A landscape photograph of a green field with a dirt path leading to a line of trees under a blue sky with white clouds.

HOMeward BOUND

DIRECTOR'S VISION

by Lidia Sheinin

MOTIVATION



I vividly remember the day when I found out that we're all going to die. I was four years old. I've been dedicating my studies to this subject ever since.

My greatest concern as a child was around the health of my grandma. I wondered if there was a way to never lose her. So I started drawing her. As I grew older I turned to jotting down her stories, then recording her voice, then filming her. In 1996 grandma broke her hip and my mom, her daughter, had to become her care-giver. This spring grandma turned 99. Even though she is here, she is definitely not the same person I used to know as a child. Her increasing age brought about another issue for me: how does one maintain relations with someone whose personality is changing dramatically? How to deal with not just mortality, but also ageing, change, and role reversal?

In 2013 I made a short documentary called "Mom", diving into the complicated relationships between my mother and grandma, and their struggle to find love for each other in spite of the hardships.

When I went off to make my second documentary in 2014, I was set on exploring a new subject matter. I was to portray a life of Nadya, a young Russian mother of four, and study her complicated relationships with her husband. While I was in pre-production Nadya's grandmother broke her hip and, Nadya had to move in with her to help. It seemed like grandmothers were chasing after me. Yet this old lady, Nina, was nothing like my grandmother. Cold and stuck up, she shooed away the kids in an attempt to maintain the quiet and order of her former lifestyle; the war was on. The film became a tragicomic verite account of her transforming relationship with the children, especially the eldest, 7 year old Artem, and their growing friendship. The young life was taking over, yet at the same time it brought new meaning for Nina.

"Homeward bound" seems like a natural progression of my exploration of dealing with these issues of age, mortality, and complicated inter-generational family bonds. Drawing on my personal search for answers and intensive observations, I aim to study the characters and relations of my protagonists with the utmost intimacy and insight.

I also feel that the journey they are going to take - from Moscow through rural Russia to a former Ukrainian, recently turned Russian, town - is a very important and timely chance for us to observe the modern Russian state and society, and the changes that are happening there.

GENRE

I see "Homeward bound" as a journey which is perceived by both the protagonists and the audience as true to life yet somewhat dreamlike, even mythical.

The story of a ten year old runaway following his grandmother on a surreal and tragicomic trip to her home town is deeply realistic in its details and depiction of modern day Russia. And yet I strongly believe that to lift this story above the commonplace and let it unveil its deeper meaning it should be approached light-heartedly. Making use of a child's perspective will ease us into the mythological and even fable-like quality of this otherwise grim journey. Therefore I aim for a visual style that would combine sober docu-drama verite with carefully crafted, sometimes dreamlike, sometimes playful view of reality, creating a mixture of fairytale and realism.



