

## DEvised FILMMAKING PRACTICES

### The Film that Breathes: *On The Dark Side of the Sun* and *The Book of Vision*

Carlo Hintermann in interview with Alex Lichtenfels and Ilya Noé

#### Collaboration and Sharing

**Alex Lichtenfels and Ilya Noé.** How did you end up starting to work with other people? And how did that collaboration start to gel?

**Carlo Hintermann.** If we are talking about cinema, narrative cinema or experimental, whatever, I think that collaboration is a key element. At first [and to find out about making films], me and my collaborators [Daniele Villa, Luciano Barcaroli, and Gerardo Panichi] said: “Let’s meet the directors that make differences in our life” [and collect what they say into edited interviews in books]. These people create something that has a peculiar environment, to let the movie be something a little bit different, kind of a breathing entity. Something that takes shape, thanks to the collaboration of people. But at a certain point, it becomes something that is not your movie anymore. It’s something that is in the world, and it continues to grow.

The answer is not just the collaboration on a movie, but it’s how we can do something in the art field that changes the approach, to produce the things that you think are interesting, unique. And so if something is unique, you need to create the right environment to let things happen. The best way to create this collaboration is to bring all the people [together]. When we worked, we shared. It was not just working on a movie, but it was sharing something.

---

**Carlo Hintermann** graduated in film directing at the New York Film Academy and made his first short films starting in 1996. One of these works, *Les deux cent mille situations dramatiques*, was selected for the Venice Biennale, 1999. With collaborators Luciano Barcaroli, Gerardo Panichi, and Daniele Villa, he formed the film company Citrullo in 2001. Their collaborations include the film *Rosy-Fingered Dawn: A Film on Terrence Malick* (2002) and the co-written book *Terrence Malick: Rehearsing the Unexpected* (2016). In 2011 Hintermann co-directed with Lorenzo Ceccotti *The Dark Side of the Sun* and his current project, co-produced with Gerardo Panichi, is *The Book of Vision*, starring Charles Dance and executive produced by Terrence Malick.

**Alex Lichtenfels** is a filmmaker and theorist who is a senior lecturer in film production at the University of Salford. He has several years’ experience in the film and television industries, working primarily as a freelance producer and director in corporate and advertising venues. He is also an independent filmmaker with the Primary Films collaborative, producing or directing numerous short films as well as several longer projects. Through his work, he investigates emerging filmmaking practices, driven by research into technological changes and how methods used in other artforms might be applied to filmmaking. He is concerned with how these practices might allow for new types of films that engage audiences in nonstandard ways. He is currently pursuing research projects on remodelling the organization of film production based on anarchist political principles, and the links between film and antihumanist ethics.

**Ilya Noé** is a visual/performance artist-researcher, eager collaborator, sporadic teacher, and occasional curator who lives and works in Berlin, where she is one of the founders of the city’s Association for Performance Art. Noé represented Mexico in Venice’s *OPEN2000*, became a UNESCO-Aschberg Laureate, and was the recipient of one of Mexico’s National Young Art Awards. A special guest at both the European Landscape Biennial in Barcelona and the International Biennial of Cerveira, she has made installations for many galleries and exhibitions, most recently the Biennale of Shanghai.

**A. L. & I. N.** You have talked about putting these books together (Barcaroli, Hintermann, and Villa 1999, 2000, 2001). As I understand it, there was a group of you. It wasn't just you alone who was writing that book on Terrence Malick, or making this film about Malick where the four of you guys had the credit as directors, as co-directors. How did the dynamics of that collaboration work?

**C. H.** I think it was about the books (Hintermann and Villa 2016) and making space for all the practitioners and collaborators. Also to demystify Malick as the solo romantic genius or whatever, and how politically expedient this was, as a gesture. [When we were editing books], we were a special group of people with very peculiar qualities. The work that we did was a combination of the different qualities. You work with these qualities, so if you have something that is focused, you need to give the right task to people. I like to share. I don't like to have the feeling that something is happening because it's my way of saying, "OK, I'm here. I did that. Something important." I like that we are here, and we are all doing something important.

This is something that continued also all during the editing. For example, often you are very tired of feedback and feedback and feedback. But you need to relax at a certain point and see if, in that feedback, there is something interesting. Because the first reaction is, I've been working one year on these things. But now I understand that. . . . And then it's very delicate, because there is the moment instead in which you need to defend something and say, this needs to stay as it is because it's part of a process. The moment that you feel that this is not part of the process, you can quit. If it's part of an organic process, it's there because you follow a process.

We were building books like movies, in the sense that we collected interviews. And we were editing as a continuous flow, exactly in the same way [as film editing], to make a contribution, to put down some seeds. Not just to say, "this is the work of that director." We didn't want to tell the secret of somebody. We would like just to show how it's complicated to build a mechanism and let that secret grow into a movie. And so I was always fascinated by this kind of mysterious place, which is the place of creation.

Little by little, I started to realize how important it was to build the same kind of environment. So I realized that it was important to start a company to do our projects, the projects that we wanted to do. Because in most cases, the relationship with production could be tricky. Sometimes it is impossible because nowadays it's difficult to have a unique and original project. You need to be your own producer, and we ended up also producing directors who, in a way, worked to create this kind of peculiar environment.

