

BAFTA Screenwriters' Lecture Series: Maren Ade
9 October 2016 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London

Jeremy Brock: Good evening ladies and gentlemen, I'm Jeremy Brock. On behalf of the British Academy, welcome to the second of the 2016 International Screenwriters' Lectures, in conjunction with Lucy Guard and the JJ Charitable Trust, without which: nothing. This evening we are delighted to be hosting one of Germany's leading auteurs, the writer-director Maren Ade. Herself a teacher of screenwriting, Maren's credits include, as we've just seen, the sublimely subtle *Everyone Else*, winner of the Silver Bear at the 2009 Berlin Film Festival. This was followed by the honestly agonisingly poignant and funny *Toni Erdmann*, which I urge everyone to go and see. That debuted earlier this year to rave reviews at the Cannes Film Festival. Maren will give a short talk, after which she'll be in conversation with film critic and broadcaster Robbie Colin, and then as we always do we'll open it up to questions from the floor. Ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to introduce Maren Ade. Thank you.

[Applause]

Maren Ade: Hello. Thank you very much for the invitation. Yeah it's, I was so, I mean I just, I haven't, when I was sitting here I was longing so much to see one of these films. I haven't been in the cinema since I think like almost a year now, because I worked so, so long on my film before Cannes, and since then I'm travelling, and all these festivals I never managed to see something. So, but again, now it's about my films. So yeah, it's interesting for me, I mean I'm invited here as a screenwriter, but I see myself very much as a filmmaker you know. The writing is a process that never stops for me, so with every film, I made three films so far, and that's all I wrote, these three films. And I continue writing constantly, so I have, even have the feeling the editing is like the very end of the writing process. And so we will talk, I don't know how many of you saw my films or *Toni Erdmann*, which we will talk later a bit more detailed.

So I want to tell you just a little bit about me, where I come from. So actually I started to study production at the film school in Munich. I thought it, yeah it's maybe too difficult to become a

director, and I was interested in producing so I handed in for that, but found out that it was a mistake so I started to write. Oh it wasn't a mistake because still today I'm like producing my, or I'm one of the producers of my own films, which is a very good thing, I'm very happy about that. But yeah I realised, yeah that I really have the need to tell a story. So then I started writing, actually the first long script that I was writing was my graduation film, it was called *The Forest for the Trees*. And at that time, the thing is I never went to classes because I changed into the directing class very late, so I was never really like yeah in those, I missed all those classes. So I had to like find a way to catch up with all these things that I though the others learned at film school, so yeah I just watched as much films as I could and tried to read, also read books on screenwriting.

But yeah, and with the first film I really tried, it's about a teacher, so with all of my three films what they have in common is that like it always started with a constellation of two characters. And yeah, in a way I worked with all my films for a while like on the characters, like writing down ideas, how they are, like I always have a, I start writing dialogue very early, that's something that is very important for me. I just have one document where I always write down how people would talk, or how this character would talk. And so it was a bit like that with every, the story always came out of the characters, or out of the constellation of the two. And so with the first film it was a teacher and their neighbour, she tries to make friends with her and doesn't succeed in a way. And yeah with that script it was something where I tried to be like, yeah like I thought it's right, I wrote a little synopsis then a treatment, and I tried to make it very, yeah like you should do it like. I was, yeah, I read that you should never like just go and write a script or something like that, so start very simple and little and think carefully.

So, and with the second film it was about a couple who was just talking, so it was this thesis of a film where you have a couple, two people most of the time talking the whole time. And because of

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that I will never do that again, but I did it, I just wrote it from the whole script like through in one, in four weeks or something. And then it took another half a year to shorten it, to go back to do it, to go back again to a shorter format. Is that right, yeah, a shorter format. And so that was one experience, and now with *Toni Erdmann* there were like several things involved. There was a lot of research involved, which was very nice for the writing process. I was travelling, the film, I don't know, can you tell me, how many saw it? You, ah that's nice, that's good. How many saw the second film? And the first? Ah, that's good. No, that's good.

So yeah, with *Toni Erdmann* it was, the thing is I have to talk more about *Toni Erdmann* because this is something I have better in mind how it was, you know the other film was seven years ago. So *Toni Erdmann* was like, I always tried to alternate when writing between two phases. You know there's always one phase where I try to not censor myself, just brainstorm, just follow my fantasy, no art police allowed or anything, just to write down, to be emotionally open to the topic and also to like yeah try to follow everything that comes into my mind, like to be in a creative mood. And this process always had like a natural ending because I got fed up after a while, I got empty. And you know it always depended, in some stage of the process it was about finding ideas, and in another phase it was about just writing really on the script. But it was always this more, let's say more creative phase of writing where yeah it was always nice for me to tell myself this is something I will do for six, seven weeks, and afterwards I have produced a chaos and I will go through and analyse it. And I always had the feeling that I come to a certain ending in that process and then I'm like, yeah that I'm like empty after a while, but still I'm not there where I want to be, so I search, I always search for something or yeah for a way to analyse myself, because I have the feeling I want to continue working on the project.

And so I read a book that I really can recommend, it's actually more on directing, it's written by Judith Weston, I don't know if some of you know that

book. Some of you know that book, it's *On Directing or Directing Actors*, something like that in English. You really should, it's very good what she's writing. And she like, that was something that I read at film school and she offers like in that book a possibility to step back and analyse your script like in order to be later able to see it from the perspective of a director. Because that was something where I was confused sometimes because I came so much, coming out of the writing and then coming to directing is, yeah it's something very different. It doesn't help you to know how you wanted it as a writer, you need to know how you come to that. And there's, we can go through that later if it's a bit detailed, but what, there is kind of a list you're following, how you are really analysing for yourself the structure and writing down like the needs of a character, or there's also one thing that she's doing that she's, that you can like write down the whole scene again out of the perspective of the character, things like that.

