

C L O S E R  
experimental documentary

24' 35mm colour dolby SR  
director/producer Tina Gharavi  
co-producer Caroline Fawcett  
co-creators Tina Gharavi + Annelise Rodger  
director of photography Tohiaki Ozawa

P R E S S   K I T

WOMEN MAKE MOVIES  
462 Broadway Suite 500  
New York, NY 10013  
Tel. 212.925.0606  
[www.wmm.com](http://www.wmm.com)



***A Northern UK / European co-production:  
a poignant mini-film exploring boundaries  
of documentary and fiction;  
unflinching treatment of challenging  
subject matter filmed with a  
stunningly visual texture.***



Sometimes when you are out- on the streets, on a bus, standing on line, in a club- you see someone who fascinates you... someone who makes you wonder where they come from, what they do... and how they got to be who they are...

*And then you begin to fantasise.*

**N O P S S**

Directed by Tina Gharavi, CLOSER is an experimental documentary which has at its heart a poignant character study of a 17 year-old lesbian from Newcastle. The film was produced without a script and the real subject, Annelise Rodger (using her life as a starting point), collaborated with the filmmaker to produce through a mixture of both documentary and fiction film techniques, a brave auto-portrait. In the end emerges not only a remarkable encounter with a young woman but also a regional story; a story about sexuality that also has broader contexts.

The pivotal segment of the documentary films a recreation of Annelise telling her mother about her sexuality for the first time intercut with an interview recounting this memory (from age13). In this sequence we see both the real and the fiction (the recreation). Annelise describes the event while the film cuts to the camera crew filming the reenactment. Fiction and documentary collide as we question whether what we are seeing is real or manipulated for the documentary. The camera crew themselves are present through a second camera which records another viewpoint. The editing collages these, one after another, in a hypnotising rythmical montage. Both mother and daughter curiously relive this memory- this time before the cameras. Ultimately, we see a touching scene between a mother and her daughter and an astonishing call for acceptance.

T E C H N I C A L D E T A I L S

24' / EXPERIMENTAL DOCUMENTARY / 35MM / COLOUR / DOLBY SP / ENGLISH LANGUAGE / UK+FR



further photos + stills available upon request

CREDITS

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER  
Paul Moody

DIRECTOR/PRODUCER  
Tina Gharavi

CO-CREATORS  
Tina Gharavi  
Annelise Rodger

CO-PRODUCER  
Caroline Fawcett

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY  
Toshiaki Ozawa

PARTICIPATION  
Annelise Rodger  
Gullf Rodger  
Nina Hajjianni  
Jo Robins  
Rosy Mackie

CAMERA ASSISTANT  
David Raedeker

2ND CAMERA ASSISTANT  
Richard Lawson

1ST A.D.  
Carl Petch

ADDITIONAL CAMERA/VIDEO  
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Tina Gharavi  
Toshiaki Ozawa

SOUND  
Tommy Hair

SOUND EDITOR  
Siegfried Canto

SOUND DESIGNER  
Jon Howard  
Nicola Lumley

ART DIRECTOR  
Jo Robins

STILLS PHOTOGRAPHY  
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HAIR DESIGN  
Global Image, Newcastle

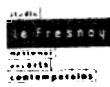
MAKE-UP  
Christine White

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT  
Susan Chu  
Brett Holden

EDITOR  
Tina Gharavi

RE-RECORDING MIXER  
Brendan Nicholson

Bridge + Tunnel  
Productions



THIS PROJECT IS BEING PART FINANCED  
BY THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY  
European Regional Development Fund



