

DISTANT LIGHTS FILMPRODUKTION GMBH
presents

a film by
FANNY BRÄUNING

with
**Roxanne Two Bulls, John Trudell, Bruce Ellison, Derrick Janis,
Buzi Two Lance, Tom Casey**

CH 2008 – 1h30 – Dolby Digital - 35mm

DISTRIBUTION SWITZERLAND

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RIDM, Rencontres Internationales du Documentaire de Montréal
17 novembre 2008 19:30
18 novembre 2008 14:15

Synopsis

Kili Radio – “Voice of the Lakota Nation” – is broadcast out of a small wooden house that sits isolated on a hill, lost in the vast countryside of South Dakota. It is the central meeting point and the point of origin of many a story, big and small. There’s Roxanne Two Bulls who’s trying to start over again on the land of her ancestors; the young DJ Derrick who’s discovering his gift for music; Bruce, the white lawyer who for thirty years has been trying to free a militant who’s been fighting for American Indian rights; and finally John Trudell, an old AIM activist who’s made a career for himself as a musician in Hollywood.

This mix of people, radio shows, listeners and guests sends out a message of a people who’ve remained strong despite ongoing humiliations, injustices and degradation. They fight for their future with humor, steadfastness, obstinate courage and spirituality. Deep within this forgotten region we discover a people’s history; a people who have continually held their head up high despite the white man and the lack of peace.

The film NO MORE SMOKE SIGNALS ties together the past, the present and the future. It gives us a new vantage point and enables us to understand that there is something beyond the tears and the ancestors – a new pride is being born.

Everything converges at Kili Radio. Instead of sending smoke signals the radio station transmits signals throughout the vast and magnificent landscape with a delightful combination of humor and melancholy, with native hip hop and broken windshields. The Lakotas are alive because certain people have started to look for new paths in order to ensure their survival today and in the future. Pride has been restored – it really is OK to be Lakota.

Director's Statement and Production Notes

Everything began the day director Fanny Bräuning asked herself the following question: why were American Indians the only population to be turned into toy characters by companies such as Lego and Playmobil? There they stood next to mom, dad, child, policeman, nurse or pirate. This question came to her five years ago while she was reading a book about the American Indian activist Leonard Peltier. Several facts shocked her: why had she never heard of the American Indian Movement (AIM)? Why had she never heard of their struggle for Indian rights, cultural preservation and autonomy? How could that be? Surely no other people were so strongly associated with such dreams and aspirations. These were childhood idols, they had melodious names, wore feather headdresses and leather wear. They symbolized freedom and an authentic way of life. Yet there was a mirror image to all of this based on common stereotypes - the resigned alcoholics, New Age gimmicks and high gloss Hollywood figures. Fanny Bräuning could not get these questions out of her mind. She decided to look for answers. Her search took her to the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota.

The young director says: "I wanted to get to know the people behind the stereotypes and look for stories and situations that reflect today's life and living conditions for the American Indians." First she confronted poverty akin to that found in third world countries. Then little by little she discovered people who had a very strong sense of awareness about their own history and origin. They looked for a road into the future and felt responsible for the generations to come. She encountered humor, self-effacement, passion, love towards the community and a sense of communal belonging and was surprised and touched by the extent to which everyday life was penetrated by their own history. She was also captivated by this place that was full of contradictions and found herself deeply moved by these people's dreams.

The closer she got to the people the more questions arose: How do you deal with a history of centuries-long oppression? How do you deal with the injustices to which the Lakota are still exposed? How do you deal with the desire to get away from it, to heal and feel free? How do you deal with the nostalgia surrounding culture and spirituality and at the same time manage in today's modern world?

During her research in Pine Ridge, Bräuning is invited to Kili Radio: "From the very start I felt I had discovered something very special, something that could help tie in all the stories I was seeing in a visual sense. It was love at first sight." Kili Radio is not only a radio station but also a magnet, a center of information and interaction for 20'000 people who are spread out over a territory of 18'000 square miles. The radio station is the symbol of a newly awakened conscience, identity and sense of community. "At the time I didn't know that Leonard Peltier was involved directly with the radio. I also didn't know that the AIM activists had actually been responsible for the creation of the radio station. Both of these facts cemented my decision to make Kili Radio the focal point of my film."