I really like movies that are kind of open, that can meet an audience. And when you meet an audience, something is happening. It's not just that you want to show something to somebody, but you want that person to be part of the relationship and the dialogue.

### **The Combination of Being Clear and Open: Approach and Attitude**

**A. L. & I. N.** What does it mean to make a collaborative film?

**C. H.** With a movie, the space is where you want the field to land. I don't specifically set exactly everything. But I set a mood, a tone. I try to weave all the elements that go in that direction. It's

always interesting to understand how to follow these things, to be in this mechanism, this kind of mysterious thing that is there.

For me, it's important to have collaborators that I trust because it is a very different way [to work] in which you are very open to something that is happening around you. You throw your idea as far as possible, and then you are running to reach that first idea that you have—to be at the level of this first big, important idea that you had. If you start with something that is very humble, very flat, everybody will say something [like] “OK, we're going to do it like this. We're going to do it like that.” The idea that you throw is like a mood that's shared or the tone. And I'm interpreting it as a narrative of sorts, of shared narratives. The good thing is to involve people and have everybody aiming at the idea that you throw very far away, so everybody is going in that direction. And I think that this approach is very interesting because it doesn't make a difference between the big production and a very small one. It's the approach that the first *Star Wars* was made, actually, that everybody was considering, “What is this project?”

I think that all the time you need to spend time. And the thing is that you need to be humble, because it's the only way—understanding that you need to create something, that you don't take things for granted is an important attitude. And sometimes, you can create this atmosphere around you, but it's not easy. In most cases, it requires that you put yourself aside, which is something unnatural for a director. But for me, it's the most powerful way of directing. And it is interesting, because it's not that you need to show that you are weak. On the contrary, you know that you will reach your goal through the collaboration of other people. But when an idea is far from your goal, you need to show it very clearly, you need to be very clear about it. So the combination of all these things makes it difficult to have the right approach. But you need to spend the right time to build these things.

Having people that are leading [professionals] to give shape to these things, is for me, totally exciting in the sense that . . . working with professionals is to understand this inner world in those tiny details, all the work of your movie is there. I use as a reference the painting of Bruegel in which you have the *Fall of Icarus*. You have Icarus, which is a tiny, tiny little figure on the background. And the rest of the painting is the life of the village and people and moving. It's exactly this. Sometimes, the important thing is that little detail on the background. With professionals, it's like you switch on an engine again that brings a bomb of an incredible energy. Because we are talking about professionals who work in the history of Italian cinema that, you know, changed completely the approach, in terms of authenticity and how also with the period movie things can become alive. I think it's something amazing, for a director, to watch those professionals in action. It's fantastic. You see how much the detail makes all the difference. This means also, in most cases, you have to protect people. You start having many different producers, and you are working with collaborators that you feel are important to you. You need to protect your editor, your visual effects supervisor, whatever.

**A. L. & I. N.** How do you think collaborators can develop that process? Is it about looking at other art forms? I guess for you, it's about looking at the filmmakers that you liked. How do you get someone to that stage, where they're able to think in that way? Or to do practice in that way?

**C. H.** I need an approach that is both free and responsible. Even if people are used to a variety of projects, going from a big movie produced by a major to an independent movie, it is always driven by specific ideas—the approach is very clear, what you want to do. I think that this is a way to give the responsibility to the people and the freedom to bring something into the project.

[Working with Malick], it was a very different way in which you are open to something that is happening around you. Then you spend months to catch the right images that you need. And when you work for him, you know that if you do something that is the right thing, that you want to do—the things that you aim for—it would be in the movie. In this way, it's incredible because you are completely free but totally responsible. I think it's the best way to collaborate with people, that you give this freedom, but the people are responsible to do the maximum they can achieve. And you see how important is this way of changing things [being open] to do something differently.

You are priming yourself to catch something that is totally unexpected. And this could happen, also, in a premier movie [a feature film]. I had this approach in my last movie. I prepared everything. Everything was storyboarded. But at the end, I had the central element of the movie that I left open, and some of the guys, they got to grow during the time I was shooting. In most cases, this openness is in a combination with mastering the technical elements. For example, in the case of a director of photography being incredibly trained and experienced, but at the same time able to forget these things and to go to completely different references.

### Letting Things Work: The Image

**A. L. & I. N.** Are we talking about collaboration not only with other people but also talking about collaboration and allowing for dialogue between the images?

**C. H.** For example, I could quote a piece of *The Divine Comedy* about the love between Paolo and Francesca, and say, “It would be nice to have that image,” and you try to reach the tip of it. But the way you will do it is totally in your hands in the sense of the way you will put the camera, the way you will follow things, to try to achieve this image. And being also respectful, because in that image, there is all the movie. Then how you assimilate it is also the result of the work with other people of the profession. They're bringing something. But you all have that image.

That's why, for example, when I'm writing something, I always imagine a starting point and where I want to arrive. And sometimes, sharing an image, such as a painting, really helps getting people on board. Nowadays, sometimes when you build a project, you spend years. And in these years, things change. Things grow. Iosseliani [Otar Iosseliani, Georgian filmmaker, b. 1934] always told me: at the same time, you need to be respectful of the guy [the person you were] that you brought to the story in the past. So be respectful of that boy who, ten years ago, wrote the story, because going back to that boy who was there and was dreaming about that movie, you can sometimes find something that is its essence. That original moment in which you drew your idea, there is something mysterious in that moment. It's like when you have a piece of poetry that you can't explain in words. You can explain Sylvia Plath's poetry, and we can discuss it for hours. But at the end, there is something that is hiding behind the words that is so powerful that is there. I have always been fascinated by people that have the strength to preserve this mystery.