So that was something that I was doing in that let's say analysing phase of writing. And into that phase there also belonged like doing research. Like that was more like this process of like where I try to collect as much as I can, and with *Toni Erdmann* there was a lot of research involved, doing interviews, going to Romania, meeting people. Also showing the script or in the first phase when it was not finished script, just the story that I had in mind. I always tried to find a friend where I feel free, and I always try to tell the story myself, that's something that helps very much because really telling someone the story is, yeah you feel immediately where it becomes stupid or embarrassing, then you go faster and so it really helps to get aware of what, and you feel like how people react on that. So that was one thing I did, and yeah and also like later then like finding a location was very important for that film, like having a picture of Romania, of the night clubs. And yeah after I collected some things and analysed what I did I went back to writing again, so then it was again just writing on the thing.

And, for really writing what I always try to force myself, it's really painful sometimes,

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but to like always read the script from the beginning until the point where I am. Sometimes it's too long because it's like, when you're working on the last part you freak out to do that, but it really helps to like know exactly where you are. And yeah, and then what was also important with *Toni Erdmann* was that I, I'd started casting very early, this is something I also did with the films before, I started casting very early to get really to know who will play it, and went back to writing after that. And it didn't change so much the script, but it was more that I, that it was really good to know who will play it. You know like with Peter and Sandra in mind, yeah I knew like what works anyway, or like I had the feeling for the characters much better.

And yeah, and then the last thing is that I continue writing during the shooting, which I absolutely don't like but it really helps a lot. Like with all the three films, it's funny because it was always the ending that I changed completely. With all the three films I was not happy about the ending, and yeah I hope that something will come, something better will come during the shooting. And also I think it's a good thing because you get a good feeling for where it's good to make it shorter. I think, I always like going into shooting with a not too reduced script, because I never know on which, because so much happens on the sub level or I, for me like or its so also a lot in that film about the psychological things going on. And because of that I tried to, I always try to leave some air somewhere or some possibilities, so I'm not so good in deciding before, so it's always a bit longer as it should be. And yeah, and then I try to like yeah catch up with it, like shortening it in the evening of the shooting.

And yeah, I mean it's really, with writing it's really something for me that is like, it's a process that is very hard to like, because I'm not so aware of what I really do, there's some things that I like or that are more easy to me like writing dialogues or something that I don't think about too much. I just believe very much in the thing that it's good to, the more often you go over a dialogue, and it gets better. So with all the scripts, I worked on every script I think almost, yeah between

one and two years. And also, yeah also another thing I do is like that I, that it's good to have some thesis, how the film should be, so there's this document where it's just written like, 'I want to make a film that is like that', 'that tells that'. Just to know, just to sometimes look into that document and to go back to the other, to the script and say, "Hmm, is it really, did it really work out?" Or, "Am I close to this?" Yeah, just writing down like also what interests me like emotionally, politically, like what's my personal thing going on with that topic. So that's all I can say until now about this writing process, and I think yeah, would be nice if you would join, so you can be the therapist now and I'm like... And then we will open it to, yeah. Oh, I don't, there's not the mic, it's on me, oh God, so I can just go here. Thank you.

[Applause]

It's good, it's different.

Robbie Collin: It's comfy, yeah. And this is, I've got this therapist's notepad as well, so it's going to be very sort of analytical I think. I want to start off by asking you about the, because you've said that all three of your films have been built around these tight constellation two-person relationships, but the galactic context of that, what's going on behind, is enormous.

MA: Galactic.

RC: Well right, yeah, to pick up the metaphor. You know in *Everyone Else* you've got these ideas about professional fulfilment and what it means to do well in your career and otherwise, and in *Toni Erdmann*, which I think is the film that most of us here have seen, you've got this idea of Europe shifting, you know the context of Europe changing behind these two characters, and also the idea of what women have to put up with at work, what they must sort of push through in order to be regarded as successful. So although you start out with that very tight focus, how does that broader context get into the work? Is it something that just comes in naturally, or do you look for these points at which to get it in?

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MA: I mean it's not that I'd go or that I'd, especially with those things, the outer environment, so it's something that I, I believe that if something interests me and if I do research on it, it will end in the film somehow, but I don't go and say, "I make now a political film," or, "This should be a statement about this or that." Because I think everything I do is like to try and get the characters as rich, or to understand them as much as I can, or to like with each character also to really have a different, to go into their perspective. Because I believe very much that also with scriptwriting yeah that it's good when you go through a scene to really put yourself into each character, even if it's just a side character. So and to throw them into this moment, or to fill them up with something that is just their personal need in that situation, that doesn't on the surface serve too much the plot. So you know that's always something that I, and so Ines, and I believe that with *Toni Erdmann* it was just putting Ines into Romania meant something, so I believe that this is maybe enough, or this just the constellation putting her there and just having her perspective like, is just raises a question you know and not, yeah. I always don't want to give an answer or like try to construct it so that it's, there's also some space in the middle for the viewer in the end to yeah, go for a walk in the film or yeah, to be free enough to.

RC: I wonder if some of the research that you did by going over to Romania and seeing you know a younger generation of Germans working out there, what's extraordinary about *Toni Erdmann* for me is that, the first time I saw it it was before we have the Brexit vote in the UK, and so the context had shifted totally the second time I saw it at the London Film Festival this week. And yet all of the stuff that's in the film, it's kind of it seems vital and relevant to right now, and I wonder if perhaps your research trip meant that you picked up on stuff that wasn't necessarily explicit in people's thinking about Europe at the time, that now has made it feel so incredibly relevant.

MA: It was a feeling about this context that, I mean I was interested in those, yeah in those behaviour, like all these Germans going abroad telling people

what's best you know, or like how this relationship, this hierarchy, that's a word that I don't like but between these big and small partners, how this continues within the companies, and yeah if you take the relationship between Ines and Anca. So this, yeah but I was more interested like in, yeah like how this, yeah just showing that behaviour in a way, yeah.

RC: And there's a specific kind of business dialect. Is it Denglish, is that right?