Sometimes in cold winters when snowstorms blow over the naked hills, Kili Radio is the only connection to the outside world. Even the film crew had to call upon the radio for help several times. Fanny Bräuning reflects: "The radio station is probably one of the biggest victories for the Lakota. During our research and filming in the reservation we

experienced a wonderful sense of humor, a great openness and generosity. Nevertheless the working conditions were tough. Cultural differences were enormous. Methods of communication were completely different and often making what we would call “normal work” simply impossible. For example, when interviewing it can be seen as very impolite to keep on insisting with a question, to interrupt or to reject any sort of offer. Many times we had to wait for hours for our protagonists to arrive. Previously arranged meetings or events turned out completely differently not to mention the unpredictable events such as the weather, accidents and other difficulties. This is why the initially planned six weeks of shooting turned into 13. The film itself was completed an entire year later than anticipated. The Lakota call this ‘Indian Time’. “Things take as long as they take.”

Kili Radio

The incidents in the 1970’s at Wounded Knee and Oglala weakened the American Indian Movement. At the same time a new self-confidence within the Lakota flared up in terms of having a voice and a strengthening of their community. In 1983 in the shadow of Mount Rushmore members of the American Indian Movement (AIM) founded the first Indian-run and controlled radio station. The name of the station is “Kili Radio – The Voice of the Lakota Nation”. Kili Radio reporter Tom Casey remembers that it wasn’t easy convincing the Lakota people of the many advantages that a radio station can bring. When in 1979 the idea was presented to the Indian chief, the latter replied laconically: "Radio station? Maybe it would be better to try and do something like a gas station."

The radio broadcasts 22 hours per day. Programming is in the Lakota language and in English. Kili Radio connects, mediates, informs, teaches, entertains, welcomes people coming back home and heals the homesickness who are far away.

The shows range from the "Morning Wakalyapi Show" and "News of Lakota Nation" to live broadcasts of traditional American Indian music and local basketball games. There are also the daily menus of the local highway truck stop and the Lakota language courses. In between all of these are weather reports, job announcements, and notifications of lost horses and deliveries of petroleum gas. Radio Kili is the lifeline of the Lakota that has come to replace the old smoke signals and campfires.

Not so long ago, decisions regarding the Lakota’s future were made in Washington DC. With a little luck “Indian agents” would bring these messages to the Lakota; these were important message sometimes with the most devastating consequences. Today Kili Radio reports on all important clan meetings, state and national elections, as well as public hearings all of which are transmitted in English and in the Lakota language so that all may understand the political interests that determine their future.

Kili Radio’s audience is made up of approximately 30’000 Lakotas who live on three reservations and in the areas surrounding Rapid City. Kili Radio is funded by local government (very modest sums), contributions from the “Tribal Government“, and many donors. Funding became critical in mid-2006 following a lightning strike that caused

200'000 dollars in damage and caused the radio station to be “off the air” for several months.

Kili Radio connects the past with the future, keeps memories alive and at the same time draws the way forward.

(Kili = Lakota: cool, extraordinary)

The Pine-Ridge Reservation

Of the originally 240'000 square kilometers of the reservation only 9'000 are left. After the gold rush by the white immigrants, who had already displaced many of the Lakota from the territories around Black Hills, the "Allotment Act" of 1911 led to an even bigger loss of territory. Reservation land was privatized and each head of family was given his own share of land. The US government's goal was to turn nomads into farmers, to break up the Lakota communal system and to integrate them into American society. The result was that the Lakota, who were not used to private property, sold their land to the Americans, either because of lack of knowledge or because of economic need.

A faded wooden sign reads "Entering Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, home of the Lakota Oglala Indians". This is the eighth and poorest reservation in the United States and is one of the Lakota's five reservations. The population varies between 15'000 and 28'000 depending on the census. Average yearly income is between 2'600 and 3'000 dollars. Out of the 30 million dollars in income generated from agriculture less than one third remains in the hands of tribe members. The few jobs available are mainly provided by the Oglala Sioux Tribe, the Oglala Lakota College, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Indian Health Service. The Lakota tried to build up an independent industry that included a moccasin factory, a meat processing factory and the sales of fishhooks but the project failed. As is the case in many other reservations, the only industry to be successful has been gambling. Prairie Wind Casino opened its doors in 2007 and created 250 jobs – it includes a hotel and a restaurant – but this number is fairly insignificant compared with the scale of job creation and money generated by casinos on many other reservations.

