

Noah Baumbach Dialogue with Scott Foundas

Scott Foundas:

We're here at the Walker Art Center for a dialogue with Noah Baumbach. From his 1995 debut *Kicking and Screaming*, through the Oscar nominated *The Squid and The Whale*, his screenplay collaborations with Wes Anderson and his latest *Frances Ha*, Noah Baumbach has emerged as one of the singular cinematic storytellers of his generation. His is a world of teenagers wise beyond their years. Adults who sometimes still act like teenagers, writers and intellectuals who think from the head first and the heart second, all of them rendered by Baumbach in richly human comic dimensions.

Scott Foundas:

As the great filmmaker Jean Renoir said, "Baumbach continues to show us everyone has his reasons." I'm Scott Foundas, chief film critic for *Variety*. We now begin our dialogue with Noah Baumbach.

Scott Foundas:

I want to thank Noah for joining all of us here tonight. I hope some of you had a chance to catch up with some of his films in the last few days that you might not have seen. I want to start by asking you a little bit about your own early memories of cinema and discovering cinema and to what extent that was formed by the fact that your parents were both writers, both people who wrote film criticism at various times. Your mother was the film critic for *The Village Voice* for many years. How much that may have influenced what you saw or how you thought about movies as a child?

Noah Baumbach:

Yeah. I guess, in some ways, my childhood was a series of either rebellions or total acceptance of what my parents were, not unlike anybody, really. It was all with movies because there was a time where I think right when I was 9 or 10 and I started to get really into movies. I was aware because my parents would ... I think it's too young to know that *Rules of the Game* is one of the greatest ones of all time that you shouldn't know that that exists yet.

Noah Baumbach:

I was rejecting that idea. I was just starting to see R rated movies. I was really into *The Jerk* and *Stripes* and anything R, *Animal House*.

Scott Foundas:

Of course.

Noah Baumbach:

There was ...

Scott Foundas:

Clearly, Ivan Reitman was a formative ...

Noah Baumbach:

It was. That was the thing because then my parent ... because I had this, like I knew what the auteur theory was, which again at nine you shouldn't know what the auteur theory is. It's just being excited that images flicker and move.

Noah Baumbach:

I was into Ivan Reitman. I would embrace the auteur theory of Harold Ramis, Ivan Reitman, John Landis and fight with my parents about it. My parents also were cool because I think they, particularly my dad and I, saw a lot of these movies. Also, because the R thing again was a big thing because I wasn't allowed to see R rated movies until I lived in Park Slope in Brooklyn. There was a theater that had been defunct. It had been a porn theater and then it was just ... it didn't.

Noah Baumbach:

Then suddenly it, like around the time that I was nine, it became ... it was happening again. Now that R movies were local, I could go see them because we could walk to them. Yeah. Yeah. Somehow driving to them was not ... the child shouldn't see these things. Now as local, my father was like, "We could see *The Jerk*." I remember it because I saw *The Jerk*, *Animal House* and I was like, "This is great." Then he took me to *Apocalypse Now* was the third R.

Noah Baumbach:

Then, it was like maybe we hold back. I was using the same terminology of like the auteur theory but talking about Ivan Reitman. Then, later, I started to see that maybe they had a point in some of these. I'll check out John Renoir and see what he's up to. I started to get into movies in a different way.

Scott Foundas:

Do you remember having any inclination at that time that you might want to make movies someday? Did you have any sort of early experiments with doing like Super 8 home movies or videos or that kind of thing?

Noah Baumbach:

I did have..Because VCRs came into, I think, I remember chipping in to finally convince my parents to get a VCR. This was not in *The Squid and the Whale*, but I should have been. I remember my father complaining that my mother had gotten his VCR and I said, "I paid for that VCR with my ..."

Scott Foundas:

Allowance.

Noah Baumbach:

I basically bought the house of the VCR with money I'd saved from grandparents over the years and so we could get. A little later, we got a video camera and I would shoot some videos and then cut them from ... I borrowed my friend, Boe's, VCR and we would ... which was a top loader. Ours went in ...

Scott Foundas:

Yeah. That's right. Front loading was a bit advanced.

Noah Baumbach:

Yeah, I got one slightly later. The remote was still on a cord.

Scott Foundas:

That's right.

Noah Baumbach:

Yeah. If you just pause, you just move it slight down.

Scott Foundas:

It only had pause. At least the first ...

Noah Baumbach:

Yeah. Yeah. No, it's just pause. The first movie I taped was *Caddyshack*. Really, it got to be a talent to know. You could feel that hesitation when the commercial was coming and you'd hit the pause. Sometimes, you get it too soon, you have to get it right back up because they were still in the movie. That rainbow would come across that thing.

Scott Foundas:

Yeah. That's right. That's right.

Noah Baumbach:

I edited my first movie that I shot with my friends from VCR to VCR. By the end, the top loader burnt out. That was the end.

Scott Foundas:

Your friend, Boe, is the co-writer of *Kicking and Screaming* your first movie.

Noah Baumbach:

Yeah. Yeah.

Scott Foundas:

You went to Vassar. You were involved with improv comedy while you were there. When did the idea of sitting down and actually writing a feature script start to happen for you?

Noah Baumbach:

I mean, it happened too early, I think. I think even before college. My father wrote novels also and my mom wrote some fiction and so I think when I was in high school, I was writing short stories and I started writing plays. I think I almost like, it's embarrassing, but if you had asked me then, what do you do? I'd identify myself as a filmmaker.

Noah Baumbach:

I had some idea that that's what I wanted to do. I also at the same time, I didn't know anybody who'd ever made a movie in, I mean, it seems so not possible.

Scott Foundas:

Right.

Noah Baumbach:

I operated with these two tracks. I would like to do this and on some level, I feel like it will never happen. When I was in college, I did want to be a filmmaker, but the technology wasn't really there. I wrote plays in college and I did improv and I acted but it all felt in some ways like preparation for, even at the time, which again, I think it's too early.

Noah Baumbach:

When I look back at it, I think, you shouldn't be thinking this is practice for later. You should be thinking this is what's happening, this is my actual experience. I did plays in college. If I look back at those, there were elements of those plays that started to probably found their way into *Kicking and Screaming*.

Noah Baumbach:

When I got out of college, it really was, Boe and I were both back in New York. He had gone to RISD and I had gone to Vassar and we were back in the city. I remember sitting, we were both living with our parents and he was still ... My mom had left Park Slope, but he was still in Park Slope. We would go up to basically the room, his room, which we'd hung out in my whole childhood and we'd put on Guns N' Roses, User Illusion one and two.

Noah Baumbach:

We started to just say like, what are all the funny things we've said over time with our other friends. That was what became *Kicking and Screaming*.

Scott Foundas:

I think this is probably a question that gets asked a lot about a lot of your movies, but was there a direct analog that the character of Max was based on this person that you knew and the character of Otis was based on this person? Or, was it more of a kind of amalgam?

Noah Baumbach:

In the beginning more so it was like, Otis is Matt. Max is Boe. Grover was kind of me. Skippy was our friend Rob more by default. That changed pretty quickly. I think they started to become other things and meld and we would use other ... Also, the story of *Kicking and Screaming*, which was ... it was called Fifth Year at that time too. Part of me is still, not just because there was a Will Ferrell movie with the same title, but part of me still wishes I'd kept that name.

Noah Baumbach:

The story of *Kicking and Screaming* was so not what we were ... I mean, it was kind of like mentally what we were doing, emotionally where we were doing, but we weren't still at college. The whole milieu was different then and we hadn't gone to college together either. It was fictionalized enough immediately that things started to change pretty quickly.

Scott Foundas:

We'll take a look at a scene. This is from relatively early in the film, but I like it because you get to see the interplay of most of the major characters in the film. There's such wonderful comic performances. For people who haven't seen the film, it is a film about people who have graduated from college but are still sort of lingering around living right near campus and not really sure what they're going to do with their lives.

