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And-Ek Ghes...

Philip Scheffner, Colorado Velcu

Producer Merle Kröger. **Production companies** pong Film (Berlin, Germany), Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg (Berlin/Potsdam, Germany). **Directed by** Philip Scheffner, Colorado Velcu. **Screenplay** Colorado Velcu, Merle Kröger, Philip Scheffner. **Director of photography** Colorado Velcu, Philip Scheffner, Parizan Nistor, Casino Nistor, Mario Ilie, Emporio Ilie, Naomi Nistor, Fecioara Velcu, Zefir Chiciu, Jeckichan Velcu, Rața Miclescu, Calil Velcu, Donadoni Miclescu, Bernd Meiners. **Editor** Philip Scheffner. **Music** Colorado Velcu, Parry Nistor. **Sound design** Simon Bastian. **Commissioning editor** Rolf Bergmann, Gabriele Conrad.

DCP, colour. 93 min. Romani, Romanian.

Premiere 14 February 2016, Berlinale Forum

When the Velcu family left Romania to resettle in Germany, their filmmaker friends from Berlin were there to film their move. The family council welcomed their suggestion that a film be made about their new life. Colorado Velcu, the father of the family who has kept wonderful journals since his youth, was made co-director alongside Philip Scheffner, above all due to his knack for staging and his feel for the artistic talents of his children, nephews, sisters and brothers-in-law. Bollywood fans one and all, their story becomes a real life family saga – with its own theme song! There is the first Velcu to be born in Berlin, the painful farewell to relatives leaving for Spain in pursuit of better financial prospects, the wife locked away in a distant Romanian prison – and the parks of Berlin become the bucolic setting for smoky picnics. How this Velcu saga came into being is a frequent topic of discussion among the participants, making this sometimes melancholy, sometimes hugely funny and charming film into an intelligent meta-movie about ethnographic filmmaking, about media images and stereotypes about Roma families today.

Dorothee Wenner

No one determines his own descent

I think a film always has a message for very disparate people. Everyone will probably interpret or understand this message differently, that's normal.

It was a great joy for me to work with pong Film. After more than a year full of ideas and snippets of film that Philip Scheffner, some members of my family and I had shot with several cameras and smartphones, the real work began: first, viewing all these little films again, editing them and finally putting all these countless pieces together. In this work, in the way precisely the right segments were chosen out of hundreds and how narrative threads were resolved with the least expected sentences in the film, pong Film demonstrated its great professionalism. At the beginning of the film, questions are posed that are truly satisfactorily answered at its end.

After the difficult work came the first gratifying experiences. The first was that we had made a film we could all be happy with. The second came when we learned that the film would be shown at the Berlinale, which is a great honour for me and made all of us, the whole team that worked on creating *And-Ek Ges...*, very proud.

I think the film achieved several aims. But the message I wanted to send appears and becomes concrete in the last part of the film: many people have the good or bad fortune to be born in certain parts of the world or to belong to certain ethnic groups; they have no power to decide these things; no one determines his own descent. That's why many people need a chance in life before they can be judged and condemned by others. A chance that enables them to lead a normal life and, from the start, gives their children the possibilities they themselves didn't have. Some people may find something useful in this message of the film. And the first impression or opinion many people have about other people could change.

Colorado Velcu, Berlin, January 2016

I film you, while you film me

The news that Colorado Velcu wants to come to Germany with his family reaches me during a screening of my film *Revision* in Greifswald. The man who had just said, on the movie screen, 'Let's end the interview here; it's better if everyone speaks for himself. You as a director know how that is done...' will now live in Germany. In Essen. We arrange a visit, and I ask whether I can bring my camera – not with the concrete idea of making a film, but because it is the most obvious form of communication for us. That's how we met three years ago: while making a film. Colorado in front of the camera, me behind it. The camera defines and legitimises our relationship. It creates a space in which we encounter one another and that can be plumbed from both perspectives again and again. Filming creates a unit of time and structures the encounter.