The proud and distinguished Oglala Lakota, as we knew them from "Dances with Wolves" are currently to be found at the lower end of the statistical social and economic tables. Whether we look at poverty levels, infant mortality, alcoholism, diabetes, cancer, TB and heart disease, suicide rates, life expectancy or the average number of persons per household, the current living conditions at Pine Ridge defy all the demands of today's civil society.

However we could do more: the reservation's land is perfectly suited for the cultivation of hemp for industrial use, unfortunately the American government continues to ban the Lakota from growing hemp and instead imports the fiber from Canada. Underneath the reservation lies large freshwater sources but even the Lakota cannot use this water for their own purposes. Bison breeding and leather manufacturing could be another source of income but for that to be successful investments would be needed as well as the

means of marketing the goods. It's difficult for one not to feel that the American government really doesn't have any interest in seeing any of these projects materialize.

The Lakota and the Black Hills

They have always survived the most arduous living conditions. In the 17th century, when the Lakota were chased away from Minnesota by other tribes from the North, the Lakota developed a new greatness and strength by moving to the high plains which were almost impossible to farm, situated west of the Great Lakes. Their horsemanship and marksmanship made them supremely talented bison hunters. In the middle of the 19th century, their hunting grounds ranged from today's state of North Dakota down to South Dakota and to Nebraska. The focal point are the "Pahá Sápa" / the Black Hills, in South Dakota, which for centuries have been a holy ground for the American Indians. This geological anomaly catches your eye from afar: an island of trees amidst a sea of grass.

In 1805, the Lakota signed a contract with the US government guaranteeing sovereignty over their own land. However this contract was only theoretical since the immigrants' greed for gold, the lands assigned for settlement, the railway tracks and government power hardly allowed time for the ink to dry. The history of the Lakota over the past three hundred years has been one of broken treaties, shrinking hunting grounds and steadily worsening living conditions.

What can occur to a population when they find themselves in the path of economic and strategic interests is something the Lakota know only too well. In 1874, when gold and silver were discovered in the Black Hills, history took its usual course: the white man declared the treaty of Fort Laramie – signed only six years prior – to be void and decided to displace the American Indians. This expulsion ended in the massacre of Wounded Knee in 1890.

23rd July 1980: in the case of the "United States versus the Sioux Nation of Indians" the Supreme Court ruled that the Black Hills had been unfairly taken away from the Lakota. As compensation it was ruled that the United States pay back the original amount plus interest – approximately 106 million dollars. To this day the Lakota have not accepted this ruling. Instead they demand to be allowed to return to the Black Hills. In the meantime the compensation money is accumulating in a bank accounted and today amounts to close to 600 million dollars. "Rich" has a different meaning for the Lakota people.

Mount Rushmore, the stone sculpture of the heads of former US presidents, the epitome of the American idea of freedom, stands right in the middle of the Black Hills. Could there be a more scornful taunt for the American Indians?

American Indian Movement (AIM)

It's 1968 in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. Unlike in other big US cities there exists a relatively large American Indian population. Housing shortages, alcoholism, unemployment, and health problems all mark their lives. The American Indian Movement (AIM) is born in this urban environment. AIM wants to represent the underprivileged American Indians most of whom live in ghettos. Support groups are to be founded to address the gravest social problems. Legal support centers, job training and job creation initiatives as well as "Survival Schools" are founded; the latter are centers of study where American Indian children can learn the cultural values embedded in their tribes as well as their original language. A new self-confidence is to be created to revitalize traditional values and create more self-determination.

No initiatives linked to the reservations are yet in existence which is where the vast majority of American Indians still live. But this "new spirit" soon reaches them too. In 1972, AIM organizes a protest rally which originates from different points across the country and converges on Washington DC. They call the march the "Trail of Broken Treaties". What ensues is the largest confrontation between American Indians and the US government in a century. Leaders of AIM demand from the government that American Indians re-obtain the right to sign treaties, a right which had been taken away from them in 1871. They also demand the right to re-negotiate contracts that had been signed under duress. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in Washington D.C. is occupied for seven days. The occupation only lets up when the US government acquiesces with false promises.