Scott Foundas:

The two main characters, Max and Grover in this scene, that they've just come back from dropping their other friend, Otis, off at the airport, who's supposed to be going off to graduate school but that proves to be short lived. We'll take a look at this scene from *Kicking and Screaming*.

Max:

God, I have that horrible song stuck in my head. Hum something so I can get rid of it. I don't know that. Hum something else. Beautiful soul. Beautiful beer. Who the hell bought black-eyed peas?

Grover's Dad:

Hi, Grover. It's Dad. Call me. I'm in Boston at the Greenbergs. Did you see the Knicks Bulls exhibition on Saturday? Call me there to discuss.

Grover:

I just spent my last 20 on groceries.

Max:

You're poor.

Grover:

Yeah. Since graduation, I'm poor, you're rich. We are no longer equal.

Max:

My parents are rich. You know what I wish? I wish we were just going off to war. Or retiring. I wish I was just retiring after a lifetime of hard labor. Get down.

Grover:

Why?

Max:

Get down. It's a cookie man. The guy who goes door-to-door selling cookies. I saw him earlier in the neighborhood. He is so hard to say no to. Just stay down. I can't handle him. He'll go away soon.

Grover:

How long do we have to stay down here?

Max:

Go away, cookie man.

Otis:

Cookie man?

Grover:

What the hell are you doing here?

Otis:

I felt antsy. I thought there was more reason for me to stay.

Max:

It's remarkable.

Grover:
Milwaukee and graduate school.

Otis:
No. I'm going to defer my admission. I think I'll move back in with my mom for a while.

Chet:
Hello.

Otis:
Look who I found.

Chet:
Hi, kids. Got you a little back-to-school gift.

Otis:
Great. Dictionary. Hey, I'm going to look up blow job. This is great, Chet, really. Thanks a lot.

Chet:
You're welcome.

Max:
Did you have fun at the airport?

Otis:
Yeah. Yeah. Here. I got you some magazines.

Max:
Thanks.

Grover:
Thanks.

Scott Foundas:
It seems like there were a number of movies around this moment. I guess maybe Cameron Crowe's *Singles* and *Reality Bites* were the most sort of high profile of them that we're all addressing some sort of generational stagnation, people in their 20s who didn't really quite know what they wanted to do with their lives and that sort of thing.

Scott Foundas:
I'm wondering, did you feel that that was something unique to that generation or did you just feel like this was something that was more universal when you were writing about that?

Noah Baumbach:

No, I mean at the time I just thought that it sucked that these other movies came out the same before mine because I was trying to get mine made. Then, I thought, "Oh, man." I feel like that actually happens a lot is that no matter what, I'll think I'm working on something that is interesting to me. Then, somehow along the way, I'll hear about some other projects or something will come out and I'll think, "How? What? Really? Okay. I guess, there is something in the water that I didn't realize."

Noah Baumbach:

I'd been a big *Diner* fan and I thought I wanted to do something like that. Something that felt personal and about friendship and about a real time in life. I mean, I was the same age as these characters. I was a little older when we made it. I was 24, I think, when I made it and 25 when it came out. That's ridiculous.

Scott Foundas:

Yeah. Just after that scene, you have a cameo in the film.

Noah Baumbach:

Right. I'm glad you didn't show that. I would have nixt that if that wasn't me. I think I still had an idea that a movie really is something that needs to be something else. It can't really just be funny things your friend said.

Noah Baumbach:

Of course, that's not only what we did. I think that because I followed that and took it all the way to the end and made the movie, I think that was important for me at the time to sort of realize that I could actually just sort of focus on my concerns and the people around me and that that could be maybe be a movie in instead of something that had more of a traditional plot or something.

Scott Foundas:

This movie premiered at the New York Film Festival, which is not typically thought of as a discovery festival. It's more of a festival that shows movies that were in Cannes and Berlin and all of that. Did that start to open doors for you? I mean, the film had sort of limited theatrical release after that. Did you feel that it got noticed? Did things sort of start to happen for you immediately off of that?

Noah Baumbach:

Yes and no. I think the New York Film Festival, the movie, I mean, some of the backstories, the movie was financed ultimately by a video company.

Scott Foundas:

Trimark, yeah.

Noah Baumbach:

Trimark, which had had a big success with the motion picture *Leprechaun*.

Scott Foundas:

That's right. It became a big franchise for them.

Noah Baumbach:

It did. Yes, they did. By the end, it was like *Leprechaun* was in space. He was in the hood.

Scott Foundas:
That's right. That's right.

Noah Baumbach:
I had a lot of almost new line almost made, there were a bunch of almosts with the movie and it kept falling apart. Trimark, in some ways, I'm indebted [to] Trimark because they really came in and they gave us \$1 million, which was way more than I thought.

Noah Baumbach:
If I was trying to get this movie made now I would just make it for less money on digital and do it, go ... We shot this movie in LA. It was always an East Coast movie and I just ignored the fact that it was LA. I kept just framing out palm trees. I feel like you can tell by the light in the movie, it's so distinctly Los Angeles. Trimark, because he had owned video chains, the guy who owned Trimark.

Scott Foundas:
Mark Amin.

Noah Baumbach:
Yes. Yeah, his first name was Mark, you see where this is going. He realized that there was a big business in just putting things on video boxes that looked scary or *Leprechaun*. Tristar of course was a successful company at the time, so Trimark. Their logo, it was sort of like electronic jaguar or something over a triangle, like a hard triangle. I didn't realize that you could take the sound out of the logos.

Scott Foundas:
Yeah, it had music under.

Noah Baumbach:
Yeah. Yeah. The music was terrible. If you've seen the DVD, it has no sound, because I'd removed it. The theatrical had the sound under it. Because of that, they didn't know what to do with [it]. They had some idea and ambition to be like Miramax or something but I mean they didn't know what that meant, really, or how to do that.

Scott Foundas:
It'd be like Mira Mark.

Noah Baumbach:
Mira Mark, yeah. Yeah. It's the same concept, really, you use names. The movie, I was done with the movie, they tested it. I remember going through the cards and seeing one person, it was like, they were all like this is ... I don't know what I'm watching. This is awful. Then, one was like, this is the best movie I've ever seen. There was one person who was like, "This is great." The numbers don't work that way when they add them.

Noah Baumbach:
They were ready to, I think, just put it on video. It [had] gotten turned down by Toronto and then New York took it. It really changed everything. It was a huge thing for me because I'd grown up in New York and I thought to be in that festival was like a fantasy. It was great. It was a great time and I was so glad to have that. Then, it had a limited

theatrical, but I always felt they didn't really know what to do with it. In some ways, I felt like I wasn't really sure if anyone had seen it.

Scott Foundas:

Yeah. It kind of got your name out there enough that you were able to make another film relatively quickly.

Noah Baumbach:

Right. Right. Yeah.

Scott Foundas:

It was *Mr. Jealousy* not showing in this series but available on DVD. It's, as a movie, I like and I think it has a great sort of a classical farcical premise about somebody who's so jealous of their girlfriend's ex-boyfriend that they send or rather they go undercover as someone else in a therapy group to meet this guy. The psychiatrist is Peter Bogdanovich.

Noah Baumbach:

Yeah.

Scott Foundas:

Between that movie and *Squid and The Whale*, you had almost a decade in which you didn't get anything made, but you were working on various things. What was going on in between those two films? Why was there such a long gap in your career?

Noah Baumbach:

Mr. Jealousy was an interesting experience for me because, in some ways, I hadn't learned the lesson that I said I'd learned just before, which was that I was sort of trying to do a lot of things at once with that movie. I think I was trying to do something more traditional, but I was also ... My impression of that movie, although I haven't seen it in a long time is that it's the things that I would probably still like about it.

Noah Baumbach:

It was also a hard production. I had a hard time with the producers and it kind of never felt quite right to me. Then, it didn't do very well. I think that that sort of set me back in terms of my ability to get something made at the time. That was hard because I was feeling like ... I felt like I was still learning and I felt like I was ... Stupidly of course, I was in my 20s and I felt like, "God, this is all taking so long to have this happen." Looking back at it, I think, it all happened so quickly. It was the opposite was what was happening.