That's exactly where we take up the thread again: the before and after are filled with watching Bollywood films together and with eating and talking. Only now and by chance do we discover that we can communicate even without translation: both of us speak a few words of Spanish, and from visit to visit we hallucinate deeper into an imaginary language that hardly anyone else understands (least of all those who really speak Spanish), but that enables a direct conversation. On one of my next visits in Essen, I bring a little video camera as a gift for Colorado's oldest daughter. From now on, the situation changes: 'I film you while you film

me' becomes a favourite motif. The family moves to Berlin; now we live in the same city. In the course of a month, one camera turns into four. Colorado shoots the first scenes of his own; finally we sign a contract about a joint film. The film we are to make, whose orientation initially seems nebulous to both Colorado and me, increasingly becomes a filter through which we perceive ourselves and our reality differently and can interpret it anew. In the context of the documentary film, our conversation about friends and relatives becomes a casting session for a feature film to be made in the future – even though we are already in the midst of it. Something develops that we relate to together and in which we can meet one another as equals: a space in which, now that the film is finished, we no longer even need a camera.

Philip Scheffner, Berlin, January 2016

Everything merely language

Acting as interpreter in the production of a documentary film, I thought, has to do with the ideal of truth, the dream of reality. Aha. So I'll interpret very precisely and true-to-reality, because it's about Roma people, and that's a tightrope walk. Because even though the Germans love diversity, constantly travel, learn languages, take an interest, are able to rethink their politics, and regard the Good, the True and the Beautiful as clearly negotiable, somehow these modern, individualistic people revert to old, pre-modern concepts as soon as it comes to the Roma. Suddenly they are quite sure, know something quite definitely, are frightened out of their wits and have nightmares.

When I interpret between Roma and Gajikané [non-Roma people, -ed.], fear usually rises up against me – in the worst case, from both sides – and I need good standing. Two meet who can't understand one another, not just linguistically, and who also don't even believe understanding is fundamentally possible. They are both stuck believing in a feral idea of alienness and hope that my translation can tame the alienness. To top it off, they always ignore that I don't speak Romani, but only Romanian. I don't touch the 'real world' of the 'others' even with my brain's language centre. The usual circus.

Working with Philip and Colorado, nothing rose up against me. Unaccustomed to that, I started to totter. I almost felt superfluous; nothing hurt when we spoke. There were no cultural presuppositions or dreams that also needed to be interpreted.

Philip and Colorado encountered one another in a world whose points of reference they had created themselves. They understood each other; it was only one another's words that were unfamiliar. A matter of the tools of my trade. And when, beyond the question of language, they didn't understand each other, they considered it as something to be expected. People can't see through one another like shards of glass.

In the land of Philip and Colorado, there has also always been a fourth language, a self-invented lingua franca that I, as interpreter, am not the master of. In the film it can sometimes be heard: a weird quasi-Spanish. Creating understanding was not my task.

This 'country' that the film shows is within our own. Even I am startled, because, after the light on the movie screen goes out, I realise that nothing can be seen in this film that was expected in the beginning. It doesn't show me the world in which Roma films have this or that function; it is not a practical, social gesture. It is an unchildlike land, beyond myths, judgements, truths; this world is constantly breaking; it's no world at all...

...everything merely language – or film language. The Good, the True and the Beautiful: nothing but words to be translated. And Philip and Colorado make a suggestion for how this fact can be eluded, playfully, freely, 'a'-morally, humanly, musically, responsibly. And I had to deal with it; in my work I went beyond the coarse basic assumption that language is either understandable or unintelligible; it was simply present, and I strayed from my fussy concerns about knowledgeable interpreting and translating. Suddenly I no longer knew 'more' than my employers. Being a translator under these conditions was something I had to rethink: I was now a transmuter of material.