The confrontation between AIM and BIA reaches a climax in March 1973 with the occupation of the small village of Wounded Knee in South Dakota. Wounded Knee had earned an infamous reputation following the massacre committed by American troops in 1890.

More protests and sit-ins follow in the hope of finally being able to make themselves heard. What follows is depicted by the American Indians as a "reign of terror". With the aid of the so-called "goons" (American Indians corrupted by the FBI) AIM members and those close to them, like the more traditional Lakotas from Pine Ridge, are spied upon and terrorized by the US government. Many disappear, are mistreated or even killed. These crimes are never investigated.

2008: The Indians are still fighting for their rights, for their land. Injustice still rules. But the times when the AIM could be considered a militant protest group are over. What remains is only the spirit of the movement which still forms the basis upon which American Indians look to when claiming their rights.

The significance of Wounded Knee

Wounded Knee comprises a little over 300 people on an area measuring less than three square kilometers. Despite its size, Wounded Knee in the Pine Ridge Reservation holds a very special importance to the Lakota Indians. Wounded Knee embodies defeat followed by uprising, humiliation and pride simultaneously.

After having been deprived of their land and having lived humiliated and beaten in the second half of the 19th Century, many American Indians searched for new strength within their spiritual tradition. They merge into the “ghost dance movement”, a movement that alarmed the American ruling classes who didn’t hesitate to put an end to it by force. The fleeing Lakota are stopped by the 7th US cavalry regiment and rounded up in Pine Ridge. The plan is to resettle the Lakota to Nebraska. What ensues is a massacre. On 29th December 1890, more than 300 Lakota men, women and children die at Wounded Knee Creek. This is thought of as an act of revenge for General Custer’s defeat at Little Big Horn 14 years earlier. The “Indian problem” is considered solved from 1890 onwards.

Wounded Knee, 83 years later: in March of 1973 AIM activists occupy the little church and 5 houses in Wounded Knee. It is a decisive act after 200 years of broken treaties, protest rallies on Washington, continuous human rights violations and repeated but unsuccessful denunciations of desolate living conditions on the reservations. The US is again worried and again uses violence. Army units under none other than General Haig open fire at the protesters. After 71 days, 2 Lakota dead, the American Indians give up their occupation. Over the following years, the US administration’s reaction is to persecute AIM activists and sympathizers as well as traditional Lakota, setting them up against one another and having them assassinated. There is no official account of this “reign of terror” but at least sixty American Indians die over the course of these two years.

13 years later in December 1986, in memory of the historic escape and the tragic massacre of 1890, the Lakota inaugurate the Big Foot Memorial Ride. Ever since, the annual Ride begins at Grand River and finishes two weeks later and 300 kilometers further at the Wounded Knee Memorial in Pine Ridge. The 300km horseback ride is a grueling expedition for the animals as well as for the men and women involved especially the younger generation for whom it is a rite of passage of great importance. They must care for the horses, cook, ride for many hours in temperatures below zero, keep campgrounds clean, all of which is meant to teach discipline and a sense of community, heightening the senses and helping to reveal their own potential. The reverence toward the land and their ancestors grows and history becomes part of present day life. The ride enables them to relive the pain and lead them to a healing process.

Leonard Peltier

Leonard Peltier is THE symbol of American Indian oppression and one of the most important figures in the American Indian consciousness.

In the 1970s, the Pine Ridge Reservation of South Dakota was close to a state of civil war. Traditional Lakota Indians called the AIM for help against paramilitary troops and FBI agents. Among the activists was Leonard Peltier. On 26th June 1975, in Oglala, two FBI agents and one American Indian are killed during a shootout. The US authorities look for culprits and blame whoever they can put their hands on. Peltier escapes to neighboring Canada but Canadian authorities extradite him to the US. In spite of questionable evidence, and in a very disputed trial, he is charged with the murder of the two FBI agents and is sentenced to two times life imprisonment. He has been in jail for 32 years.

His lawyers filed an objection which since has been passing through the American legal system. Peltier's case has been the subject of many books, documentaries and film projects such as "Incident of Oglala" and "Thunderheart" both of which were produced by Robert Redford. 20 million citizens from different countries, 60 US members of Congress, 51 members of the Canadian parliament, the New Democratic Party of Canada, the National Association of Defense Lawyers, the European parliament, the Dalai Lama, the arch bishop of Canterbury and the Nobel prize winner bishop Desmond Tutu have pleaded unsuccessfully with the White House to re-open the case.