Take a novel by Gesualdo Bufalino [Italian novelist, 1920–96]: the way he composed things that are using different times, different levels of the narration without prioritizing the past, the present of the things, but having things stay together. What happens when reading is that there's always this flow of emotion, mood, in which the word is always hiding in a way, each word hiding, because they are so well-chosen. In the same way, an image is the end of power. It is not just the combination [chosen word and flow], but they make something that is still arising. You don't need a producer or

co-producer of your movie if they have their own idea—they explain everything, and they don't see that sometimes what is important is what is hiding in the combination of two images, something that is not there. This is the place in which the integration takes form. It's something that is mysterious and that continues to work in the mind of an audience or a reader that is doing something. I don't know why I'm attracted, but you are not exploiting something. You are not suggesting that this is the way you need to watch these things.

We have still the illusion that in the world, as it is, everything is set. Everything is there. And everything is working somehow. The reality is that nothing is working. You need to let the things work. I think that the way of combining the two things is to find new means, a new way, a new approach of doing things. All the time that you are doing something that is changing, it's a little revolution. You need to find the key person or key people that allow you to do that because they did the exact same things when they started creating something.

### **Technique and Sensibility: Qualities**

**A. L. & I. N.** When you offer this image and you end up throwing this idea for everybody to go in that direction, it struck me that there might be a friction, a tension between that and how to keep it at the same time open.

**C. H.** I think the important thing is to share things—not just to please somebody and to say, “OK, your work is important,” but to incorporate things, to have the ability to bring something in and to understand. It's really an attitude that is so unique, especially in the world of cinema, where usually as you know, everything is standard. Instead, all the time, you enter into a different way of doing something.

Protecting these mysterious things [that are different] is developed out of confidence, paradoxically, in the people who are working on something, in the sense that you can never take for granted the result that you will achieve. It's [work] that you need to invent all the time, and has two main levels, in the sense of cinematography, of sound, of acting. If you always consider that your result will be something that you achieve in a different way, [no matter what skills you have,] you will feel that you are responsible to find this different way. So, for example, Sam Shepard [United States actor, playwright, author, screenwriter, 1943–2017] said to me, “OK. If I started to be confident as an actor, it didn't work at all. I needed to invent something. I needed to be me doing something and finding my own language in that movie.” It makes a lot of difference, with even two people or one hundred. But if you have just one or two people that are not sharing these things, that's the moment in which everything collapses.

Instead, it's the way of maintaining this atmosphere and this way of working. You need to protect it, because it's continuously under the darker industrial way of doing things, and with this behaviour you go to the next step, to bring something in. [With this behaviour] you will have a person who will do three times the things that you want doing than if you go there and say, “Now, you need to stay day and night to work on it.” But this is something that you learn in life.

This process of collaboration is also a moment of creation when you are writing a script or you are in exchange with other people. Sometimes you surprise people in reaching the goal when you bring these things out of people, when you don't see just the professionals doing their thing. Instead, you are thinking, this is a sensitive guy who likes flowers. And you move the sensitive guy that likes

flowers into the right place, where he can give a contribution because of that. Not because it's a great key thing, but in doing that, in a way you are always making a documentary in the sense that you try to understand the quality of the people.

The director you admire, when I have met them, they always talk about this quality of understanding. It is very delicate, this balance. But I think a director, with this attitude, is doing the best work when he's able to find this quality in people and let this quality flow into the movie. Malick found the quality in things. It is something that is precious to me, and it's with this meaning that you understand the question of balance, of finding your way, of how much time you need to spend. Not to follow something that will give you a status. "To be again," this is the question. In the sense that it's not "to be or not to be," but to be something different all the time.

But it is depending on the project. For example, if you write a project that is just following one character, and you really need someone special for it, you can take the risk to take no professional actors for everybody else. You will have the possibility of doing that, because the movie allows you to do that. But if you have a movie with a very complicated narrative structure and a schedule that is very tight, you will not have the time to do it, and you need a completely different production approach.

### **Process: The Language and Rhythm of the Film**

**A. L. & I. N.** You started to realize the idea of the director as someone who gives freedom to the crew or the other collaborators when you were making your first films and meeting and writing your first books about directors. Why did you choose that as a way?

**C. H.** [When you are younger,] twenty years old, you are so dogmatic and you have the illusion that you need to be muscular, you need to make it your responsibility. And I only understood later, years later, that it was a very immature attitude. In most cases, I think often, young people are much more conservative than older ones. I always found fantastic old men totally open, and I found very young people that are very dogmatic. On the one hand, it's fear. On the other hand, it's dogma. And so you say, "OK, I have ten rules. Nobody can tell me anything, because I'm following these things." All the work that I'm trying to do is to destroy this dogma, this taboo, because often you are suffocating your creative process with a lot of structure.