# F E S T I V A L L S

Sundance Film Festival

Planet Out Short Movie Awards, OUTfest , Grand Prize

International Documentary Film Festival, Amsterdam

Thessaloniki Documentary Festival, Greece

Festival Dei Popoli, Italy

San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Film Festival

International Film Festival Mannehiem-Heidelberg

Cork International Film Festival

Feminale

London Gay & Lesbian Film Festival

Chicago Reeling, Honorable Mention

Creteil Films de Femme, Paris

DV8-Film

Indentities Queer Film Festival, Austria

MIX Brazil

## B O G R A P H E S

### TINA GHARAVI / DIRECTOR / PRODUCER / EDITOR

With former experience as a production designer on feature films and editor in New York (as well as producing short films and music videos) this is Tina's directorial debut. Working as a Lecturer in Media Production, she lived in the North-east for several years before leaving the College in order to pursue her directing career and establish a production company, Bridge + Tunnel, in Newcastle. Her next project is a documentary about returning to Iran where she was born.

### ANNELISE RODGER / PARTICIPANT / CO-CREATOR

Annelise has been quietly minding her own business in a club in Newcastle when she was asked to enter into the production of this project. A student at Newcastle College, this is the first film which she has made. Her total involvement included everything from giving the director tips on where to shoot to carrying heavy camera boxes on set to working with the sound designers. Though very pleased with the film spotlight, Annelise is set to work in the future as a psychologist or youth worker: heading to Bristol University in September to study for her first degree.

### TOSHIKI OZAWA / DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Toshi flew from America in order to volunteer to work on this project. Though he has extensive experience in commercials and feature films from lighting Calvin Klein ads and shooting music videos (Morcheeba) to working as second unit photography on Vincent Gallo's **Buffalo '66** and **I Shot Andy Warhol**, he believed that this was an important production to be involved with. This was his first visit to Newcastle. He is now safely back in LA making working on his next feature film project.

### CAROLINE FAWCETT / CO-PRODUCER

Formerly trained as a Play Specialist, Caroline is well suited to the rigors of working with a film crew. This is her first film experience and she is eager to pursue a career in media production. She is currently administrator of Bridge + Tunnel.

### JO ROBINS / PARTICIPANT / ART DIRECTOR

Initially trained as a painter/decorator and having been involved in a variety of activities, Jo was long-term unemployed before finding herself trying to decide on the perfect shade to paint the sets. She is keen to work on further productions.

### NICOLA LUMLEY (SALAD BUTTY) + JON HOWARD (SOUND TANK) / SOUND DESIGNERS

Nicola and her sister, Kelly, have long been established as the hippest female dj's in the North-east often seen mixing at the Salsa Bar on Friday night. Nicola has previously scored an animated short. This is Jon's first experience of scoring music for a film. Soundtank have been putting music out for several years and they have currently pressed some of the music which is featured on the sound track of **Closer**.

Both Jon and Nicola collaborated on music/ sound ideas from an early stage of the production.

Tina Gharavi: notes on making CLOSER

The concept of the film was crossing/combining documentary and fiction; taking a real person, a character and developing a film from their life.

***Why did you make this film?***

It was important from the outset that the subject of the film was aware and involved in the process of making the documentary and had a chance to intervene/navigate the project, something which I had not seen in other documentary films. This was the first question I was asking when we set off on this project. This consideration was made complex by the fact that Annelise was only 17 years old when we started working on the project (and 18 when we began principle filming). In this project I was experimenting with process orientated filmmaking; interested in seeing what ideas could be generated from avoiding using pre-determined scripted dialogue/action. There weren't a whole team of researchers aboard, we were never sure what the film was going to be at the end. But filming freely without a tight storyboard was going to be problematic. If it was going to be possible, and since I knew that I wanted to shoot 35mm, the whole team had to be "in on" the process. So, first I searched for the right director of photography who could understand this process and this film; ready to collaborate totally.

***How did you find Annelise?***

I saw Annelise dancing in a club and I was completely captivated. One night in Newcastle I had been dragged out by some friends- I wasn't into dancing so I hung out at the bar watching "the theatre of life". I saw this young woman dancing on the stage amongst many people, apparently alone. I thought at the time that she could not be older than 15 or 16. She was luminous; drawing in and reflecting all the light around her. People often ask if I was attracted to Annelise and if that is why I pursued the project. I honestly have reflected on this question myself and I don't know the answer. Whatever "attraction" means (I am sure that there is always a sexual side to it) I was drawn to Annelise- I saw that she was a film waiting to happen.

