said: You never finish a film; you abandon a film. I feel that's extremely true. You go through all these phases of making a film, writing it, shooting it, editing it. And you have the hope that at a certain point you'll feel, yeah, it's done. This is exactly how I wanted it to be. I was waiting for that moment where I felt like that was it. That moment didn't

well. He started writing music very early on during the first drafts of the script. When I spoke to every member of my team, I would always say that I wanted this film to have a physical effect. I want the film to work physically. I want people who come to watch the film to have a physical experience. Valentin understood what I wanted. He listened to a lot of Arvo Pärt, music with a lot of sharp sounds and a lot of violins. The first piece of music he created was so hard to listen to. It definitely caused a physical reaction.

But then he continued on that path. And I have to say that Valentin is really a true collaborator for the effect I want to have in my films because I feel like the music in *Girl* really adds to the physical effect of the dance scenes as well as to the film overall. This word "physical" has become very important to me and has been important in all the short films,

as well as for *Girl*, of course. If there's one thing I've discovered after making three shorts and a feature, that's always something that's coming back. I'm analysing myself here, of course, but with the camera I always seem to want to touch the characters in front of me or physically interact with them. This is something I didn't allow myself to do in real life for twenty-two years. For twenty-two years, I didn't allow myself to have a physical relationship with another human being. In my work, that's what I'm trying to do. Not just on a mental level where I'm trying to get to know people, understand them or reach out to them, but also very much on a physical level. I want to try and touch them. My camera has always been extremely close. My camera has always been trying to focus on the body. And it's really trying to be intimate. When I talked about this physical effect with my crew, those conversations were an extension of my

would produce it. I was surprised but said, okay, of course! This was even before *L'infini* was made. I wrote a first treatment of *Girl* that he absolutely hated. And I thought, oh no, I'm going to lose him. But I rewrote and rewrote. This was before there was another writer. And he still didn't like it. But he did feel like I was ready to really invest whatever I needed to. In Belgium, we have a very famous festival called Leuven International Short Film Festival. *L'infini* won the jury prize there and that got me a bit of visibility within the Belgian film sector. The film didn't really do well at all outside of Belgium because it is really an experiment. But as soon as we got a bit of visibility in Belgium, we immediately handed in the treatment as it was at the time. At the time it was called *Under My Skin*.

We got some money to start writing the script. Angelo came on board and we started attending

SOMETIMES PEOPLE REFUSE TO SEE THE METAPHORICAL ASPECTS AND ONLY END UP TALKING ABOUT THE ENDING.

passion to become a dancer. When I go to watch a dance performance, it's a physical experience. You have bodies interacting and there's this physicality in front of you and you react to that with your own body. I want the same kind of interaction between my films and the audience. In *Girl*, the dance is literally present. Perhaps in my next film it will be more in the way the Dardenne brothers use it, by using the camera as a choreographer around situations by using movement. What I do know is that I will try to look for that physical experience.

Maybe you guys have questions?

AUDIENCE You have a very special generosity. Your talk has been really wonderful to listen to. But concretely, could you talk about how you realised the financing for the project?

DHONT When I was doing my studies I got to know another Flemish filmmaker, Felix von Groeningen. He made a movie called *The Broken Circle Breakdown*. He also made a film called *The Misfortunates* and has just made his first American feature called *Beautiful Boy* with Timothée Chalamet who you might know. I directed a lot of the "making of" material for his films and also helped him cast his films. He taught me a lot about how to be on set. Through Felix, I met a producer called Dirk Impens. We got along very well and I pitched him the idea for *Girl*. I told him about this article that I'd found of a young trans girl called Nora and how I really wanted this to be my first film. He resonated with that and said that he wanted to help me make it and that he

workshops like Sources 2 and Cinéfondation. A year and a half later, we handed in the script and they said yes. A lot of times in Belgium and probably other countries, you hand something in and you get a no and then you have to hand it in again and then you get another no and then you have to wait. With this project, every time we handed it in we got a yes and that's a very luxurious position to be in. For my short films, I've always used French and Dutch co-production money. I really want to identify as a Belgian filmmaker much more than a Flemish filmmaker. Belgium is divided into two parts – a Flemish part and a French part – and I want to be able to unify those two sides of the industry, those two sides of the country. The French-speaking part of Belgium really resonated with that and also immediately said yes. So then we tried France and France said no – which they regretted afterwards when the film went to Cannes. [laughter]

The Netherlands gave us some money, as well.

We made the film for about €1,3 million. We had enough. I mean we didn't have cranes or anything like that, but my style is not very crane-y. But we had the money to make it and we made it in thirty-two days. In the first six days of the shoot we did all the dance scenes. They were very intense because we had cast Victor, this fifteen-year-old ballet dancer that had never danced in en pointe shoes because he'd always been training as a boy. For the three months before the shoot, he had been training so that he could do everything himself *en pointe*. It was very demanding and actually very

dangerous for his legs and his feet so we had to really do it in the most responsible way. So shooting all that in six days was an intense first part of the shoot. We were all already really overwhelmed by everything that we needed to do. But the financing part went extremely smoothly for the budget that we had. The only worry, you could say, was the combination of a first-time feature director and the subject. There were a lot of fears around the subject, a very delicate subject. I have to say they were right. It's a very difficult subject surrounded by a lot of different opinions. It also depends on which country you're talking about. We're now doing promotion in America for this film and I can tell you, it's a challenge. But it's really interesting at the same time because it's a film that can spark conversation and dialogues that I think are very important to continue building on what we call representation. I'd like to tell you that the funding for this was very difficult and I had to fight every step of the way, but it was very, very easy.

AUDIENCE Congratulations on the film. Can you talk about the motivations or the reasons for writing the final scene when Victor's character does such a horrible thing to his body?

about. But sometimes people refuse to see the metaphorical aspects and only end up talking about the ending. That was something that was predicted in the script phase. People told me that audiences would only talk about the ending and that we were going to lose much of the subtleties. And they were right. I'm generalising because it's not all the time. But it's so impactful that many do just talk about the ending. I feel that when it comes to cinema about minority groups, we are in such a specific time. We are in a time when political leaders refuse to see the existence of certain groups or they just want to erase trans people altogether. We need art to be emancipatory and we need to see trans characters conquer and we need to see them shine and we need to see them be brave. I also need to see that. But I also need to see these characters make mistakes and to see them in a human way. As a queer artist, I think it's important to see those characters in difficult relationships and not only present them as fighters against the outside world. We need that too but I also need to see other sides. Now, presenting the film as it is and hearing re-actions from trans kids and their parents, I'm very happy I kept that in. I'm happy I persisted but it was the most difficult part in the writing and in the making of this film to stand that

MANY SAY THAT A DIRECTOR'S FIRST FEATURE FILM IS SOMETHING HE OR SHE HAS BEEN LIVING UP TO ALL THEIR LIVES SO IT'S A VERY IMPORTANT FILM IN HIS OR HER LIFE.

DHONT That's a very good question. It was always in the script because it was one of Nora's darkest thoughts. When she told me that, I was shocked. I really then understood her when she told me about this necessity to be in another body. In the arc of the film I'm using ballet as a metaphor for a society that is so binary, divided into male and female. In the ballet world, there's a lot of horror of the body. It's all about the manipulation of the body to conform to this ideal of perfect form, to the most elegant, feminine form. Here's this young character trying to find her way in that sphere representing something new, someone for whom it's not that easy to reach this vision. I felt like it made a lot of sense, this end point in the arc we wanted to have. But literally ninety percent of the people I presented the script to that read the scene absolutely hated it and they wanted it out. They couldn't believe that I wrote it. There were very extreme reactions to it. I have to say that even in the script phase, that convinced me even more that it needed to be there. It was something that people needed to react to so it was something I needed to keep in. Now, looking back on it, people do see the metaphor I just spoke

ground because a lot of times in the making of it I did question whether this was right. Is this *right*? That was a dangerous thing because if it wasn't right, then we lost our story or we lost our arc. Some people disagree with me but I feel like it's really where I wanted this film to go.

AUDIENCE Watching the film, I felt myself moving in two directions. I was very into Lara's story. It took me out of myself. The next moment I was inside myself, thinking about my own awkwardness or insecurities. I was really relating to the character but also reflecting on myself. That's a beautiful balance that you found between having these two lines – the deeper narrative about trans people and about whether we accept them or not in our society. And also you have this very material, concrete story about this specific character. Not about all trans people, but about Lara. Did you have certain principles while you were writing about maintaining this balance, or was that something you found in the editing that gave the film that rhythm, to keep a spectator moving from outside to inside and back again all the time? I felt very effected by it.

DHONT I spoke before about the personal attraction to Nora but as a filmmaker what really attracted me was this combination of a young trans person and the world of the ballet. The world of the ballet, for me, was why I didn't need concrete antagonists. I didn't need an unaccepting father. I didn't need a difficult family member. The ballet world spoke about the bigger picture, the bigger conflict in society and its binary world. So I could just have the character be in that world and that would say enough. When I talked about Chantal Akerman showing a woman in her flat peeling potatoes, you see her peeling potatoes for twelve minutes. And you're watching her. In *Girl*, we see the rehearsals and we see Lara there and the repetition of that and how that speaks for itself. When you watch the dance scenes, you are constantly seeing the same thing and it becomes a sort of mantra, a repetition of her being there. What was very clear for us in the writing was that we wanted this to be a portrait. This is something I repeat in the promotion of the film a lot because it's very important for me to say that this is a portrait of one trans girl. It's not a story about being transgender. My biggest wish is that we would enter the character, that the eyes of the people watching would be her eyes. For some that worked and for some it didn't go that way. But I really hoped that we'd experience the film as her body's experience. I wanted to leave a lot of space for the audience to look at her, her face, her expressions, and try to interpret how she's feeling. I wanted to try to be with her and at the same time not dictate to a spectator how he or she should feel. I wanted to leave that in an open space so that an audience member had the ability to project. That's my interpretation as to why a lot of people resonate with it. As a person you're able to watch

a relationship with a body. But for a lot of us it's very complex one. I think the film channels into that relationship with oneself. Being a teenager, something all of us go through, my hope was that would be channeled, that universal experience, that we could use that to enter this character.

When I think about showing queer characters, I think about how Barry Jenkins shows Black characters. I don't know if you've seen his latest film, *If Beale Street Could Talk*, but he takes this American Hollywood genre and uses two Black protagonists in a way that we would traditionally have seen two white protagonists. Barry Jenkins takes it out of this niche and makes it for everyone. I want to do that with queer characters. When I hear trans people talk about this film, the ones that don't like it say that the film is made for cisgender people and that it's a film made for an audience to understand this issue. I disagree. This film is made for the widest possible human audience. I look to my characters for that which connects us so that my audience can connect with them. I look for what makes them resonate with me and therefore resonate with all of us.