To have something open—all the time that I have an exchange with somebody, makes a difference for me. For example, I brought this very neat script [to some producers] to screenwriter Pascal Bonitzer. Everything seems to me that we are in the right place, and I give a very brief, fantastic description of the eighteenth century, with it being very detached. And Pascal Bonitzer says, "OK, but I don't see why this character is in that place without doing anything, we need flesh and blood." For me, now, it was completely . . . I didn't expect it at all—especially considering the movies he wrote for Rivette [Jacques Rivette, French film director and critic, 1928–2016]. But it was fantastic, because you understood how even the creation of language had been passed by [in your own script] and put a taboo on your back. It let me find something. It's very interesting how you need sometimes to have somebody that shakes you and shows you a different way, a different attitude. And this is all part of this process. If you are convinced that by your own, staying close in your room with a set of rules, that you will achieve something, it's really the wrong path.

**A. L. & I. N.** Some of your collaborators are very established, some are very new to filmmaking—it's clear that none of them have worked in this way before. But the collaborators, let's say, are all so committed to a particular way of working. So what is it that allows that to start happening?

**C. H.** As a producer, for example, I suffer a lot from these things. When we produce somebody we see that with a change of attitude, you can achieve a much better result. It's related to this kind of spiritual attitude that you can have in doing artistic things. At a certain point, I started to go back to rediscover my Jewish heritage. What I found fascinating is to put the self aside, and also to find ritual as a moment in which you are building something, and building something that is not just you. I think that we are missing a lot, because we consider ritual a constraint and something bad. Instead, the repeating of a gesture, doing something that has its own time, that is different from the time outside, is fantastic in the sense that it's the same thing that you're doing when you're doing a movie. You find your own rhythm. It's not the rhythm of the world. It's the rhythm of the world that you are creating. Like when you suspend time and you go back, or you go far away to reach something that is not there, that's not reachable with your hands. Religion, when it's not too dogmatic, trains you in these instincts. It's also something that you do in a collective way, with the cooperation of somebody.

What I like is when you feel in a movie something that is really working as processing and lets somebody process something at the conclusion. This is very difficult. In most cases, there is the story editor of the production or things that push in the direction of making everything clear so that you need not to miss anything. But often, you need a weird thing happening to let the movie stand out. I like the cinema that gives you these things. For example, for me, a director like Bruno Dumont [French cinematographer, director, screenwriter, b. 1957] has this way of working underneath with something that will burst into the open of a sudden, something wild will happen, and something that is natural in manner is very violent. You feel something, but you don't clearly see the picture. You feel something. You feel tension. You feel . . .

You need to be a great artist to be able to do that. Because often, what you are not seeing or what you are not hearing is the most important thing of the movie. It is the same in a great novel or a great piece of poetry. It's these things that need the collaboration, the cooperation of an audience, a reader, something to reach something. This is very precious and is very archaic in the way we relate to art in general.

**A. L. & I. N.** Your approach is not the usual industrial vocabulary. How would you talk about people working together and communicating?

**C. H.** It's very difficult when you want something that has its own language. What I learned simply studying a work that I like is how important it is to find this language, to find this proper language. And how important it is that if you conceive a project, that it has its own language. Every element of the project aims to reach its own language, then the project will advance by itself. If you take out one of the pieces, everything is going to collapse. My reference is always Borromini in Rome, for whom, in the Baroque period, the ornament was part of the structure. So if the ornament is part of the structure, and you take out the ornament, the structure is going to collapse. So don't let a producer take out the ornaments because the project has its own language and is a breathing entity, in a way, is its own life.

When you have a common language, cinema really grows. It's really interesting now how much cinema is involving other arts, like performance. Often, somebody is doing an experimental work and giving their language to the people that will do the blockbuster the day after, and it's in that sense [also] that the performance artist is experimenting.

[When directing,] I needed to invent something. I needed to be me, doing something and finding my own language in that movie. But it's very delegated, in the sense that it passes through the way you build the crew and people that work together. In the end, you achieve something that is unique. This is the way of building a language, having sometimes some odd but very interesting person working with you. In that moment in which you share something, it's the moment in which the director is unique, and because they feel there is a common language people understand, they can be part of these things of going ahead.

## The Dance

**A. L. & I. N:** When you talked about what you called the dance earlier—this space everybody's coming to, to achieve what's happening—you said “That's why we did it, that's the why of why we did it.” Question, so what is it about that that makes it so important, or that makes it the “why”? That makes it somehow the core of . . .

**C. H.** It's when you see that the people that are working on things are feeling part of those things. And they are dancing because they want to dance. This is not because you force them to dance. And people dance together. And we see, we dance with the feet. We don't dance with the head. Because if we dance with the head, everybody will do their own dance. Instead, we dance with the feet, because we are all part of this dance. [We are responding] to other people's feet. If you feel that people are dancing with the feet on the set, I think that is the moment to say, “OK, that's why I'm doing these things.” Because I want to share a moment that is important for everybody. It's not just a moment that is important for me.

It's rare that you have the feeling that these things are happening. Probably for only two days if you shoot for two months. In those two days, you have the feeling that you did your job and gave credence to the people, and let people feel confident to bring something and help something. That is, again, inside the detail. If you have an electrician who needs to follow a character with light, he can do it in a good way or in a bad way. When they do something that is really incredible technically—they are always reaching for things. It's also physically demanding and you see the difference. You see the difference. I have to say that in a certain moment, in certain projects, I had some problems in the sense that people don't want to push too much. They want to produce and say, “We'll just correct this. It's a work as other works, and you can pretend.” Instead, sometimes you see somebody that is putting in this extra value. When you see these things, you say, OK. And you feel that in that moment the thing that you are doing is a collective effort.