Ramsey Clark, former attorney general under Richard Nixon, is today part of a team of lawyers defending Peltier and works to maintain Peltier's story alive. "Many Americans have forgotten about or have never known Leonard Peltier and what he stands for. How can he still be in prison despite the fact that his innocence is even recognized by those who keep him behind bars? Those who brought him to jail in the first place and insist that he remains there more than a quarter century later believe that his case has landed on the garbage heap of history along with all of the other calls for justice by native peoples."

Among his brethren, Leonard Peltier is also known as "Tate Wikuwa", which means "the wind that chases the sun", as well as "Guarthelass", which means "the one who leads his people". The man who some call the Nelson Mandela of the United States vegetates in a 2x3 meter cell. His release from prison is planned for 2041 by which time he would be 97 years old.

THE PROTAGONISTS

Roxanne Two Bulls

When Roxanne talks in her run-down trailer without running water and heating about “being rich” one truly understands the great significance the land of the ancestors has for her. After years of wrong directions and detours she has returned to her roots, to her identity, and regained the strength needed for a new departure. She’s planted young trees all around her trailer and redecorated the inside all by herself but she knows that she won’t truly feel like she’s returned until her own trees are as tall as her neighbor’s. Roxanne no longer needs “worldliness” – her entire world is here, in the shade of the Black Hills.

Roxanne speaks about addiction, alcoholism and violence on Kili Radio. She knows the destructive spiral all three can lead to based upon her own experience. She has eight children born of four different fathers, suffered from alcohol addiction and was beaten by her partners. But she managed to get out of it all and now wants to share her experiences with others. Sometimes, after her show, the phone lines are cut off owing to the high volume of calls – a sign of her capacity to reach out to others and speak about issues that have long been ignored.

When Kili Radio was in its infancy, Roxanne who was a young girl went from door to door, asking people whether they thought a radio station was important. Her enthusiasm and the importance of this project is still visible today when she recalls the day when Kili Radio first went on air.

Derek Janis

Derek’s body is full of tattoos, tattoos he drew himself. He says that he lives a typical “Res-Life”. “I sleep until midday, I have a car and a horse to take care of”. For a little money or in exchange for something (barter is traditional) he works as a tattoo artist in his small studio. That is how he got his horse. He loves the idea of sitting on a horse like a warrior. But today things have changed and he is a DJ on a hill.

Derek is the host of a four-hour hip hop show on Radio Kili. He loves his job and also by far prefers spinning records instead of getting into mischief out of boredom. Even though the microphone, the mixing board and the computer might not be his own he can use them to compose his own songs. He tells us that at night when he is alone in the studio he sometimes dances by himself.

He also knows that elders do not approve of the lyrics of the hip-hop songs requested by his young listeners. He carefully mixes over the “four-letter words” and occasionally plays a traditional PowWow song.

Buzi Two Lance

As a young man Buzi used to visit his uncle who worked at Radio Kili. And one day, out of the blue, he started working there as a volunteer. Today, more than twenty years later, he’s programming director. But this has nothing to do with ideology. He doesn’t

belong to the AIM group of activists but he makes clear that since the occupation of Wounded Knee, it's better once again to be American Indian. This is easily believable as you see him at peace with his status as an American Indian. Right in the middle of the show, he sits calmly soldering cables, completely at ease with the modern equipment, while at the same time believing that the medicine men are right when they say that a feather on top of the antenna which transmits Radio Kili is equally protective against lightning than an expensive lightning conductor.

Buzi makes his money working at the Pine Ridge Casino and once in a while is cast as an American Indian extra in Hollywood movies, sometimes even with his children and his horse. Casting agencies call Kili Radio whenever they need a few hundred American Indians in traditional costumes plus horses.

John Trudell

When Kili Radio makes a surprise announcement that a guest of honor will be on the show we find ourselves strangely moved by a modest looking man, quite thin, and wearing sun glasses. The guest of honor is John Trudell, a poet, actor and activist well known for his powerful words and his charisma. He's a very important person in the American Indian independence movement. Such has been his involvement and his passion to fight for the rights of American Indians that the FBI compiled a 17'000-page dossier about him during the 1970s, one of the most comprehensive sets of documentation that exist about him.