AUDIENCE First of all thanks for coming here to talk to us. It's been very interesting to listen to you. I wanted to ask about the way you as a director project yourself into your films. You talked about this conflict about being honest but not using autobiography. Do you think it's possible to make an honest fiction without talking about yourself?

DHONT I've never had the need to make autobiography. I've never wanted to make a film about a moment in my life. On the other hand, my films



Script Development Workshop
at FilmCamp/Norway 2016:
Participants, partners and Sources 2 team
with Lukas Dhont in the middle

are extremely personal. I don't think you can make something and not have it be extremely personal unless you're making something for a studio because they've hired you to make something. If you write and direct a film, it's extremely personal because it's come from you. I don't watch the film anymore. I watched it at Cannes and ever since then I've not seen it. I'll probably look at it in a year or so but I know how personal this film is. I know how much of myself is in it and it's quite a lot. I was talking to you about the things that were important to me when I was young, the roles and behaviors that express masculinity and femininity, and also the relationship I had with my own body. I had a very complex relationship with my body as a teenager. It sounds heavy to say but I suffered a lot and I think I put all that in this movie. In a way, it's out of my system now. This film was not only made for an audience. It was something for me. The main reason I make films is for me not for you, although I hope they are something for you as well. I make them to process something from my life. It was also a way for Nora to process that part of her life. For the two of us, it's a time-based document. That's a luxury to be able to do that. I'm in a very luxurious place where I get to do therapy while also practicing my profession. [laughter]

AUDIENCE Luca Guadagnino was so impacted by Dario Argento's *Suspiria* that he made a remake. Do you see yourself some years in the future perhaps revisiting the character with Victor or another actor, maybe ten years in the future to learn about what happened to Lara after that not-so-happy ending?

DHONT Would I go back to Lara? No. I would not. I would not because she has been very close to my

heart and I'm grieving the fact that I had to let go of her. But she's been in my mind for nine years so I'm also happy to let go of her. She's extremely important to me and always will be as this film will always be crucial in my life. But I don't think I would ever revisit it. The film is very much what I wanted to say about this and I'm really looking forward to continuing with another character and another part of me, with another part of my life. Like I said, it's a time-based document, something I can now leave and move on. I want to move forward. Unless in ten years I don't have anything to talk about anymore and someone asks me to do a sequel and they're going to pay me a lot of money, of course I will!

I think Luca Guadagnino is extremely talented. He really does one film at a time. If you look at *Call Me By Your Name* and then look at *Suspiria*, which he made after that, I think he's challenging himself by diving into different worlds, diving into the old and making it new and diving into different subjects. That is something that would definitely interest me. I don't know if I would do a remake of a horror film but it is an interesting idea. For now, this may be a selfish thing, but I'm really interested in creating and bringing to life what comes out of my mind. That's what I want to do.

Thank you everyone for listening to me.

I hope there was some inspiration at some point. Have fun in Seville!

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ADINA PINTILIE

ADINA PINTILIE | CURRICULUM VITAE



Adina Pintilie

Adina Pintilie works on the boundary between fiction, documentary, and visual art. In the new Romanian cinema landscape, her body of work stands out for its distinctive style, courage of cinematic experimentation, and uncompromising gaze at the workings of the human psyche.

Touch Me Not, Adina's début feature film, won the Golden Bear and the GFWW First Feature Award at Berlinale 2018, followed by an impressive international festival circuit. The film was acquired for cinema distribution in more than 35 countries and nominated for European Discovery 2018 – Prix FIPRESCI at the prestigious European Film Awards. *Touch Me Not* has been selected in major international film festivals such as Toronto, Karlovy Vary, BFI London, Viennale, Sarajevo, Sydney, Seville, Jerusalem, Moscow, Thessaloniki, IDFA, Sofia, and many others, and screened in venues such as the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, and Forum des Images, Paris. *Touch Me Not* received financial support from Eurimages, Creative Europe MEDIA, TORINO Filmlab, Romanian Film Fund, Mitteldeutsche Medienförderung (MDM), Czech Film Fund, Bulgarian Film Fund, and Eurometropole de Strasbourg. Script development was supported at Cannes Film Festival's Atelier CINÉFONDATION, BINGER Filmlab, Amsterdam, and NIPKOW Program Berlin. *Touch Me Not* won the ARTE Development Award at CINEMART Rotterdam Film Festival, and the CINELINK Work-In-Progress Award at Sarajevo Film Festival.

Adina's medium length film, *Don't Get Me Wrong*, premiered in Locarno 2007 in the Filmmakers of the Present Competition, won the Golden Dove Award at DokLeipzig, and screened in over 50 international film festivals, including Thessaloniki, Montpellier, Trieste, Namur, Documenta Madrid, München, Moscow, Sarajevo, Warsaw, and Krakow. Her film *Oxygen* premiered in Rotterdam's Tiger Awards Shorts Competition 2010, screened in festivals such as BAFICI, Montpellier, Thessaloniki, and Tampere, and was nominated for the Best Short Film Award at the 2011 Romanian Film Industry Awards. Her short film, *Diary#2*, won the ZONTA Award at the 2013 Oberhausen International Short Film Festival, and her previous short film, *SANDPIT#186*, premiered in Locarno 2008 and won the Runner Up Award at the 2009 Miami Film Festival.

“TELL ME HOW YOU LOVED ME, SO I UNDERSTAND HOW TO LOVE”.

VILNIUS, LITHUANIA | 6 APRIL 2019

ADINA PINTILIE

SOURCES OF INSPIRATION LECTURE
ON OCCASION OF THE SOURCES 2
SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP
NEAR VILNIUS | LITHUANIA PRECEDED BY
THE SCREENING OF *TOUCH ME NOT* (2018)

PINTILIE *Touch Me Not* is a research process and an invitation to engage in dialogue, which challenges you, the viewer, to question your own preconceived ideas about intimacy, sexuality, and the body. The project started from the premise that when I was twenty, I thought I knew everything about intimacy, how relationships work, about eroticism, beauty, the body. Today, twenty-plus years later, faced with real life, all those ideas, which used to be so clear back then, seem to have lost definition, grown more complex, and unsettlingly contradictory. The film, *Touch Me Not*, was triggered by this self-reflexive process because out of this intention to forget

non-professional actors. But whether they were professional performers or not isn't relevant. A wonderful group of gifted and courageous characters ventured together with me, existing in the blurred area between their real biographies and their fictionalized ones. In front of a camera, they had the courage to share some of the most vulnerable areas of their intimate lives. We worked with a fusion of personal stories and fictional elements, exploring procedures such as: meetings between real characters and quasi-fictional ones, family constellations, video diaries, re-enactments of memories and dreams, and staging reality. We created a sort of 'emotional incubator', in which the fiction realm often functioned as a safe space, a protective structure that brought us together and allowed us to safely explore sensitive areas with an authenticity we may have not otherwise accessed through traditional approaches of documentary. The shape of the film changed organically through this complex process of self-exploration. This is why *Touch Me Not* rejects labels of genre, or any other labels, for that matter.

THE WAY WE EXPERIENCE INTIMACY, ON A PROFOUND LEVEL, IS CONDITIONED BY THE WAY WE'VE BEEN BROUGHT UP, BY OUR FAMILY AND THOSE AROUND US.

everything I thought I knew about these things – from education, family, school, etc. – I wanted to re-discover, with openness and curiosity, how people really experience the difficult and contradictory experience of intimacy.

Born out of a long-term research process, the film grew on the fluid border between reality and fiction, and working with a mix of professional and

To develop and finance such a project/research process has been quite a challenge. I will share with you an experience you might not like to have, mostly because life is too short to spend nine years to make a film. But in any case, you might find some useful resources in what I can share with you.

There were two main challenges from the very beginning. On the one hand, there was the challenge of the topic itself and the way to explore it. Topics surrounding the body, intimacy, and sexuality are so important, but they are always so difficult to talk about. There are so many taboos, so much shame and blocks around them. As well, the way to explore these topics, via an artistic research process, involved a high degree of uncertainty. By the very nature of this research, you just don't know where it will take you.

Then there was also the challenge of the language. What is the right cinematic language that is organically necessary to share this kind of research process with an audience? In the film you don't just



(l to r) Dagnė Vildžūnaitė, Adina Pintilie

THERE ARE OTHER KINDS OF BEAUTY, OTHER WAYS OF RELATING TO EACH OTHER...

follow the experiences of some people; there's also this concept of a dialogue with the audience. It was very important to engage viewers in a very direct way in the same self-reflective process that we were all going through while making it.

Indeed, at the core of the search, there is this interrogation: *"Tell me how you loved me, so I understand how to love"*. The way we experience intimacy, on a profound and most often irrational level, is conditioned by the way we've been brought up, by our family, by the relationships with those around us. There are many conditionings we are aware of that influence our behaviour and personal relationships in subtle and unpredictable ways.

I had the good fortune to be accompanied on this journey by fascinating human beings, ones who made me question my own preconceived ideas. On a certain level, it worked similarly to a therapeutic relationship would, meaning that in interactions with the 'other' you'd re-learn how to relate, to re-adjust your perspective on reality, becoming aware of dysfunctional thinking and patterns of behaviour, discovering new things about yourself and others, about ways to relate, about the personal boundaries we negotiate every day.

Many of my views have been re-shaped in the process. For example, the ones on disability and sexuality, on sex work, beauty and corporality since there are lots of types of bodies that differ from the

classical norm of beauty. For me, Christian, the protagonist with spinal muscular atrophy, is a superb human being inside a beautiful body – even though obviously he's different than the norm. As it is a film about intimacy, it is implicitly a film about the body, about the subjective experience of your own body and the way you perceive the bodies of others. Christian has one of the most harmonious relationships with his own body, even if he's mostly unable to move that body. His relationship with Grit, his partner and their progressive views on intimacy (which you can follow on Christian's blog kissability.de), the way they explore their sexuality, has been a source of joy and inspiration for all of us.

Christian had a strong emotional motivation to be part of our journey, which he shared with us from the very beginning: *"I'm not afraid of this film or being attacked. Just know the people screaming are precisely those who have no idea about disability, about what we disabled people feel, need, desire. They have their own false concepts about disability. They look at us as vulnerable beings that need to be protected and can't have a sexual life. But that's actually a patronising, disrespectful attitude. In fact it's they who disrespect us. Like anyone else, I do have the right to enjoy my body, to explore my sexuality and express myself as a sexual being. I believe it is important to show that people with differently-abled bodies have the same desires, dreams, responses to stimuli, like everybody."*

(l to r) Austėja Milvydaitė
(Creative Europe Desk MEDIA Lithuania),
Adina Pintilie, Marion Gompfer (Sources 2)



... OTHER VIEWS OF THE WORLD THAT ARE DIFFERENT THAN SO-CALLED 'NORMATIVE' ONES.

