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# WENDE SNIJDERS ZURICH

DIRECTOR  
SACHA POLAK

SCRIPT  
HELENA VAN DER MEULEN



WENDE SNIJDERS

SASCHA ALEXANDER GERSAK

BARRY ATSMA

MARTIJN LAKEMEIER

casting REBECCA VAN LINEN, TANJA SCHUH, SARA DE VRIES-VINCK, MARTHA MOJET, make-up FRANÇOISE MOL, costume design SARA HAKKENBERG, sound MIROSLAV BABIC, sound design MARKUS KROHN, head of sound MICHAEL KACZMAREK, composer RUTGER REINDERS, editor AXEL SKOVALD, RUELOFS NCE, production design JORIEN SONT, director of photography FRANK VAN DEN EEDEN SBC, I.N.C., line producer CHRIS JORNA, production consultant NICKY TUŠKE, post-production supervisor MAARTEN DE GRAAF, coproducer KARSTEN STOTER, BENNY DREHSEL, DRIES PHYPY, JEAN-Claude VAN HUCKEGHEM, MARINA BLOK, SIMON OFENLOCH, producer MARLEEN SLOT, script HELENA VAN DER MEULEN, director SACHA POLAK.

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# ZURICH

2015, The Netherlands, Germany, Belgium  
Duration: 89 minutes

**Director: Sacha Polak**

**Script: Helena van der Meulen**

**Producer: Marleen Slot**



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## Cast

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Nina	Wende Snijders
Matthias	Sascha Alexander Gersak
Sven	Barry Atsma
Hitchhiker	Martijn Lakemeier
Paco	Aäron Roggeman

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## Crew

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Director	Sacha Polak
Script	Helena van der Meulen
Producer Viking Film	Marleen Slot
D.O.P.	Frank van den Eeden SBC   NSC
Production design	Jorien Sont
Editor	Axel Skovdal Roelofs NCE
Composer	Rutger Reinders
Head of Sound	Michael Kaczmarek
Sound design	Markus Krohn
Sound	Miroslav Babic
Make-up	Françoise Mol
Costume design	Sara Hakkenberg
Casting	Rebecca van Unen, Tanja Schuh, Sara de Vries-Vinck, Martha Mojet
Production consultant	Nicky Tüske
Line producer	Chris Jorna
Post production supervisor	Maarten de Graaf
Co-producer NTR	Marina Blok
Co-producer ZDF/ARTE	Simon Ofenloch
Co-producer A Private View	Dries Phlypo, Jean-Claude van Rijckeghem
Co-producer Rohfilm	Karsten Stöter, Benny Drechsel

### TECHNICAL DATA

Running Time: 89 Minutes

Format: DCP

Screen Ratio: 1:1:85

Frames/second: 24 FPS

Sound Format: 5.1

Original Version: Dutch with English and German

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## About Zurich

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ZURICH is Sacha Polak's second feature film. The script was written by Helena van der Meulen, who also wrote the script of Polak's first feature film, HEMEL (2012). HEMEL premiered at the Forum during the 2012 Berlinale, where it won the FIPRESCI award. In 2013 the long documentary film NEW BOOBS had its premiere at the Netherlands Film Festival in Utrecht. With the script of ZURICH, Polak was selected for the prestigious Berlinale Residency, which allows directors to spend four months in Berlin to work on their films together with film-experts.

ZURICH is an international co-production between the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium. The film is produced by Viking Film's Marleen Slot in co-production with Rohfilm (Germany) A Private View (Belgium), NTR and ZDF/ARTE. The film was accomplished with support from the Netherlands Film Fund, CoBO, Flanders Audiovisual Fund, the Belgian Taxshelter, Casa Kafka, Mitteldeutsche Medienförderung.