**A. L. & I. N.** How does the approach or attitude that is needed for collaboration come about in the practice of making a film?

**C. H.** I think that the cinema, just with the power of framing, can show this attitude. Which is something fantastic. For example, following the work of the experienced cinematographer and cameraman, you really understand how framing is a kind of attitude. And you find people that really



feel the frame. It is something alive. It's something that gives you the difference. And then you go with the dialogue between lenses and things. But at a certain point, I sometimes feel the moment instead to collaborate. I felt that some intimate moment, I had the need to operate [the camera] myself. My own documentary [work] is to gain the trust of what you are filming, to let something happen, arise, because you have established the right distance with something. And the right distance, it changes a lot. If you are shooting in some documentaries, I really felt that the relationship between the camera and the person I was filming needed to pass through me, to [find] the physical approach.

I'm totally fond of Jörg Widmer [German cinematographer, [joergwidmer.com](http://joergwidmer.com)]. It's because he has this natural way of letting the frame bleed, which is something amazing. It's never forced. It's always finding the right way, the right approach to let things arise. Which is not something that you learn somewhere. I think that it's really an attitude. . . . And you can feel it. When you have somebody like him, and the director who is able to incorporate these things in the movie, that is where the [film] language goes one step forward. For example, when you have this free shooting that follows characters using very wide lenses, it's something completely different from staying completely close to one character and following them everywhere. There is that technique that many directors use, of letting something breathe in this natural way, in this kind of flow, something that is continuously flowing, and then [afterward] you likely see the same approach in a commercial.

### ***The Dark Side of the Sun* (Ceccotti and Hintermann 2011)**

At the end of the first interview, Hintermann began to talk about his film *The Dark Side of the Sun*, which he began to make shortly after filming a documentary about pen pal relationships with inmates on death row in Texas. The film is based on a summer camp for children with xeroderma pigmentosum (XP), a lethal disease that isolates them because they cannot go into the sunlight. At Camp Sundown, children who suffer from XP can play together at night.

**A. L. & I. N.** How does a film like that come about? How do you even find the subject and the people? Maybe how does it start?

**C. H.** I was in New York, and I was reading the *New York Post*, and there was an article about that family [that ran Camp Sundown]. I was interested that even in the tough situation, incredible things arose at a certain point. I started investigating the links of certain conditions that put you into a limitation, how people react to that. And so I said, these things [about the camp] are very interesting, but I was very afraid of exploiting that reality, being driven just by the most obvious aspect.

It was several years later that it was the time to approach those people and explain why I want to make a movie about them. If they don't want to do it, I completely agree . . . but I like this challenge of knowing each other and establishing something. And so I like their attitude, for they were not interested at all in having media coverage. After that first meeting with them, I started writing the project. Then, I decided to attend a camp to understand. Because for me, it was not easy to find the right approach. So I wanted, together with the other people, to get together with Daniele [Villa], who was the producer of the movie. We decided to bring something there, a little workshop to the children, and start with having them shoot something. So it was important for us that they knew how to make documentary and to bring something into it. And there, in that moment, I understand that it was possible to do the movie because they start understanding, questioning things. Little by

little, the children were attracted to me instead of the contrary. So they were also deciding what I can do or not. From that moment on, we started to build a production.

**A. L. & I. N.** How do you think collaborators can develop that process of building?

**C. H.** It was complicated, because it was adding animation. I understood immediately that I needed to write the project with the children and to find a way to have them own something—and this was the animation. It was fantastic because they wrote the story of the animation. I collected all the stories of those children, then I wrote something and I bring them the writing, asking them what they think about it. And so things start to grow, be wild with your imagination. It was fantastic because at the end this was the production. It needed to stay at the level of the imagination of the children who were going to build this kind of cosmogonic universe in which you have gods and whatever, and images.

I started building the animation as the documentary of the inner world of those children, where is the secret that was impossible to show with the camera. In a way, it was there, that tool [the animation], that possibility of putting into that dimension their fear, their desire, their life. It was a fantastic process that ended with them dubbing their own character.

It was a project where we needed to stay at the level of our protagonists in the sense that all the cinema apparatus needed to stay, to follow the needs of the people. So if you can't use the lights, you need to find the solution. It's not that you need to force them to do something that they can't do. This was challenging, completely challenging because we needed to develop a special deal with a company that was making lights with the LEDs. We needed to incorporate the toys of the children as our lights. And so all these things became very organic.

Paradoxically, it's you that is missing something. The one that is challenged is you, in the sense that you need really to change your way of viewing things. It was an upside-down world. We didn't sleep because we needed to shoot all night long. But then, the children were so excited that they started to continue with doing things during the day. For us, it was that we needed to find a way.

**A. L. & I. N.** I would be so tempted to try and turn that into a story where the story is about making something incomprehensible comprehensible. How does that process work? How does it work with the animators, as well?

