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# Havarie

## Philip Scheffner

**Producer** Merle Kröger, Meike Martens, Peter Zorn, Marcie Jost.

**Production companies** pong Film (Berlin, Germany), Blinker Filmproduktion (Köln, Germany), Worklights Media Production (Werkleitz, Germany), ZDF/Arte (Mainz, Germany). **Director** Philip Scheffner. **Screenplay** Merle Kröger, Philip Scheffner.

**Director of photography** Terry Diamond, Bernd Meiners. **Editor** Philip Scheffner. **Music** Blue Waters Band. **Sound design** Volker Zeigermann, Alexander Gerhardt, Philip Scheffner. **Sound** Pascal Capitolin, Volker Zeigermann. **Commissioning editor** Doris Hepp.

**With** Rhim Ibrir, Abdallah Benhamou, Leonid Savin, Guillaume Coutu-Lemaire, Emma Gillings, Terry Diamond, Jackie Kelly.

DCP, colour. 93 min. Arabic, English, French, Russian.

**Premiere** 13 February 2016, Berlinale Forum

37° 28.6'N 0° 3.8'E. An inflatable dinghy full of people, one of them waving. The camera pans slowly to the right and shows tourists on a cruise ship looking out to sea. The camera moves back, touches upon the boat again and then pans to the left, to the other side of the ship. The refracted sunlight bathes it in colour and a vertical ray of light separates the ship from the boat, to which the camera now returns. At times the image blurs; ghostly reflections appear in the water.

The following is heard at the same time: the rescue crew requesting via radio that one should wait until a helicopter arrives. A woman talking on the phone in France to her husband in Algeria. Later he speaks of a crossing. The Irish tourist holding the camera, ship employees, Russian and Ukrainian cargo workers talking of encounters with this refugee boat (or another). And of their world.

During the work on this film, images overtook reality. *Havarie* responds to this by condensing sound and disassociating it from the image to create a space of perception that allows the viewer to experience their own position without ever losing sight of the subject at hand: a cinematic coup of true radicalism.

*Stefanie Schulte Strathaus*

## Keeping eye contact

Havarie begins with maritime coordinates 37° 28.6'N 0° 3.8'E and the faint sound of ticking. The coordinates tell us where the small boat we see is positioned. In French, a young girl describes standing at the window watching something happening to her father that frightens her. She is twelve. It involves two men and a car. She is watching and cannot move to help him. From a distance, we are watching a small boat filled with people floating in the clear calm blue sea, the sun shining brightly. It will take another forty-five minutes before the camera turns and, for the first time, we will see the place, the point of view, from which we've been watching the small boat. The situation, the *mise en scène*, is clearer now but the turn of the camera produces a major distortion in the image, a dramatic shift in colour and tone as if a storm has arisen, before we return to the calm blue sea. It's a kind of warning to the viewer. A great distance remains between you and the men in the boat. Minimal contact will be made but the distance will not be closed; the ambiguities will not be resolved.

In September 2012, the cruise ship Adventure of the Seas encountered thirteen Algerian men in a rubber dinghy on their way to Spain. They contacted the Spanish Coast Guard requesting permission to bring the men aboard the ship. They were asked to wait for the air and sea rescue team, which would arrive to take the men to a prison from whence they would be deported to Algeria a month or so later. The cruise ship waited for ninety minutes, and to the cheers of some of the passengers sent out a small boat of their own to bring water and food to the men floating at sea. The wait was filmed by passengers on the port side of the cruise ship and it is one of these very short films that forms the visual track of Scheffner's film.

The dinghy waits and the cruise ship waits, keeping visual contact with each other. We watch them watching each other, waiting too. The sea is calm and blue and the sun is shining. Sometimes it is very hard to see the boat: it recedes and blurs and then returns to view. The men in the boat wait for at least ninety minutes, maybe more, we're not sure. We wait for ninety minutes. Calmly and methodically, with that combination of critical precision, political intelligence, and impeccable care for the people involved that characterises all of Philip Scheffner's films, Havarie forces you to wait, to experience a different temporality than the newtime in which an image such as this is normally presented. Wait and listen. You must listen very carefully. In fact, at some point, you realise that you can stop watching but you can't stop listening.