MA: Yeah, the business thing is sounding, yeah I mean, it's, you understand the subtitles, it's really that's something that's really, I mean the writing continues with these subtitles. It is something I really realise, it's really, you cannot just someone let do the subtitles, so with these subtitles, also in French and in English I had very good subtitlers, but we worked, I worked on the English version four weeks completely, and because it's so important that it's like close to the German, but still you have to shorten it. You always lose something, you always lose of the picture, so it, yeah that's what I was a bit under shocked at, I have to yeah really think about dialogue. And so yeah that's, what was the asking...

RC: Well it was the idea of that particular way of speaking, the Denglish.

MA: Ah, yeah, so this changed a bit, the Denglish, so you don't have Denglish, you don't have it?

RC: I don't think, no, we just have English. We don't have, we're too lazy.

MA: So we have Denglish.

RC: Can you explain a little bit about what that is.

MA: Yeah, I realise you don't have it.

RC: Because when you hear it you understand.

MA: Yeah we put English words for things, and we get, we make them sound German. So like, what's a Denglish word, it's like we pronounce it German but it's an English word. Strange things, yeah,

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"handy," "what's that?", "it's handy, it's mobile," I mean like, I don't know that's not what. But with this business world was something that I, there I also did research on like, I made interviews with a lot of people, and that was something that really through the interviews like got into my ear how they are talking. And I found that it's often too, when you write it too stiff or that they, that it's often so simple how they say things in this business world. They use some terms that you maybe don't understand, but still it's a very simple way of speaking and not like this business language that we have in mind.

RC: And yet the script isn't afraid to go right into that business language where it's appropriate. That you have, I mean Ines' job, it has this kind of air conditioned glamour to it in that she's you know she's out on rooftop bars.

MA: Air conditioned glamour, that's good.

RC: You know the kind of sealed off offices and everything. And the great shot in *Toni Erdmann*, if you've seen it you'll know this, when she looks out of the office block window and there is pow across the centre of the screen, this divide between the old Romania and the new.

MA: Yeah, but that's something, that's one thing that, it's good that it's in the film, but that was something spontaneous that was not in the script, that was me as a director. So no, it was the real view out of the window, and I said, "Okay, we have to shoot this. Maybe it's too much, I don't know, we will see." Because dealing with that, yeah the poverty there, the big difference, I was not sure, I wanted it, I thought it's more painful when it just appears not too often, and then when you see it it comes like a shot. And before, yeah that you maybe you have people who are, the people are used to it, so the ex-pats working there every day.

RC: In that meeting that precedes that shot, the kind of consultancy work that Ines does is, I mean we get a pretty neat dose of what she does for a living, and you know that meeting sounds to me

who has never done any consultancy work at all, but it sounds totally plausible. And the more I sort of think about that scene...

MA: The presentation you mean?

RC: Yes, right, right.

MA: That was a lot of work.

RC: Yeah, exactly, but in context it seems effortless because she's just turning up to do her job, but how did you find that voice of you know how those meetings generally run and the kind of chemistry in the room?

MA: That's a good example for, because I said the writing, I finish it in the editing because still I'm shortening. You know I always, for the work with the actors it's always good if you have the full scene, you know just going into a little part of the scene. It's not, so we had a whole presentation, it was much longer what we shot so that it made sense and that it created a real tension, and with that scene I also, I found, at a certain point I found a young consultant who did, I searched for a project that I could take for the film, and so there was a project that was close to the project in the film, and she helped us a bit with the dialogue. So I went through, so then it made sense, I really was, I wanted to do something that also works for a real consultant later, but still it should work for the film. So, yeah, the research was really, I really had to understand what they were doing. In the beginning I was like writing down like in school like, 'CEO', 'second management', and so like really mad, yeah I feel better now since I know.

RC: In the context of that meeting scene, you're able to use these side characters like the young Romanian businessman to introduce these notes of things that the film is dealing with in the background. Like he's able to say, when Ines is admiring the fact that young Romanians are incredibly fluent in lots of different languages, they're really up to speed on this new way of doing business, he can chime in and say, "Well actually, they're forgetting how to be Romanian," and then this issue of you know your national identity or your core identity that Winfried

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is so in touch with is able to be raised via a different character. I mean how did the, where did the idea to plant that kind of, that line with a side character come from, and why does that work better than perhaps having Ines realise it herself?

MA: I don't think, I mean with that side character, that's something, sometimes there's an effect, things happening that you didn't, this was something I didn't plan like, I wasn't very aware of that, I see that it works now like that and I discovered it. Some things you discover later that you, you think about one topic and yeah it's there in every character in a way. And yeah, but this character was really someone, I always, especially with those business characters I always had someone in mind a little bit that I met that had that position. And yeah, and I found it, yeah I found it interesting. And so that's for example a side character, I really always meet with the actors and I also write, that's also when the writing doesn't stop is like I write a biography for them, especially for the ones that I don't have enough time to work with so carefully, so I write things down; what their job is, where they come from. And yeah even with people who just say one sentence, I think it's very important that you fill them up from inside, that they have like a known story and yeah.

RC: So when you're building the central relationship in the film with Sandra Huller and Peter Simonischek, the two leads, how much do you work on that with them? Because you said the casting is kind of a vital part of finding their voices. At what sort of stage was the writing before you went into the casting, and what did finding your cast actually allow you to bring onto it here?