**C. H.** We had people who worked on the movie that were attending the camp, even when we were not shooting. I had an editor there dressed like a clown . . . and it created a kind of intimate relationship. After we went to the camp, we had Skype and other things that are used, because it's the way they can communicate. The children are very connected, and it was easy. Some suggestions came also from the process of animated movies that they were watching, some Japanese things that they liked. This is a background that Lorenzo Ceccotti, director of animation liked, so it was interesting. And I was also on the production side. Because at the end, the main producer was NHK, the Japanese television [channel], which was fantastic because they followed the project.

It's very strange, because at the beginning, it's very complicated to work with Japan. Because there are many things, different cultures. So you need to gain their trust. And it takes a while. But once you arrive at that moment, they are so into it that [you really try to] understand each other, which is the good part of the project.

After they joined the project, they came all the time on set. And they followed the moment of creation of the animated process.

The children started something, and we started working on those things. We took the time to let the things grow. So we work on that for quite a while. And then, of course, I wrote some dialogues and other things that are inside the movie, starting from the suggestion of the children. We wanted to do the best from these suggestions and things that were coming from them.

### **The Book of Vision (Hintermann in post-production 2019–20)**

In the second interview, Hintermann went on to discuss some of the processes in the feature film *The Book of Vision* that he was making, with Terrence Malik as executive producer. The film is based on a fluid sense of time between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. His work on this film has taken many years of preparation (from ~1997), which he talked about first, but his focus was on the way the director works with the camera and the actors.

**A. L. & I. N.** The title, *The Book of Vision*, I can't help but read that and think of the books that you made early on. Is that conscious for you? Or was it something more to do with the plots?

**C. H.** It's linked with the meaning of books in general. The book is not just a physical object that stays there. It's animated, it's alive, and it can be a medium to reach something. *The Book of Vision* is this: it's a book that the vision is . . . it's not there. In a sense, it's to let the vision arise. And so this is the link to books. And if I go back to the book that I wrote, I try to do the same things, to let people speak and bring images, things, thoughts, dreams.

**A. L. & I. N.** Why did you decide to produce this film with your collaborators, with your own company?

**C. H.** [We talked to several producers but] they didn't find a deal. So we took back the rights to the film and decided to produce it ourselves. After this period that we had with the Italian unit of *Tree of Life* (Malik 2011), we were experimenting with a different way of doing a movie, fiction movies, in the sense that the approach was similar to documentary. We decided, OK, let's try to build our own structure for the movie. Let's be the main producer. So we tried to organize things in a way to be very planned, but at the same time, with some freedom for improvising and trying things out that we wanted to go one step forward.

The movie has a CG part that I designed, together with Lorenzo, the guy who did the animation in my previous work. Again there was one layer of the movie that was made considering some things that were interesting about time. What we tried to do is to go back to the way of visual effects that were made in the movies of the eighties, more or less like *Labyrinth* (1986), a fantasy that had most of the visual effects on camera. This let us start conceiving things differently. There is a fantasy part in the movie that is related with a forest, and tree people that live in the forest. So we started conceiving to have as many things as possible, things on camera, things that we can shoot to integrate with CG. Then we evolved this concept of trying to project stuff during the shooting, to have some elements that will not be CG, but what we had already filmed. So the performance of the actor was not to act with the green screen but to have something visible in front of them.

**A. L. & I. N.** This is a much more practical question in some way, but isn't the film industry, the way it's designed almost the most antithetical place to things that you've been describing happening? So how on earth do you, how do you make that work, on a practical level?

**C. H.** I started to work on that, putting together a very complex production frame, with the help of Malick, who decided to be the executive producer of the movie, which helped a lot in putting together all the crew and all the people. We started choosing—considering the things that we said yesterday—we started to choose the right collaborators in order to create this atmosphere, this mood. I wanted to create a completely different environment in which people can feel that they can contribute to something.

You need to gain the trust of the people, and this was the case. For me, it was also interesting to work in a frame that is more the one of American production, in terms of departments, in the sense of having a production designer who is also responsible for the look of the movies so that you consider the movie as a whole thing. So you are not divided into different departments but you try to turn it all together in order to obtain what you want. It was the first time that I started working in this way, and it helped a lot to put all the people together who were working in relationship—costume design and production design and DP and visual effects. In the end, it became having a nice exchange with friends. But fantastic professionalism. So it was the best situation possible.

Again, it was a question of finding solutions. I spent a lot of time looking for the right location, to have a place that was already bringing something to the location, that was a character in its own. It was a long preparation, and all the time, during the years, I learned how to do all the processes, to work on a movie.

**A. L. & I. N.** You said that this feature film is continually combining different levels or ideas about time. How did you approach that while making the film?

**C. H.** In documentaries, I like to plan things, especially in a certain location: to see what is going on there, having the right tools to cover the things that are happening. One example in *The Dark Side of the Sun* was the sequence of flying lanterns that they were using. What we did was simply to design a shot, but the action was totally live. [It's important] to have the tools to get something that is spontaneous, but to have enough tools and means to cover that moment in the best possible way. I did *The Book of Vision* with the same approach, and with the design of many things in the movie. It's a movie in which the camera is often moving, and the idea is to have a kind of vertigo that goes from the contemporary part to the period part. The actors are doing two roles, one in the contemporary part and one in the past. So I really wanted the time of the movie to be a combination of these two elements.