Noah Baumbach:

Then, when this didn't quite go how I wanted it to, I think ... It's not that I was like, "Oh, I've got to sort of figure something out." I really was just trying to get another movie made at the time. Retrospectively, I think, I went through a period of discovering in a more substantial way what kind of films I wanted to make and both who I was as a person and as a filmmaker. Not to sound like too grandiose about the whole thing. I mean, it was a hard time for me because I felt like I'd made two movies and I was 27 and I felt like I was nowhere in some way, which of course wasn't true.

Noah Baumbach:

Retrospectively, I'm glad it happened how it did.

Scott Foundas:

I remember, I think we talked about this once before, but there's a kind of interesting thread in these movies where, in *The Squid and The Whale* you have this scene where Jesse Eisenberg's character performs, "Hey You" by Pink Floyd at the school talent review, passing it off as his own original composition. In *Mr. Jealousy*, Chris Eigenmann plays this kind of self-styled latter day Hemingway character. There's this whole conversation in *Kicking and Screaming* about affectations that become habits.

Scott Foundas:

Just general idea of people trying to be some idea that they have of what they should be or aspiring to be somebody other than what they are. I'm wondering if that's something you're conscious of [having] wanted to write about or wanted to explore where you think that that comes from.

Noah Baumbach:

Yeah, I mean, it's interesting. It's interesting as you say it. Not really, but when I hear it, I'm aware of it. Of course, from the point of view of a 16 year old in *The Squid and The Whale*, there's something very touching about that. It's less touching when you're 40. I suppose you're right. I think, I'm interested in people who ... it's true of Greenberg and it's true of Frances to some degree too of people who have ideas of themselves and what they kind of either want or hope for themselves in their lives and have a hard time digesting the reality of their lives.

Scott Foundas:

Yeah. *The Squid and The Whale* is a movie that at the time, I remember you saying it was your most ... you felt it was your most personal film, but not because it was inspired by your parents' divorce and your own coming of age, but for other reasons that you felt it was the first film you really made in your own voice, in your own language. Talk about what that meant for you.

Noah Baumbach:

Something happened when I was writing, the decision to write the script even and not that it was a moment where I was even aware of that decision, but I just started writing about it. It was revelatory for me that I found myself writing in a way that I hadn't written before. I mean, I was being more honest but I was also ... it was like the closest I've ever felt to like writing as a physical act. I mean, writing in movies is always a [so] boring. It's like why people in movies like writing and then they go, "Yay," when they write something good, because otherwise, how do you know it's any good? You don't.

Noah Baumbach:

I had that feeling when writing that. I felt like, except that it was more visceral and angry. It was like revenge as writing. It wasn't necessarily even revenge on my parents or anything like that because I was very close to my parents and still am. I felt like I was connecting to myself in some way that I hadn't before and that the writing and whatever the distance is between what's in your head and what you're actually typing or writing long hand was just ... it was closer.

Noah Baumbach:

I so often have that. I think I'm walking down the street or I'll wake up and I'll have some idea and I'll write it down. Then, when I take the notebook to the computer later, I can't quite get what was so smart about it. What was so anymore. This was somehow, it was all happening at once, at least in my memory of it. I mean there's also those

days of doing nothing. Yeah. It also then took so long to get made and I kept working on it because it took so long. I had nothing else to do. I just kept working on it.

Noah Baumbach:

When it got made, it was a very low budget and I had 23 days to shoot it. I just knew that this was ... There was a point where I was just like, whatever this move we can get for this movie. I mean, it was budgeted. I remember like the low budget they were like, if you get seven million you can probably make this movie. We made it for like a million and a quarter or something. I just said, "Give me what you have, but what can we get and I will make it."

Noah Baumbach:

I just felt like I had to do it. I kind of put everything I had into that movie at the time. I, both in the writing and in the directing, I think I just felt like this is it. That's what it was for me. I didn't know what it was like for other people watching the movie. It was like, that's all I know. This is it. I'm depleted.

Scott Foundas:

This is a scene from pretty late in the film. I resisted the temptation to show the divorce scene, which is often shown, maybe iconic, at this point. This is quite a bit after the divorce has happened. This experiment in joint custody has been going on with the two boys shuttling back and forth across Prospect Park. This, to me, is like a scene that is worthy of check off in its sort of currents of absurdity and tragedy.

Scott Foundas:

This is a little bit of *The Squid and The Whale*.

Walt:

I dunked my head in that pond in the park.

Joan:

The one near the zoo? Sweetie, that's filthy. I hope you didn't drink any of it.

Walt:

Some may have gotten in my mouth. I tried not to swallow. I shouldn't have broken up with Sophie.

Joan:

Why did you?

Walt:

I thought I could do better.

Joan:

Better how?

Walt:

I don't know.

Joan:

That's good. You miss her.

Walt:

Yeah. I don't see myself as a person who is in this situation. I just don't. I don't see myself this way.

Joan:

This is how it is.

Walt:

Did you ever love dad? Because if you didn't, why did you ever marry him? If you were going to leave him, why did you put us through this?

Joan:

It wasn't planned. When we first met, he was unlike anyone. In Columbus, there was no one like your dad. I had had an affair with a man before your father. He worked at the college bookstore. We used to make love in the stockroom.

Walt:

Mom, I don't want to hear about your affairs, please.

Joan:

I'm sorry. I think, I don't know what I can say to you.

Walt:

You have a way of saying things sometimes in a way I don't want to hear them.

Joan:

I know, chicken. It's something I do. It's a bad habit.

Walt:

Do you remember when we watched Robin Hood?

Frank:

He knocked on my window.

Joan:

Bernard, what are you doing?

Bernard:

Joan, let me ask you something. All that work I did at the end of our marriage, making dinners, cleaning up, being more attentive, it never was going make a difference, was it? You were leaving no matter what?

Joan:

You never made a dinner.

Bernard:

I made burgers the time you had pneumonia.

Joan:
Only after I insisted.

Bernard:
If I had made more dinners, would that have made a difference?

Joan:
I was ready to leave long ago. I just didn't know it then.

Bernard:
I've been giving it some thought. I mean, you called my father at the last minute. Whatever you said something, whatever you said, he thought I could save the marriage. You felt I wasn't aggressive enough. I'll make more of an effort to do stuff. I've been cooking and doing chores at my house. I make veal cutlets, which the boys love. Why don't we all have dinner and talk more about this?

Joan:
I'm sorry. It's just burgers.

Bernard:
I'll sue you, Joan. You know I will. You had an affair for four years with that fucking shrink that ruined our marriage. I can get the kids. I talked to Eddie Goodman works on these cases all the time and I have an open-and-shut case. Frank, Walt get in the car.

Joan:
Sue me? You only wanted joint custody because you pay less child support that way. Because it's cheaper for you.

Bernard:
Walt. Frank.

Frank:
I don't want to go.

Bernard:
I don't give a shit, Frank. Get in the car. Frank.

Walt:
Let him stay. Let him stay.

Bernard:
I'm just asking this one thing.

Walt:
Look, he wants to stay. Let him. I'll go.

Bernard:
Fine.

Frank:
Hold on. You want him tonight?

Walt:
Okay. Thanks.

Frank:
That's all right, my brother.

Joan:
The cat.

Bernard:
I got him. Joan, I got him. I got him. Goddamn it.

Walt:
Dad. Did you see him go?

Bernard:
I'm moving it. Fuck off.

Ivan:
Bernard. You all right?

Bernard:
I had him.

Ivan:
Joan, call an ambulance.

Bernard:
Walt, get in the car.

Scott Foundas:
I remember meeting your father at the New York Film Festival that year and I sort of proudly told him, I was a fan of his short story collection called *The Return of Service*. And he said, "That's not my best work. You should have read," and he mentioned a different collection. I thought it was very much in keeping with the image that I had, but.

Noah Baumbach:
That story of *The Return of Service* too is about him playing tennis with his father.

Scott Foundas:

That's right. There's a great story in there about King Kong as well.

Noah Baumbach:

For another talk.