Each of the protagonists goes through a series of transformative encounters. Whereas Tomas goes through a few of the essential steps in his emotional evolution in his relationship with Christian, Laura's key meetings are with two escorts: Hanna Hoffmann and Seani Love. Sex work is another aspect in which I have changed my perspective. I discovered the complex and therapeutic forms of personal exploration that paid sexual services could take. People have many motivations to practice sex work other than just a financial one.

Hanna's story, for instance, is relevant in terms of this process of searching for inner freedom. Hanna came out as a transgender person at 50 after living her life in a skin and an identity in which she'd never felt at home. She had always wanted to be a woman, despite being endowed with a male body. When she turned 50, she finally decided to take the risk and become what she'd always wanted to be. She left her twenty-year marriage and family and started a new life as female. It is also when she became a sex worker.

Hanna has a Master's Degree in Philosophy and navigates between philosophical references. Her passion for classical music, stories related to her profession as a real estate agent and a professional escort, converge with the economic and political crisis in Germany and that of Europe, in general. With highly articulate discourse, She is an activist

for the rights of sex workers and sexual minorities. She is an executive member of BEDS (Berufsverband Erotische und Sexuelle Dienstleistungen – a German professional association of sex workers) and provides psychological counselling to her fellow transgender sex workers in Leipzig.

Contrary to general preconceptions, Hanna's main reason for becoming a sex worker was not a financial one. As for many other transgender persons, her work as an escort played an essential role in her search for identity. It was a liberating space where she was able to explore her sexual preferences and fantasies, her seductive powers, her femininity. Hanna also debates on the therapeutic qualities of the sexual services she provides, not just for herself, but also for her clients. These services are a combination of erotic role-play and psychological counselling, which has an empowering effect on clients since they feel recognized and accepted as they are, while understanding that their desires and fantasies are not something negative or 'wrong' but a natural form of self-exploration.

In the same vein, it was interesting to meet Seani Love, who provides a mixture of sexual services, BDSM practices, Tantric sex, and psychological counselling in the form of Jungian psychotherapy. The relationship with each client is personalised because he intuitively feels what each person he is working with needs. The session with Laura

portrayed in the movie was the first time he met her, without knowing anything about her, just like any new client. Within the first ten minutes, he sensed the priority should be to work on establishing personal boundaries, on truly saying no. In Laura's personal history there had been times when her personal boundaries were not respected. Because of that, she accumulated large amounts of unprocessed anger, which kept her from getting close to others. The work with Seani helped her to become aware of the blockages she was facing, to express repressed emotions, and re-learn how to negotiate personal boundaries.

Seani has a very interesting website seanilove.com that presents the complex services he offers. He has a progressive vision of expression and personal sexual exploration. At the 2015 Sexual Freedom Awards in the UK, he won 'Best Sex Worker of the Year'. This type of festival offers recognition to sex workers, that has a very progressive discourse when it to fighting discrimination and abuse, to accepting difference, without passing judgment.

I want to read a short fragment from an article that Seani published on his site. It's called *Conscious Kink Saves The World*. "Times are changing. We are entering a new phase where we as a species are

yourself, you will implicitly relate differently to others, you will be able to recognise and accept the difference of the Other, and this will have a major social impact. Seani follows this line of thinking: that if you manage to have a different relationship with yourself, one of understanding and acceptance, you will have different types of relationships within your community. If you get to such a level of self-awareness, you will become immune to the pull of extremist movements, and all the forms this increasing aggression around us may take.

Maybe this was the core insights of this research process, that there are other kinds of beauty, body types, other ways of relating to each other and of experiencing intimacy, other views of the world that are different than so-called 'normative' ones – and yet as human, as natural and valuable. The difference from the norm is as normal as any norm.

During filming, we all constantly worked with unpredictable elements, with our vulnerabilities, emotions, bodies, with our inner worlds. This has been a constant challenge for our entire team, particularly for the protagonists. We began in 2013 with an extensive casting process that lasted more than two years. It was atypical casting, more similar to a documentary one, where I looked for people

AND YET AS HUMAN, AS NATURAL AND VALUABLE. THE DIFFERENCE FROM THE NORM IS AS NORMAL AS ANY NORM.

gaining greater understanding of the sexual impulses we have. Kink isn't seen as dysfunctional anymore but as an enriching and healthy aspect of normal peoples' sex lives. If we attempt to consciously explore our sexual fantasies, we are exploring a part of our subconscious minds and thus are gaining personal insight, self-knowledge and wisdom about our own journeys through the world. We are bringing the subconscious processing into the conscious mind for understanding, for exploring and for gaining greater self-awareness". Seani is working in a direction often explored in today's psychoanalysis. One of the books we all studied during the filming process is *Arousal*, by American psychoanalyst Michael Bader. It talks about the fact that the way you are acting, feeling, thinking in sexual and intimate situations offers a key to your subconscious. And if you manage to look at yourself with honesty and openness and don't automatically judge yourself as 'abnormal' or 'deviant', you have a very good chance of discovering profound aspects of yourself, able to understand and find solutions to conflicts and problematic dynamics – not just related to issues of intimacy, but also to other areas of your life. If you manage to understand yourself better and accept



Workshop opening: (l to r)
Audrius Kuprevičius
(Lithuanian Film Centre),
Marion Gompfer (Sources 2),
Rolandas Kvietkauskas
(Lithuanian Film Centre),
Julie Metzendorff (Sources 2)



(l to r) Miguel Machalski, Paul Tyler,
Eric Collins, Liz Rosenthal,
Marion Gompfer (Sources 2),
Austėja Milydaitė
(Creative Europe Desk MEDIA Lithuania),
Gualberto Ferrari, Audrius Kuprevičius
(Lithuanian Film Centre)

with whom I would be on the same wavelength, who would share similar interests in exploring intimacy. It was important to feel that my potential collaborators would have strong emotional motivations, that they were willing to walk with me down the difficult path of self-exploration and share their experiences and visions with audiences. After casting was complete, we delved into the actual work process, which had several stages. We started with a period of mutual discovery, using video diaries that each protagonist made on the

extensive periods of editing where, as in a documentary, we started to create a narrative.

We realized there was an emotional ‘red thread’ that connected all the stories. The film includes the talks we had about our search for inner freedom. Each character is facing an acute contradiction between their need for intimacy and their fear of it, going through a transformative process where they struggle with their own conditioning, emotional blockages and protective mechanisms. These are

NO MATTER WHAT YOU LOOK AT YOU ENTER THIS CONVENTION WE CALL A SUSPENSION OF DISBELIEF WHERE YOU SEPARATE FROM YOURSELF AND ENTER INTO THE STORY BUBBLE ON THE SCREEN.

Edvinas Pukšta, Ana Agopian



(l to r) Edvinas Pukšta, Vincas Sruoginis, Kristina Buožytė, Behrooz Karamizade, Zvile Gallego



often unconscious and keep them from relating to others. They have ingrained conflicts between attachment and autonomy, between giving and receiving, between the image they have built in their minds about love and the reality of it. Loving another human being without losing the self – the central dilemma of intimacy – was at the core of my search as a director. Basically the entire script had been organically re-written in tandem with this re-search process.

As a child learns to walk and become a separate human being making his or her way into life, so the characters of *Touch Me Not* start to gradually move away from the past, moving through a difficult, yet liberating process of cutting the umbilical cord and becoming free, finally able to meet and possibly love another as he/she really is, not a distorted image.

The film was conceived as a dialogue, a conversation with the viewer. That’s why, from the very beginning, there was the idea that the fourth wall would be fluid. It was important that the characters and viewers engage in direct dialogue, that they could look each other in the eye. This is why we needed this system of using the teleprompter. It’s a device that’s been used in television and also introduced in documentary cinema by Errol Morris. The characters could see me in the lens. Initially the idea wasn’t to see the camera and the entire workings behind it, but to follow the characters’ explorations. At some point they would start talking to you, the viewer, giving you direct feedback seemingly without the presence of the camera.

What I noticed though when we initially used this procedure, was that its effect was the opposite of what we intended, because it cut the viewer off from the emotional flow. It had a Brecht-like effect, a so-called ‘distancing effect’. I kept wondering why

topic of intimacy. This was used as basis for what we created regarding new themes we would shoot later in the process. It was an essential time in which we came to know one another more deeply. During that time a mutual trust grew. The characters became familiar with the presence of the camera to record the most intimate moments of their lives. This allowed us during the real shooting to work with a fusion of reality and fiction, personal stories mixed with fictional elements, with a high dose of unpredictability and emotional risk, a time during which none of us knew precisely where the journey would take us. The shooting alternated with

this was happening, because it wasn't our intention. Our intention was to have the protagonists be in constant emotional contact with viewers.

I realized the ways in which we usually read cinema are so ingrained into our perception, that no matter what you look at, be it fictional or not, you enter this convention we call a suspension of disbelief where you separate from yourself and enter into the story bubble on the screen. You move into a different world, separate from yourself, your body, your life. But it was *essential* that this separation wouldn't take place while watching the film. On the contrary, it was very important that you, the viewer, are in direct emotional contact with the screen, that the channel between your body and the movie is always open, that you are constantly aware you are in a movie which, through the camera and the filmmakers' unavoidably subjective eye, offers you privileged access to the intimate lives of these people who want to engage in a direct dialogue with you.

That's why the presence of the camera and of the filming process became organically necessary. It was very important to establish, from the very beginning, the status of the 'gaze', the specifics of the 'act of looking', what you are actually experiencing. To be constantly aware that you, the viewer, are not in a 'bubble of disbelief', that you are an active part of this ongoing research and dialogue

with the protagonists, a witness-camera, a channel of communication between the viewer and the world of the film.

This inclusion of the 'apparatus' in the film, made it also necessary to clarify my own position, as a filmmaker. I exist there as an emotional trigger of this research, going through my own journey of self-discovery. But the focus is not on me or the apparatus but on the protagonists that I discover, together with you, with curiosity and fascination, and with whom both you and I are communicating directly.

I believe this kind of dialogue makes the film function as a mirror in which you can see yourself and catch a glimpse of some of your own possibilities that haven't crossed your mind, or you might be afraid to accept.

It prompts a self-reflective process which is not always comfortable. It makes you aware of your own responses. That's why the film often triggers strong and unexpected emotional reactions, which are very subjective. It takes you out of that comfort zone in which you feel you know things, you have certainties, by offering you surprising perspectives which destabilize your thinking.

Concerning the complex process of development and financing, fortunately I started this project in

I BELIEVE THIS KIND OF DIALOGUE MAKES THE FILM FUNCTION AS A MIRROR IN WHICH YOU CAN SEE YOURSELF AND CATCH A GLIMPSE.