For these things to work, score has also the same attitude, having some instruments that are real, like a saxophone and clarinet, so the way we recorded them, you can feel the instrument, you feel the mechanism. And on the other hand, to have a layer of electronic sound that create an effect of having the dream or remembering something coming from the past. And then project the two into the future. I tried to work so all the elements of the movie have these two layers at once.

The idea was to have this new time that was a combination of past and future. And to reach that goal, you work in a subtle way, in the sense that all the elements, all the departments, in terms of costume, in terms of production design, music, lights, are trying to work in this direction. I had it in

mind to have a movie with its own language. The main thing is already made, so actually, we try to do something new. For my producers, it is very complicated, it was demanding in terms of production. But we put together fantastic professionals. For me, it was like having a fantastic palette to combine things and to put things together.

And then, of course, came the work with the actor. It was another layer of this idea. What I tried to do is to have everything well prepared, so that I have room to play with the actors and let the actors bring something in. The script was highly articulated, because the story's very complex. There are many things going on, both in the past and the present, and I needed to follow a structure that was there and clear. In certain cases, with the main actors, I shared also the storyboard. It was not simple for the people that read the script for the first time. Many things were going on. It was not easy to understand the lines of the character. So I needed to help them in entering these things, and with the challenge of acting two roles, one in the present, one in the past.

I was open to letting the characters change with the approach of the actor. This was quite complicated, because with the schedule that I had, with the structure and the script that I had, it was not obvious how to do that. So I took actors coming from theatre, adding a big experience from theatre. All the actors involved with the movie have fantastic technique, and they can go back to their professional skill when things become tough. These things helped them a lot because they are not afraid. They know where they can find things because they have many tools to do that. This helps you to bring in something new. Also, the character changes, so I made some changes while I was shooting, because I understand that some characters take their own importance. You arrive at a moment which is beautiful, and which is through the character that is leading you. You are not working as a puppeteer with your character, but it's the character that talks to you.

**A. L. & I. N.** You talk about working with actors, trying to make sure that you create a space where there can be some experimentation, or they can bring something in for themselves to the role, like we were talking about yesterday. How does that literally happen? What do you do in order to generate that space or in order to encourage actors to . . .

**C. H.** I didn't feel that it was helping if I leave the actor completely fresh to come on set and start a performance. I preferred to rehearse several times. In all the movies, how I build the space is important, especially the period part. I tried to have the position of the character as his way of living in the world, in the sense that if you have some power, you stay in a [social] position, and you walk in the space in a certain way. I rehearse this element, giving to the actors an idea of how to use the space. This was also linked with the camera movement that we designed with the DP. So I think that in this case, having some restriction, in the sense that knowing how you [the actor] need to view the space gives room for bringing something else into the actual performance, so they felt confident in the way that they needed to move in the space.

If a character, at a certain point, say in a hospital, moved from the bed to the window, all these things were pretty well planned, for the actors to feel confident in the place that they are. This positioning and the camera were totally at the service of the performance. They let an actor be confident that he's in good hands. And not just in the hands of the director, but in the hands of the director of photography. Because when you have an actor that is experienced, probably his performance was brilliant, but was not shot in the right way. It could happen. Instead, when they find that something is solid, they feel free to act without this concern and this worry about "Oh my gosh, I need to move because the camera is not shooting in the proper way." This is something that

you know little by little. You understand that the actor, during the rehearsing, brings in something fantastic, and you need to understand how to shoot it so that it can be as effective as possible.

This is the work. For me, it was very stimulating because I needed all the time to click into how to catch the ideas that the actor had. For example, in the movie, you have a lot of top shot because you have a character who is being accused of something. The way the character is in the space is as if they are alone in a big hole and all the attention is on them, like during the Inquisition. If you let the actor feel that the shot is the right one for that moment, then they are really free to just bring something. This is something I was learning while working. It's something that you can't learn in a book. It's something that happens by having discussions with people, and for me, that's why we spend so much time to have the right collaborators. If you have an incredible technique, for example, the idea of the DP bringing in an incredible key grip, it changes completely the way things happen. With this film I felt totally free because even to design something, a complex camera movement, it was possible to do so on the spot. Sometimes you have a key grip, and you say, "OK, we need to do something. This is the moment," and they say, "This is impossible. We need to spend three hours more. We need to . . ." Instead, when you feel that you have someone who immediately can react to these things, and bring also something in, it's fantastic. So you feel that the camera is kind of dancing.

For me, an important point for reference is Bertolucci's [Bernardo Bertolucci, Italian director and screenwriter, 1941–2018] cinema. The way he's using camera movement is always a way to narrate something. It's not that you're just doing a camera movement to show something. But it's because it's the right one in that moment. It's difficult to obtain these things without the right professional. You need somebody who can react fast and can follow you, so you feel really supported. When the people understand what you want to do and they follow the way, and they put their energy into achieving something, it's the best thing. For sure, I had those people who really helped me, and this helps the actors because they never need to worry about these technical things, so you give a lot of freedom to them. When you work with experienced actors you can see if the actor is using his technique and that's it, and it's already good because they are very good—or if they are trying to find something instead of using something that is already there.

**A. L. & I. N.** You've been using this word "shared" a lot. And it's about that, we are in it together. Everybody, with their differences, contributes to it. There's a space that, I don't want to call it safe, but where everybody can do what they do, fostering this ecology . . .