Scott Foundas:

Exactly. One of the other things that was very different about this movie from your two previous movies was the style of the film, which we can see in that scene, the sort of clipped editing style and the handheld camera, which you take it to an even further extreme in the next movie, *Margot at the Wedding*. Talk a little bit about that, not just the change in what the writing process was like, but your approach to the actual directing and editing of the film.

Noah Baumbach:

Yeah. The idea was that it would be handheld, but as handheld as like to try to really hold it as sort of steadily as possible. Bob Yeoman who shot the movie, also operated and is a great operator. That you would kind of feel a human hand in there but it wouldn't feel ... we never wanted it to do that thing where you kind of show that the camera is moving. Retrospectively, I think, I also needed to try something that I hadn't done before.

Noah Baumbach:

Because I think it freed me up too visually and also as you said in the editing. I mean, I wanted the movie to feel immediate and ... I mean that's sort of easy way to say it as documentary like. It isn't documentary. I mean, you watched that. I mean, that's so written, I think, in a good way. It does give an immediacy. You're in there with them and there are scenes in that movie were really like he would just like walk, like we would shoot it like a master wide shot. Then, in the middle he'd just like walk up and start shooting a single.

Noah Baumbach:

We would use the walkup in the movie. It's kind of weird. A couple times, it felt right when we were cutting it. The cutting, yeah, I think I really ... *Kicking and Screaming*, which you see in the clip before is very ... it's leisurely. Scenes would often end and then you'd stay there and you stay there a little more. I mean even like if you'd seen my first cut, it was like you'd stay there four beats later.

Scott Foundas:

I think that's very common in first films. You still see that.

Noah Baumbach:

Sure.

Scott Foundas:

It's the inability to kill your darlings as they say.

Noah Baumbach:

Yeah. That's true. I think also with that movie, I had this idea that it was always ... it was that thing like when you're with your friends and it's funny because it's boring even. Like you're hanging out for so long that you're laughing at stuff that you don't even know what it is anymore. That was also part of it was that it would ... I remember even a

producer, someone who was in the financing end of it, called me after he saw the first cut and said, "There's a way in movies where you don't actually have to ... if somebody is walking up to a door you can actually cut and then they can be inside the room on the other side."

Scott Foundas:
Yeah.

Noah Baumbach:
I felt like ...

Scott Foundas:
It did take movies a while to get there.

Noah Baumbach:
Yeah.

Scott Foundas:
You seen early films from the beginning of the 20th century that have all of that.

Noah Baumbach:
In 1995, I think, we were pretty much aware of what you could do. I kind of wanted to see them go through the door. That was part of it. I also did cut that movie on film, which was the first and only time I did it. I can't say how I would have, my editing style would have for how I would have cut movies and how do I [had I] kept cutting on film because I don't know. I think just cutting on film, obviously, it's a slower process. It is more leisurely. I think that that probably played into that in some way.

Noah Baumbach:
Yeah, with *Squid*, I really felt like there was something, like I was saying about the writing, just wanted to like ... I would cut people off in the middle of sentences. I would cut scenes off. Even if I had the coverage, I wouldn't use it. I would just crash scenes together. I wanted it to feel like it had this kind of momentum and everything was like that the movie kind of couldn't stop.

Scott Foundas:
Also, I think it's the first film in which you really feel, I think, the characters say very harsh things to one another at many points. Yet, somehow you always feel that there's an undercurrent of genuine affection between the characters but also for the writer, for the characters. I think that it's very easy when people make movies about "unlikable" or unsympathetic characters to say that the filmmaker is misanthropic or that he doesn't like the characters. He or she doesn't like the characters.

Scott Foundas:
Certainly, *Squid*, *Margot* and *Greenberg* are movies about people who aren't necessarily that easy to warm up to, but you do really see their humanity. I'm wondering from your perspective, if you can talk a little bit as a writer, do you feel like you have to be able to do that to get yourself interested in a character? You have to be able to see that dimension in them?

Noah Baumbach:

I don't even consider it. In these characters, I really was writing them how I felt, in a way that I felt was true to them. I don't mean that as a copout. It started to come up like when I would do press on *Squid* and then even more on *Margot* of this notion of that, "Oh, these people are so unsympathetic or bad parents." I got caught up in it even in some cases I would find myself kind of accepting that premise and then trying to talk my way out of it in some way. I was doing a Q&A on *Margot*, somewhere up in the Jacob Burns. I was answering a similar question about *Margot* and I was answering it in a way that I'd found myself falling into this pattern. Somebody in the audience raised their hand and was called on and said, "I don't know what anybody's talking about. This is how people are."

Noah Baumbach:

I was so thankful to him in that moment because I caught myself and realize[d] like, why am I accepting this? That's how I feel. I'm sort of playing along. I didn't feel that way. I wouldn't have made the movie if I felt like ... I don't want to make a movie about unsympathetic people. I want to make a movie about people who I feel like I am interested in and understand. That said, of course, I'm aware of the complications that these people are not that they're ...

Scott Foundas:

Mr. and Miss Congeniality.

Noah Baumbach:

Right. Sure. That people might have reactions to them. I watched that. I hadn't seen that clip in a long time and I really feel for Jeff there. I mean even when he realizes that the claim he made is bogus, he's like, "If I had made more dinners," I mean, I feel for him.

Scott Foundas:

I think the great line there really is when he says I made the burgers when you had pneumonia and she says, only after I made an issue out of it. You should have taken that person from the Jacob Burns Center and taken them on the road with you because we did some Q&A's together for *Margot* where there were incredibly hostile questions.

Noah Baumbach:

The montage would be us be like being run out of town.

Scott Foundas:

Exactly. There were some people like really ...

Noah Baumbach:

Putting our hats on and running with our, yeah, bags, jumping in the train.

Scott Foundas:

Yeah, like *The Music Man*.

Noah Baumbach:

Yeah, we were.

Scott Foundas:

I feel like *Margot* ...

Noah Baumbach:

Except, we didn't have any money with us. We weren't robbing them or anything. We were just.

Scott Foundas:

I feel like that movie maybe because it also kind of coincided with the end of Paramount Vantage a bit. It just never really got the attention it deserved. I think it's probably still maybe you're sort of most under seen and least sort of talked about film or along with *Mr. Jealousy* but it was a movie with stars in it. Nicole Kidman, Jack Black, Jennifer Jason Leigh.

Noah Baumbach:

It's the one that people will say, "I actually liked that one."

Scott Foundas:

It's your *Stardust Memories*.

Noah Baumbach:

Yeah. The compliments start to match the picture. That one is that there's always the person singling themselves out from the rest of the world. Which I appreciate.

Scott Foundas:

This is a movie about a writer who is attending her sister's wedding with her sort of awkward pubescent teenage son. Nearby, just down the road from where the writer, she's having an affair with is living. These are the characters that populate this scene that we're going to take a look at, which was just an irresistible scene to show tonight given the context of why we're all here. Take a look at *Margot at the Wedding*.

Dick:

I'm very interested in your story "Middle Children." The father is a loathsome character, yet we also feel strange sympathy for him.

Margot:

I was really interested in exploring a father daughter relationship. While he clings to her, desperately, he suffocates her really. He also silently resents the responsibility of parenthood.

Dick:

There's this sexualized push-pull with Daphne, which I find ...

Margot:

He craves isolation. I always saw him as someone who so over-identifies with everyone around him that he begins to lose all sense of himself.

Dick:

You make his only recourse to abandon his family, including his beloved daughter.

Margot:
Yes, yes, *that's true*.

Dick:
I write historical fiction, so I don't have to answer to this, but I wonder, for someone who writes so nakedly about family, how autobiographical is this portrait?

Margot:
My father was a loving person. He had his days, of course, but he was devoted to us as children. I would never have written this portrait were it true.

Dick:
I'm interested in how the father could be, in fact, a portrait of you.

Margot:
Why do you assume that it's ... I mean, we all take from life. I had to have our refrigerator repaired the other day at our apartment in Manhattan, and I was alone with this guy. I think he was Puerto Rican. He was sent over by Whirlpool, who I think it is, makes our fridge. Although he did say that he worked for an independent organization that Whirlpool subcontracts. I think he was retarded.