***How did this project begin?***

I had been awarded a filmmaker in residency position at a media institution in the North of France which were funding a project. It was a fiction film about the wives of submarine men, of all things. Fortunately, the project fell through when the screenwriter of the project decided that she wanted to direct it herself. This left me with no project to produce. I was reflecting on what I wanted to use the residency for- I was in a really privileged position to do anything that I wanted, the funding was already in place. It was the filmmaker Robert Kramer, also an invited artist at Le Fresnoy, who encouraged me to film what interested me most. I looked back on all my ideas in black A5 notebooks and I remembered the young dancer. So that was it, I got in the car and drove the 12 hours back to Newcastle to try and find her!

Luckily, it didn't take me too long to find her. When I approached her, I had no idea how open she was going to react to the idea, or how hostile! As you see in the film she has a very open character. We exchanged phone numbers and had a meeting later in the week before I went back to France.

***What was it like the involvement of Annelise?***

I wanted Annelise to be at the heart of the production team. I had worked as a lecturer in Ashington (North of England) and had worked for several years with students of her age. I knew that there would be things that she was capable of and that it really depended on her, what she wanted for herself.

I found Annelise completely eager to being involved with developing the project and her suggestions and comments were a constant flow which arrived to me in meetings and through constant email contact. At times it was difficult for me to communicate the purpose of the film and perhaps most difficult to communicate was the idea that this film was not just entertainment; that there was a meaning to what we were doing. We watched many films together to discuss what we wanted the film to achieve. I was clear that what we were making wasn't Ally McBeele. We talked about and watched Kids, Gummo, and many so-called lesbian films, Bound and Drugstore Cowboy too.

At times energies went in peaks and valleys for the both of us... the various stages of production were never fast enough. I got to know Annelise very well I think. One of the factors of this was that our shoot was delayed through the summer due to our French investors. So I spent a large span of time in Newcastle mainly with Annelise- developing art direction and location scouting together with the production designer.

Perhaps my one regret was that Toshi wasn't available throughout this period to get closer to Annelise and to work together to further develop our visual ideas.

### ***How did you end up working with the DP, Toshiaki Ozawa?***

It took me about a month of calling every producer, director, and agent I knew before finding Toshi. At first I really wanted to give the project to a lesbian DP and I called everyone I knew to find the name of someone they knew working in the industry. I did the research but didn't find any possibilities. I was really trying to find someone who had an investment in the film- it was positive discrimination. With no luck I tried just to find a woman or even a gay man- in the end the person who emerged was a straight married man- and it worked out great!

I actually don't remember through what chain of phone calls I came to get Toshi's number but it was apparent from our early conversations that he understood the working process which I was interested in. He had worked with the British filmmaker, Issac Julian, and was collaborating with Verushka, the fashion model, on similar, non-traditional projects. When I said that there would be no script, even on the day of shooting, he said 'No, problem' and that was it. All we had were locations and rough ideas that linked the scenes!

When I began discussing my interests in terms of aesthetics and film imagery, I mentioned that I had recently seen a film which had interested me for the visuals of *Closer*. This was *Buffalo '66*. It turned out Toshi had actually been second unit director of photography for this film. He had worked very closely with Lance Accord who had shot the film and the director Vincent Gallo.

As our conversations deepened, I began to realise the impressive work Toshi had done- he had been asked to be the DP for *Velvet Goldmine* (which he turned down to work on *Buffalo '66*) as well as shooting tv ads for Calvin Klein. I made it clear from the beginning that though we had some funding from Northern Arts and co-sponsorship from Le Fresnoy, a French media institute, that the budget would be modest for the type of film that we were making (high shooting ratios and transferring video to film). Toshi replied that the reasons he did commercial projects was so that he could make films such as ours. I knew immediately that he was the right person to work on the project with.