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## Short Synopsis

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In a desperate attempt to leave the past behind, Nina (Wende Snijders) is wandering along Europe's motorways. She meets a German lorry driver, Matthias (Sascha Alexander Gersak), and joins him on his journeys. Nina doesn't reveal much about who she is, though. Slowly it becomes clear that Nina's drive to hang around in the truckers' scene is a result of the pain caused by the ultimate betrayal that has befallen her. ZURICH is a film by Sacha Polak (HEMEL, NEW BOOBS) with Wende Snijders, who makes her feature film debut in this film.

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## Sacha Polak (director)

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### If a cheetah comes to you in your dream

To see a cheetah chasing you in your dream suggests that you may need to be more active in pursuit of your goals. It could also symbolize that something is missing in your life – or that you somehow feel that you are missing the mark as far as your purpose in life goes. Alternatively a cheetah may appear in your dream when you are trying to move on in life and something keeps bringing you back to the same dilemma.

'Once we had wrapped up the writing of HEMEL, Helena and I soon started dreaming about a new film. The development process of HEMEL went smoothly and we definitely wanted to continue our cooperation. HEMEL is about a motherless child. ZURICH is about a childless mother.'

### Abandoning your own child

Nina is played by Wende Snijders. Who Nina really is (before Boris's death) is something we barely see in this film. Nina is traumatised right from the start. Who is this woman, who is capable of

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abandoning her own child? I think this film will give rise to moral questions. We are probably more used to the idea of a man abandoning his children than a woman. I want to portray a woman who deeply loves her daughter but Boris's betrayal and her inability to mourn, cause her to become a threat to Pien. What she really wants is simply to disappear because she's been swept from her feet and can't look after her daughter any longer. I approached this film like a dance film. A film aimed at portraying a feeling from the subconscious. The feeling of wanting to disappear and of not being able to cope with responsibility any longer.

### **Two parts**

ZURICH has been split up into the parts HUND and BORIS. Hund and Boris both die in the film and they are both important to Nina. We've had lengthy discussions about the structure of the film. How we would narrate the story in the correct emotional order. I think this is a story full of suspense and I hope the story will leave the viewer with mixed feelings.

The first part of the film shows a woman who received a heavy blow when her boyfriend died and it considers the question if Nina will be returning home at all or if she'll find comfort in Matthias's arms for good instead. We don't know about the existence of a daughter.

The second part shows the blow caused by the news and the incomprehension it gives rise to. The end actually feels like an end and you can look back later and realise that the end is not the end. The film ends chronologically with the death of Hund. An emotional blow and one that allows her to face Boris's death for the first time. A blow that might bring Nina back to her daughter. Something we deliberately choose not to show. Something for the viewer to fill in.

We've also added scenes with Sven and Paco and without Nina. I did this to try and make ZURICH a broader story by introducing more characters. The film still has to lean on Nina's experiences, though. Therefore, we carefully picked the moments during which we do not see her but do get on with our story. The scene with Paco and his friends at the cemetery may therefore feel a bit odd, because you want to stick with Nina emotionally, but I must say I love such scenes because they create a bit of friction.

### **Berlinale Residency**

In 2012, ZURICH was selected for the first Residency of the Berlinale. Together with five other filmmakers from different countries I was given the opportunity to work on the film in Berlin for a period of four months. I was granted a coach with whom I elaborately discussed the script. This was a very inspiring time for me.

### **About Wende**

Helena showed me the TV-programme '24 hours with...' by Wilfried de Jong, in which Wilfried de Jong and Wende Snijders spent 24 hours locked up in a room together. Wende was changeable and fascinating. The idea to use Wende as an actress gave rise to the plan for ZURICH. We got Wende involved in the script development right from the start. It was quite a risk to let such a heavy role be performed by a singer. For me it was important to find the similarities between Wende and Nina and to let them become one. I thoroughly enjoyed working with Wende. Wende really threw herself right into it. From screaming at the top of her voice to complete self-exposure. She is not afraid to be ugly or vulnerable. We found one another in making things we consider important without making concessions.