Margot:
There was an anger in him, and suddenly, I became afraid for my life. I called Jim at NYU, and I asked him to come home. I think it was Frigidaire who made our fridge. I'm going to need to take a moment here. You're an asshole.

Scott Foundas:
As a critic, I don't have to answer to this, but no. I think Nicole Kidman's had few finer moments. She's a splendid actress. One of the things that was so startling about seeing her in this film is how much she didn't seem like Nicole Kidman. It wasn't a glamorous turn. She looks like somebody who's trying to make herself look less attractive than she is so she'll be taken more seriously. There's very little actorly device obvious in the performance.

Scott Foundas:
She can sometimes seem perhaps a bit technical as an actress. Here, there's something so earthy about her and about her ... particularly in her scenes with Jennifer Jason Leigh. I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about working with her. I mean, she was really the biggest star you had worked with at that point. If there was sort of a conscious effort to de-movie star her for this performance.

Noah Baumbach:
Nicole is interesting because she is a huge movie star. I think she really likes to hide in the characters. I loved working with her. We do say, I don't know, eight takes or something and she would, each one, it was almost like a physical act with her. It would feel like almost like a sport. My memory of it is like that she would almost sort of like hurl herself into scenes. She would produce all this kind of amazing stuff.

Noah Baumbach:

It was really exciting to direct her because I felt like I had to be as alive to every take as she was so that I could then say, this is working. This is amazing, but maybe not right here. Where you're going here, try to keep going. She really gives herself over to who she's working with, I think, if she trusts them. We had a great experience on the movie. I'd love to do something else with her. I feel like even people's reactions to that character, whatever they were, she never commented on it. She was totally that person.

Scott Foundas:

I mean, looking back, do you have a sense of why this movie did seem to generate such hostility in some viewers, which as we experienced firsthand?

Noah Baumbach:

I don't know. I really don't. I actually don't. I had a hundred theories at the time.

Scott Foundas:

Yeah.

Noah Baumbach:

I think it's a movie if people see it again or watch it now, I think, they might not know either why. In a way, the movie, for me, was almost like stream of consciousness from *Squid in The Whale*. It's probably the only thing to this date that I wrote really ... it really came from an image even. I had this idea of a mom and kid on a train and leaving somewhere and the mother was fleeing. It was more impressionistic than anything else I had done to that point.

Noah Baumbach:

Even, as you were saying, the cutting of it, it's not as evident in that scene. I took stuff that I was exploring with *Squid* and even went further with it. They're not jump cuts, it's just like ...

Scott Foundas:

Scene stop before where you think they're going to end.

Noah Baumbach:

Yeah. It's like every scene you go in the middle of it and you go out before nothing really concludes. I think also if the movie were cut differently, people might've had different reactions to it. I don't think it would be as interesting a movie, but I think it might have given people something to hold on to.

Noah Baumbach:

I think the movie is almost like hard to, maybe, it's like hard to hold on to. A little bit of the making of it, I mean, not the actual shooting of it, it was really fun. I mean, we had a great time making it. The creative process involved with it was, like I said, was more stream of consciousness, I think, than anything I had done up until then and since. The way we shot it too, I mean, Harris Savides who shot it, it was our first movie together.

Noah Baumbach:

Harris passed away recently and I said this. It was actually in his obit in *The New York Times*, but I will say it again, is that I told him I wanted that the movie should feel like when you're in a house in the country with lots of windows where you've spent the day inside and the sun, it's not dark yet, but the sun's passed over the house and it's now dark in the room, but it's still light outside and you don't realize it yet, so you haven't turned on the light. That was like

what I wanted the whole movie to feel like. We did these tests and Harris was like, "I'm thinking these lenses." I think we talked about flashing the film.

Noah Baumbach:

We've talked a lot about Néstor Almendros, the cinematographer who ...

Scott Foundas:

Days of Heaven among many others.

Noah Baumbach:

Yeah. And he shot with Rohmer and Truffaut. When I saw the test, I've never had that experience where I was like, that is exactly what was in my head. I think the movie, we shot it. I mean, it was all photochemical that movie too, which is worth noting now because we color timed it. We used these very old lenses too, so that even I can see it in that scene, like within a scene, there's softness that wasn't in the previous shot, even though we're intercutting probably different takes, but of the same setup. It's just because the lens would be uneven and maybe it was the way where the person was on the ...

Scott Foundas:

Sure.

Noah Baumbach:

The things that, which I really like about the movie because it's so ... it was unpredictable and it got maddening at times too. Sam Levy who shot *Frances* with me, who had worked with Harris who shoot ... he told me this story later, actually I didn't know it, but he was shooting *Wendy and Lucy* at the time. He said Harris called him while we were making *Margot*. He explained all the things we were doing. He said, "Don't do what I'm doing."

Scott Foundas:

Like don't cross the beams.

Noah Baumbach:

Yeah. I was like crossing the beams. It was kind of crazy.

Scott Foundas:

You talked earlier about doing *Kicking and Screaming* in LA and sort of trying to hide LA because it was supposed to be an East Coast movie. The next movie that you make after *Margot* is a film that completely embraces and reveals LA in these gorgeous widescreen compositions, again, care of Harris Savides. Talk a little bit about deciding to do on [an] LA movie, which turns out to be *Greenberg*.

Noah Baumbach:

There were sort of two ideas that went into *Greenberger* [*Greenberg*] or two major ideas. One was to shoot in LA and the other was I wanted to do something that was ... I wanted to do a movie that felt to me like a certain kind of novel that I really like. I mean, I don't know how to say this, but it's like, yeah, where writers that I like have written these sort of portraits of American men at times in crisis or times in their life. It was sort of ...

Scott Foundas:

Philip Roth.

Noah Baumbach:

Phillip Roth has done this with *Portnoy and Zuckerman* and *Sabbath's Theater* and then you had Saul Bellow with *Herzog*.

Scott Foundas:

Sure.

Noah Baumbach:

Rabbit, Run, Updike and *The Sports Writer*. There were this kind of tradition of American novel and they often would have the name of the character as the title. I had that idea with *Greenberg*, it was sort of. The character of Greenberg was sort of something I'd been playing around with. I'd written a play actually that had a character like that that I hadn't really figured out. Then, the other thing is that I wanted to shoot, I had been spending more time in LA. Jennifer, who I was married to was from LA and we were there for stretches of time.

Scott Foundas:

You learned to drive.

Noah Baumbach:

Not at this point. I learned to drive later after *Greenberg*. I think I humiliated myself into learning to drive by making *Greenberg*. Actually, it's a funny story. When I was talking to Ben Stiller about [the] movie and he was going to do the movie, but I think he wanted to sort of fill [feel] me out and talk more about the character. We were talking about the character and then he said, "Okay," and he was laughing and he was sort of really into it.

Noah Baumbach:

He said, "There's just one thing, there's nobody who doesn't know how to drive and can't swim. That is just too pathetic. Nobody is that pathetic," to which, of course I said, "I don't." Fortunately, this was on the phone, so I didn't have to see his face. Oh God, what did I just do? I wanted to shoot a movie, but really because LA is a really interesting city. There's a tradition of LA movie, I mean, the sort of.

Scott Foundas:

Yeah.

Noah Baumbach:

I was thinking about Paul Mazursky. I was thinking about Altman. I was thinking about these movies that really kind of get the city even if their genre or like they somehow get the city.

Scott Foundas:

The city feels like it's a character in the film.

Noah Baumbach:

Yeah. Those were the two elements, that and the character Greenberg, I guess, three elements that were sort of what I put forth for myself in writing the script.

Scott Foundas:

I feel this movie was for Ben Stiller a little bit like *Margot at the Wedding* was for Nicole. He just seemed unmasked in a way or real in the film in a way that I think you don't often see him because so much of what he does are these sort of big family comedies like the *Meet the Parents* movies and *The Night At The Museum* movies where he's basically playing kind of a one dimensional neurotic and it's very lucrative in terms of box office, maybe not that interesting for him as an actor for the audience.