*I'm at the window.  
What did you do today?  
I don't have legal papers  
I'd like to stay here  
Destiny – it's all blocked  
I fell in love with her  
It's my destiny  
Keep visual contact  
the full moon at night as we were about to leave  
I loved the dolphins the sea was calm the dolphins played  
news about my visa  
action now  
William Wallace is sailing the high seas yah!*

*the sea is dangerous  
deliberately  
ghosts live in deserted places they haunt the sea  
Harraga is our motto  
the sky and the water  
oh Barcelona  
peaceful fisherman  
stowaways  
good watch  
there's no peace  
come sooner, please  
permanent state of waiting  
life at sea thirty one years  
the boat is very far away  
I heard people going from Libya died  
spirits still roaming  
let's sing again  
good morning message from the bridge  
not too many stars  
around forty minutes  
port by port  
what is its position  
can't remember their faces  
young  
foot injury  
out of nowhere  
a good night is when nothing happens  
on edge always helplessness anger  
proceed on your voyage after the helicopter  
you don't need to fear the ones who escape  
this is what life should be  
human beings in this  
start to try to imagine  
drastic enough  
waving  
image awakens memories  
three days at sea calm breakdown rain  
the one in the blue jacket prison Spain the one always singing from  
Constantine in front unwell  
died stayed yellow jacket also prison orphan impoverished  
the Spanish mountains wanted to stop he needs to get to Europe  
arrested landing ashore the Barcelona song again  
cooperation thank you  
continue on voyage*

What do you hear? Water running, someone making coffee or tea, car traffic, sirens, phones ringing, car doors opening, crowds at a café, waves, motors, hands clapping, coughing, rain. Keeping visual contact with the ship we hear, as one expects in a Scheffner film, the sound of birds and above all Rhim and Abdullah's sighs and breath. The voices are very close to my ear, creating an intimacy that's almost too much to bear. I start to catch my breath in return.

What do you hear? The working life of those who work at sea and the sea as a collective escape route to make something – love, job, health, ideas, decisions, peace – work better than it is where you are immobilised and enclosed by the borders states erect to keep us from being free of them.

Havarie creates a poetic language for Fortress Europe that's very precise and very beautiful. For me, its beauty derives from that precision, from an exquisite attention to the fate of those

thirteen men in the boat and the thousands like them who cross the Mediterranean every year, hundreds of whom die. What's remarkable about *Havarie* is that it gives this attention without your ever learning the names of those thirteen men and without the help of a narrator, someone to connect the parts, to help you make a story of it all. How it does so is hard to explain, especially if you haven't seen the film yet. Part of the explanation lies in the poetic language of the film itself, the composition of the visual and aural landscapes, which, like all of Scheffner's films, forces you to think about what are you watching and why it is being presented to you as it is. The thinking demanded in this film is harder than in Scheffner's previous films, not because the subject matter is more difficult, but because you have to do it more on your own. Perhaps that's as it should be in a situation in which one keeps visual contact but always at a distance, a distance whose coordinates are to be found not in the sea, but in those socio-political conditions that make the sea a perilous escape route from there to you.

*Avery F. Gordon, January 2016*

### Sea sight

'You'd always wait. It's a waiting game... You are always on the edge... Sometimes you can be distracted by certain images, or whatever, and they are not an important security image. And you can get distracted. And that's when you'll miss something else. So you do need to be on your toes. You need to be on your guard.'

*Terry Diamond*

There is no beginning, and there is no end. When we leave the cinema after ninety minutes, the boat is still there, or a boat anyways. That's how life is. No breaks.

But *Havarie* does give us those ninety minutes to attend to life, to look and listen. Curiously, while the standpoint from which we look is static, this might allow us to take a step back from our usual spectator position. Curiously, while we look at the surface of the sea, a space is opened out, indeed many spaces, many living spaces, and so we listen in those spaces, we see in those spaces. While 3.36 minutes are expanded, while time is given back to Terry Diamond's distinct observation of a chance meeting between the massive steel cruise ship *Adventure of the Seas* and a small rubber boat carrying thirteen men, we encounter a series of different living spaces, and they encounter each other. While time is unfolded, life stories are folded into each other and are at the same time folded back into the space that is the sea. The radio communication planning the rescue and capture of the *Harraga* boat overlaps with each living space introduced – the politics of the sea adds a significant layer to many people's lives, to all our lives.