MA: To change, yeah. I think, I mean the film is really like, I would say 95 percent a written script. I just reconstructed it because I, someone wanted it, and so I thought I have to do that anyway, so I put in all the scenes that I wrote during the shooting. And it's more close than I thought, it's strange because I like this feeling of improvising in a way, but still they learn their lines so I mean it's like yeah, they come and sometimes I forget that it's like something that I wrote. And

sometimes I allow that they are like, I'd try ask for please if something good comes into your mind you're allowed to say that. But then sometimes I get very nervous when it, I mean with improvising sometimes there's the tendency that they put too much, that they verbalise too much the emotions or that it's, they just, or that it becomes too inventive or things like that. And then I get, become very nervous and tell my assistant to control if it's really the script in the lines. But with casting, for the casting it's something, I never use the script for the casting, I made that mistake with the last film. And I think it's very dangerous to like, because the actor prepares for a casting differently, they prepare themselves, which is not always a bad thing, but I need, yeah for me it's always good when, yeah when it's like, yeah when they're open and able to react. So with that, so I always write completely new scenes for the casting, and that's something yeah that's fun just doing it for the casting. And then I realised that in the end that there are some interesting scenes that I wrote just because I didn't think of how it would work in the script, because that sometimes makes too much pressure, you know when you always, yeah, work in one document. And so, yeah, and then, and it's more that I know like, for example I have the Toni in mind, how Peter would do the Toni. And also when doing the casting also with Toni we improvised, also we did also, yeah improvisation. What I let them do is often like improvise a scene that is in the script, like Toni appearing you know, so many, yeah you can try that everywhere, in a kitchen or in a, yeah. So, and it's more that I have a feeling what the conflict between the two is, and yeah it's hard to remember.

RC: I think capturing that improvisatory feel in the writing, I mean it's done in *Toni Erdmann* incredibly, incredibly well, and then you have these moments, towards the start of the film for example, when Winfried embraces Ines at her birthday brunch and smudges some of his skeleton makeup onto her blazer. And now, that's great because it distils down so much, not only the fact that they would both turn up to the same event dressed so differently. She's dressed for work, she's very professional, upstanding.

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And he comes straight from school with this, if you've seen the film you'll know this, with the skull makeup still on his face from the school concert. So we get the sense that both of them come to the same event you know with a very different outfit on, but also the fact that his joking has some real world, it causes real world problems and conflict that aren't just, 'oh, she finds him a bit annoying', or 'he's not very charming'. You know there's a sort of a tangible upshot of what he does. So when you find a moment like that, that's obviously something that has to be pre-written in stone, that can't be just discovered on set.

MA: No, that's pre-written. Then someone needs to make the spot there, and the jacket needs to be heavy three times so you can clean it in-between these other scenes of that.

RC: So what's the secret to alighting on a character interaction like that, that distils down, because you could have those characters unload at great length about what it is that their behaviour annoys about each other, but instead just in that kind of tiny interaction you get all that.

MA: That's really, I mean that's very causal in a way, he had that makeup and they are hugging, and so I thought yeah it's like, I mean I know that it's like, that it means something or that it, like this father who's like, what's the word, smearing, or like putting that thing like on her, so it's also a symbol maybe for something. But yeah, that's an idea that sometimes, I like, I wanted, I was more interested in this, for me what's important about writing is I think a lot about hierarchy between characters, I think this is something that I want to be very aware of, who's changing hierarchy when. I think like, especially with like that family scene, also during rehearsing we tried out how much higher is the new husband in the status, and how is Winfried struggling with his status, I mean he's trying to come a bit up with doing these jokes, and then he falls down again with doing this thing with the makeup. And yeah, I think it's always for a character and also later for the actor a good thing to work with, and also yeah, there's always in, if you have these

daily life situations that's where a lot of little drama is happening like in that.

RC: It strikes me that having Winfried drop out of the narrative for so long, because obviously the film starts focussed on him from that first shot of him answering the door to the postman, then we follow him to Ines' birthday brunch, and then she kind of picks up the lead character mantle for a very, very long time, and that's what makes.... I'm slightly wary of describing this in too much detail for the people who haven't seen it, but there's a scene in which he unexpectedly arrives back in the centre of the story. But to lose him for so long seems like the kind of thing that screenwriting manuals might advise against, because you know you've set someone up as the main character, and then you've sort of shuffled them out of the spotlight for long enough for us to forget about them, to make that return surprising.

MA: I was, this was really something that I was interested in, like changing in the middle of a film the main character, so I was aware of this. And I hope that it will work, I was a bit anxious that I don't know, because I always also read in a book that it says the person, the character you start the film with will always be the main character, you cannot change something about that. But it worked here because he, he also transforms, he comes back as someone new. The only thing about that film was that it really, that was a moment I was very afraid of in the script, but also later in the shooting because the film starts again you know. You cannot do anything about it, you have to make a new introduction of Toni, and it takes a while, and I needed that, what do you say this gap before where you think, "Oh God, no. This film continues just in the business world." I mean so that's where you get nervous that it will like, yeah, go on like this. And so, yeah, and it was more that I really saw this, that there was this first hour where I wanted it to start maybe normal, routine, maybe not very nice, yeah they don't have a special problem in their relationship but it just fell asleep, they lost contact, and then things get worse and worse and worse. It was the idea to really create a dead

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end in their relationship, so that to really make sure that as a father there is almost no possibility for him to come back, so that you really have the feeling, "Okay, what's now? It's, the film is over." And I also had in mind that Winfried himself has this feeling like, like to stop this bad film he was in with his daughter, and to write a new one like coming back as this Toni. And it was also, I was also, I took four shooting days just for this scene because I knew if this wouldn't work, the whole film wouldn't work. So that's always something, yeah.

RC: So what was particularly tricky about it to get just right? Was it the timing of the turn, or his subsequent conversation with Ines and her friends?

MA: I tried to shoot as chronological as possible, so I mean also for the actor just to start with that new character and to, because the tone you, I leave things, I always try to leave things open for the shooting. I mean I try to know as much as I can about the staging, I always try to rehearse on location, and I know where the camera will be and the setting and everything, but I try, I have to leave something open. Like that's the emotional side, or like with Toni, yeah also how big this Toni will be. I didn't know, I had to see that, I had to see the full set, I had to see, I mean I even decided on shooting day for another wig because before I had a much more realistic wig that looked similar because I liked that old thing. But on shooting day I changed back to that because I saw the whole environment and found, okay, we can do it with that wig, although it's like, it looks in reality like completely unbelievable. So things like that, I need to react on things. And also we tried different versions of Toni, also while casting we like let out all, Peter tried out all. I mean like from a Toni like very American cowboy version, until a very strict CEO, I mean there's a wide, he has a very wide range and it was very funny to test everything a bit that came into our mind to, yeah to have later this little, yeah I always hope that it has more layers than in the end. Yeah, and it was more that I wanted to find the right tone, and it was important that he, I mean Peter plays Winfried, and Winfried is not a good actor as Peter, so Peter plays

Winfried who's a bad actor who tries to act, and that's like a very thin line. And so, and sometimes yeah it was annoying because for sure he would have had like a much more dramatic version of Toni. And also I found very dangerous that sometimes I realised that I find things funny in the casting or during rehearsal or shooting, and on tape it doesn't work, like when I watch it later it's not funny anymore, so I had to find out what's really funny. And it was very clear then that it was always funny when it was existential in a way, so when he really was the father with a certain need, like when you really could see through to him you know, through these loud things like the teeth, the wig, that something where you're like, or when he really addresses her and it really becomes this double thing, yeah, double play.