Gualberto Ferrari's group:
Kyra Jungck, Behrooz Karamizade,
Vincas Sruoginis, Zivile Gallego,
Gualberto Ferrari, Sinisa Vidovic,
Dinko Draganovic, Charlotte Bruneau,
Christina Øster

2006 when I was finishing film school during a time when Romania joined the European Union. I was making my diploma film, which was investigating this area of cinema I'm interested in, this border between fiction and reality. This was a privileged moment. The younger generation might take the EU for granted, but I would warmly recommend carefully preserving this progress of humanity at this cultural level because without this concept of cultural collaboration within Europe, this project would not have been possible. This key year brought the possibility to participate in various residencies and development workshops. For a Romanian filmmaker, this was not possible before.

A very important incubator for the project was a creative residency in Amsterdam called the Binger Filmlab. It works differently from the various labs and workshops. Right after film school, I spent a year at Binger at a very crucial moment in the development of the project. Either I had to go and work in advertising or take more commercial jobs, or... There was no 'or' because the other option was

post-production stage, a very delicate stage budget-wise because you've usually spent everything you have to be able to shoot. Then there is this black hole budget-wise, time-wise, deadline-wise where you have to find solutions. So for us getting the award for work-in-progress at CineLink 2016 was crucial.

We started to develop the project at Binger from 2010/2011 and we managed to finance it in part between 2013 and 2015, then we filmed in 2015/2016, while continuing to work on financing and while we had already started post-production. We entered full post-production swing in 2016/2017. In the end, this film's budget was around € 1.500.000. Initially, we severely under-budgeted and this had a huge impact on the whole life of the film, of course. What I recommend, especially if you are a first-time director/producer team, is that from the very beginning you should have a very experienced fellow producer on board, someone with a lot of experience in international co-productions or experience auditing for EURIMAGES. We did become a

OF SOME OF YOUR OWN POSSIBILITIES THAT HAVEN'T CROSSED YOUR MIND, OR YOU MIGHT BE AFRAID TO ACCEPT.

this one, which protected my growth process as a filmmaker. For a whole year, I developed the project in this creative incubator, with all expenses covered by Binger with some support from the Romanian Film Fund. Unfortunately this kind of residency doesn't exist anymore. Ideally you go through a residency like this after you've been through a development workshop where you've had the chance to build a first draft. In an incubator-type setting you can explore and develop in more depth. At Binger, we had some casting sessions and filmed some scenes. We did psycho-dramatic exercises and did a lot of experiential workshops around different areas of the film. *Touch Me Not* is an exploratory film, a research film. If you also have a beginning or first-time producer, which was also our case, this kind of buffer period where you can focus and receive feedback from trainers and industry people, is very important.

When *Touch Me Not* entered the marketplace, it faced the cinema industry. Our first step into this world was at CineMart, the co-production market at International Film Festival Rotterdam. There are also other important markets such as Berlinale co-production market, as well as regional ones like Sarajevo's CineLink, which was also very important for us. Unlike other markets, CineLink has awards for work-in-progress projects. They can help not only in the development period, but also in the

complex international co-production during the six years and ended up as a five-country co-production with Romania, Germany, France, Bulgaria and Czech Republic, with additional support from EURIMAGES and MEDIA. But it was a huge burden balancing this underestimated budget in those eight years.

I knew from the very beginning that this was going to be a research film and conceptually a dialogue film. Therefore, it was a huge challenge to figure out how to write the project. You cannot finance anything without a proper written proposal unless you are very established. Then, of course, you can just write half a page and get financing. Well, fair enough. I understand this because a financing institution needs an amount of security. So if this is your first feature, it's essential to have previous works, even in a shorter format. It's understandable the people deciding who to give money to for a feature project need a proof of ability beforehand.

The project existed in a classical format for many years. It was a 90-page script, a scene-by-scene description with a treatment, with a storyline, with an almost classically defined narrative. If you look at the backbone of the film now, you can still find this initial narrative structure. But this was not a priority. If I can go back to my approach, I don't believe there is a clear border between fiction and



Participants and Sources 2 team

I DON'T BELIEVE THERE IS A CLEAR BORDER BETWEEN FICTION AND DOCUMENTARY.

documentary. I don't believe in these labels. Fiction is interesting for me as a tool to work with reality. I've come from a film school that provided a classical upbringing in terms of what cinema should be or what it is, the classical storytelling of realistic narrative fiction with big respect for McKee.

There have been amazing works coming from the Romanian school in that area, *chapeau* for that. The film school has been very important in my process, so please don't take this as a complaint about the film school. On the contrary, without it I wouldn't be here. It was the first training period, like a sort of an army. Learning the rules of the game is useful to be able to eventually transcend these rules if you want to. We filmed on 35mm so the amount of film was limited. You needed to know precisely in advance everything you were going to shoot, restricted to two takes maximum with a fairly non-existent budget and very limited amounts of time. You worked within a strict framework and you had to deliver. This discipline gave you knowledge of a language that became deeply ingrained.

In my last year at the school, there was a very important alternative, which was the possibility of attending the workshops I spoke about. My first experience was in a nonfiction workshop called Aristoteles. It was their first edition, another European Union initiative focused on Eastern Europe. Romanian television was involved. In one month we

were supposed to generate a film in a nonfiction format and it was the first time I got to work with digital formats. Now Aristoteles is open to the whole world and I recommend it as a sort of summer training, a creative hub where you have some very interesting tutors who don't come from classical fiction, but can open up methods of working that can be very useful even in making a classical fiction film. This was the first context where I could use the tools of fiction to make documentary. In film school, I had been in constant debate with my teachers, particularly with Radu Gabrea whom I'll always hold very dear. He unfortunately passed away. He directed among others the very interesting film *A Man Like Eve* about Fassbinder. Gabrea and I would debate a lot about this whole McKee fiction scheme. So-called 'inciting incidents' don't happen like they do in the McKee fantasy. The big changes throughout our lives are subtle. You don't really know when they happen. There can be a conversation that can operate unconsciously inside you and can change something three years from then. The triggering points in your life sometimes are not even conscious. They function very much on the subconscious level. It's not so easy to create things that are shifting at one precise point. There is always mention of the similarity between Romanian fairy tales and the McKee structure.

In the fairy tales, there is this balanced situation in the beginning and then a monster appears who

kidnaps the moon from the sky, let's say. This destabilizes the initial order. Then the hero comes; he has a lack inside, something missing, so he embarks on a journey to bring back the moon, which is also a personal transformative journey. Along the way, there are helpers that support the hero and his growth. In the end, of course, he fights the bad guy, returns the moon to the sky, and finds a wonderful girl to marry. I had huge resistance to these models of storytelling, ones that didn't reflect the reality of my experience at all.

Cinema is a tool of discovery. I'm not interested in the classical procedures of fictional cinema when one makes a plan on paper and knows in advance what's going to happen and can transform it into something palpable. This means that a film is being made according to a plan. This caused a huge contradiction with the film school's whole model of film directing because on set you're supposed to know what you're going to do. Everything is planned very carefully. Being vulnerable or wanting to work improvisationally creates such chaos in a regular shooting structure if you're not prepared for this kind of flexibility. If you work as a filmmaking team with a lot of unpredictable elements, emotions, and vulnerability, especially if you hire a crew trained in this classical way of shooting, it can be very challenging in terms of the dynamics on set. It can be perceived as a lack of organisation on the part of the director, or a lack of professionalism, because it's a totally different way of working. So if you ever

intend to work with a mix of reality and fiction, you need a huge amount of flexibility from everyone, and to choose people who have had experiences like that and make a training session of a few days to explain the process in which you intend to work in advance.

There are many filmmakers trying to do different things and that's very legitimate. It's a matter of being aware of the others you're working with and where they're coming from. If they're coming from a different world or approach, it's important to explain yourself properly. Sometimes the filmmaker is going to cry on set. Sometimes she's going to change the shooting location. Sometimes you'll be kept outside the set because privacy is required and so no one else might be allowed on set for a whole day of shooting. Sometimes the sound team will not be able to properly record some scenes because we don't know what kind of interactions are going to take place so we cannot put lavaliers on people or allow somebody with a boom to run around because this will disrupt the intimacy of the situation. If things like this aren't communicated in advance, this type of working method can create a lot of frustration.

I'll return to talking about the process and how the fusion of fiction and reality functioned. We worked with a lot of personal material. We had several psychotherapists as consultants along the way. During this whole process, the fiction functioned

I DON'T BELIEVE IN THESE LABELS. FICTION IS INTERESTINGS AS A TOOL TO WORK WITH REALITY.

Miguel Machalski's group:
(l to r) Rasa Miškinytė, Marjoleine Boonstra, Bastiaan Tichler,
Miglė Satkauskaitė, Karin Berghammer, Jan, Van Dyck,
Almudena Monzú, Javier Ferréiro, Miguel Machalski



more as a safety structure and emotional incubator because it brought us all together, creating the authentic encounters. What you see happening in front of the camera are authentic interactions between the people involved in that situation.

I will give you examples of why this kind of hybrid structure sometimes allows for a higher degree of freedom than classical documentary or fiction structures would allow. In classical fiction, you as a protagonist are a prisoner of the scripted character. This is also the case in a classical documentary, where you are a prisoner of your daily persona. We all have a way of presenting ourselves in the world. Everyday life has a highly performative dimension. We feel safe when seen in a certain way. The beauty of creating this emotional incubator was that we could go to unexplored places. Laura Benson, the main protagonist, said at one point that she could explore possibilities of herself that otherwise she would have ever dared explore. The privacy on set was always protected. Not more than two or three people were present. But that had its downsides. For example, the fact that we didn't allow the sound

your personal experiences most of the time. For example, when Laura had to meet real escorts, the meetings you see in the film take place like those between a real client and a real escort. They had never met before and knew anything about one another, so the script only contained the premises of the encounter. But what you see happening in the scene is what's happening in that moment between those two people.

The character of Laura is a hybrid. She's a mix of a scripted proposal of the character and the material that the protagonist brings. This hybrid person is meeting Hanna, the transgender sex worker, and Seani Love, the other sex worker. These two come to the meeting with their own biographies and backgrounds. There is the cinema that is influencing the reality in front of the camera and the other way around. For example in this encounter between Hanna and Laura there are several different directions the conversation could have taken. I'm always present too, very close to them even when you don't see me. When Hanna started to talk about her relationship with her own body, this was particularly

I'M NOT INTERESTED IN THE CLASSICAL PROCEDURES OF FICTIONAL CINEMA WHEN ONE MAKES A PLAN AND KNOWS IN ADVANCE WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN...

crew on set sometimes had a huge impact on the post-production costs and time. The sound recorded on set was of a very low quality. Yet it's a film about intimacy so we needed an intimate and immersive experience reflected in the sound design. Therefore, we had to recreate a lot of the recordings from set. Without that we would have had this impossible paradox where you have a very intimate experience in the images with the sound feeling like it was coming from the flat next door. If you can predict when that might occur, then you can cut expenses with the sound team on set. However, we needed to capture on-set sound as a reference, so we planted several microphones and booms. We never found an invisible lavalier. We did do a lot of research to figure out how the sound crew could be the least visible on set but didn't ever find very practical solutions.

