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The Revolution Of Plastic

by

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ABSTRACT

‘The Revolution Of Plastic is now!’ is the battle cry of this film. The fiction film The Revolution Of Plastic is a direct polemic concerning the overconsumption of plastic in our everyday lives.

This is the story of Leo, a ten-year-old girl who rebels against her father Mister Risso, the Manager of Detergents at Willy Supermarket. Mister Risso is a forty-five year-old man who lives only for his job and hoards a serious amount of plastic. Leo has a passion for dolphins and takes refuge in an imaginative sea world created in her bedroom. Her imagination came to life after the departure of her mother.

The story begins one evening when Leo discovers a terrible headline: hundreds of dolphins were found dead on Rockaway beach due to the ingestion of plastic. Mister Risso is apathetic, which drives Leo to misbehave. She becomes estranged from Gerald, her tiny plastic dolphin best friend. She revolts the next morning by throwing away her father’s precious collection of plastic bottles. Although Mister Risso disapproves, it doesn’t stop her obsession for eradicating her life of plastic. French History notebook in hand, she sketches out a plan that uncovers her desire to hold a protest outside of Willy supermarket, the same supermarket her father manages.

Surrounded by plastic inflatable dolphins, she protests for peace for the dolphins, but also for Mister Risso. The moment reaches a climax when he joins Leo on the ground and chants with her. Their united action announces a fresh start for the future and for their relationship as father and daughter.
RESEARCH ANALYSIS

The initial idea for this film came from my desire to discuss the impact of plastic and its usage. Environmental issues, plastic and oceans in particular, have always resided at the core of my research. In the fall of 2015, I created a series of photographs concerning climate change with Andrew Dermirjian entitled “Culinary Tragedies.” Each photograph represented one environmental issue and each one used food to depict the issue. One photograph in particular was called “Plastic soup (fig.1).”

My concern grew when I realized that massive amounts of news coverage on this topic could be found everywhere. After one too many violent images of dead dolphins, I felt that I had
to tell this story. My compassion and my vision of a future where we are conscious of the dangers of plastic, specifically for the lives of dolphins shine through.

I’ve always had an affection for dolphins. I spent a large part of my childhood on a sailboat with my parents and dolphins were always a big part of my aquatic, imaginative life. I would watch dolphins jump along the hull of a boat, following us in the open sea. In my young mind, dolphins were my friends. I also remember the plastic we found in the Mediterranean Sea, the fear my father felt and the pessimistic comments he made about the planet’s future. *The Revolution of Plastic* weaves together my childhood memories and my 27-year-old guilt. In this film, I express my voice with the aid of my artistic background and my roots.

A native of France, my cinematographic influences come from the French “dramadies.” Michel Gondry was a great reference for this film. His film *Le Detour* beautifully preserves the naivety of his protagonists and breathes life into the main character: a bicycle. In *The Revolution Of Plastic*, dolphins are the leitmotiv of Leo. I wanted to weave together Leo’s innocence and the absurd, sterile world of Mister Risso. Producing a film about a child who loves dolphins was very challenging. The film could have taken on a very cheesy tone, but I worked hard to avoid it. Like Michel Gondry’s *Le Detour*, I wanted to approach the subject maturely without falling into the “kitsch.” The Dardenne Brothers also inspired me, especially when addressing the political and social issues of the film.
PROJECT DESCRIPTION