RC: I think one of my favourite moments where that happens is that previously, I mean this is maybe about half an hour before it actually occurs, Ines makes some comment about you know, "When are you going to do something in life that doesn't just involve sliding a fart cushion under someone?" And he says, "I don't have a fart cushion."

MA: Yeah, that's too bad humour for him.

RC: But then, you know half an hour later...

MA: He buys one.

RC: Yeah exactly, he buys one specifically. So you have this, the joke of him sitting on the fart cushion is funny in itself, but there's also this wonderful, affectionate call-back to this conversation he's obviously remembered with his daughter, and has stung him, and yet he's able to express that in the form of a joke.

MA: Yeah, he's annoyed. I mean he's like also she's saying no man your age who like, who really wants something from life. So he knows there's some truth inside, I mean it's a very cruel scene for him this scene where he says, "I don't even have a fart cushion," because she's almost dismissing him as a father, which is not possible, but it's, and I mean

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he could be angry for like two years, but still he takes like this, I mean still he decides for this very, yeah this very unlikely approach, or that he takes this last five percent where he realises that she's also longing for a different form of communication, or that she's also right about that. But still he's annoyed about this. I mean Toni is also like, yeah I mean it's more masculine, he's more showing off, it's more, it's also like a different male, more different version of him, so it's also, he's also presenting a cliché and asking a question. "This is how I should be like? Using fart cushions?" So it's also a discussion about humour. But with fart cushions it's funny, it's always funny, I mean you cannot do anything about it.

[Laughter]

RC: So if you take away one screenwriting tip from this event...

[Laughter]

I mean actually, funnily enough because I suppose the effect of a fart cushion is totally visceral and almost inexplicable on paper, it just has to happen in front of you.

MA: Yeah, like nakedness, that's also something. Like on paper it was always, yeah you're really this naked, you're naked, then it's like hmmm.

RC: If you haven't seen *Toni Erdmann*, there's a scene towards the end of the film...

MA: It's a good reason to go.

RC: Oh yeah, just see this for the naked party alone. Ines' birthday party turns kind of by accident, on the hoof, but she embraces it, into this naked party. But you can't kind of understand nudity on film unless it's sort of in front of you, so when you're writing it...

MA: Yeah, it makes something with you that you cannot read, you know. It has, it's a good effect, as Sandra said at a certain point it's also good, yeah she had to play naked when you have a shot from here, everybody should be naked under, it's very easy to play a scene then because it creates a certain

tension and insecurity. This we cut out, no.

RC: Particularly when you have that party scene and you're writing that, did it seem excessive on the page in a way that it wasn't in practice?

MA: Excessive? The party?

RC: Yeah, sort of felt like you know you were writing, 'This person comes in. They're naked.' 'This person comes in. They're not naked, but they go away, take their clothes off and come back and they're naked.' Just this sort of, almost as if it's kind of hammering the point too hard, in the way that you know when it's actually enacted, having the courage of your convictions to go with something that extreme actually makes sense in the end.

MA: No, I still, I mean I write a lot of feelings also in the script, how the characters feel, what's happening on the inside, like this insecurity is like this, he's really struggling to if he's coming or not, like working a lot with adjectives. But before I give it to the actor I take all that out because I think it's not good for them, it's good for people to decide if they want to see the film and give money to it. But later it's, yeah it makes it too limited in a way, and it's more interesting to discover that. Yeah I try to write some history inside, yeah, into the script. And the version we work with is a bit more dry than later, yeah. That was not the answer.

RC: No, no, it was, it was.

MA: Okay.

RC: I want to ask you about this wonderful moment of human frailty which we actually mentioned in the Q&A earlier today, in which Ines' boss arrives and he sees Ines' personal assistant, who's Anca, the young and very beautiful Romanian girl, and he kind of comes in with this obviously surprise that everyone's naked, but there's this little kind of flutter of you know hope in his heart...

MA: Hope that it will be something, yeah.

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RC: So in order to...

MA: That's what I mean, with him it was clear what he is expecting, so we thought like yeah it's important to just think how does this Gerald feel when he comes to door? You know, we don't did that shot, but like how, I always had in mind like how did he get up the stairs, what is he thinking, where did he drink that beer? We talk about like how fast did he drink that and what did he decide? What came to his mind like, yeah that maybe he heard about that people are doing it in college or somewhere you know like, so I don't know. So then he comes there and then, yeah then we thought yeah maybe he's hoping, and maybe that Anca, and that's what makes it then, he's just... And there for example something like with that, that's a good point because I like very much the way he's saying this happy birthday when he's putting away the bag. This is something he just said you know that was not in the script, so these little presents I always tried to, yeah tried to get from actors like the way he looks then.

RC: I want to open this to questions from the floor. If you have any questions please raise your hand, and we've got a mic at the back. There's someone there, mic's just coming down at the side. And is there anyone on this side we can set up with another mic? Any questions at all?

Q: Yeah, I just wanted to ask about the nature of surprise in the film, because you know in a lot of screenwriting you get people telegraphing what's going to happen in advance so you're semi warned for things, which you don't really do. You really do set up real surprises, and how does that work when you're writing, you know what are you looking for there?