VISUAL STYLE

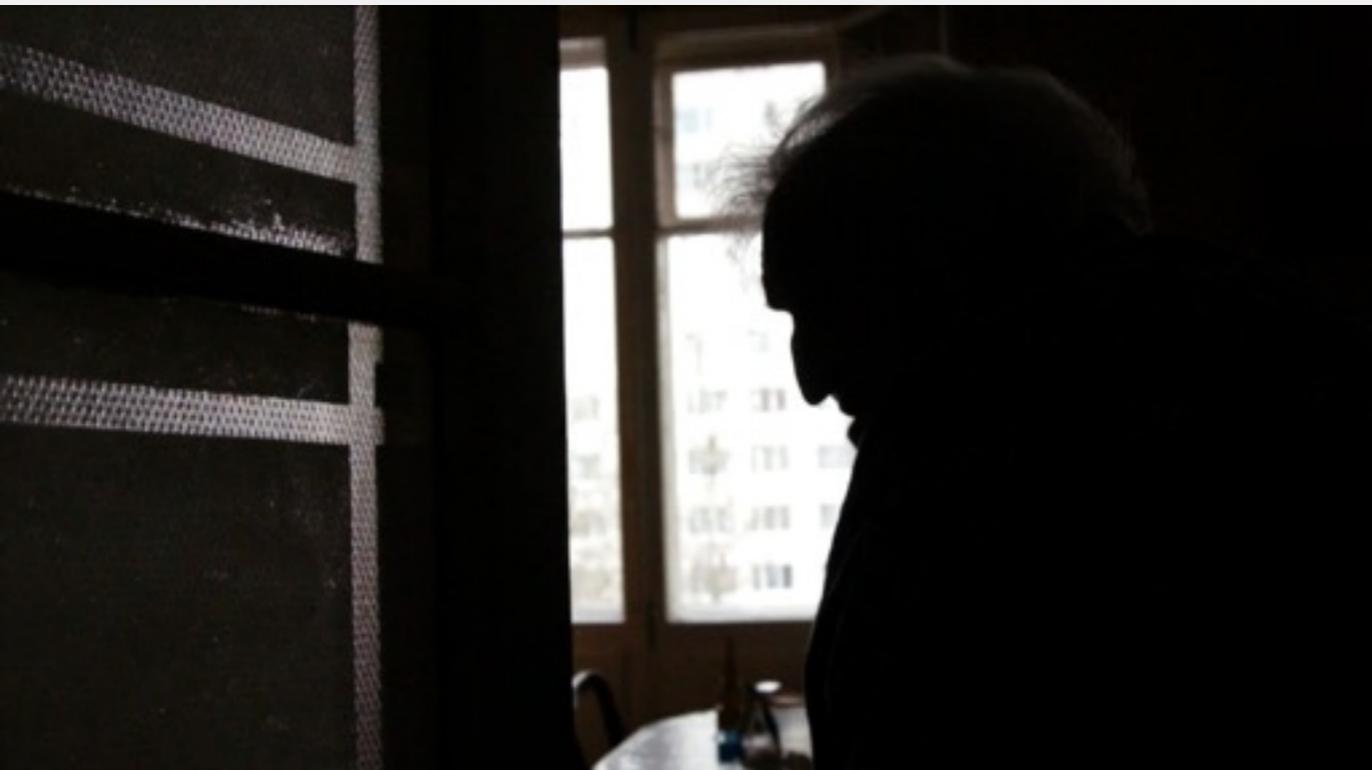
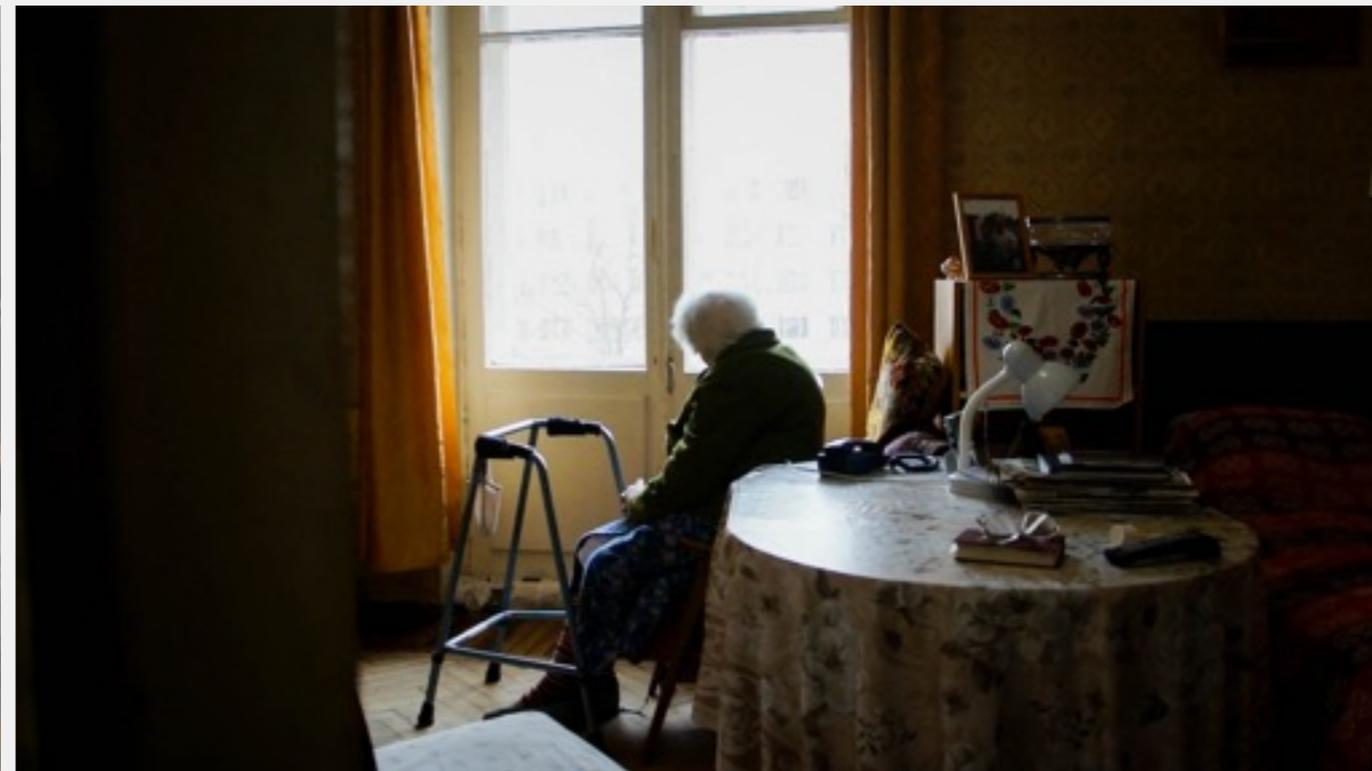
REALISM

I come from a cinema verite school of documentary and intend to achieve realism through my experience of watchful observation and being close to my protagonists.

