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THE VOID

VOID

A GASPAR NOÛF FILM  
8928-73 7488



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# ENTER THE VOID

## A FILM BY GASPAR NOE

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## SYNOPSIS

Oscar and his sister Linda are recent arrivals in Tokyo. Oscar's a small time drug dealer, and Linda works as a nightclub stripper. One night, Oscar is caught up in a police bust and shot. As he lies dying, his spirit, faithful to the promise he made his sister - that he would never abandon her - refuses to abandon the world of the living. It wanders through the city, his visions growing evermore distorted, evermore nightmarish. Past, present and future merge in a hallucinatory maelstrom.

# INTERVIEW GASPAR NOE

## Where did the inspiration for this project come from?

I grew up with an atheist education, but towards the end of adolescence, when you start smoking joints, you also start asking yourself questions about death and the existence of an eventual afterworld. Even though I've never participated in any religious faith, I started to get interested in books to do with reincarnation, *Life after Death* by Raymond Moody in particular, and I had this whole crazy idea of what could happen to me when I die. This fear of death dies down as you get older, but my initial ideas about making a film having to do with what happens after the death of the main character came from that time. Later, when I was around 23, I watched *Lady in the Lake* (Robert Montgomery, 1947) on mushrooms. It's a film shot entirely from the point of view of the main character and, under the effect of the psilocybin, I was transported into the TV and into Marlowe's head, even though the film was in black and white and subtitled. I thought that the technique of filming through the eyes of a character was the most beautiful cinematographic artifice there could be and that the day I made a film about the afterworld, I would film through the subjective vision of the character. Years

later, the opening sequence of Kathryn Bigelow's *Strange Days* confirmed the effectiveness of this filmic tool for me. So this is an idea I've had for a while, before *Carne* or *Seul Contre Tous*. I've written it over the past fifteen years and I couldn't even tell you how many drafts I've done. The first were much more narrative and linear, while the later drafts were much more abstract and euphoric. *Irréversible* was kind of a trial run for this project, where I tested ideas with flying cameras and long takes.

## What's the link between drugs and death?

Books tell stories where people have hallucinations at the moment of their death, linked to the secretion of DMT in their brain. This molecule is a substance that is the source of dreams, and, apparently, a massive discharge of DMT can occur in the brain during an accident or when one dies. It's the same molecule that we absorb in our systems when we take ayahuasca, the magic Amazonian drink... I've never experienced clinical death, nor been in a coma, and I don't believe in any kind of life after death. But I liked the idea of making a film about a character who wanted to reassure himself by believing in some kind of

afterworld. As if he needed to embark on one last spiritual voyage, projecting his obsessions, desires and fears along the post-mortem path described in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

## Speaking of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, was the book a direct source of inspiration? Is this film a loose adaptation or variation?

In the description of the afterworld in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, there is definitely a voyage, a process with several stages that leads up to the final stage: reincarnation. But inside, the visions and the nightmares that are supposed to reveal the psyche, or past life, of the dying individual, aren't described. The "Book" is very abstract, very colorful and very poetic. This parallel world, where the spirit, which has now left the body, floats for a long time, is described as a reality as illusory as the world of the living. Lots of people have been inspired to write fiction by this book (in particular Philip K. Dick), but it was also used to guide people through collective LSD-induced psychedelic voyages, as Timothy Leary did in the 70s. While the book is a religious text, it quickly became a beacon for the hippies I so admired as a kid.

## Why is the main character a young "loser" drug dealer?

He's not a total loser. He's actually kind of a winner up until he loses control of his dick and, by fucking his friend's mother, ends up being turned in to the cops. For most people I know, the principal drive in life isn't drugs at all, it's sex. Selling drugs is more of a way of attracting affection. He's just a young crazy dog who's doing his best to be happy in life. And I think this is something that is universal to us all.

## Was it this way in the original screenplay? Did you consider using other kinds of characters, with different pasts?

No. I wanted to make him an average character from the beginning, the most normal possible. Neither fearful, nor overly courageous, and kind of into sex, like most people we consider "cool". Actually, that's probably why I named him Oscar because it made me think of Gaspar, the person with whom I identify most easily.