Then suddenly Colorado's diary was on my desk, vulnerable writings; I translated, abandoned the completely naked words I translated to a process that became ever more organic; something took on form, melted away, was sought, never captured, it grated, it sang, then suddenly something was there and seemed to breathe – how wondrously odd.

As if the first day of work prefigured all that followed: I interpreted at the birth of Colorado's grandnephew. Almost metaphorical. A 'translation into the world and life'. A position that came ever more naturally to me while working on this film: initiated into what would come, into plans and their progress, encouraging, silent in the labour pains, then breathing-with, waiting-with and in the end withdrawing at the moment of birth, happy to have shared the experience of this process not only intellectually, but also physically.

The title consists of foreign words – at least for us Gajikané. That's fine. They are empty. Parizan will sing them to us. That's enough.

Eva Ruth Wemme, Berlin, January 2016

Izadora's master plan

At the margins of the film, the wild girl in the pink jacket develops into a camera-shy teenager. *And-Ek Ghes...* – the title – contains many promises, many stories and also hers and mine.

Noami is her 'Roma name'; Izadora is her official one. Noami and I meet in 2011 on a hot August day in the courtyard of her grandmother's house in Fața Luncii, the district in Romania's Craiova region that is her home. Noami with her little sister on her arm. 'Naomi?' I ask, 'Like Naomi Campbell?' 'Noami,' her beloved grandma corrects. The transposed letters remain. I no longer know how it actually starts; we had no common language, but somehow we arrive at the topic of India. Noami's changes of costume during that day, on which we crouch in the shadow of the house as if in an oven while the men shoot the film *Revision* inside, are fast-paced. She stages her own casting show, because a path to India, to Bollywood, seems to lead through me. The glittering dresses, the moves à la Deepika Padukone and Priyanka Chopra have become blurred images in memory. In focus is her gaze: demanding, inquiring, loving, strict. At the end of this first day, she gives me a hair clip and steals my heart.

Today I also know her version of the story. Three years after our first encounter, we suddenly face one another in Berlin: shy like strangers, palpitations, a bashful glance, curiosity. No words. The camera becomes a means of communication. Noami shows me what she and her brothers have shot, we laugh and we try to exchange thoughts.

An eternity went by before Noami was finally permitted to go to school. I remember the day we discovered the magic of a common

language: 'The day when you came into my house...' she begins quietly but with determination. Suddenly I feel I'm part of a master plan – one that we 'adults' merely carry out, but that is concocted behind this pair of eyes viewing me critically. 'One day...' or something like that, I promised her back then in Romania, 'maybe you'll travel to India. Who knows?' *And-Ek Ghes...* – One day... We make cautious travel plans. By the way, she wants to be called Izadora.

Merle Kröger, Berlin, January 2016

Notes from an Indian screenwriter (not Bollywood) turned choreographer to Philip Scheffner and Colorado Velcu on filming the song sequence for their film *And-Ek Ghes...*

Love Song Rule #1: The couple must sing and preferably dance to the song in the middle of a bustling city ignoring people around them. Watching the couple dance in front of the city's biggest and richest sites, the audience – in the throes of some neurological magic – will reach the conclusion that they too can enjoy those riches, if only they can find their one true love.

Love Song Rule #2: However, during the song the lovers must enjoy all the free pleasure spots offered by the city. This cuts out the impossibility of Rule #1. Who, among the audience, can actually sing and dance in the middle of a city? But yes, it is possible to sing a song when you take a boat or carousel ride without being ridiculed. And yes, of course the longing looks and furtive touches make it all the more exciting.

Remember to create as many beautiful and poetic codes, symbols, and mythologies of 'love' as the most desirable emotion as possible. This will create a belief that love is more important than social justice, equality or anything else that people need to live decent lives. Keep people busy with love!