**'The sea there is keeping me from my wife.'** – Abdallah Benhamou

The spatial dimension and the intense presence conveyed through the sound we listen in is indebted to a commitment to meticulous documentary research and tracing of those particular individuals in this very boat, those who could well have been in their stead, and those who could well have encountered them. That we start creating images in our heads is not an accident, that

we experience the intimacy of spaces and relations is not random, but follows admirable aesthetic political choices. *Havarie* advances us carefully selected fragments that continuously open out and never close down, never allowing an image to obstruct our view, or a call and response to close down our imagining of lives.

**'How desolate. Everyone's gone.'** – Rhim Ibrir

Significant fragments accentuate the particularity and locatedness of those we encounter and the conflicts they live in and with. The death of a friend through the British army in Ireland; the fear for a son to be called to the military in Russia; the terror in front of your house in Algeria; the never-ending back pain and endless time of waiting – waiting for one's visa, waiting for home, waiting for lost souls, waiting for hopefully nothing to happen, for a peaceful night, waiting for the mobile phone to ring.

**'The main thing is that you stay healthy; that the kids are doing well. Yes, and that there's peace finally.'** – Leonid Savin

For ninety minutes, we as spectators are our very own longing, but we too wait, and we meet others in the creation of images of memory. While they remember, we try to see with them, dolphins as well as planes trying to purposely overturn them. Through that intricate web of evoked conflicts, in inner and outer spaces – unlike the succession of news items competing with each other – there is absolutely no pretence of sameness but a proposal for connectedness as a political choice.

The very singularity of each detail is carried as well by the acute separation of our senses, of looking and listening and bodily affect. When our senses meet again, a turbulence seems to arise, forcefully locating the crisis in our very own bodies. We are confronted as on-lookers but we are also a part in the global web of conflicts.

**'So I don't know if we were a symbol of hope or...?'** – Guillaume Coutu-Lemaire

While there is a radical rethinking of the productivity of storytelling in documentary works, there is also an explosive transformation of 3.36 minutes of digital video found online, into what looks like tempestuous experimentations on 16mm film. At one moment the screen and thereby the sensation of our bodies in front of the screen, flows over in a burst of colours, in the starkly blinding sun, in the glaring light reflections of the cruise ship and the entraining effect of a Filipino song. While we are brutally thrown back to our location, we are also bathed in the crystallisation of the very situation we witness and have become part of.

**'And if I tell you: one more trip, and then that's it?'** – Houcin Ouahiani

Ninety minutes of looking at the boat with thirteen people who made the decision to risk their lives to cross the sea – 'We can only assume' – does not culminate in our finally seeing. In fact, it questions the very possibility of seeing or if we actually intended to see at all. But equally, this time might transmit that we do not need an image or even the story of another in order to connect.

'I like the sound of the waves crashing. I suppose it gives you a sense of peace. And this is what life should be.' – Terry Diamond

*Havarie* is thus a view in the space of geopolitics, of labour, of deep longing, of patient waiting, of escaping, of brutal choices, of life, death, and ghosts, and of the lack of memorials. It is sometimes also a space tangential to state politics, a space of possibility, for fiction and thereby for reshuffling relations and perspectives. Offering us time to look, *Havarie* gives us the precious gift of attending, of drifting, of imagining, of discomfort, of the labour of actively setting ourselves in relation to. When we leave the cinema for another image, the boat will still be there. But maybe we had a glimpse of the possibility of the entanglements of our relations and locations and of the autonomy of our imagination and the possibility of deciding for ourselves how we want to relate. It can't get more real than that.

Nicole Wolf, London, 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 Spatzen/Day of the Sparrow* (100 min., Berlinale Forum 2010). 2012: *Revision* (106 min., Berlinale Forum 2012). 2016: *And-Ek Ghes...* (co-directed by Colorado Velcu), *Havarie*.