



There Was a Little Ship

A film by Marion Hänsel

Original Music René-Marie Bini

Screenplay Marion Hänsel – Executive Producer Marion Hänsel – Director of Photography Antoine-Marie Meert – Sound Henri Morelle
Editing Michèle Hubben – Sound Design and Mixing Bruno Terrière – Production manager Manique Harroche

A coproduction Man's Film Productions – RTBF – ZDF/ARTE – With the participation of Cinéma et de l'audiovisuel de la Fédération
Wallonie-Bruxelles – de Wallimage (La Wallonie) – du Tax Shelter du Gouvernement Fédéral de Belgique.

International Sales: Doc & Film International



SYNOPSIS

A woman, hospitalized for a relatively long period, observes what surrounds her. Her room, the view of the city, the sky, the corridors, the elevators and the nursing staff. She listens to the sounds, different during the day than at night. She has time to dream, to revisit certain moments of her life. These memories, like small bubbles begin with her birth in Marseille in 1949 and bring us to Antwerp, Paris, New York, England... to end in Flanders in 2015, after she gets out of the hospital.

We never see this woman. We simply hear her voice telling us stories, moving, harsh, funny or sad, that have marked her life.

There was a little ship is a filmic-biographical essay, sincere and poetic...



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



An atypical project no doubt. No actors, no dialogues. A voice over, that of a woman whom we will never see. This voice speaks in the first person and, like a storyteller, tells us about moments of her life. From the start, the spectator understands that it is a personal story, based on memories. A work about memory. Funny thing memory! What do we keep, what do we filter, what do we transform, what do we forget, voluntarily or involuntarily. Why do certain scenes that seem so ordinary remain engraved in our memories and others, perhaps essential, have disappeared. I cannot explain it. Under what impulse does our brain remember, at any given moment, images, sensations that we have experienced; fuzzy or extremely precise. With or without sound. In black and white or in colour. Again, I do not know!

The bubbles, as I call them, emerged in my head during a rather long hospitalization.

This scenario is also a reflection on time. Seconds, minutes, weeks, months. Night-day. Time, momentarily slowed in its frantic race.

The desire to write, to describe all this was strong and seemed to me exactly what I had to do at this time in my life. *There was a little ship* took to the sea.

The writing of this scenario has been like a serene and curious stroll through certain moments of my life. I hope you will perceive the pleasure I had in writing it.

The images directly illustrate the narrative of the voice over. Sometimes, they are in counterpoint or are abstract, graphic, rhythmic images. In black and white or in colour.

There are archives (I can no longer film Marseille in 1950, Antwerp in 1955, New York in 1970...) and family film archives shot by my father.

I wish to retain a great freedom in the choice of the images that are to be filmed. To be open to improvisation depending on the places where we will be. Attentive to the light, the reflections,

the winds and many other possibilities that will present themselves. Thus this work must be done in total symbiosis with the director of photography. For me, Antoine-Marie Meert is the ideal person. We have wanted to work together for a long time. This moment and this project seem to us to be perfect for this first collaboration.

The search for images to be filmed, which will also take place during the filming, should not scare us. On the contrary, I am convinced that it will stimulate us and we will take the time needed to work in this manner.

The texts of the voice over, . I didn't want them to be more dramatic, nor more explicative, nor more emotional. I wanted them to remain fluid, simple, like little stories that one tells a friend, a nephew, a sister after dinner or during a walk in the country. Little stories, sometimes sad, sometimes funny or joyous, sometimes serious.

Are they interesting, moving for others? This is not a question that I ask myself otherwise I wouldn't have made this film.

For my film *Clouds, Letter to my Son* I chose to have the very intimate letters read by well known actresses in the different language versions: Catherine Deneuve in French, Charlotte Rampling in English, Barbara Auer in German, Antje De Boeck in Dutch.

For *There was a little ship* this seemed impossible to me. Thus, it is my own voice. Like Agnes Varda, Chantal Ackerman, Eric Pauwels and other film makers who assume the role of the narrator in some of their films.