## Why have a brother and sister relationship in the film?

As brother and sister, they both came out of the same womb. We get the impression that they are like two sides of a single entity, especially since they are close in age... Even though they're not twins, there is an existential dependence between them. The loss of their parents has already kind of cut their legs out from under them. The death of Oscar or Linda would be like the loss of a limb for the other.

## Was the almost incestuous relationship always present from the outset?

I don't think it's an incestuous relationship. But I do see two young lost souls needing affection. They want to recreate the family they lost and fight to avoid imitating the parental couple they were deprived of. It's not incestuous if you don't appreciate it when testosterone-filled idiots are getting off on your sister while you're trying to recreate the cocoon of your childhood.

## The theme of hate, or of how an accident can suddenly turn one's life upside down and change one's destiny, is very present in your films. Do these themes inspire you or are they simple dramatic devices?

Whether in *Carne* (a misunderstanding that leads to a stabbing), *Irréversible* (an anonymous rape at the turn of a corner) or the car accident in *Enter the Void*, there is the recurring theme that one can lose everything in one second. The fear of losing one's parents is the ultimate fear of every child and, in fact, it's a dramatic device that anyone should be able to identify with. Once I met a girl who had witnessed her mother's death with her sister in very similar conditions. She convinced me of the benefits of psychoanalysis in these traumatic kinds of cases. When I was very young, I had a taxi accident which, while almost benign in comparison, is still engraved in my memory. But the real dramatic device in this film is the blood bond between the two children, with this impossible promise they've made of mutually protecting one another, even after death.



#### Did you want to film in Tokyo from the start?

The first version of the script took place in the Andes, the second in France and I wrote another version thinking it could take place in New York...

But for me, Japan in the most fascinating country there is and I always wanted to shoot a film there. For this specific project, with its hallucinatory sequences, all requiring very vibrant colors, Tokyo (which, as far as I know is one of the most colorful cities with the most flashing lights on the planet) was the ideal setting. Even if it seemed very complicated at the outset, it was a huge pleasure to film there, and I would be happy to make another film in Japan. Despite the technical complexity of the shoot, the crew was so passionate about the film that even working fourteen hours a day, six days out of seven, I felt like I was having a good time. I rediscovered the energy I had when I was young making short films, but this time with an incredibly talented, ultra-professional crew. Their desire for perfection was as joyous as it was contagious. Later, I filmed with a crew in Quebec that was just as motivated and professional even if their working methods were very different. It's pretty strange to go from a shoot with decadent post-adolescents to a touching shoot with kids.

#### The film uses very complex camera movements...

My biggest obsession when I started preparing the film wasn't knowing who was going to act in it, but who my key grip was going to be. The most complicated part was getting someone who would be talented enough to figure out various ways of attaching the camera to the crane so that it could continually fly through the walls. It seemed like an impossible technical feat. We tried to make prototypes. Finally, we thought of filming in real locations, but we had to reconstruct a lot in the studio because otherwise it was impossible. As a result we had these enormous cranes in the studio and sometimes their movement was limited. I had nightmares where the crane got stuck, every night I dreamt of camera positioning and shot order... Thankfully, we hired a great Japanese key grip who was also very cool. It's really a miracle that the film is such a technical success because every sequence raised a new problem.

#### Does the Love Hotel really exist in Tokyo?

Like the "Void", the Love Hotel was created in a studio. There are many in Tokyo but foreigners aren't really welcome and everything is written in Japanese. I based my research on books and photos of Love Hotels, accentuating the psychedelic side.

#### How long was the shoot?

Three months in Tokyo, then four weeks in Montreal for the childhood scenes. At first, I was thinking of a city like New York where I spent a part of my own childhood. So it felt natural that their childhood take place there. But for reasons having to do with work legislation issues, we finally chose Canada because we could shoot for many more hours a day. In the USA, it would have taken us eight weeks instead of four.