Noah Baumbach:

He wanted to do something less lucrative.

Scott Foundas:

Yes. This was also of course the beginning of what's turned out to be a very fruitful, creative partnership for you with Greta Gerwig, who stars in the film as Greenberg's sort of on again off again kind of love interest to Florence who is the assistant of his brother who goes on vacation and Greenberg comes out from New York to house it. This is a scene from rather late where they've had various ups and downs and finally the relationship sort of builds to this moment. I think both Ben and Greta are really terrific in this. I'm going to take a look and then ask a little bit more about working with Greta.

Florence:

I don't know any of this. I don't know Karen Dalton. Very cool. Thanks.

Greenberg:

You sure you don't know it?

Florence:

No. No. Thanks. Thank you.

Greenberg:

You can tell me if you know it.

Florence:

I don't.

Greenberg:

Karen Dalton was this homeless junkie in the '70s. It's a woman with sandals. Maybe there's something you can sing on there.

Florence:

You like old things.

Greenberg:

A shrink said to me once, I have trouble living in the present, so I linger on the past because I felt like I never really lived it in the first place, you know?

Florence:
Do you think you could love me?

Greenberg:
I don't know, Florence.

Florence:
I just get excited to see you, and then I think I get worried it's going to go too fast, so I say things to get a reaction. What?

Greenberg:
We got to stop this.

Florence:
Really?

Greenberg:
Yeah. You got to stop calling me. I've intentionally not called you. Even when I needed to call you, I didn't. I took a pet taxi.

Florence:
I haven't called you.

Greenberg:
You called me today.

Florence:
That was for Mahler.

Greenberg:
Come on, it wasn't for Mahler. Florence, take some responsibility. Don't put yourself in this kind of situation.

Florence:
What situation? I like seeing you.

Greenberg:
No, you don't. You don't like it. Why are we even having this conversation? We're not really even dating and we're seeing other people.

Florence:
I'm not seeing anyone.

Greenberg:
Neither am I, but I want to.

Florence:
Who?

Greenberg:
I don't know, anyone. I'm doing nothing. I'm not tied to anyone. How many times do we have to go over it? Jesus, I should be with a divorced 38-year-old who has teenage kids and low expectations about life. I don't want to fucking do this anymore. God.

Scott Foundas:
Greenberg kind of has the opposite problem of Max in *Kicking and Screaming*, who says the nostalgizes things before they've happened. Greenberg is living in the past because he can't deal with the president [present]. Or maybe it's the same problem.

Noah Baumbach:
Neither in the president [present]. Yeah.

Scott Foundas:
I feel like Greta at this point was mostly known for being in what have been called these mumblecore films, very low budget, American independent films, mostly made in Brooklyn by young, privileged white filmmakers. She was kind of the Anna Karina of this movement but tight cast in a way also. I think none of those roles let her show the kind of dimensions that she shows even in that scene. I'm wondering how you became aware of her and thought of that she could do this part.

Noah Baumbach:
I guess Godard was also privileged white guy, wasn't he?

Scott Foundas:
Yeah, that's right. It helps if you want to make films.

Noah Baumbach:
One thing I just want to say quickly too is that because the decision to shot this movie widescreen and there are so many interiors in it, which was an interesting. I remember when Harris suggested it and I thought, we have all these scenes in rooms. I was glad we did it because I think, again, there's something, it just feels like Los Angeles.

Scott Foundas:
LA is horizontal and New York is vertical.

Noah Baumbach:
I maybe read something, I read a review or something about *Hannah Takes The Stairs*, I think, and I saw that one. I had contacted Joe, the director, because I liked it and he had sent me the next one they did, because they all just had made one the next week.

Scott Foundas:
Yeah. Joe Swanberg made a movie while we were sitting here tonight.

Noah Baumbach:

I looked her up. I had her come in and audition. I thought like it's an interesting idea, but watching her in those movies, I felt like she seemed to have ... I mean I think in some ways, what's interesting about those movies is you couldn't quite tell what was craft and what was sort of interesting because it was not professional. Greta, I felt that you could tell had real craft, but I didn't necessarily think that it was going to work. I just thought it would be an interesting person to audition.

Noah Baumbach:

She came in and she had memorized the entire script. I mean, she knew all Florence's lines. I was going to read just two scenes with her, ended up reading the entire script with her because she was so interesting and so good. I think she connected to something with the character in a way that was, I mean, I think it was kind of profound in the way how she played that part. I just like, "It's done. This is who's going to have to play it."

Noah Baumbach:

I had her come in and read with Ben. I also wanted to sort of see if she could replicate it and do it again and again. It was an easy decision. There was somebody in Hollywood that she had met said after the movie who's sort of well-known in Hollywood said to her, "Were you just someone they found on the street? Are you, are you the girl?" Basically, that real girl they just cast. I think what she does is so deft that it almost does feel that way.

Scott Foundas:

I think there's a real rawness about both of those performances. Although one could say the same thing about some of what we saw of the actors in *Squid and The Whale* or in Nicole in *Margot*. It may be difficult for you to say as the orchestrator of all of this, but do you feel there's something that you do or that you have to do as a director to get actors comfortable enough to be that raw or that sort of unvarnished on screen?

Noah Baumbach:

I think, a lot of it is casting right. I feel like, and I've seen this from auditioning people, that I've auditioned lots of actors who I really like and they're just ... it's not the right match for it. Maybe it's the part, but sometimes I think it's even just for how I write. I think like people who kind of connect to, if they understand the rhythm of the dialogue as I've written it, I often feel like then they can just play it. That there's something, it's sort of self-correcting. It's like if they can say it and mean it, they're great. It's like all the rest of it happens.

Noah Baumbach:

That said, I mean, there's always things, I mean some ... like with Greta, I almost felt like once I saw her do it, I was like, "I'm going to leave you alone and just come back and keep doing that." Sometimes, with other actors, like with Jeff on *Squid*, he had a hard time initially with it, because I think he was kind of trying to play an idea of what he thought I wanted. Then, he kind of connected to something very clearly in himself, but he had to do that. I couldn't do that or help him do that. I didn't know him well enough.

Noah Baumbach:

It's a thing that actors do. I think the thing that they all share though, like with someone like Ben it's more clear because of his other work or some, but they all ... there's a sense of humor in all the performances I feel. Even in *Margot* at least that I feel. I mean even like in that scene there where Greta, there's something heartbreaking about it.

Like when he's like, "We got to stop seeing each other." She's like, "Really?" It's funny. It's like there's something that they ... To me that's so part of how it's written that I think if you don't have that, you can't do the other stuff.

Noah Baumbach:

Like Jeff used to always say when we made *Squid*, he would say afterwards, I'd say like, "How'd you feel about that take?" He'd say, "It felt funny." Because he wasn't playing it funny, he felt it funny. I think that that is true a lot with the actors that I've worked with in these parts.

Scott Foundas:

Before we turn it over to the crowd, I want to just talk a little bit about the new project, *Frances Ha*, which I assume some people saw last night here. This is really a terrific vehicle for Greta and she's really in every scene of the film and it's really a chance to see even more dimensions of her. You guys wrote the film together and you made it in a kind of unusual way. It was really off the radar project that sort of nobody really knew you were doing until it was finished and it started to be announced for film festivals. Can you take us through a little bit the conception of it and why you wanted to be able to do it in that off the radar kind of way?

Noah Baumbach:

I remember when Harris and I were making *Margot*, there was a point, we were all ... there was a big outdoor area outside the house and we were shooting some scene, exterior scene. We were sort of working out on the shot and we turned around and there were all these other people, a sort of second ring around us then in the back. This was hardly a big production. There were really like maybe seven of us here shooting the movie. We used to always talk about this like how can we kind of get it to just be this without the distractions.