Urmi Juvekar, Mumbai, India, January 2016

Like in the movies

With a light touch and yet tremendously profound, *And-Ek Ghes...* opens new filmic and political grounds, not unlike *Havarie* (also directed by Philip Scheffner, also in the 2016 Berlinale Forum). Co-directed, its collaborative process, however, grows into a meeting of different decisions on where to place the camera in order to show the 'life that one is leading.' That this meeting is on a level playing field allows that gradually Colorado Velcu and his extended family take charge of how they want to be framed. Being specific, stressing details, including distinct emotions, choosing the perfect mounting of the camera and the precisely correct context is crucial to understanding a story, they assert. This context, however, is also a context of seeing, of being seen, of anticipating how one might be seen, of wanting to be seen at one's best, of playing with the roles and clichés one is cast in but also of staging oneself to expand how one is real. That's how a 'typical day' may include having a sensible heart, receiving one's first bank card, appreciating the aesthetics of a cathedral when strolling around Museum Island, having a picnic in a beautiful park, being excited and anxious about the first day of school, shooting a scene again to do it better, because one can, or sadly saying good bye to those who leave again. The small camera is used as a recorder of things to remember, as a diary to confide in

and to reflect on how one handles the challenges of the present day, and as a screen to fictionalise oneself for the future or just to be able to arrive in the real through a diversification of gazes and how one is looked at.

With ease and elegance, *And-Ek Ghes...* thereby expands genres such as first-person film, the video letter or home movie, through the depth and sensitivity of layers of reflection, self-reflection and always having in mind one's diverse addressees. Simultaneously, as one of those viewers we could be thrown back to question how we often look, listen and relate through pre-described narratives, but also to how we ourselves might want to realise and expand ourselves through a song. A beautiful place to meet on equal footing.

'I wish that more people would have these opportunities.'
(Colorado Velcu)

Nicole Wolf, London, January 2016

Occasional comical moments

Thanks to Gică's mediation, I met Colorado for the first time here in Berlin in early 2015. He and I became colleagues and, together with another colleague, we supervised a temporary project of the Amaro Foro association, offering counselling for the Romanian-speaking residents of a piece of junk real estate that made headlines in Berlin at the time. It was a project that, in my view, would not have been possible without Colorado.

Eventually, Colorado told me that he and Philip Scheffner and Merle Kröger were working on a new film project, completely different from *Revision*, not just formally, but also in terms of content. The film's central depiction of painful experiences with racist and German conditions, the arc that the film describes from the 1990s to the present, impressed me. I was curious about what would follow – and I wasn't disappointed.

Colorado, his children and other relatives filmed at self-chosen moments, in which the camera was always a conscious part of the depictions. Obvious efforts at targeted staging and viewing previously shot film material are part of the story. There are several levels of filming within the film. And when the participants reflect aloud on formal aspects, the course of action or their own roles, beautiful and sometimes very comical moments arise. The narrative fragments of the individual family members, who are often filming themselves, are held together by Colorado: his diary entries form a kind of narrative framework that simultaneously offers a very intimate access to the man depicted. Ultimately, the political dimension of *And-Ek Ghes...* lies in the existential questions that often surface here for Colorado and his family as Roma from Romania.

Hendrik Kraft, Berlin, January 2016



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Philip Scheffner was born in Homburg an der Saar, Germany in 1966. He lives in Berlin, where he works as an artist and filmmaker. He runs the production platform pong along with Merle Kröger, Alex Gerbaulet, and Caroline Kirberg.

Films

2003: *A/C* (42 min.). 2007: *The Halfmoon Files* (87 min., Berlinale Forum 2007). 2010: *Der Tag des Spatzens/Day of the Sparrow* (100 min., Berlinale Forum 2010). 2012: *Revision* (106 min., Berlinale Forum 2012). 2016: *And-Ek Ghes..., Havarie*.



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Colorado Velcu was born in Craiova, Rumania in 1979. He has been living and working in Berlin since 2014. He appeared as a protagonist in Philip Scheffner's film *Revision* (2012). *And-Ek Ghes...* is his debut film.