MA: I mean with that, I wrote that in the script but I wasn't sure if it would be a surprise then. I mean like, I was surprised by some things myself you know later, like the version of the singing, that was much more than I ever hoped for. And also in one shooting I was not sure if that's like, ah there she is, Sandra is there, I just saw her because the light

came on. So no, and, I mean it's all these surprises were written in the script and I was hoping for them, but actually it was more that I found out in the editing more how they would work, so also that it, how much or like also while directing it that it always needed, there's often a moment before where nothing happens or where you don't know how the story will continue, or also the characters don't know how it will continue. I mean they are doing this role-play themselves, so they are often in this situation, "Are we going on with that film or not?" You know like, they are in charge you know like... And it was interesting that things like, that I didn't plan to be so long for example in the script like that painting eggs, I mean it's 130 minutes already which is when they are painting eggs for very long until before she's singing, so it's really this situation. Yeah so what's coming now, but always when I shortened that the singing didn't work. So yeah I was, and I was interested in those moments before a surprise and after a surprise, like when the history falls apart again, or like yeah, because before you, yeah you have to be precise about these things, like where they come from or like with jokes. I mean a joke always has a more complicated reason, yeah there's always something more going on, yeah.

RC: Just to pick up on that element of surprise in the film, the appearance of the Kukeri at the end of the film, the kind of enormous Hungarian hairy monster. That is, there's a crumb of foreshadowing that I totally missed the first time round where he kind of spots the head down the hallway in, just after the egg painting in fact, just after the singing scene.

MA: Ah, that's good that you missed that, it's good that people miss it.

RC: When you kind of, how did you even think to transplant this monster into this story?

MA: I wanted to, I think it would have been too inventive to just let him appear. But maybe, as people, a lot of people don't, I mean he's really saying, "What's that?" And she says, "It's from Bulgaria." But you don't, it's dark, you don't really recognise. I think it always, a film needs

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to be, you need to be able to forward back, and things are correct. Like also with Toni appearing, you cannot cheat with those things. So I think it's important to know where he got that, also because I don't want to be, yeah it's not an invention of me or like to step too much into that fantasy thing. That was always something I was afraid with that film, that maybe yeah that I'd lose this realistic ground. I mean what they're doing is not very, yeah very likely, but it still should be possible you know that things like that happen.

RC: How did you actually discover about the Kukeri? Was that something you were aware of before you started researching the film, or did you find it when you were in Romania?

MA: I mean it was in the script, I was searching for, that he like in the end chooses a costume where he's completely gone and where it's like that is like something that's closet to his soul or his inside. And I like those Eastern Europe costumes, they're very different ones, and I mean also in Africa you have these very interesting things, and it's really luck to find that thing because it existed like that and it almost feels like something from the zoo, it's very lively. You know because they carry it here on the chin, and when they move the head it's, yeah there's a lot, it's interesting because in the neck, the way you move the neck there's a lot of emotion happens there, and yeah it's not a stiff costume. So it was really nice, I was almost in love when I met that for the first time. I was lying in bed and had the feeling something very special happened today to me.

RC: Well maybe, I mean this answers my question but...

MA: And the man who sold it, it was really hard for him to sell it, it was very expensive. They raise goats with that long fur for a long time to have like just the middle part of that fur, and that makes it so lively, so it's made out of I don't know how many goats, more than 20 or something. And yeah, it's really there to get the evil spirits away.

RC: The fact that you were so besotted

with it when you found it maybe answers this question, but I mean did you ever think when you were writing it, actually this is kind of a step too far?

MA: Too far? Did you find that?

RC: No, not personally, I loved it you know, I think I lay in bed afterwards and felt similarly to you. But it's just such a kind of a further leap into the absurd, particularly on top of this naked party.

MA: Yeah, I mean, you know I tried it, the producer went under it, and I got almost completely undressed, not completely, but I tried it out and filmed myself with that thing, because I wanted to be sure if it's too stupid you know, like just that picture. And I couldn't ask someone, I didn't have a cast at that time, so I wanted to make sure that I choose the right thing, and that it's not too much of a sexual thing in the end, just because it's a naked woman and a hairy thing you know. But it worked because this thing was so melancholic and with these, I don't know, there was, I found out myself that if you don't have anything sexual in mind it's not there, you're just naked then. And the thing is too naked, because it looked naked as well, yeah.

RC: And what's amazing I think about the way that moment's written is it punches through the sort of clichéd reconciliation, that you know this out in the park, this wonderful hug between father and daughter, you know a more conventional film, that would be the end credits.

MA: Yeah, I put them there. You know why, just to, I was sure that it didn't work. But just to, I mean just to know that if someone would ask me why I didn't do that I would know why, because you were really disappointed then. It was like you would be thrown out of the film, it didn't, it was too simple to say well that's now, just, it was too much of a message then. And so it was really necessary, I know there's a little, it could be an ending, yeah, but it didn't work.

RC: But that's a great way you think to avoid that sort of cliché is just to push through, find out what happens next, and find out what happens after that

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again.

MA: Yeah, and for me it was really important that it, that you needed, that real life needed to come back you know, and I thought that it's very important for the story that Winfried himself, also what I wanted to tell about parents and children, that he's not aware really of what he did for her. I mean I feel like being a parent is sometimes like throwing a boomerang and you don't know where it will end or how it will come back or yeah, he's doing a lot of effort but still he has the feeling he didn't answer her, or he still owes her that answer to that simple but very complicated question; what's worth living? And so, yeah I found it important that they meet again in real life, and I like, that was always part of the story that two people do a lot of effort to come just a very little closer, yeah that the change is not so big.

RC: Any more questions? There's one on the side there, yeah. And then actually if we can have a mic down at the front as well please, thanks.

Q: Can I go back to that scene of the party, yeah, which they're naked and the gentleman comes with the costume. Is it that somehow at a different layer for you was that in order they express themselves, the main characters in the party, they get their clothes off, but in order the dad express himself, put a costume on? He dresses. So it's a kind of irony in it. Is that a different layer that you intended to express?