**C. H.** In the moment, you really need to forget who you are, forget the things that are there, and give room for those moments. This means understanding when these moments are about to happen. And so you need your assistant, in the production that is there, just to push it. To say, "Let's go. We need to shoot that one" or say "OK, no." Or, "This is something that is happening now. We need to focus on this moment." Or, "It's better to have this moment and cut another scene if I need to." Oddly enough, Malick is also shooting this way. Do you think that he's going to shoot forever? Instead, he's concerned about staying on a precise schedule. So it's a question of saying, "OK, it's better to have this element and probably adjust other things, change other things, instead of not having [this moment]." This is something that you have the feeling of, with everybody, again, the collaboration. It's not something that is just in your mind. But you have the feeling of these things together.

For example, it's a good sign when you see that someone in the crew is interested in something. You have people who are used to shooting every day and on many different projects. When you see that somebody lets their attention click, you say, "OK. That's something, we are starting to do a movie." There is the moment that you have the feeling that you are actually doing a movie. There are many movies that are just, "OK, plan, we do these things, we stay in time, and whatever." Instead, it's very nice to see when people start to feel they are a part of something, that they are a part of the creative process. This, I think, is the best moment. It's incredible, because it's a kind of drug, in the sense that you want to go back to that feeling later. Because you feel that this is the purpose of why you are doing something.

It makes sense to do this work when people are considered as part of this creative moment, because it's a kind of dance and everybody has a role in that dance. Everybody gives a contribution, and in most cases, it's a contribution on the spot. You might have, for example, a grip that is following a character with real lights. So if you are changing something, if something happens that was not planned and you need to adjust, when that guy feels that he's part of it, you really see the set dancing together with the performance. This is the best moment. It's really fantastic when these things happen.

So again, it's a question of creating a very organic way of shooting. The environment is everything. It's really delicate. And while you edit, you really understand what is working, what is not. And you understand why. And the reason always lies within the whole environment, not just with a few people or one actor or whatever.

I think, in most cases, you need to foster these things and help these things happen. It's not easy, because you are always under pressure. There are always things coming from outside. It's really tough. Luckily, I have a lot of professionals who really like to make movies. This is the difference. You could have a lot of people who just want to finish the day of shooting, and that's it. So it's really important to foster the attitude of being part of the movie. At the end of the movie, it's not yours. It's not the movie of the director. And this, for me, is a matter of fact. It's not something that is a philosophical thing. A movie is made by the effort of everybody.

## **Audiences**

**A. L. & I. N.** The ethos you've been talking about is also collaborating with the audience. It is about the dialogue. It is about the sharing. It goes back and forth. It's a to and fro. How does this process of making art or making films, how does that then reflect back on those people who are giving themselves to it, in some way? Or giving part of themselves, or changing themselves, because they're looking beyond who they are to another.

**C. H.** If you have this approach while you are making the movies—free your mind so that your ass will follow—actually, the audience will stay in the same position, in the sense that they'll take the movie in this way. It doesn't matter if it's a huge audience or a small audience. The important thing is that you activate a process. There is a genre where we open things up. You can win all the Oscars in the world, but if you are not activating a process you are not letting the audience do a process. I prefer something where you start questioning, that it's something that you didn't grasp. And you start thinking for weeks.

Iosselliani, for example, said that a movie is an anthology of our desire. And if you do edit the movie in this way, every image is a kind of portrait of a desire, of reaching something or doing something, you have this continuous movement, and you know that nothing is compressed. You realize how much this is so when you are writing, when you are shooting, when you are doing the movie, you are exactly doing that—making an anthology. At the end, you need to do your anthology of the best that you did in all the process.

A movie is something that, in a way, breathes. Even if you have a movie that has really polarized critics, it's important that there are those specific moments in the movie where, you know, the movie as an entity works in all these parts. And sometimes in a movie you pick something as an audience that is important for you, for your life, that changes something, that creates this process of thinking. In general culture, art is fascinating because it's something that I never consider an accessory, that is aside of our life. I always consider it as part of our life. And I think it's a beautiful thing. When I'm watching a movie, I'm not considering that I'm watching something. I consider that I'm living in something.

~

Carlo Hintermann has had final editorial control of the script of this interview.

## References

- Barcaroli, Luciano, Carlo Hintermann, and Daniele Villa, eds. 1999. *Addio Terraferma: Iosselliani secondo*. Milano: Ubulibri.
- Barcaroli, Luciano, Carlo Hintermann, and Daniele Villa, eds. 2001. *Il cinema nero di Takeshi Kitano: con tre sceneggiature: Sonatine, Hana-Bi, Brother*. Milano: Ubulibri.
- Ceccotti, Lorenzo, and Carlo Hintermann. 2011. *The Dark Side of the Sun*. Rome: Citrullo International.
- Hintermann, Carlo. In post-production 2019. *The Book of Vision*. Rome: Citrullo International.
- Hintermann, Carlo, and Daniele Villa. 2016. *Terrence Malick: Rehearsing the Unexpected*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Malick, Terrence, director and screenplay. 2011. *The Tree of Life*. River Road Entertainment.
- Roach, John, and Mary Sweeney. 2000. *The Straight Story—Una storia vera: un film di David Lynch: sceneggiatura originale / Mary Sweeney e John Roach*. Edited by Luciano Barcaroli, Carlo Hintermann, and Daniele Villa. Milano: Ubulibri.