Noah Baumbach:

That was something that I had been thinking about for a while. When I talked to Greta about making a movie in New York and something that maybe we could collaborate on. That was the other thing I was thinking about is to see if it was possible to make a movie that with the kind of really stripped down fleet footed crew. At the same time, to make something that was beautiful and elegant and, in this case, black and white and not greedy in the handheld. I wanted to do something kind of formal even. That was sort of what I set out to do.

Noah Baumbach:

Then there was the work that Greta and I did in the character Frances in that story. From a production side, that's what I sort of set out to do. I did a number of camera tests. I was also shooting digitally for the first time and I did a number of camera tests with Harris initially and Sam who shot the movie, we did them together, and Pascal who was the colorist on it. In addition to sort of figuring out the aesthetic of the movie, we were kind of figuring out how small a crew could we do this and do it really well.

Scott Foundas:

Was there a particular reason you wanted to do a movie about characters at this point in their lives? Because this is sort of a movie about people who are a little bit older than the characters in *Kicking and Screaming*, but younger than the characters in *Greenberg*. Yet, they're still sort of at a crossroads. They're sort of post-collegiate. They're not yet on the verge of a midlife crisis, but they still feel like they're sort of drifting somehow.

Noah Baumbach:

It was really because Greta was 27 the character was 27, that was really what started it. Once we knew that that was sort of the age range of what we were dealing with, I think we were talking a lot about that time in life. There was a Joseph Conrad book called *The Shadow Line* that I think Greta was reading just anyway. I had read it after I'd read a Philip Roth book called *Exit Ghost* and he cites it and quotes from it. It's about us [a] sea merchant who's 27. *The Shadow Line* refers to the time of passing from young adulthood to adulthood and 27 is the age that Conrad kind of says it is.

Scott Foundas:

That was a good year. Yeah.

Noah Baumbach:

You don't see it coming. And I remember Greta once said, she was getting close lined by *The Shadow Line*. It did not make it into the movie. Once we were thinking about that and I was thinking about that and remembering my, I mean, the time you referred to after *Mr. Jealousy* was sort of after I was 27 and a lot had changed for me at that time too. I was interested in that time in life.

Scott Foundas:

Let's look at a brief scene, another movie dealing a lot with friendship in the way that *Kicking and Screaming* does, in this case between Frances and her friend Sophie, who's her roommate at the beginning of the film and they sort of start to drift apart as Sophie becomes more involved with her fiance Patch and that sort of culminates in this a scene from *Frances Ha*, or as it'll be known in some European territories, *The Shadow Line*.

Frances:

I want us to be a family, you know? I can be part of your family, don't you think? Patch, I love you. I want to love you but I need you to get drunk.

Waitress:

How are we doing over here?

Frances:

Really good. We'll get a bottle of your most expensive vodka for the table and then all of the stuff that comes with it.

Waitress:

Very good.

Frances:

Sophie.

Sophie:

Yes?

Frances:

Sophie, come with me.

Sophie:

Where?

*Frances:
Bathroom.*

*Sophie:
Really? We're still doing this?*

*Frances:
Patch, you got this, money-wise?*

*Patch:
Yup.*

*Frances:
I was lying. I don't love Patch.*

*Sophie:
I do love him.*

*Frances:
Since when? When did this happen?*

*Sophie:
It's been happening.*

*Frances:
That's fucking bullshit. Come on, Sophie.*

*Sophie:
No, you're bullshit. You're making me feel really bad right now.*

*Frances:
I want to love him if you love him, but you don't love him.*

*Sophie:
I do.*

*Frances:
Sophie, I fucking held your head while you cried. I bought special milk for you. I know where you hide your pills. Don't treat me like a three-hour-brunch friend.*

*Sophie:
All right. I'm not talking to you while you're like this. We have to go.*

Frances:
I'm going.

Patch:
We can stay if you want.

Frances:
No, I'm going.

Sophie:
Come on, get your stuff.

Frances:
I'm going. You fucking sit down. Enjoy the Galapagos. I'm also going on vacation. A long one. I'll set up my email so it sends out a vacation email. My voice mail will also say I'm on vacation. If you get that, Sophie, don't worry, I'm on vacation. I'll try to give you a call when I get back. Okay. Thanks, guys. This was great.

Scott Foundas:
I wanted to show that scene because one of the things that the way you made this film allowed you to do was to do more takes than you might have done on your other movies. You had mentioned to me when we were in Berlin that the part of the scene in the bathroom you did, how many takes?

Noah Baumbach:
Forty-three.

Scott Foundas:
Which just kind of makes Stanley Kubrick look like Edwood [Ed Wood]. Talk about that a little bit and why you wanted to do a lot of takes on this film and maybe take us a little bit through how that went on that particular scene.

Noah Baumbach:
In coming at a production style that was more sort of stripped down, I felt like we don't have the certain advantages, we have others. We can do more takes. I wanted to sort of create a situation for myself where I could change my mind. That's a thing with the movie when you're going, I mean, when we made *Squid* in 23 days, I mean, I'd have to get like four major scenes done in a day. I couldn't change my mind. The handheld helped it because you could kind of change your mind in the middle of the scene. You just say, "Walk over, do that." It was rougher.

Noah Baumbach:
It becomes difficult and it's interesting about movie making. I mean, I've talked to other directors about this and it's, I think, unlike any other art form where it's like you put in all this preparation and then you have really this amount of time to get it right. You can try to go back, you can reshoot it, I mean, you hear about Woody Allen used to build in reshoots. I totally understand that. I wanted to kind of create the best possible situation for myself where I could really take time. We shot, I think, in 50 days on the movie and we took breaks. We went back and we waited to shoot in different seasons and things that would have been impossible under different production structures.

Noah Baumbach:

With something like that, it's a little deceiving because the amount of takes, I mean, it is that many takes. Part of it on with digital is you can roll on the first rehearsal really. On film you would rehearse more before you shot because your film was more expensive. It's not quite the same as doing 43 takes on *The Shining* or something. I mean that was an intense scene and you have two people who kind of have to hit the same ... the sort of as Greta is reaching her stride. Mickey is getting more emotional and Mickey couldn't be really emotional in that scene. Then, Mickey had to work through that and then Greta lost some of her energy and some of the early takes were felt too drunk.

Noah Baumbach:

It was that kind of thing. On another movie I wouldn't have had that luxury. I'm sure I would've gotten a good take out of the amount I did. I think on this one, we did get something that we wouldn't have gotten under different circumstances. It was just something I felt like I wanted to try really because I hadn't had the luxury to do it before.

Scott Foundas:

I want to go ahead and take some questions from the audience.

Tim:

Thanks, been a big fan for a long time. I want to ask two questions, the first one is a little probably too existential or maybe a bit rhetorical, but would you rather fuck a cow or lose your mother? My second question is, so I was a fan of *Kicking and Screaming* for many years and that movie really opened me up to like, okay, something beyond the *Die Hard* trilogy and I kind of went into film school after that. My question was, so for many years I was this guy online, I was meeting friends through the movie. Recently, I saw a friend who I hadn't seen for many years and he passed by me on the street and I said, "Hey, is that a pajama top you're wearing?" He was like, "No, it's not." He's like, "Fuck Tim, I haven't seen you for years. Oh shit. I knew it was you because of that."

Tim:

That movie didn't come out on DVD for many years. I lamented on it. I watch[ed] this VHS over and over again until it was like, I was like, "I can't watch this anymore. It's going to fall apart." I wondered what was the process of that? How did it get on Criterion out of all things and why was it not put out before that? I don't know. I just want to know that process. Sorry. That was a lot. That was a mouthful.

Noah Baumbach:

Yeah. As I said before, it was put out by this video company so it had the terrible video box too with it. I think it was like ready for anything prepared for nothing or something, something terrible like that. I think it was after *Squid and The Whale* it came out that Criterion did it. I went back. I watched the movie for the first time since I had made it then too, because when we did it, which was very heady for me.

Noah Baumbach:

Yeah. I mean, I wish it was a better story, but that's sort of how it happened. I made a movie more people saw and then it got on TV.

Scott Foundas:

Criterion said, "You got any other stuff?" Right?

Noah Baumbach:
Yeah.