Another aspect of protecting privacy was that none of the protagonists needed to mention where the material they worked with came from, whether it was a memory, a dream, or fantasy. The sources didn't need to be revealed. Yet what experience showed is that when you're in an improvisational situation like when you meet someone for the first time in front of the camera, you do bring into play

interesting to me. So I encouraged the following conversation to go in that direction. For the scenes with Hanna, we had two days of shooting and we had several versions. I wouldn't call them takes because they are never takes. They are meetings.

We supposed that Laura was going to have three meetings with Hanna. The first meeting was always an exploratory one, aimed at finding out the way forward. In these meetings, Hanna's story about Brahms emerged. This kind of personal material is a sort of magic, one of my greatest joys in the process of filmmaking. You have the created and constructed world, but in this world what's most interesting is the human material, the poetry in the human beings that are there on set. With Hanna, it was absolutely amazing to find out that when she fell asleep as a child, it was to her father's piano playing of Brahms' music. I already knew Hanna's history. As I shared with you before, I've already been through an emotional incubator period with all the protagonists, months before the official shooting. Through this previous process, I knew that Hanna had a difficult relationship with her father. He had wanted to be a musician his entire life. But he had given up on what he really wanted to do, becoming a lawyer instead, deciding to fit in



a box set by his society. The core story of Hanna as a human being is a story about personal freedom. This is what I found fascinating about her character and why I chose to work with her. In the beginning it wasn't clear where the film was going but in the several years spent in this process, the red thread of the search for personal freedom became more and more clear in the evolution of each character. This wasn't just for the main characters, but also in the secondary characters. In this meeting with Laura and Hanna, the subject of the music of Brahms came up, the same music Hanna would also put on for her clients to help them relax in her real life as a sex worker. On set, we discovered this whole emotional connection. The fact that she bonded with her father over the Brahms music and that this was so important in her emotional memory, I found so poetic because Brahms could stand for a sort of nostalgia for the lost freedom of her father.

Knowing this, when it was time for the second meeting with Laura, I encouraged Hanna to go further into the Brahms topic. They discussed the Brahms music more deeply and you can see the different layers of the conversation and the impact this personal material had on Hanna as a protagonist. If she had used something I brought into the story that had no connection with her, it would have been, I assure you, a completely different film. When she asks Laura to sit and listen to the music, it had such an influence on Hanna's whole body. I knew her before this discovery of the Brahms material and afterwards. What emerges in the film is the post-Brahms Hanna [laughs]. That's the kind of power this material we worked with had. The discovery of the emotional keys to the characters was one of the most magical elements in this situation.

Another layer appeared in this discussion when Hanna mentioned in an *en passant*, kind of joking way, her own 'imperfect body'. This comment triggered me. Laura had her own experience with her body and in the incubation period we had already built part of Laura's emotional flesh around this idea. The huge struggle for Laura's character was in her relationship with her own body. I always saw Hanna being so much herself, so natural within her 'unnatural' identity. Her conversation about the imperfect body immediately interested me. In this conversation, you discover the wonderful relationship she has with this body, one that challenges the norms of beauty or gender. She created a whole mythology of the body. You discover the affective relationship she has with her breasts; they have stories, birth dates and names. Our position there as a film crew, and mine as a filmmaker, acted more like a medium or mediator. This applies to all the relationships you see developing in the film. What happened in front of us influenced us and we, in turn, had influence on the reality happening in front of us, accompanied by our own triggers and areas of interest during the actual shooting.

At this point, I'd like to return to a question that came from one of you about how we got the money to be able to go through the earlier development stage, which allowed this process to grow. What was important for us was to have financing in place from the very early development period. We applied for development funding from MEDIA. For research and process-based projects, development funding is crucial. To prove what the project can be, particularly in this kind of situation, you need to have filmed material. The written material is not enough. Fortunately, we received MEDIA funding. With this

money we could start filmed research very early on. The research for *Touch Me Not* has always been filmed, including all the initial encounters with the protagonists. Consequently there was a huge amount of material. *Touch Me Not* is not just a film, but also a multi-platform project. It will develop into multiple formats and several feature films will come out of this research, together with an interactive performance and an installation. These are the several layers of the research that will hopefully grow in the coming years.

In parallel, we started to apply for financing. The first production financing we received was from TorinoFilmLab. The development period has a very special privilege since innovation, risk-taking, and experimentation is very much encouraged. This is why the development co-production markets and workshops are wonderful opportunities not to be missed. However, everything that is encouraged and rewarded in the development structure is used against you in the financing structure of the same project [laughs]. It is important to benefit from this stage where you have this kind of freedom, as well as creating strong partnerships with co-producers that you meet within this development structure. They will become your main supporters.

If you're making a project that doesn't follow the classical route, then later in the financing stage the whole issue of 'safety' comes up. The bigger the budget, the more the funders might feel unsafe when you come with an atypical story structure, especially when you are a beginning filmmaker. In our case, the development funding generated film material, which we could then show in support of the written material. This had the strongest impact I have to say. We also learned a lot about how to

present the project. Luckily, we got the MEDIA funding. But I don't think we could have received EURIMAGES support later with the same project before we got this funding of MEDIA in 2011. Five years later EURIMAGES came on board in 2015. The new written format of the project by then was the result of ongoing failures. We got positive responses to maybe only twenty percent of the funding applications we submitted. The overall amount of work was huge and it took a lot of time. I would warmly recommend that in order to keep up your optimism, you should be patient and stay true to yourself and find the right partners. The amount of rejection encountered along the way can be a huge challenge. On the other hand, those rejections gave us an important piece of information and that is, if you try to make a project conform which does not conform to the classical rules of filmmaking, or if you try to make it conform to the rules of financing applications, it's not going to work. You must realise a high degree of honesty and find the right language for the project.

Back in 2013, the situation with the French financing was becoming rather disastrous. We thought we could build a fruitful collaboration with France, but we kept getting rejected from Arte and in the post-production period by Aide aux cinémas du monde. Our French co-producer, Philippe Avril, has a lot of experience with formally challenging projects. He's worked with Pedro Costa and Wang Bing and other filmmakers, working along these borders of reality and fiction. He produced the winner of last year's Orizzonti Award at Venice, *Manta Ray*. He has this amazing intuition, not only as a result of his poetic being, but also from his experience that it's never gonna work to make an application with a 90-page script because the script is not enough.



Eric Collins' group:
(l to r) Eva Cools, Eric Collins, Ivo Victoria,
Malene Choi Jensen, Tomas Vengris,
Natassa Xydi, Manos Papadakis,
Iatia Rosenthal, Marianne Lentz,
Ana Agopian

The script for this film only describes experiences, a structure that follows an inner transformation so something needed to be radically changed in the way we approached the funding applications. Philippe came up with several ideas, as did the co-producer Benny Drechsel. Philippe asked me to write a new statement explaining why I wanted to do this project, this research on intimacy. He had this crazy idea that I should write this new statement as a letter to my mother. This was the first point where we broke away from the usual way of presenting a project. I had a month to write it and that was a terrible month in my life. It was excruciating to try to honestly explain to my mother in this letter why I'm doing this film and why I'm going to weird places to find these weird people to do this weird film and what's at the core of it. You see part of this letter in the film, the beginning and end of the film where you hear this imaginary conversation with my mother. In the film, I decided to keep it ambiguous because this unseen conversation partner can be any significant other. One of the core ideas of the film is the question: *Tell me how you love me so I can understand how to love*. It explores this huge impact of the ways we are brought up and how we learn to relate to our significant others in our intimate relationships as adults.

We all grow up with a sort of vision of utopia, with certain expectations about how reality is and how we should be, what I call normative fictions, which we develop from familial, societal, and educational experiences. But reality is much more complex. The scripts we grow up with limit our view, they are only a *limited* part of reality. There are so many other ways in which people experience intimacy and sexuality. There are so many other kinds of beauty that are different than the norm, but they are

The idea to introduce part of this process in the project presentation had a very huge impact on the way it was perceived because all of a sudden the people judging or deciding about the life of the project could have a deeper insight into what this film could be. This is not a typical story so I don't know if all this applies to you or will help you in any way. But I do think that if you want to challenge some paths in the filmmaking process, this will challenge all other aspects of production, from the application processes, funding, and financing to the distribution and promotional life of the project.

The way this project was born, as a personal dialogue with the viewer for all the protagonists, along with this research concept, had implications for its distribution. *Touch Me Not* is not only a film. It's an experience that goes beyond cinema. With the intense controversy it has raised since its world premiere at the Berlinale and winning the Golden Bear, *Touch Me Not* has become more than a film. It is a self-reflective experience.

An essential contribution to this development has been the committed involvement of the film's protagonists. They each have a charismatic presence, progressive inspirational world-views, and strong emotional motivations to share their experiences and opinions with the public. Some of them are outspoken activists in the human rights arena, used to raising debates on sensitive topics like personal boundaries, intimacy and disability, gender fluidity, beauty and bodies different than the norm, inner freedom, etc.

The extensive international exposure, including more than one hundred confirmed selections in prestigious festivals all over the world, together

YOU HAVE THE CREATED, CONSTRUCTED WORLD, BUT IN THIS WORLD WHAT'S MOST INTERESTING IS THE POETRY IN THE HUMAN BEINGS THAT ARE THERE ON SET.

valid and humanly interesting – and as normal as the normative ones. *Touch Me Not* was a sort of re-learning or re-education, that emerged from this intention to forget everything I thought I knew and to discover, with openness how people really experience this aspect of their lives, which is sometimes very far from the harmonious idea of intimacy we grow up with. That personal curiosity was at the core. So this was what I had to explain to my mother: why I was spending so much energy on this project and why I was so curious about all these things.

with a worldwide theatrical release, in more than 35 countries, offers a solid platform to fully develop this dialogue. It creates a large context which will expand the self-reflective, transformative process the film initiates by taking the discussions beyond the cinema space, offering audiences the chance for direct exchange with the protagonists within an open debate format called *Touch Me Not - The Politics of Intimacy*. We've had several intense encounters with audiences within this format at major national releases and premieres.