#### Were the dialogues written or did you have them improvised, as you did in *Irréversible*?

Contrary to *Irréversible* where there was a three-page script, we had a one hundred page script, but with very little dialogue... Because it's a very visual project, every last detail had to be accounted for, up to the color of the clouds, to help people visualize a film that seemed extremely abstract on paper. So I wrote all the details, all the camera movements. Then, very often during the shoot, I invited the actors to add their own dialogue and actions once we had the desired take in the can. Dialogues are always best when they are natural. In fact, if today the film is longer than two hours, it's because the sequences happen in natural time. If we try to accelerate this natural time, we get results that are too informative and situations that fail to fully communicate the desired effect.

### How did you cast the film?

The challenge was to find unknown actors, but not necessarily amateurs, because, for the role of Linda for example, I wanted to have a girl who was able to scream or cry on command, since the film has a number of melodramatic sequences. I saw young actresses, non-professionals and models. Then, in the United States, I found Paz de la Huerta who I liked more than the others. Then I needed to find a brother who physically resembled her, because I can't stand movies where the brother and sister don't look alike. Oscar (Nathaniel Brown) and Alex (Cyril Roy) aren't actors at all. The thought of acting in a film had never even entered their minds. They're easy-going people, they have a good time in front of the camera and I don't think there was a single moment where either of them felt they were working. Paz, however, was definitely conscious of the fact that she was interpreting a role.

### How did Nathaniel Brown take the news that we would never see his face?

For the role of Oscar, whose face we never see, I would have definitely had to deal with narcissistic fits had I taken an actor. So I picked someone who wants to be a director and who was enchanted with the idea of participating in a shoot and who was invited to bring ideas if he wanted to. He is very intelligent and was excellent on the set. During one subjective vision sequence when I was very tired, I even proposed that he shoot the sequence in my place. I met

Nathan about ten days before the beginning of the shoot. He was selling T-shirts in Brooklyn. A week later, he was a "film star" in Japan. Cyril is a French guy from Tokyo who is as crazy as he is cool. He was accompanying one of his friends to the casting we had for foreigners living in Tokyo. He came because he was a fan of *Seul Contre Tous* and *Irréversible* and wanted to talk to me. He loves to talk... I put him in front of the camera and all of sudden I finally saw the character I had been looking for for so long.

### How would you define the film's genre?

Psychedelic Melodrama.

### Did you always have this psychedelic idea in mind?

Even if I really like Alan Clark, Peckinpah, Fassbinder or certain directors that represent existence with a certain amount of cruelty, this time I wanted to make a hallucinatory film with colors and images, something hypnotic and dreamlike where the visual beauty and the sensorial overpower the factual. Without wanting to compare myself to these geniuses, this time I thought more of certain sequences in Kubrick's *2001* or of Kenneth Anger's work. Even if it's often a question of getting high, it's not a film about getting high, but about the idea of existence as a drifting boat with no port of arrival. The main subject of the film is rather the sentimentality of mammals and the shimmering vacuity of the human experience.

### With regards to Pierre Buffin's involvement in post-production, how many shots were filmed then modified and how many were filmed in visually creative psychedelic ways?

The film is in three parts and deals with three narrative systems, each linked to the deformation of perception. The idea was to reproduce altered states of consciousness using cinematographic means, and to get as close as possible to reproducing human perception, even during sleep, pain, etc. When we get to the thirtieth minute, Oscar finds himself in the second state and starts to experience hallucinations that continue up until the end of the film. When we did "mental" special effects, it was like improvising a concert without ever having been the conductor of the orchestra, or ever having played an instrument: you depend totally on the person who picks the musicians and have to be able to harmonize their work. In the beginning, a certain musical "taste" is there, but the instruments are in the hands of others. And with Pierre Buffin and his teams, I know that I couldn't be in better hands.