### **Biography**

Sacha Polak (1982) graduated from the Dutch Film and Television Academy in 2006 with her short film, TEER, which was selected for several different international film festivals. After this she made the short films EL MOURABBI (2007), DRANG (2008) and ONDER DE TAFEL (2008). In 2009 she

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attended the Directors' Lab at the Binger Filmlab and in 2011 she directed her first feature film, HEMEL. HEMEL had its premiere at the 2012 Berlinale, where it received the prestigious FIPRESCI Award. Sacha spent last year in Berlin, where she was invited by the Berlinale to take part in the Residency Programme to develop ZURICH. In 2013 her personal documentary NEW BOOBS premiered at the Netherlands Film Festival.

### Filmography

- 2006: Teer / Tar (23 min)
- 2007: El Mourabbi (10 min)
- 2008: Drang / Craving (26 min)
- 2008: Onder de tafel / Under the Table (40 min)
- 2011: Broer / Brother (10 min)
- 2012: Hemel (80 min)
- 2013: Nieuwe Tieten / New Boobs (67 min)
- 2015: Zurich (89 min)

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## Wende Snijders (actress)

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When Helena and Sacha approached me for the part of Nina, I felt a bit afraid and so I hesitated at first. I don't necessarily want to be an actress. I want to act while performing a song on a stage, but I've never felt inclined to play a role in a film. Acting really is a profession. However, after I'd seen Sacha and Helena's film HEMEL, I decided to say 'yes'. The things they make are so subtle and true. I said to Sacha: I'm surrendering myself to you completely. You can do with me what you like, but you have to give me confidence because I am far from self-assured when it comes to acting. Film is very intense; it's totally different from making music or theatre. It was an amazing experience for me. Sacha is an excellent director, who is able to give confidence and to create a peaceful environment and who is explicit as to what she wants. Contrary to my own work, in this film I was purely of service to the work of art Sacha is making. I enjoyed being one of many links in a chain and surrendering myself.

I play a woman whose man dies and who finds out he was leading a double life. My character is an interesting one to get my teeth into. She is forced to live through her grief and in order to survive she breaks free from reality. This strongly appeals to me. I've done research for the role and I've thought a lot about Nina's drives to do what she does. We have a lot in common especially where her intuitive way of life is concerned.

### Biography

In ZURICH wende makes her debut as an actress. Wende is a performer and producer of repertoire and shows within both the world of music and theatre. Wende makes shows in which she uses a range of theatrical elements to tell a story, she is always looking for both the tension and the interaction between pop music, electronic music and classical music. Within this framework she seeks a balance between entertainment and experiment. Wende received an impressive number of awards for her work. For her first show she went into French chansons from the fifties and sixties. In 2009 Wende changed course with an English language CD she wrote herself. Her last album is recorded in Berlin with Tilman Hopf and Nackt, producers from the electronic underground scene.

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## Helena van der Meulen (script)

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### Origin

ZURICH is an artistic feature film of the un-Dutch road movie genre. The starting point of ZURICH was creating a leading role that would fit Wende Snijders like a glove. Besides being a wonderful singer with great presence, Wende is also an intriguing and surprising personality, who adopts such an open and (seemingly?) vulnerable attitude that time after time the opposite threatens to be achieved. This inner conflict formed the inspiration for this role and this script. A character balancing between attraction and revolt and creating both intimacy and distance in the audience is something I consider ultimately filmic.

In order to fine-tune Wende's personality with that of Nina, the fictional leading character, as organically as possible and to increase the feeling of authenticity we approached Wende right at the beginning of the script development. This allowed her to grow along with the script, which allowed Wende to put herself in Nina's position and vice versa.

### Narrative structure

The idea for the narrative structure of the film arose from the story we wanted to tell: two parts, in a narrative structure that was reversed.

As a result of the non-chronological order the question 'what exactly happened' remains unanswered until the very end (giving it away would be a spoiler...).

The accompanying reversal of 'cause and effect' is more important, though.

The first part of ZURICH (HUND) shows the consequence of a terrible blow that befell Nina (the effect). The second part (BORIS) happens before the actual blow takes place (the cause). Or rather: the blows – one by fate and the other by her own doing.