As in *Clouds, Letter to my Son* the sound track was created after the filming, during the editing. A veritable musical score has been invented, sometimes the sounds are that of the image sometimes they are out of sync, manipulated. In some sequences we used direct sound to give another colour, a different truth.

Thus, the creation of the sound track was very exciting work and deserves that we dedicate the necessary time.





Some already existing songs have haunted my ears during the writing of the scenario: *Lullaby, my sweet little baby* by William Byrd, a lullaby, interpreted by Alfred Deller, *Drunken Sailor* sung by Ferré Grignard and René-Marc Bini with whom I have worked many times, to make the link between certain sequences.

The spine of the scenario is the period spent in the hospital, two months, sixty days, it is long and short at the same time. These sequences of observation, listening, waiting are logically organised. They begin at the start of the hospitalisation and they accelerate little by little as the departure from the hospital approaches.

The sequences of memories, the “bubbles” as I call them, are proposed in a chronological order, from 1950 till today. I think that this will facilitate comprehension and give a certain fluidity to the story.

In reality, I did not write them like that. A bubble emerged in my memory, the memory could be from 1970 then 1950 or 1985 and I then would write the scene.

The editing of this film was a creation in and of itself. As this type of project allows almost total narrative freedom, we gave ourselves time to explore different options to arrive at a film that we hope is original and moving.

TECHNICAL SHEET

Production: MAN'S FILMS PRODUCTIONS

Coproduction: RTBF - ZDF ARTE

With the support of: CENTRE DU CINÉMA ET DE L'AUDIOVISUEL DE LA FÉDÉRATION WALLO-NIE-BRUXELLES ; WALLIMAGE (LA WALLONIE) ; TAX SHELTER DU GOUVERNEMENT FÉDÉRAL DE BELGIQUE

Writing and Direction: MARION HÄNSEL

Original Music: RENÉ-MARC BINI

Voice: MARION HÄNSEL

Image: ANTOINE-MARIE MEERT

Sound: HENR MORELLE

Image and Sound Editor: MICHÈLE HUBINON

Sound Design and Mix: BRUNO TARRIÈRE

Production Manager: MONIQUE MARNETTE

International Sales: DOC & FILM INTERNATIONAL

65' - DCP

COLOR - B&W

ORIGINAL VERSION: FRENCH

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FILMOGRAPHY

1977 ▪ ÉQUILIBRE - Short Film

1982 ▪ THE BED

CAVENS PRIZE - BEST BELGIAN FILM / CESAR - NOMINATED FOR BEST FOREIGN FILM

1983 ▪ DUST

VENICE FILM FESTIVAL - SILVER LION / SACD AUDIOVISUAL AWARD / CESAR - NOMINATED FOR BEST FOREIGN FILM

1987 ▪ CRUEL EMBRACE

BARCELONA - EUROPA PRIZE

1988 ▪ IL MAESTRO

TROIA - AUDIENCE AWARD / SAN SEBASTIAN - AUDIENCE AWARD / REPRESENTING BELGIUM AT THE EUROPEAN FILM AWARD

1991 ▪ ON EARTH AS IN HEAVEN

BERLINALE - OFFICIAL SELECTION - PANORAMA / REPRESENTING BELGIUM AT THE EUROPEAN FILM AWARD

1994 ▪ BETWENN THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA

CANNES - OECUMENIC PRIZE

1998 ▪ THE QUARRY

MONTREAL WORLD FILM FESTIVAL - GRAND PRIX DES AMÉRIQUES & BEST MUSIC

2001 ▪ CLOUDS - LETTER TO MY SON

CANNES CRITICS WEEK - CLOSING CEREMONY

2006 ▪ SOUNDS OF SAND

SAN SEBASTIAN FILM FESTIVAL - OFFICIAL SELECTION - CICAIE AWARD

2010 ▪ BLACK OCEAN

VENICE DAYS

2013 ▪ TENDERNESS

ROTTERDAM / KARLOVY VARY

2016 ▪ UPSTREAM

VENICE DAYS / TORONTO

2019 ▪ THERE WAS A LITTLE SHIP

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