### How does one communicate mental images?

I did a lot of research watching films. I watched a ton of shorts, clips, read books and looked at paintings, put together a whole visual file and a very complete collection of excerpts (from *Tron to 2001* or Peter Tscherkassky's short films, for example), that gave an idea of the type of film I wanted to make. After we filmed the shots, we gave them to graphic design artists and animators and tried to recreate the desired effect with the real images.





### Was the project hard to finance?

It was pretty easy to put the images of the film together, but much more difficult to put it on paper and finance it. There were a bunch of false starts with different producers at a time when the film was technically impossible to make. In the end, I'm happy that the film took a while to get off the ground because thanks to the technical evolutions that have taken place since, and the skills of Pierre Buffin and his team, the film is now possible to do in a credible way. Had I made it eight or ten years ago, it would have come off as a little campy and theatrical.

So the most difficult part of the film, more than the actual shoot, or the editing or post-production, was to find the money and to convince people to shoot a film in Tokyo with a large budget, erotic sequences and without known actors, with the added risk that it may not be suitable for viewers under 16 years old...

Thankfully, Vincent Maraval at Wild Bunch did everything to get the ball rolling. He's the one who introduced me to Marc Missonnier and Olivier Delbosc, the producers at Fidélité. Pierre Buffin later became their associate and co-producer of the film.

### What is your feeling about the film and about presenting it at Cannes when it's not completely finished yet?

I think I'm in good company, and I'm happy with the result, which is much more intense than I thought was possible at the beginning. I know there's still work to be done, but I already like the film. After Cannes, the structure of the story will stay the same, but the sensorial, visual, and auditory elements of the film will be accentuated. There are a number of layers of visual degradation and a bunch of little details that will make it even more psychedelic and hypnotic. Presenting a film when it's not in its definitive form is more frustrating than risky, but to say no to the Cannes Film Festival would be like shooting myself in the balls. And that's something that, for both me and for my producers, is entirely out of the question! So, in Cannes, the most flagrant way of indicating to all those that won't read this press kit that the film is not in its definitive form is to not put credits on it. And whoever knows me well, knows how much I like making credits!

*Interview by Nicolas Schmerkin*

# CAST

**NATHANIEL BROWN** OSCAR  
**PAZ DE LA HUERTA** LINDA  
**CYRIL ROY** ALEX  
**EMILY ALYN LIND** LITTLE LINDA  
**JESSE KUHN** LITTLE OSCAR  
**OLLY ALEXANDER** VICTOR  
**MASATO TANNO** MARIO  
**CARY HAYES** BRUNO  
**SARA STOCKBRIDGE** SUZIE  
**SAKIKO FUKUHARA** SAKI  
**NOBU IMAI** TITO  
**EMI TAKEUCHI** CAROL  
**JANICE SICOTTE-BELIVEAU** MOTHER  
**SIMON CHAMBERLAND** FATHER

# CREW

**DIRECTOR** GASPAR NOÉ  
**SCREENPLAY** GASPAR NOÉ  
**VFX ARTISTIC DIRECTOR** PIERRE BUFFIN  
**VFX SUPERVISOR** GEOFFREY NIQUET  
**VFX PRODUCER** NICOLAS DELVAL  
**DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY** BENOIT DEBIÈ  
**CAMERA** GASPAR NOÉ  
**KEY GRIP** AKIRA KANNO  
**CAMERA ASSISTANTS** YASUSHI MIYATA  
JACQUES BERNIER  
JIMBO HIDEAKI  
TOSHIO HANAOKA  
**ASSISTANT DIRECTORS** MICHAEL WILLIAMS  
MASAHIRO HONDO  
LUCIO TOMARO  
**LOCATION MANAGERS** GASPAR NOÉ  
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JÉRÔME PESNEL  
THOMAS BANGALTER  
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BRAHIM CHIOUA & VINCENT MARAVAL - WILD BUNCH  
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GASPAR NOÉ - LES CINÉMAS DE LA ZONE  
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**SOUND MIXERS** NICOLAS LECLERQ - PARANOÏD FILMS  
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**ART SUPERVISOR** EURIMAGES  
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FILMFÖRDERUNGSANSTALT (FFA)  
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