Scott Foundas:
Other questions?

Speaker 21:
Can I do two questions? We cool?

Scott Foundas:
Go ahead.

Speaker 21:
All right. You said with the new film to have the luxury of shooting 43 takes, is there any way you could describe the luxury as opposed to how you made this film as opposed to films before that? Also, when you're sharing the writing efforts, like with Anderson or Greta, could you describe that process and how you share that effort? Yeah.

Noah Baumbach:
For the first question you say share the ... what would you like me to elaborate on that?

Speaker 21:
Like you said, it was a luxury to be able to take the time to do 43 takes on something being a fairly short scene. I mean, as opposed to *The Squid and The Whale* when you're under the pressure, I mean, how did you go about this film differently? Yeah.

Noah Baumbach:
Yeah. I think a lot of small movies tend to be big movies just shrunk. I didn't want to do that again. I wasn't interested in making a first movie again but I felt like the way technology is now that I could make a movie with such a small crew that we would be ... it's almost like if we had the camera right now, Scott and I could be shooting the movie, to some degree. It's more complicated than that. That was sort of the basis of the idea was to sort of, to not make a small movie in the mold of a big movie.

Speaker 21:
Did you take your time with this more?

Noah Baumbach:
Yeah, I mean, we have more days, that was the thing. There was actually the scene with Greta with the vodka bottle when she yells at Sophie, we shot at the end of the day and she was tired and it wasn't working. I did the thing that you wish you could do on any movie, which is we said, let's just stop and we'll come back. I mean, we had rented the place so we had to come back like a week later or something. I've never done that on a movie before and that was a great thing to do.

Noah Baumbach:

That said, *Squid* I think benefited from an energy, it was like a fever dream making that movie. I think that benefited from that. Actors like that, they move fast and they get, they're doing it. We really prepared it too and rehearsed it. It's a different preparation too, depending on how you're doing it. I just wanted to try something different. The other question about collaboration. Yeah, it depends. I mean with this also, I was going to direct the movie, so where we were writing something that I'm sort of also thinking about as not just as a writer but as a director, I suppose.

Noah Baumbach:

Whereas with Wes I was really there to give him options or come up with ideas. It was a collaboration also out of friendship. It was similar to Greta and that we liked each other so it wasn't that we were like the writing was sort of an extension of our conversations. With West it was not to, I mean, I would push for an idea if I thought it would work. I knew ultimately he's going to take what works for him and what fits how he sees the movie. That's just the difference, I think, if you're directing it or not.

Scott Foundas:

You've also done some writing now on big Hollywood movies, either as kind of a ghostwriter, rewriter. Then also for Dreamworks animation on the third *Madagascar* movie, which you have credit on in which, I think, I teased you about rather mercilessly when I heard you were doing it only to then see the movie get these rave reviews. I thought, [oh] actually, I've never seen a *Madagascar* movie. I did get the DVD of that one and I have it sitting there. I'm just wondering if you could talk a little bit about that process of working really inside the system like that.

Noah Baumbach:

Yeah. What's interesting in animation, I mean, I've done *Fantastic Mr. Fox* with Wes too, but we kind of approached that I think somewhat naively initially like the way we're going to write a script and then he'll go off and animate it. I think he discovered with the puppets that it's such a slow process and you discover things that you really need to keep working on it, maybe not as much as they tend to work things over on sort of more traditional animation.

Noah Baumbach:

I remember getting a call from West because he was in Europe and he said, "I think we need more scenes with these." I was like, "Really? I thought it was all so good." Then, I realized, no, you're right. Because he showed me the animatics because they do like ... you do all these stories. You can kind of like put it up on its feet in a way you can't with a live action movie. You have all these like they call them animatics but they're like moving storyboards and you're seeing the movie and then you can see what works and what doesn't work.

Noah Baumbach:

I knew that going in with *Madagascar*. Again, there, I was just trying to be ... I wanted to do it as well as possible. It was freeing in a way, because I wasn't going to be the judge of what gets in and what doesn't. It's such a long process that you keep coming back and they keep working on things. They're really rigorous. I think, they're great. I was very impressed with how they make those movies and it was really fun. I was really happy to be part of that.

Scott Foundas:

I think we have time for a couple more from out there. There's someone in the back.

Speaker 22:

Hey, thanks a lot. It's been fascinating watching all these films again in the screening series. I'd seen them all before, but seeing sort of the progression from *Kicking and Screaming*, which I first saw back in '95 through *Frances Ha* now.

It strikes me as you're in a very different place as a filmmaker. *Frances Ha* seems to be [the] most independent film that you've made, but at the same time it's sort of the most traditionally classically Hollywood like it feels like it comes from a tradition.

Speaker 22:

I'm wondering as you've moved through all of these modes, where you feel like you are right now, where you want to keep moving, like where do you see yourself going? Whether it be keeping it independent or continuing to try and find projects in the big, in the studio mold.

Noah Baumbach:

I totally understand what you're saying but there's no plan. I really felt like *Frances* was the right movie to make the way I made it. I'm going to make another movie in the fall with Ben again, Stiller, and it would be different than the way we made *Frances*. It would be more on the sort of mold of how I made *Greenberg*. It'll be interesting to go back to that having sort of had the *Frances* experience and see.

Noah Baumbach:

I'd actually written the script before *Frances*, the one we're making in the fall and it almost got made and then things didn't come together and so I went and made *Frances*. It's like a different ripple in the universe and now I would have made that first. I find it's very hard to plan. I find like Jesse said in that clip in *Squid and The Whale* like, I just don't see myself this way. I try not to think of myself that way, like of where I am or what I'm doing. I'm always sort of have a few things going at once in my head at different stages, even things that are notes or partly written or things I think at one point I'd like to explore.

Noah Baumbach:

I kind of try to just go with what the livest wire is at the time and also what seems practically the thing that's going to happen when that actor's available. There are all these other factors that come into it. While I totally understand sort of like looking at them all together, sort of looking at it that way, it's really only ... it only works retrospectively, I think. It's hard going forward to think that way.

Scott Foundas:

Someone over there. Yes, on the end. Very reaching, reaching.

Speaker 23:

Thanks a lot. I apologize if this is something you don't like to talk about, but there's kind of a lost film. I could tell it was sort of purposely skipped over, but there's sort of a lost film in your catalog which I really love, it's *Highball*. It's kind of a lost classic in my book. I was just curious if you could tell the story of how it came about and then how you ended up taking your name off of it.

Scott Foundas:

Then, we'll go to a scene.

Noah Baumbach:

Yeah, exactly. We could pop in the VHS. Does the Walker have VHS? *Highball* had all good intentions. It was after I'd made *Mr. Jealousy* and I thought, "Hey, while we've got the cameras and where everybody is ... we're all standing up still, let's go make another movie." It was Wayne Wang had done it with *Smoke* and *Blue In The Face* before that.

I thought, maybe we could try to do something. I think it was also at the time I wanted to do something maybe that was kind of more of like explicit comedy, more explicitly a comedy I should say. Not an explicit comedy. That's coming. That's where I see myself go.

Scott Foundas:

There's a lot of horizontal scenes in it.

Noah Baumbach:

Yeah. I'm trying to bring in all the questions. We went out to make it, but we didn't have enough time to do it and we didn't have enough time to get it right. There were too many people and it was too many people in it, too many people around it. We didn't finish it. I tried to put some of it together, but it's not a cut that I had much to do with and so it was just never finished. It is an example of if it was in the digital world, I could have done it, but we were shooting Super 16 and it was too expensive.

Noah Baumbach:

I just never felt it was actually done but it was put out and I've got to live with it.

Scott Foundas:

Somehow it seems fitting that you have a lost pseudonym-directed film. It's something that perhaps one of your characters might have so it's-.

Noah Baumbach:

Thank you.

Scott Foundas:

I think, unfortunately, we're out of time. It's been such a pleasure. I want to thank very much Noah Baumbach for-

Noah Baumbach:

Yeah, thank you. Thanks a lot.

Scott Foundas:

... subjecting himself to this tonight.