MA: Yeah, I mean it's like, what I like is that he's like, yeah that he's like, especially with the hugging then later that he's like, that she can only hug him when he's completely gone you know like, or when he's not there anymore. I mean with that costume and that being naked I think it's so different to every viewer, like what he has, what comes into his mind depends how much you're, how you would feel about that. Yeah but I think the father is dressed but the Kukeri is naked, so I thought it's a good compromise, he's a guest who can really come to that party. But with Ines it was more about, yeah she's coming closer to herself through this film for me to like

getting rid of the role she's playing and also this dress she's trying, she's trying to be someone else and she realises that she doesn't like that skin anymore. And it's really very, we worked on that, how she got rid of that very long, like this really, that she physically cannot wear that anymore, so it's enough reason to open the door naked, and the rest is something that starts happening, but yeah. So I think she's, yeah she's what she is when she's naked then.

RC: In the front row.

Q: When you were developing as a writer before you made movies, I mean what, just out of specifics, what were the key challenges and strengths in terms of finding your voice. Obviously, because now you have something like the film this afternoon which I thought was well [?], when you were finding that voice as a writer what were the key blocks that you had to overcome?

MA: The key blocks?

RC: Writers block, like things, obstacles in discovering your voice.

MA: Ah that was, this story or me generally as a writer like how I? I think, it's, I think what I found the most, I mean it's always the most important to like, yeah it's so simple but to not copy something, or like to just stay with what, yeah to find something personal. My films are, they are not autobiographical you know, but I always write about something that I know, but that I make like bigger for a film, or that I make like more intense for a film. And so it's always a process of yeah, of me also finding something out about myself sometimes, or that I, yeah. And that's sometimes, because it's personal you're sometimes not so sure if it's like something that other people are also interested in, so you have to find that out and to like... And to, and I think most difficult is not to get too nervous and not to throw something away too early. Yeah, I always had a long breath and I always tried to put as much in a story as I could, and always try to follow also other things that interested me. And sometimes I'm surprised how it like, it's also like this boomerang, how it comes back at a certain point. And

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yeah, to find that out maybe, yeah.

RC: Another question somewhere, yeah.

Q: Hello again, yes thank again. I was very interested to know because earlier, well not earlier but about three quarters of the way through you have him, Toni, the father, go to the oil place and he's very humanitarian, gets offered apples, and you see, you have this kind of grief about his kind of experience, and he's chipping away at her awakening perhaps of humanity. And so in a way it's a bit of a tipping point so that she begins to kind of, then her birthday party is, then she's in the nude and der der der. So I was kind of intrigued by the fact that she has this turning point, and she begins to grow into a kind of a, a bigger kind of world view. And then near, at the end, she's wearing the hat, she's got the teeth, but she announces she's going to work in Japan with a similar kind of place. So is this because this is like kind of tragic comedy, or because there's, it's very, very difficult to have a kind of happy ending because she's actually going to still do the same thing. She hasn't really awakened to the things you have to as you mature in life. So I'm wondering about the ending.

MA: I think it was very important for me that she stays herself you know, and she will never become her father. But I think, I mean it's clear he has a completely different system of values, and his daughter, I mean he educated her with these human values and she knows all that, he sent her out into the world to be curious and to be self determined. So in a way it's like she's following that, and she's using it in a different way. And I don't think that she's so wrong in that job, and yeah, I also think that Ines, or we saw as a character, that is much more, I mean that is also maybe more human than she's, or more open and more than she is in this film. Because the film is just a small period in her life, and she's also acting in a certain way just because her father is there, and just because he feels that he wants so much to be like he thinks it's more right you know. And so especially on the oil field she sees that and she knows, and I don't think she has, she also has a heart for this, but from her perspective things became

so complicated and so complex and she tries to solve it on another level, so yeah it's not that, yeah.

Q: Yes, so is she a victim to the world on a bigger point of view, as a bigger world view, that it's impossible as an individual really to fight the big thing that's happening in the world, and how it's hard to kind of change anything anyway.

MA: Yeah, it's much more complicated for her generation, so this, you had to, it's more complicated who's responsible. And also this job that she's doing, like this consultant job it's also always an outsourcing of responsibility. And I saw, I choose that job also because I found it something typical for our generation, that it's got too complicated who to blame for what, it's so easy for everybody to say, "But I'm not responsible. I cannot change all this." And yeah I think it's, and Winfried on the other side, for her it's almost naive. He's like, I always saw him like a sinking island, this system of values that he has, yeah.

RC: Any more questions? Yeah, in the middle there, thanks.

Q: This might be a little prosaic after that, but I'm just really interested in the relationship between writing and editing and the way you work in the edit, both kind of during the shoot and then into the editing process.

MA: Yeah, so I always try to get, I have a lot of footage, I end up with a lot of footage. So in, with *Toni Erdmann* it was 120 hours, something like that. And I repeat the scenes very often, I don't do much takes but I let the scenes always run very long, and it's like, yeah something like ten, twelve takes per shot. And so sometimes I know what is right or how I think the scene should be, but I believe very much that there's always, yeah that there's always something to find out on a shooting day, you know you have to leave something open. And sometimes shooting can be so uncreative, everybody's like, sometimes I feel like everybody's praying in the morning like, "Just let's shoot something, doesn't matter what, hopefully end this scene." And so I try to be a bit, yeah try

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to be as creative and as open as possible but still, yeah there's always this wish I have that the actors are really in the moment, and on the other side I want to be precise about what's lying under. And so it's a complicated thing. But what I want to say is I end up with a lot of footage and that is more like an archive for me in the editing room. And so, and with some scenes it's really that I, like for example this dialogue in the spa when they were talking about what's worth living and these things, that dialogue it was longer, not much longer but it was longer, and I could combine things that I couldn't have directed or that it's, I mean you would have taken another week to like come to that point. Because it's often so, it feels so coincidental like how people try to talk with each other, but like talking...

RC: At crossed purposes.