If you want to explore these fusion area between fiction and reality and you know you will need high production value because you' are using the language of fiction to explore and work with reality, I think it's much more realistic to apply with the film positioned as a work of fiction. Budgets for documentary are not reflecting the needs of this kind of filmmaking. A lot of things need to be change in the way the documentary industry perceives non-fiction filmmaking. A € 200.000 budget is not going to be enough to make an international non-fiction co-production. This may be fine for certain kinds of filmmaking, but not for cinema that is working at the border. We made a project where the language of the film was very important. We had locations and a studio. We built locations for the film where we worked with a set designer and an international co-production with five countries. We shot in three of those countries; we did post-

it pornography even though there was not one scene in the script. Yet there were conversations about intimate things about the body and these were considered pornographic, so they wouldn't support it. This is not about the film fund as an institution, but about the specific jury in a specific moment. In Romania, there is a law that there has to be a call for projects every year, but since budgets are very precarious there, it was a terrible years when there was no other call for projects. We were blocked from the possibility of receiving financing for a year and a half until the next call.

At the next call, however, we got first place in the début section, this time with a different jury. The project hadn't changed at all. So the film fund, in the end, did strongly support the production, as well as the distribution and festival promotion. You do meet people along the way that are not the right

EVERYTHING THAT IS ENCOURAGED AND REWARDED IN THE DEVELOPMENT STRUCTURE IS USED AGAINST YOU IN THE FINANCING STRUCTURE OF THE SAME PROJECT.

production in four of those countries. Our cast was from seven different countries. And then there was the long period of time it took to make. We didn't shoot everything in one go. We had three shooting periods – 2015, 2016 and one in 2017. This kind of process is more typical for a nonfiction film.

You must be aware of the needs you're going to have in order to position yourself correctly. Today there are certain professional standards and expectations around the practice of making documentary films and I wouldn't recommend going with such a project into that context. At least for the moment, it is the fiction world that allows a degree of flexibility and exploration in terms of budgeting. Unfortunately there is no territory in the financing sector that transcends these limitations. In the funding, there is always this clear border between reality and fiction, so you need to try to fit into boxes even though your project is trying to break free from those boxes.

Normally, your own country needs to be the first to finance the production. Only then can co-producers from other countries apply in support of the project. We got TorinoFilmLab funding before the Romanian Film Fund came in and that was quite a blessing. The Romanian Film Fund didn't see fit to finance the project in the beginning, even though it was already receiving media attention and great recognition from the international film industry. Unfortunately, the Romanian Film Fund considered

match for your project and then you are blocked. But Germany and France were the first countries on board since we had met those producers at CINEMART. They remained on board as solid collaborators for many years. The funding that came from Germany allowed us to begin filming the casting and research process that helped with further financing since we could present visual material with some of the protagonists that would be in the film – emotionally powerful material even though we didn't know what the film was going to be precisely at that point. Nevertheless, it was very important to have a rigorous script and this is also the case for any non-fiction application, even though such a script can only be a sort of imaginary idea of what the film could become.

This exercise of imagination we put in the script was useful because it helped structure thoughts and experiences. It made it possible to foresee some of the directions in which the film could go. The specific addition to this project presentation was that we introduced this meta-cinematic layer as well as the research process itself. This was all in the script and in the project presentation, which included the letter to my mother. The financing started to happen. The challenge to find the right language of a film doesn't just happen in the film-making process. It happens in the financing and research. It's about how we manage to stay true to the process.

SOURCES 2 SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

4 –12 APRIL 2019 NEAR VILNIUS | LITHUANIA

DEVELOPMENT FEATURE FILM & CREATIVE DOCUMENTARY

Mentors

Miguel Machalski | Spain, Argentina
Eric Collins | France
Gualberto Ferrari | France, Argentina

Alumni

Karin Berghammer | Austria
Dinko Draganovic | Austria
& Sinisa Vidovic | Bosnia and Herzegovina
Jan Van Dyck | Belgium
Eva Cools & Ivo Victoria | Belgium
Marianne Lentz & Malene Choi Jensen
& Maria Møller Kjeldgaard | Denmark
Christina Øster & Nina Bisgaard | Denmark
Behrooz Karamizade | Germany, Iran
Natassa Xydi & Manos Papadakis | Greece
Tomas Vengris | Lithuania & Tatia Rosenthal | Israel
Miglė Satkauskaitė & Rasa Miškinytė | Lithuania
Vincas Sruoginis & Zivile Gallego | Lithuania
Charlotte Bruneau | Luxembourg
& Kyra Jungck | Germany
Bastiaan Tichler & Marjoleine Boonstra | Netherlands
Ana Agopian | Romania
Javier Ferreira & Almudena Monzú | Spain

SUPPLEMENTARY PROGRAMME

Sources of Inspiration

Adina Pintilie | Romania

Lecture

Liz Rosenthal | United Kingdom

Special Advice

Paul Tyler | Denmark, United Kingdom

PARTNERS

Support

Lithuanian Film Centre, Creative Europe MEDIA



TORFINN IVERSEN

TORFINN IVERSEN | CURRICULUM VITAE



Torfinn Iversen

Born in 1985 in Sortland, Norway, Torfinn Iversen started to make short films at the age of 11. He holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Visual Culture (film and television) from Lillehammer University College, which included a semester abroad at Hawaii Pacific University. He received a Master's degree from Nordland College of Art and Film in 2009.

Torfinn has written and directed several short films that have screened at a variety of international film festivals. He is an alumnus of Berlinale Talent Campus, 2009, and his short film *Levi's Horse* was selected to the Generation section of Berlinale 2012.

Oskar's America, Torfinn's debut feature film, won the Inaugural Eurimages Co-production Development Award in 2014 and premiered in the Generation section of Berlinale 2017. His latest short, *Bog Hole* (2018), was screened at numerous festivals including Palm Springs International, São Paulo International Short Film Festival, Oberhausen Short Film Festival, and Giffoni Film Festival. The film was nominated for Best Short Film at the Amanda Awards, Norway's national film prize.

Currently developing a new feature film, *Uncle Egg – Searching for a Dad*, Torfinn has been selected to participate at the 2019 Cinekid Script Lab in Amsterdam.

IDEAS ARE WORTH NOTHING UNLESS THEY ARE PLACED IN A CONTEXT.

MÅLSELV, NORWAY | 5 OCTOBER 2019

TORFINN IVERSEN

SOURCES OF INSPIRATION LECTURE
ON OCCASION OF THE WORKSHOP
SOURCES 2 COMPACT AT FILMCAMP | NORWAY
PRECEDED BY THE SCREENING OF
OSKAR'S AMERICA (2019).

IVERSEN It was great to be here as a writer in the workshop last year. There were some inspiring workshops and lectures, so I hope that this one will be inspiring for you, too.

To start off, I'll show you the trailer of *Oskar's America* because that's a good way to see some images of this new feature film, which I wrote and directed. I'll share the process of making the film and of course in order to do that I must give you some background. It's a very personal film. It came

mind, even after many rounds of thinking about it or the situation, then I start to write out the idea. For me, writing is about creating some kind of emotional chaos for a character and, then through the writing of the story, the chaos has to get sorted. I spend some time searching for those images. It was the same with this one – this horse on a boat out in the open ocean. I don't know where this image came from but it's probably a result of the image playing in my imagination and connecting it to my own life, searching for an original way to express it. There is something inside me and I want to convey a story in a certain way without being preachy.

I grew up on an island in Vesteålen. When I was a kid, my mother told me a lot of stories, stories she would invent as she sat beside my bed. She would also read books, but the stories she invented were the really interesting ones, and she was very good at telling them. They were entertaining and surprising. At the age of eight I became obsessed with drawing. I didn't have a camera at that time, so I drew thousands of images, as cartoons, with different stories. I just wanted to draw all the time. Both of my parents painted and wrote as a hobby, and I think it came from that.

I TRY TO LET THE CHARACTERS PAINT THE FILM.

out in 2017 in cinemas in Norway and Sweden. It was the first Norwegian children's film in six years that was not based on well-known stories from a book. In Norway, as in many other countries, most films for children are based on very well-known material. Of course, the process of bringing something original from scratch to the screen is very hard. I came up with the idea in 2011, and the film premiered in the Generation section of Berlinale in 2017. Let's begin with the trailer. [trailer plays]

I want to talk about originality. To me, originality often means dealing with an object or character placed in a situation where it normally does not belong – like this horse in the boat. That was one of the first images that came to me. I wanted to try to see if this kind of image would be strong enough to carry a movie. If the image stays long enough in my

A local film festival started in my hometown of Sortland in 1993. I was eight years old and I won my first film award for a storyboard that was around thirty pages long. That was a huge motivation for me to continue to tell stories with drawings. When I was ten, my parents divorced, and my younger sister and I moved in with my mother. My mother was quite restless. She was very attractive and funny and dated new guys all the time. She introduced me to a lot of new stepfathers. There were so many of them, I couldn't keep track. But one day, one of her boyfriends brought me a stolen film-camera. I was flabbergasted. I used it for a couple of months, but it didn't work that well. My grandfather saw my passion for this. Since he was not a fan of stolen goods, he helped me to finance a Hi8 video camera for cassettes. All the kids in my class were really shocked that I came to school



(l to r) Karol Griffiths, Torfinn Iversen,
Marion Gompfer (Sources 2),
Michael Seeber, Arash T. Riahi,
Ellen Charlotte Sørheim

THERE ARE SO MANY THINGS FROM MY CHILDHOOD THAT ARE STILL IN ME.

with a video camera. Their parents might have had one, but it would be used to only record weddings, birthdays or summer holidays. None of the kids was allowed to touch their parents' camera. It's very different today, of course. We all have cameras on our phones, including kids. It's said that in 2022, there will be around 45 billion cameras in the world, more cameras than there are human eyes. A lot has changed in a short time, and we are somehow writing digital diaries by taking innumerable pictures.

So, after I figured out how the new Hi8 camera worked, I invited my classmates to be actors and crewmembers. We started to create short screenplays with lots of different scenes and shot them. At first, the teachers were not always happy about this. My cousin, sister and I wrote and filmed parodies about all these stepfathers we'd had since our mother introduced us to a new stepfather almost every month. [laughter] One of them was a gardener but didn't have the intention of taking care of flowers. Instead, he started some illegal business in the basement of my mother's house. I was ten years old and he asked me to water the plants for pocket money. There were quite a lot of them. But one day when I returned from school, the plants were being carried away by law enforcement. So yeah, I didn't know that those plants were illegal at the time, of course. After that, my sister and I had to move in with my father and we were allowed to see my mother sometimes at her home,

but only with a supervisor from the child welfare present, who sat on a chair like in *Kitchen Stories* by Bent Hamer, observing everything. I think she wrote down every move we made and every word we said.