### ***What was the influence of Toshi on the film?***

Though he came on board, flying from America only a few days before principle shooting, Toshi's influence is visible and unmistakable. We had spent hours talking through the scenes and qualities of the images we wanted to achieve. I had already sent to him many reference images and from his previous experience and our conversations, I was confident that he understood where I was coming from.

It must have been quite a shock for him just coming off shooting the CK Jeans 2000 campaign to the North of England to make a scriptless film about a young lesbian. We even quote CK in the film which have used lesbian chic in the past to sell their products- we thought it was great to reclaim this imagery and have some sexy images in a film which treats the subject matter appropriately. Toshi's energy was great to have on set, in fact the whole team really got on and many mentioned at the end how enjoyable a shoot it was. For me that is one of the great successes of this project; people liked what they were doing. Again, this is a film about process.

### ***What considerations did you give before making this film?***

I had initially been cautious about making a lesbian themed film, esp since it was my first at a professional standard. There is still a stigma attached, no matter how idealistic you want to be about modern day gay rights. I was also very cautious as I don't use the label lesbian and it wasn't my own story. I was very conscious about who I was speaking for. I think these issues really resolved during conversations with Robert Kramer (who lived in Paris before his death). I expressed these reservations to him during our dialogues but he encouraged me to pursue what interested me. If it gave me energy then it would carry me and the audience through. He understood my reservations and told me to trust myself and the film I was going to make.

In the end I knew that this was a vital story and that sexuality wasn't the only issue which brought me to make a film about Annelise.

### ***How did you get this film funded?***

As I mentioned, I already had some funding in place with the residency at Le Fresnoy, which is one of Mitterrand's large artistic projects for young filmmakers and artists, giving them access to professional standard equipment, support and a modest budget in order to realise a project. Though I was skeptic that I could get public funding for the film, I knew that this was vital for the project, especially if it was going to be as long as it needed to be with the flexibility of transferring video to 35mm. I spoke to Paul Moody, who was at that time the head of the Northern Arts Northern Production Fund and though I said that we had no script and no clear idea of what the outcome of the film would be, he encouraged us to submit a proposal to the funding committee. They were open to experimental projects and part of the key of getting the funding was that we justified what we were doing in a comprehensive proposal; so they knew we weren't running around using public money to film our shoes.

***Why did you choose to use both film and video?***

I really wanted to make a documentary-slash-fiction, whatever we want to call it, using film. I wanted to combine digital video with the 35mm (super-16) footage that we were shooting. The problem as always is cost- I wanted to get away from using film as fantasy and video as reality. I wanted it to be ambiguous or at least I didn't want the audience to be conscious of this.

In all, there was over 20 hours of video and film rushes which is not such a high shooting ratio for a film of 24 minutes. This came from the fact that a lot of time was spent not shooting. I am amazed by some filmmakers who have their eyes permanently glued to the eyepiece or bring the camera everywhere.

***What issues do you feel are important about the film?***

Certainly with Annelise I spent more time without the camera than with. In the end, I think definitions of director/co-collaborator and friend became difficult to define. At times this wasn't easy but now I am quiet happy about it. I couldn't have made the film in this way if we hadn't been closer. I know that my relationship with Annelise will continue after this film and there is a special bond that has come out of making this documentary. Though I know in some ways I will always be 'the director' to her- a false objectivity and distance isn't what my filmmaking is about. The moment you start making a documentary, you irreversibly change the course of someones life.

These were ethical issues which were constantly with me throughout the production. I wanted Annelise to be conscious of this, though at 18 some might question whether she was old enough to understand the implications of making this project. People underestimate and patronise Annelises strength and self consciousness and certainly, I met with her parents to explain what I was doing. You have to talk to Annelise to find out about the effect of this process; maybe ask in 5 or so years when the dust settles.