During my time in the IMA program, I have found a way to express my frustrations, which is to write and direct conceptual and absurd short films. To me, absurdity is an efficient tool when discussing sensitive topics. For *The Revolution Of Plastic*, I needed to create worlds with many different layers of interpretation. Another objective was to entice the audience into the magical, surrealist reality of Leo. To her, Mister Risso is a caricature of plastic consumption. At certain moments, it appears as though he loves plastic more than his daughter. On the other hand, his obsession over plastic reveals a deep distress over the departure of his wife. Behind the absurdity and exaggeration of his character there lies a deeper human emotion. The same is true with Leo’s character: she lives in the world of her imagination. Her bedroom is a sanctuary. The plastic littered throughout the house increases the absurdity. Mister Risso uses objects to fill the gaps left by his wife, while also illuminating the problem of consumption in our society. The gifts that Leo is offered by Mister Risso are used as symbols of overconsumption. Leo’s bedroom is filled to the brim with stuffed animals and toys from Mister Risso, who hopes his misguided efforts to express love through plastic objects. They’re like two ships passing in the night: their distance transcends the physical. Another example is when Mister Risso offers her a plastic dolphin toy as a way to call a truce after the fight that takes place in the early morning. In retaliation, Leo confronts him in public outside of the supermarket. The absurdity allows the audience to cut the distance from one reality to another and to question both. Leo uses inflatable dolphins for her protest, which clearly delivers the message of the film: we cannot avoid the problem of consumption – we are encased in plastic, even when we protest against it.
I’m reminded of my affection for the playwright Eugene Ionesco in *The Bald Soprano* (1950) and *Rhinoceros* (1959). Characters reveal themselves through their mistakes and the unfortunate circumstances of their environments. The absurdity twists the prejudices we hold about life and to question our actions and ourselves. In *The Revolution Of Plastic*, my characters are human, flawed, make mistakes and learn to do better. During Leo’s protest, Mister Risso breaks down the plastic walls that he had created in his heart to reconnect with his daughter. When other characters fall to the ground, the moral of the story becomes tangible. In this scene the absurdity gathers momentum and Leo’s fantasy is vindicated.

Fantasy is used to express the core of the message. It is the realization of Leo’s ideal world. To me, the relationships between fantasy, absurdity and reality helps the viewers understand the piece and gives the film depth. This experimental approach is part of the aesthetic of the film: from the mood and tone to the setting. Set design was a useful tool in defining my style. I was able to make both Leo and Mister Risso’s worlds come to life. Props like the laundry detergents color my dark sense of humor. I developed a look that gives clues to the characters’ histories. Close-ups of various set dressings and wardrobe accessories inform the audience of their personalities, the kinds of relationships they have. We can see that both are similar yet something separates them. We are completely immersed within Leo’s world: her point of view. Mister Risso’s point of view is only present in the film during the protest when he looks behind him towards the supermarket. The choice of close-ups references the filmmaking of the director Lynne Ramsay. In most of her movies, close-ups are essential to the story and give a stylistic look that I particularly enjoy. The film *Gasman* (1998) was a source of guidance during this process. The film is a series of close-ups that provide information about the little girl’s feelings and the envi-
ronment within her family. Small symbolic nuggets provoke suspense and add a touch of mystery to the protagonists’ actions. Viewers feel as though they are living the experiences with the protagonists. In *Gasman*, I also like the under-exposed look: it sets a dramatic tone for the film. In *The Revolution Of Plastic*, lighting was used to introduce the characters’ environments. Working with the Director of Photography, Tatiana Stolpovskaya, we contrasted the kitchen and the dinner area with a low but sharp exposure at the beginning when the two characters are together. Juxtaposed with Leo’s bedroom, which has a soft and gentle exposure. To give texture, we added blue lighting for when a child was on the screen, which gives an oceanic and relaxing environment. We also highlighted the collection of laundry detergents on the counter with additional lights in order to present Mister Risso’s affection for his detergents (fig.2).

![Fig.2 : Carvalho, Cait. Set of the kitchen scene. May, 2018.](image)

Color was another essential element of the film’s style. It is an efficient way to contrast Mister Risso and Leo’s worlds. Leo’s color is blue: a color that signifies hope. Mister Risso’s
color is red: a color that signifies anger. Leo’s blue is pastel and soft. Blue can be found everywhere, which highlights the absurdity of the film. Mister Risso’s red helps define his personality and what his character stands for in Leo’s mind. The color red is known for the impact it can have on the behaviors of animals. The red in his jacket and the logo with the red, overweight whale symbolizes Willy supermarket, the place that Leo hates the most (fig.3). Red signifies Leo’s anger and the call to action she feels in her heart. The living room where Mister Risso spends a lot of time is colorless and de-saturated. In the morning fight scene, we created moods according to the emotional state of the characters: we started with cooler colors (blue and green) to represent Leo’s personality who leads the fight, then warmer but opaque colors to represent Mister Risso’s authority and his plastic world.