At that time, we got two VHS recorders from my uncle. They were very old, but we could start to edit with these things. That was really something. We sent the short films we made to the film festival in Lillehammer called Amandus, the national youth film festival. One of these films, *Gaute on the Mountain* is about a biking musician who loses his bike-wheel as he is going down from the mountain to play for the town. The wheel just continues to roll for two weeks. It won the award for best short film, and we were in heaven. The jury said that the film followed every dramaturgical rule of screenwriting. At that time, we had no idea what dramaturgy meant. For us, this was just intuition. Probably also because we watched a lot of films.

We became kind of "local celebrities" on this island. Local newspapers started to write articles about us as young filmmakers and followed everything we did, almost like *paparazzi*. After a while, people started to ask us if we also could do wedding videos. Oh yes, we could. Soon after we were making money on wedding videos. Of course, we spent all this money on new equipment. We were only thirteen-fourteen. Then we made a 60-minute live-action film, which is painful to watch

(l to r) Torfinn Iversen, Maida Hals, Julia Andersen



I WON'T CALL IT THERAPY BUT IT IS A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION, A TREASURE BOX I CAN TAKE FROM.

today, but it was a nice type of film school. After making some other short films, I went to Lillehammer and took there a Bachelor's Degree in film history. I then studied for another two years at a film school based in northern Norway, the Nordland College of Art and Film, followed by studies in literature, strategy and financial analytics.

Now I'd like to talk about sources of inspiration and then about the process of writing and directing *Oskar's America*. I always find it interesting to talk with other filmmakers about their backstories. Are there writers here that are directing their films? Yeah, quite a few. I really like this phrase "sources of inspiration". We all have our ways of finding inspiration. There's always a risk of being too personal because you take the chance of losing relevance. We had a lot of discussions about this while making *Oskar's America*. In terms of my own backstory, I'll tell you a bit more. As I told you, I got a camera when I was eleven. I still have about six hundred video-tapes from that time. Some years ago, I started to digitalize these tapes. Some were de-magnetized or broken. When I think back, it was kind of confusing to me because I had memories in my head, and when I watched the tapes, it was kind of different from what I remembered. By watching these tapes, many childhood memories came back – in very nice and interesting ways, but also in not so good ways. These tapes are like my personal treasure boxes. I get ideas and inspiration from

watching them. It's sort of a time travel and can be a source of inspiration in many ways.

As a kid, I did a lot of social experiments because I wanted to test people's reactions by staging and provoking situations. My cousin and I used to fool my grandfather very often (not the one who helped me to finance the camera). We placed a camera in the bookshelf. My grandfather loved to play lotto and he would spend his money on that every Saturday. Around 7.30 in the evening, you'd see the lotto balls rolling around on the TV. This was in the mid-90s. My grandfather would fill out his numbers and then hand in the lotto coupon to the local lotto shop. The right seven numbers would be the big win. A couple of weeks before this episode, I had used my uncle's VHS player to record the lotto show from a couple of weeks previous. While my grandfather was making his evening meal, I used his pen and changed all the numbers on his coupon so that he would get the feeling of becoming a millionaire by getting the correct seven numbers. When he realised that he got the right seven numbers, he was standing on his chair, because the winner would get ten million crowns. He was waiting for the phone to ring from Norsk Tipping like they always do. But the phone did not ring. Instead, the VHS player stopped and started to rewind. This was, a really, really mean joke but my cousin and me watched the tape and his reaction at least a hundred times.

Inspiration comes from observing people, their behavior, their faces and way of dressing. My uncle was very special to me and has been an inspiration for many of the films I've made – in a good way. Where I grew up we had some untypical neighbors. There was one who collected bread from the local bakery, and would nail it up on the walls inside the house because the still-standing air inside the bread provided good insulation in the wintertime. [laughter] I'd never seen anything like this in any film I'd watched, but these kinds of stories were all around me there. I thought this was the norm but when I moved away from that place, I could see all of these untypical things with a different lens.

People inspire me but landscapes do too. I've done three projects here at FilmCamp. The last one is now in post-production. We shot it here in April surrounded by snow a metre high. I have locations in mind when I write something. I really like to do that. It's easier for me to develop the story and visualise the characters' interactions with each other in this location. In *Oskar's America*, nature is a big part of the story. It's its own character, actually. I'll come back to this.

The German filmmaker Maren Ade's debut feature, *Der Wald vor lauter Bäumen* (*The Forest for the Trees*) is a film I've watched several times. I can watch it again and again, and I recommend it to you if you are interested in characters and certain situations. This film has inspired me so much. It was screened at Tromsø International Film Festival in 2004. The festival director told me that Maren Ade was present, doing the clicking manually herself, for the subtitles during the screening. [laughter]

Ideas are worth nothing unless they are placed in a context, tested out and developed. As I mentioned, certain images stay inside me. I often note them down on my phone and then transfer them to a folder on my computer. I'm obsessed with categorising things. It's very important for me, this structure, more important on the computer than in real life. I collect these ideas and notes and read them again after a year, two or even ten years later. If I don't find something interesting in them, I put them away for a while and sometimes they come back to me even if they're not relevant for what I'm working on at the time.

There are many advantages and disadvantages directing your own script. When you write something you will direct yourself, you can easily feel a kind of pressure to limit yourself, as you might be aware of the costs. It's important to have a co-writer for this reason, but also many other reasons. Sometimes this sense of limitation can be good, but it can also lead you in the wrong direction.

For the last six or seven years, I've been going back and forth to and from Berlin. I have a three-year-old daughter in Berlin so I try to spend as much

time in Berlin as possible. This caused me to think about how I spend my time as a filmmaker. The cultural scene in Berlin is really huge and complex, which means that you can feel lost there easily. The advantage of living in two countries and cultures is that you start to look differently at your own culture and that's another source of inspiration. You start to question yourself. Where do I come from? In which way do I want to express myself? How do I spend my time? You start to ask yourself these kinds of questions. In my hometown in Norway, the airport has only one gate. It's very easy to fly away from that place as there are so few people and no queues. A big part of our lives is waiting in queues, especially in big cities. And one of the things that struck me while spending time in Berlin, were the extremely long queues – on the roads, in the airports. In Kreuzberg, a district in Berlin, I once saw a 100 metre-long-queue in front of a certain kebab shop. Maybe you've been there? The same when I went to the post office. It could take me two hours there waiting, waiting. It was like the whole German capital was made up of queues. I'd never seen anything like that before – so different from my hometown. Sometimes it is okay to stand there and reflect and observe, but in the long run, it's taking up so much time. I tried to stay away from all these queues.

If I did have to queue somewhere, I planned in advance so that I could, at least, get something productive out of it. If I'm in the middle of a heavy writing process, I use an app called Aloud, which reads my writing to me. There's something about hearing your writing read out loud, not reading it as a text. I think it can generate new ideas and if I'm stuck in a queue at the post office for two hours, it's sometimes good to be able to listen to what I'm actually writing. It was very helpful to me as I spent a lot of time in Berlin while writing this film, and, therefore, spent a lot of time in queues.

All the short films I had done earlier helped me in some way to get to the point where I could start to develop *Oskar's America*. Just before I got the idea for the film, I had done a short film called *Levi's hest*, *Levi's Horse*, about a young boy who was bullied by other kids and pressured to throw stones at a cognitively challenged man's horse. The boy had to learn a lesson and make up for what he did. It was shot here at FilmCamp in the winter landscape. It premiered at Berlinale Generation 2012. My producer and I had the idea of developing this short into a feature. In Norway we are very lucky to have a funding system for short films. In many other countries, you go to film school and make your graduation film and it's hard to finance another one, as training for a feature. But for me short films are not only something you do to train. I'm a fan of looking upon the short form as a medium in and of itself, as some stories fit best in a fifteen-minute format. In Norway, there are many directors who continue to make short films after

they've made feature films, often to test out a new idea. I feel very lucky to have that possibility.

So, after *Levi's Horse* played at Berlinale, I had fourteen or fifteen ideas in my folder. I tried them out but they didn't really work for the long format. The short went to many other festivals after Berlin and it was a kind of door opener to financiers. The main idea for *Oskar's America* actually came as I was climbing a mountain, one of the locations you see in the film. It's also very close to my hometown. The view was amazing and endless. The island had these beautiful beaches. I wrote down some ideas. A couple of days later, I came across the story of two Norwegian oyster pickers, George Harbo and Frank Samuelsen, who crossed the Atlantic Ocean in an 18-foot rowboat in 1896. Have any of you heard about this story? No, okay.

An American magazine had promised that the first people to cross the Atlantic Ocean in a rowboat without any sails would receive 10.000 American dollars, the equivalent of 300.000 American dollars today. They started in New York in this open oak boat with no sail, and fifty-five days later, they arrived outside Cornwall. They were met by a lot of journalists. They continued in this rowboat even to Oslo and they placed the boat there in the main square, Karl Johan's Gate. Sadly, they received very little attention because they came in the shadow of Fridtjof Nansen who had just returned from the Arctic Ocean and all the cameras and everyone's eyes were on him. They also, unfortunately, didn't get the money they were promised so no fame or

fortune either. They got one Swedish gold coin from the Swedish king who might have been feeling a bit sorry for them. [laughter]

It was quite an unknown story, but after a while I found this little, nice book about these guys. Here it is. That's the boat. It's their diary about crossing the Atlantic. So, after doing some research on this story, the next step was to see if I could include the idea about the boy who has to stay with his grumpy grandfather during the summer holidays, waiting for his mother to come back from America. She's going to rehab, as you know, and she's not going far away from her son. But the boy thinks she's very far away, as she tells him that she is going to America for a job interview. I tried to see if it was possible to combine this story with the story of the two ocean rowers. Writing the treatment went quite well actually. I felt I had a very good flow. In a couple of weeks, the characters and the setting were quite clear to me. I divided the treatment into pieces in some kind of three-act structure with eight sequences. It went fast. I felt a drive, and after two or three months, I had the first version of the script.

While I was at the Norwegian Short Film Festival in Grimstad, I pitched this story over a beer late at night with the main consultant at the Norwegian Film Institute. He became very interested and told me to send him the script. A few weeks later, we received development money from the Institute. That was a big motivation to write, of course, because somebody had started to believe in this

PEOPLE INSPIRE ME BUT LANDSCAPES DO TOO.

Arash T. Riahi's group:
(l to r) Erika Matmgren, Simone Schmid,
Tommaso Mottola, Joen Heed Windahl,
Inka Achte, Arash T. Riahi, Marianne Mäkelä,
Dominique Santana, Francesco Rizzi



project, and believed it could be a movie. There were five or six dramaturges involved during the years of writing and developing it. At some point there were so many ideas, so many thoughts, so many people and meanings that I sometimes had to close my ears. I ended up writing twelve or thirteen versions of the script. It turned out that the thirteenth version of the script was ironically maybe the one closest to the first draft, but a lot had been tried out, which was good. In 2013 I went to EAVE in Luxembourg as a screenwrite. The good thing about that was that we could test the project on an international audience of filmmakers. We had a lot of pitch training there. It was very good, I think. We received a lot of rejections of course, and a lot of ups and downs during the financing process in our dialogues with the Film Institute: “You’re almost there; you’re almost there.” Then we pitched it in Amsterdam and won the Eurimages co-production development award. A few months after that we received production grants from the Norwegian Film Institute, which made it possible to make the film.