MA: At crossed purposes. So yeah, that's something that it's very hard to direct or to like to act. So with scenes like that it's very, it's very nice to have a lot of footage and to build them in the editing. I mean there are a lot of takes that I could have taken completely, but it's, yeah it's always good when I can, I still have enough, I can work on the psychological things as well, so like how I built up the tension.

RC: Just on that point actually of building up the psychology of your characters, both *Everyone Else* and *Toni Erdmann* open with one of the leads having some kind of an interaction with a character we never see again. In *Toni Erdmann* it's Winfried talking to the postman, and in *Everyone Else* you have the girlfriend character talking to this little girl beside the swimming pool. And it just seems like that's possibly a really useful way to make us understand what one of the leads is all about, but in a kind of a no stakes scenario, so in a way that's not going to possibly effect what comes afterwards because they're interacting with someone who really has nothing to do with the rest of the plot. And I was wondering if that was a technique you...

MA: The guy who comes in?

RC: Yeah, with the guy who delivers the

package at the start.

MA: The package? Oh yeah, at the start, yeah.

RC: And also, just even with that scene, it's kind of the opening shot, and I think you know if you're trying to write a screenplay you want to kick off with this incredible flourish, and that is just like aggressively boring, you know you just find this kind of drab door and fixate on it, and then there's this kind of bizarre, going nowhere interaction until suddenly it lurches off to the side and we see what's going on. So, I mean in terms of finding that right first page, you know the first few pages of your screenplay...

MA: The scene was very close to that but I didn't, it was, the door was not there, that it so long it was not there. And yeah I had that door, and then when we shot it I saw that door and it was such an ugly door so I thought like, "You cannot, you have to do something with that door. I mean it has to become something more than just a door." So it was the only possibility to, and I was aware of this door thing because we were, we shot the German part in the end, with the naked party there was so many doors opening so I thought it could be interesting to start it with that boring picture. And to have at least for the beginning this, to be only one time in the perspective of someone who would like meet his humour from another perspective, like to get to know him from that perspective. And it was also a bit like me making a joke as a filmmaker, only one time thank God.

RC: Any more questions? I want to actually ask something else about, in a similar way to nudity has this visceral, in the moment reaction, so does music. And your films aren't overloaded with music in any way at all, but in *Everyone Else* you have this great scene where the song is *To All The Girls I've Loved Before* I think, this incredibly corny pop song, where Lars Eidinger's character, the male in the central romantic relationship, he starts out by ironically performing this song to his other half, but then halfway through the performance suddenly takes on this sincerity that you don't expect.

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MA: Yeah, the song takes over, yeah.

RC: Yeah, right, and it becomes this beautiful moment of transcendence. And similarly in *Toni Erdmann* you have the moment where Winfried is starting to play the Whitney Houston song and Ines reluctantly agrees to sing along, and then halfway through it we realise we're having this real soul-peeling epiphany. And it strikes me as amazing that you've managed to do this with songs where the emotional currency is basically when we come to the film, they're on the floor. You know we've heard these films a million times before in all kinds of contexts, you know hotel lobbies, you know that kind of wallpaper music, and yet you've chosen songs like that in order to really emotionally invest your characters.

MA: I think, I mean with Whitney Houston it should, and with music I think it needs, you need to have a feeling like yeah, that they need to belong to the real story. With *Everyone Else* it was like that, I had in mind that all the music that is used could have been taken out of that music room of the mother, you know.

RC: The mother has incredibly chintzy taste if you've not seen that film. She has this slightly kitschy lounge with all these artefacts and things, and the CD collection is a part of that.

MA: Yeah, the set designer even put the CDs there that are like played in the end, or like that are played through the whole film. And with Whitney Houston it was like, yeah, it was always this song, and yeah I like that type of music that attacks you emotionally so much, and yeah you have to decide how to, if you go with the song or not. Yeah it was good that we found that on the shooting day, this aggressive and ironic version, because still the song, yeah the song still worked.

RC: These are things that when it comes to writing you have to almost see them in practice in order to understand them.

MA: Yeah, but as a writer I can like listen to it, so when writing these scenes I put on the Whitney Houston song, it's a good thing. It's good like writing, it's good to, I'm always like to be in this a bit, I like to

listen to cheesy songs when writing. Yeah sometimes you walk in and then say, "Oh God, this morning how can I connect with my emotions?" So just put on some Whitney Houston and it's easy.

RC: I think we have time for one last question. Yeah, there's a hand in the middle there, thank you.

Q: Hi. Just following on from that, the music, because I also listen to music when I write as well. But having laughed so hard at the naked party and everything, the final scene at the funeral, and the father, Toni says, or Winfried says about how he was going to play Harry Belafonte at the...

MA: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: But that one comment where he says, "Oh, it's negro music," I haven't laughed so hard, but like oh, because it wasn't something he had said all throughout the film. It brought like a new perspective of his character, I wasn't sure how to take that comment.

MA: I don't know if the translation is good on that. In Germany he uses a very, we talked long about that translation, it should be like he's like something that how the grandmother would have called it. And actually I thought about putting that, actually in the funeral there was a part when there was singing of, Annika help me, I don't... Time To Say Goodbye, yeah, and he wanted Belafonte, that Try To Remember on the funeral. And I thought about yeah we had this, but this was too much at the end you know that song. But yeah, and there was also, I always had in mind like this, coming to that word like negro music is that for me in my mind it's important that Winfried belongs to that typical post-war German generation who had a very strong enemy with the generation before who was racist in a way. I saw that in his family, so that was kind of like, he had a strong enemy which was also like the birth of his humour as well as of his political position that he had. And so I wanted it also when they talk about the steel helmet, I just wanted it to be there a little bit in the end where he's coming from.

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Q: We saw this funny character, but it's like another layer to this person, that's how I took it, I was kind of like okay, but I wanted to ask that question.

RC: Okay, that is unfortunately all we have time for this evening, but Maren Ade thank you very much for joining us.

MA: Thank you.

[Applause]