*The Revolution of Plastic* is an auditory experience as well as visual. The sound design was crucial. I used several sounds effects in this film, all of which were free to download from YouTube. Sound design creates a structure for the film, particularly the sound of the ear signal. This sound signifies to the viewers that Leo is having a fantasy. It appears three times in different
part of the film, like a sonic beacon. Within the sound mix, I added sounds of dolphins swimming and calling out under water. Combining the ear signal and the dolphins’ call adds a complex sonic experience to Leo’s daydream. In the final scene, the sound that can be heard is the sound of dolphins calling out repeated over and over again. It feels as though they are musical instruments, similar to didgeridoos. It is used to lull characters into a trance. I also added the sounds of plastics scraping one another to accompany Leo’s most intense feelings. Background noises complete the actions of the characters and are used to give rhythm and pace to the film. In addition, these ambient sounds work like dialogue during actions and transitions. I removed some dialogue to let the viewers understand the characters’ actions. Silent shots are used as a pause, a moment of reflection.

THEESIS PRODUCTION PROCESS

The making of the film has been a complete (and quite intense) experience. *The Revolution Of Plastic* is my first fiction film with a script. During my time in the IMA program I wrote treatments and unofficial scripts, but they didn’t follow the “rules” of screenwriting. I started to work on this script as a student of David Riker’s *Write a Short Film*. First, I developed different stories revealing characters’ rebelling by attacking people in the street or supermarket products directly. It ended with a protest in front of a supermarket. The protest plays out like an artistic performance that heavily refers to the “happenings” of the 50’s and 60’s. Artists of that generation were using objects and metaphors that symbolized over consumption within society. Tires, food, trash: nothing was sacred. They also performed in public spaces and in very specific loca-
tions like prestigious galleries and in front of significant monuments. Leo chose ten inflatable dolphins in front of a supermarket (fig.4).

![Photo](image.png)

Fig.4: Delcourt, Elisabeth. Behind the scene of the protest with Lois Ruben, the guard Mursi Layne, Mister Risso Jared Barron and the crowd. June, 2018.

The focus was then adjusted to center on the relationships between characters and how they reveal themselves through actions. But it was difficult to find a way that clearly illustrated why Leo needs to protest. I worked on different approaches for this process for several months with my main advisor Andrew Lund. I am so grateful to have been able to collaborate with such a great team. They taught me how to write in the correct format for short films and how to build a climax. I also learned valuable screenplay techniques, like ways in which to make the message more concise and clear. The shoot follows the concept of the script to a “T.” It was my responsibility to ensure that we had all the elements in hand for the final piece.
Shooting was my favorite part, from pre-production to the last day of the shoot. During pre-production, I first designed the sets for the film. I made labels for detergents and consumption products on Illustrator and Photoshop (fig.5), where I created ridiculous brands, sprinkled with puns and jokes. I spent a lot of time collecting props with Cait Carvalho, my assistant and fellow IMA student. For the cast, I was lucky to be able to work with the Lee Strasberg Institute, an acting school in Manhattan. There I found my heroine, Lois Ruben, who was a student of mine when I was a camera assistant in her class. Lois is from Switzerland and we could speak in French. I also found the other young actresses, the guards and parts of the crowd from the same school. The actor who played Mister Risso also performed in my latest mockumentary, “The Hopefuls.”

In terms of crew, I worked with Tatiana Stolpovskaya on the cinematography and Cait Carvalho also assisted me on set. We worked together in “The Hopefuls” and I was lucky enough to have them by my side for this project. Sergei Kriskov and Zoya Baker were the sound opera-
tors. Evgenia Kovda, also student in the IMA program, helped during several shoots as Tatiana’s camera assistant. Shooting began on May 5th and ended on June 24th. Three days of shooting took place in Cait’s apartment and five days of shooting took place outdoors. We shot on many different locations: in the street for the school scene, the parking lot of a Food Bazar supermarket for the gift-giving scene, a private parking lot for the protest and two different beaches for the beach scenes (fig.6).