On 11th February 1979, during protest rally in favor of Leonard Peltier in Washington D.C., John Trudell made a speech about the war the FBI was waging against the American Indians and burned an American flag. Several hours later, his parent-in-law's house on the Shoshone Paiute reservation was burned to the ground killing his wife Tina who was pregnant at the time, his three children as well as his mother-in-law.

During his militant days, John Trudell also participated in the 19-month uninterrupted siege of the former Alcatraz jail by the « Indians of All Tribes ». In 1973 he became president of the AIM and remained in the post for seven years.

Today, Trudell's music is his sharpest weapons. He's convinced that the American Indians should fight less and think more. He wants to win the fight through intelligence and common sense. John Trudell lives in Los Angeles where he focuses on his music but he feels very much attached to Pine Ridge and regularly visits Kili Radio. His own common sense leads him to explain the past using the history of evolution but his heart and his music speak another language.

Bruce Ellison

More than 30 years ago he came from New York to Rapid City for a three-month internship; this was four days after the shootout in Oglala. He has stayed ever since. First he was supposed to only defend a few of the Wounded Knee protesters who had occupied houses. This is how he became Peltier's lawyer, trying to get him released from prison for almost three decades. And because lack of injustice is an everyday occurrence, he continues to stand up for the rights of the Lakota, whether it be to

prevent uranium mining, the abuse of water rights, or the decriminalization of the cultivation of industrial hemp.

Sitting calmly in his office crammed with papers he tirelessly enumerates the sad facts: there's 80% unemployment; male life expectancy is 41; childhood mortality is ten times higher than the national average; there's a lack of housing; most families live without electricity and running water. The list is very long - too long to really remain calm and never tire. Bruce Ellison bears the marks of a man who's been fighting for 30 years. But you can tell that he's here to stay and will carry on fighting for justice as this has become his rallying cry.

CAST

Roxanne Two Bulls
John Trudell
Bruce Ellison
Buzi Two Lance
Derrick Janis
Tom Casey
Mary White Face
Melanie Janis
Ramona White Plume
Anpo White Plume
Ron His Horse Is Thunder
Ashley and Trevor Belt

CREW

Written and directed by Fanny Bräuning
Produced by Kaspar Kasics / Fanny Bräuning
Cinematography Pierre Mennel / Dieter Stürmer / Igor Martinovic
Sound Gabriel Miller / Judy Karp / Jaime Reyes
Dramaturgy and editing Kaspar Kasics
Additional editing Myriam Flury / Petra Grawe
Original music by Tomas Korber
Sound mix Denis Séchaud
Sound design Kai Tebbel

Fanny Bräuning

Born in 1975 in Bâle, Switzerland, she obtained her baccalaureat and studied cinema at the Zürcher Hochschule für Gestaltung und Kunst. She has travelled to New-Zeland, Australia and Laponia. She has worked as an assistant on numerous films and television productions. Her documentaries, MEINE MUTTER and PALOMA were shown at the documentary film festival, Visions du réel in Nyon, Switzerland. NO MORE SMOKE SIGNALS is her first feature-length documentary.

Kaspar Kasics

Kasics was born in Interlaken, Switzerland and grew up in Zurich. German studies, music and philosophy were his first interests before turning to film after completing his doctoral thesis and working for Swiss television for five years (writer, director and presenter).

Kasics is of German and Hungarian origin. He has directed pieces on Robert Wilson, Harald Szeemann, Reinhild Hoffmann, Santiago Calatrava, Anna Huber, Fischli/Weiss and many others. He has also directed films about the Monte Verità, the last living Swiss embroiderer, and children in psychiatry.

His debut as an independent director and producer started with the documentary entitled JEMAND – ODER DIE PASSION ZUM WIDERSTAND. His documentaries CLOSED COUNTRY and BLUE END were presented for the first time within the official selection of the Berlinale, and his feature-length film DRAGAN & MADLAINA won the prize for best Swiss film made for television. DOWNTOWN SWITZERLAND, which he produced in collaboration with Chr. Davi, Stefan Haupt and Fredi M. Murer. In production: the feature-length film NOBODY IS LIKE YOU.