AUDIENCE What was the budget?

IVERSEN With the exchange rate at that time it was around two million euros. We got onboard with the Swedish company, Bob Film, as co-producers, which was very good and we shot it in twenty-nine days. So that’s the practical side. During the actual shooting, of course, we had all kinds of weather, and a horse that wanted to run away all the time. She didn’t want to be in the boat at all. [laughter] The main character also got sick so we had to change the schedule. But it was still a good time. In June, it was only 8 degrees Celsius so we tried to do some colour correcting in post to make it look a bit more like a summer holiday. When you go to film school, you’re often told that you should avoid working with animals and kids and bad weather. This is what I we had to do, of course. The weather here by the coast is quite changeable. You have the sun shining, and two minutes later it’s raining.

So what did I finally learn from all this? There is something that makes me want to make films about a certain kind of unhappiness and loneliness in a character that he or she has to overcome in the story. Feeling lost – since maybe I was feeling a bit lost myself as a kid – is something that kids, especially, can identify with. There is always the aim of finding a uniqueness to every project and as I said earlier, if it gets too strange or is too obscure, it can lose its relevance. I think one of the most important things I learned during this process was to be open to suggestions, even though there were a lot of them. I had to create my own filter. And lots of things from that filter were what ended up in the film. Sometimes you are afraid that people will steal your ideas, and you want to keep them to yourself. But I find it good to test them out at an early stage, to get reactions.

For the moment, I’m developing another feature film with the screenwriter, Bernd Lichtenberg, who wrote *Good Bye, Lenin!* It’s a film about a sixteen-year-old girl in Norway and an eighteen-year-old Afghan refugee who will be deported from Norway. They set out on a heavy learning trip together. Then I have another project with Julia Andersen, who is also here. It’s called *Uncle Egg – Searching for a Dad*. It recently got nominated by the Norwegian Film Institute to participate at the Cinekid Script LAB, which will be held in Amsterdam and during Berlinale 2020. I want to test the pitch on you for that. Is that okay?

“An estranged fourteen-year-old boy from northern Norway sets out on an adventurous trip towards a scorching German summer together with his simple-minded uncle who is obsessed by cuckoos, in search of finding his real father. It’s not going to be easy when he learns that there are 25.000 men with the same name.” That was the pitch. The cuckoos normally come every spring to place their eggs in other birds’ nests. But in the last years, the cuckoos are coming from Africa too late – lazy birds – and aren’t finding any place to put their eggs. In the last twenty years, fifty percent of all the cuckoos in Great Britain have disappeared, and it seems like the same thing is happening here now. [An audience member asks Torfinn to read the pitch again and he does.]

AUDIENCE What’s the name of the father?

IVERSEN Oh maybe that’s the clue! The name is Jürgen Müller. And there are 25.000 of them.



Michael Seeber's group:
(l to r) Tristan Ferland Milewski,
Aiks Karapetjans, Gabija Budreckyte,
Lina Pliopte, Michael Seeber,
Maida Hais, Eamonn Murphy,
Quintin Ahern, Bettina Walter



Karol Griffiths' group:
(l to r) Jørgen Færøy Flånes,
Johanna Pyykkö, Andrea Schütte,
Eduardo Carnero, Kerstin Polte,
Karol Griffiths, Carlos Garcia de Dios,
Miguel Gomez-Tejedor, Virgil Widrich,
Leiv Igor Devold, Justyna Blik

AUDIENCE You have to put the name there!

IVERSEN Yes, thank you so much!

AUDIENCE Was the pitch successful?

IVERSEN So far, yes it has been, but now I see we can improve it. [laughter]

AUDIENCE Does it have anything to do with your personal story?

IVERSEN Yes it does.

AUDIENCE Don't you find a similarity between this and your previous movie? There is the trip and the boy, not with his grandfather, but his uncle. Instead of searching for America, it's the search for a father.

IVERSEN There are some similarities, of course. I want to explore that territory more. It's the same genre. The main target group for *Oskar's America* was eight to twelve year olds. This might be for a bit of an older group, nine to fourteen. The main character in this film is fourteen at the moment, but maybe he will be younger.

IVERSEN At the airport or the post office, you can't do that, that's true. But by listening to it, it might trigger something and then of course I sit down later to make notes. The first time you listen to something, you don't really get it. But when you hear it two or three times, it becomes much easier to remember it.

AUDIENCE Can you talk about music as an inspiration?

IVERSEN When I started to write *Oskar's America*, I found ten soundtracks from various archives, compositions that had different atmospheres that could fit into the story. As I was writing, it helped me to keep track of where I was in the story when it came to atmosphere. When I had developed eight sequences, there was a song for every sequence. It was a way to get into my writing. I always need one or two days to come back to a story if I haven't worked on it for a while.

AUDIENCE Do you write every day?

IVERSEN On a normal day, I take my daughter to kindergarten at nine o'clock and then I write until one o'clock. Then I answer emails. I try to avoid going to the post office. [laughter] What's also very good for me is to write in the evenings because then things are quite quiet from nine o'clock on. I think it's essential to get enough sleep during the writing process – extremely important. It's not always possible, but a short nap in the afternoons can help.

AUDIENCE Sorry for the shameless question, but I'm curious to know about how filmmakers in Norway work in the film industry, pay the bills and feed the family. For example, you made this movie that came out two years ago and you've been thinking about and writing your next projects since then. Some directors make commercials or work in the theatre. How are you handling these boring problems?

IVERSEN Yeah, well, you're living on the edge of course, for a long time. You often have to invest parts of your salary into the film. But we have something called Den kulturelle skolesekken (the cultural schoolbag), which means that for a longer time after the release of the film you can you're able to go around to screen the film at different schools and talk about it, which is usually well paid. There are several places to apply for screen-writing grants in Norway but, they're not always easy to get.

AUDIENCE Are films your main sources of income?

IVERSEN Yes, it's been the case since I finished film school in 2009. I've been very lucky. Sometimes you're so on the edge, thinking about how to survive the next month, but it's worked out so far. It's part

SOMETHING MAKES ME WANT TO MAKE FILMS ABOUT A CERTAIN KIND OF UNHAPPINESS, LONELINESS.

AUDIENCE How did the previous film do at the box office?

IVERSEN *Oskar's America* was seen by around 20.000 people in the cinemas in Norway, including some school screenings.

AUDIENCE You can say that all the Jürgen Müllers can see the film for free. [laughter]

AUDIENCE I'm fascinated that you listen to your own texts. I don't think it's possible to listen to the scripts though. Is that possible?

AUDIENCE There's an app I use called GoodReader. It can read scripts in different languages.

AUDIENCE But normally when I read my texts, I want to make changes. Doesn't it make you crazy just to listen?

AUDIENCE But when you're standing in a line with a hundred people, you can't change something at that moment anyway.



Participants and Sources 2 team

of the game. Why do we do this to ourselves? Why do we want to write these stories? It's my passion. I can't do something else; I have to do this. But of course, you have bills to pay.

AUDIENCE When you're on your own, it's not a problem, but when you have a family, it becomes a problem.

IVERSEN Yeah, you need supportive people around you and I've been quite lucky in that as well.

AUDIENCE When you see your films on the screen, do you see yourself in them? You started your talk with your personal story. What is the effect it has on you when you see the final product? Now you're starting a new project, a similar one. Is it because there was something missing in *Oskar's America*?

IVERSEN Yes, exactly. Part of my process is that I think there's something personal inside me that I can give to the character. It's how I come up with the story. I try to let the characters paint the film and sometimes I see myself in it. Not the full version, but a part of me. I take something from myself and add a lot of layers around it. It can kill part of the process to have too many doubts about what you're doing, so it's also important to listen to yourself, the story you want to tell, and fight for scenes you believe in. But that's also a part of the process.

AUDIENCE Are you especially interested in the relationship between parents and children? The boy wants to travel across the Atlantic to see his mother and in your new project a boy is searching for the father. Is this a preoccupation for you?

IVERSEN It is, actually. There are so many things from my childhood that are still in me. I won't call it therapy but it is a source of inspiration, a treasure box I can take from.

AUDIENCE Did you consider your own relationship to your parents as problematic or difficult?

IVERSEN My mother died in 2015, unfortunately just three months before *Oskar's America* was greenlighted. A police officer called me to tell me she was found dead. She was living in Copenhagen for many years and had many ups and downs. We seldom met, but talked often on the phone. She'd read the script. and she very much liked the Levi character. I also have a very good relationship with my father. He doesn't work in film, but he's been supportive in every way, giving me ideas and also providing inspiration.

AUDIENCE When do you feel that a script is ready? There are two heads: the writer and the director. When do you know when you're ready to shift from the writer to the director?

IVERSEN It's hard to say that it is ready, but at some point, there are many other people coming in, and the script has to be clear to them. During the editing you get a feeling about how the film will be, and you often change some things in the structure, which maybe worked in the script, but not in the edit.

Thank you so much for inviting me here. Good luck with your writing. And thank you for the good idea for Jürgen Müller! [laughter]

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Switzerland 2020
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Rajko Jazbec

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Germany 2020
Nikias Chrysos

WHERE NO ONE KNOWS US

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Croatia 2019 | Jure Pavlović

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Romania, 2019
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Slovenia, North Macedonia,
Serbia, 2019 | Urša Menart

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Artemio Benki

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Pau Subirós, Aitor Martos

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Josep Amorós

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Norway, 2018 | doc
Hilde Korsæth

GIRL

Belgium, 2018 | Lukas Dhont

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Norway, 2018
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Camilla Strøm Henriksen

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Matīss Gricmanis

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Juuso Laatio

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Balázs Lengyel, Balázs Lovas

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Sabine Girsberger

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Dagne Vildziunaite

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Géza Horvát

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FLICK
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Fintan Connolly

THE PINK HOUSE
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Joana Hadjithomas,
Khalil Joreige

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JOSEPH LEES**
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Catherine Linstrum

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Burny Bos,
Ben Sombogaart

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Aurelio Carnero

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Olivier Nilsson-Julien,
Nicole van Kilsdonk

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Anders Wahlgren

THE RED DWARF
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Yvan le Moine

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Knut Erik Jensen

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Solveig Nordlund

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Pericles Hoursoglou

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Fatima Ouazzani

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Ineke Smits

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Angharad Jones

MAJA STONEFACE
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Elsa Kvamme

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Maria Iliou

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