![Image of shoot]

Fig. 6: Esse, Madeline. Shoot of the fantasy beach scene with Marine Brun-Franzetti, Cait Carvalho, Sergei Kriskov and the children actresses. June, 2018.

The most difficult part was coping positively when the weather wasn’t in our favor. We had to postpone three shoots in May, but luckily cast and crew members were flexible and understanding. The second most difficult part was getting shoots done on time. There was an immense amount of pressure during most shooting days because I wanted to get a lot of shots done in a short amount of time. We had limited time with Leo, who couldn’t stay on set for more than six
hours. The restrictions on time were the most stressful part and sometimes came with consequences. The lack of crew definitely affected our schedule. However, Tatiana did an amazing job, keeping everything on track by setting lights and the camera at the same time without assistance.

The most important lesson that I’ve learned from shooting is the importance of assembling a complete team (fig.7). For instance, a permanent camera assistant and production assistant would have made a huge difference. And to make shorter shot lists when time is limited.

![Image of a film crew](image)

Fig. 7: Delcourt, Elisabeth. Shoot of the parking lot scene with Marine Brun-Franzetti, Tatiana Stolpovskaya, Cait Carvalho, Evgenia Kovda, Macha Tsarenkov, Sergei Kriskov and the actress Stella Ruben. June, 2018.

Overall, I am grateful for this experience and it has reinforced my desire to be a film director. I feel lucky that I was able to work with such wonder professionals who were dedicated to the project.
Post-production was two intensive weeks of failures and short naps. At the end of the last shoot, we realized that we had lost almost half of the footage from the previous shoots. We also discovered problems in several bits footage: red frames from our shoots in June, which we thought could be solved in post. When we reviewed the footage, we noticed that the red frames were dropped frames: information missing in the files. The issue originated from two SD cards that couldn’t handle the BlackMagic Camera speed. Since this realization, my challenge has been to use the unscathed footage and some of the affected files to make the story concise and clear enough for the audience. I was happy to see that my tenacious attitude of repeating actions on set until perfection was achieved saved the film! At first, I edited the film with a lot of jump cuts to create a style that was harmonious with the missing bits of footage, but it affected the pace of the film. The second rough cut has less jump cuts and needs smoothing out.

AUDIENCE AND EXHIBITION

*The Revolution Of Plastic* adopts an experimental approach to present a social and political issue that concerns everyone. During the first screening, I wanted to get feedback from people around me who have different backgrounds, to ensure that the message of the film is clear, despite the experimental approach. Some viewers of my previous film “The Hopefuls” didn’t fully understand the meaning of the film, or the various layers of lectures resulting from irony and political involvement. That failure pushed me to make *The Revolution Of Plastic* even more reachable.
Once a satisfying version of the film is cut together, I will create a solid Press kit, where I will clearly express the message of the film for the audience. The audiences I want to reach are the younger generations including millennials. The ten year-old heroine is a perfect model for change because she doesn’t hesitate to shake up trouble and her voice has an impact on the “adult” world. First, I will submit my film to international festivals dedicated to emerging filmmakers and international students as well as ecological issues. I will also reach out to schools to see if they can screen my film during festivals, events or classes. Newspapers and blogs that promote artists discussing environmental issues and the impact of plastic are also on the list. It will be interesting to reach out the Art World and to connect with curators and galleries who specialize in experimental and emerging cinema. This is a great opportunity to learn about promotional strategies and how to distribute the film by contacting organizations like Kanopy. It will also be a good film to use as material for working towards artist residencies, grants and film productions companies.
Bibliography


Filmography


*Small Deaths.* Directed by Lynne Ramsay. UK: National Film and Television School (NFTS), 1996.