The fact that there is a sex scene which is in a 'documentary' film is perhaps surprising to viewers. Certainly by the time this scene appears in the film, the audience should be asking questions about what this is, documentaty or fiction. At first, I hesitated filming this. The idea for this scene really came from Nina Hajjiyanni, who plays the object of obsession in the bar scene, and Annelise. They felt very strongly that this story-about a young lesbian-couldn't avoid this segment. I agreed that it was an important part of the story but that it needed to be honest. I wasn't interested in any of the late night tv sex scenes nor gratuitous nudity. I decided to shoot the film through a long rectangular mirror which is part of the furniture. We used this wide shot and extreme close-ups of skin. For me it was the most difficult part of the shoot.

The ethics of documentary filmmaking is not an issue I shy away from. It is really a topic which is implicit in the project from its very inception.

***Who was involved with the project?***

The team was made up of several people who had little or no experience in filmmaking. However, there were drawn into the process through their proximity to the story. That energy was incredible- people who had been long term unemployed volunteered to get up at 6 in the morning to make breakfast for the crew and move camera boxes to the set- it was something that made the atmosphere a team effort which is always the best part of making a film.

As far as film technicians, I have worked with Tommy Hair previously who recorded location sound and Richard Lawson who I have previously made a film with. David Raedeker came from London and was a brilliant camera assistant. The camera team did an amazing job of adapting to the organic flow of the shoot. With this ironed out our movements and set-ups were rapid.

Caroline Fawcett, my co-producer, managed the production marvelously considering this was her first film shoot and really kept everyone together and well-taken care of. I have known Caroline for several years so I knew that we could work together, even when we was a lot of stress on set.

Nina Hajjiyanni came on board as a performer but her curiosity about the process and what we were going to do next meant that she stayed close to the crew throughout filming. She was a great sounding board when we were idea generating.



AUGUST 2001



**Tina Gharavi's** fascinating directorial debut **Closer** is an experimental documentary (which Tina also produced) which has at its heart a poignant character study of a 17 year-old lesbian from Newcastle. The film was produced without a script and the real subject, Annelise Rodger (using her life as a starting point), collaborated with the filmmaker to produce, though a mixture of both documentary and fiction film techniques, a brave auto-portrait. In the end there emerges not only a remarkable encounter with a young woman but also a regional story; a story about sexuality that also has broader contexts. You'll be able to see it at the BBC British Short Film Festival, screened at the Leicester Square UCI Empire Cinema in London in September and it has also been entered in the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Film Festival on June 23rd. This, I believe, sums it up.

"Sometimes when you are out- on the streets, on a bus, standing on line, in a club - you see someone who fascinates you... someone who makes you wonder where they come from, what they do... and how they got to be who they are...

And then you begin to fantasise...

# Under Construction

## *Diverse*

### **Reality bytes**

#### **Confused by reality**

If a documentary contains fiction, can we still speak of complete reality? In Tina Gharavi's 'experimental' film CLOSER, a lot of boundaries are crossed. The director was hanging out in the 'theatre of life' (the disco), when she saw her subject, Annelise, dancing and immediately became obsessed with this fanatically dancing girl and asked if she could make a film about her. So the question is what came first - the chicken or the egg? Did the director find this girl so attractive that she needed an excuse to get close to her? Or was Gharavi seeking a good subject for a story? Should the filmmaker keep a distance from the story, because otherwise there is a possibility of becoming part of that story? The director of CLOSER went even further, allowing Annelise to be at the heart of the production team - the normal boundaries of who is the director were faded out. The fact is that Annelise confronted her mother with a revelation ("I am a lesbian") in front of two camera teams. An emotional moment. This 'reality' is however not the 'truth' - or is it? The story may be real enough, but the scene is in fact a reconstruction of what is supposed to have 'really' happened. Confusing? Maybe - but it sure is interesting.

**COLUMN FROM IDFA Daily 25/11/00**