That is why the second blow is the heaviest. Both for her and for us.

This emotional climax of the film, which chronologically happens much earlier, takes place at the end of the film, thus forming the climax of the viewing experience.

### Content

The first part of the film (HUND) follows Nina, running away from too heavy emotions. Love, grief, anger and guilt. Lots of guilt. Feelings that are too contradictory to cope with just like that. It needs time. And she claims this time by placing herself outside 'our' time, as it were. She stops taking part in a world that keeps on turning as usual. Nina lets herself be lived until the wound begins to heal and she is able to step back into her own life.

HUND shows the disorientated wanderings of a woman who has been thrown off balance. A woman and mother (though we don't know that yet), who cannot or will not return home. By her own doing (but we don't know that yet, either).

All she has brought along is her voice. That is what she falls back on. The only way for her to start giving room to her emotions is by singing and humming, whispering or screaming.

Why Nina is unable or unwilling to return home is revealed in the second part (BORIS) – in retroaction. This part is no whimsical wandering, on the contrary, it unwinds in an implacable straight line from one dramatic event to the next.

Both parts avoid explaining Nina's character psychologically or otherwise. Without explaining her emotions, let alone judging her behaviour, the film wants the viewer to sympathize with Nina. With room for her own mystery, something inimitable, that makes her unique and for that reason moves us. Just like in real life.

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## Biography

Helena van der Meulen has written many international acclaimed scripts like TOT ZIENS (Heddy Honigmann 1995; Bronze Leopard in Locarno), TUSSENLAND (Eugenie Jansen 2004; Tiger Award IFFR), BLUEBIRD (Mijke de Jong, 2004; Glass Bear for Best Youth Film at Berlinale Generation), MY SISTER (Marco van Geffen, 2006; selected for the Golden Palm Competition for Short Films in Cannes), and JOY (Mijke de Jong, 2010; selected for the Berlinale Generation programme). Helena was nominated on two occasions for the LIRA Script Award (TUSSENLAND, Best Script 1998-2002 and BLUEBIRD, Best Script 2002-2006). The most recent adaptation of her work HEMEL (Sacha Polak, 2012) was awarded with the FIPRESCI Award at Berlinale Forum.

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## Viking Film (producer)

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Viking Film is the Amsterdam based filmproduction company founded in 2011 by Marleen Slot. International in scope, Viking Film wants to make high-quality films for both Dutch and international audiences with a special focus on arthouse, children films and animation films.

Viking Film finished the feature films ZURICH from director Sacha Polak (selected for Berlinale Forum 2015) and THE SUMMER OF SANGAILE by Alanté Kavaïté (selected for Sundance Competition and Berlinale Panorama 2015, Eurimages) feature documentary NEW BOOBS (Sacha Polak) and the co-production LEONES by director Jazmin Lopez (selected for Venice Film Festival 2012).

At the moment Marleen is working on feature films MONK from Ties Schenk (Cinemart 2014), BULL DOWN! by Gabriel Mascaro and VITA & VIRGINIA (Sacha Polak). Marleen worked as a producer at Lemming Film for many years, she is part of EAVE and member of the board of ACE and Film Producers Netherlands.

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## Beta Cinema (World Sales)

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Beta Cinema has established itself as a "boutique-operation" for independent feature films with strong theatrical potential. Beta Cinema's philosophy is to keep its selective acquisition policy of 10 to 12 titles per year in order to fully develop the theatrical potential of each title according to its individual character.

Beta Cinema's portfolio includes outstanding productions like the international box office hit "The Physician", Berlin 2014 Silver Bear-winning "Stations of the Cross", Berlin 2013 Golden Bear-winning "Child's Pose", Academy Award 2011-nominated "In Darkness", Cannes 2008 Jury Prize-winning and Academy Award-nominated "Il Divo", Academy Award 2007-winning "The Counterfeitors", Academy Award 2007 nominated "Mongol", Academy Award 2006-winning "The Lives of Others" and the Academy Award 2004-nominated "Downfall".

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