It is important for me to create a genuine and close relationship between the audience and the main characters by making them real, believable and very human. It is equally important to be able to intimately observe the development of the characters' relations to themselves and each other.

A fly-on-the-wall observational camera allowed me to achieve this in two documentary films I've shot, directed and edited. Both were dedicated to the complex nature of family relations.

Stills from "Groundhog Day"



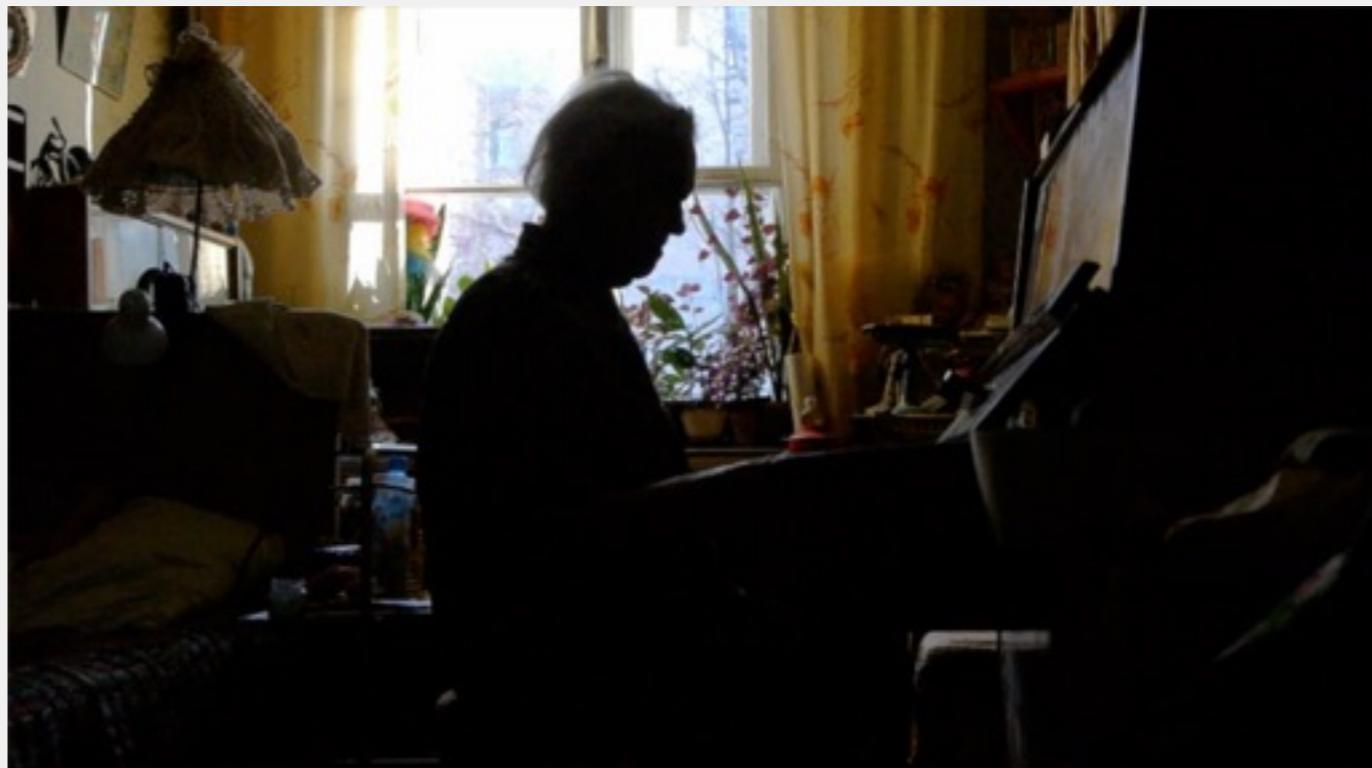
documentary, 28 min, 2013
director Lidia Sheinin

Stills from "Groundhog Day"



documentary, 72 min, 2016
director Lidia Sheinin

Stills from "Groundhog Day"



documentary, 72 min, 2016
director Lidia Sheinin

Video clip from “Groundhog Day”



selected scenes, 0.53 min

director Lidia Sheinin

<https://vimeo.com/172666000>

The life of the post-soviet landscape unfolding in front of us as the journey progresses is another important aspect of this story. The realistic details are there to make the myth easily achievable and create an acute awareness of the social and political context of modern Russia. Here I also plan to take advantage of an observational approach and the use of local people, shot in a neorealist manner.



FAIRY TALE

In addition to its realism I feel it's equally important to create a gentle, humorous and sometimes fairytale-esque view of reality, drawing on the imaginary world of a child's perception.

Some of the methods I plan to use to achieve this include attention to detail that we seem to lose with age; unexpected comedic observations; an unusual perspective. Some sequences will have a more dreamlike quality to shape an enchanted feeling of being submerged in a child's vision of the Ulysses journey in search of Ithaca.

This approach is laying a lot of emphasis on the mood and atmosphere. I've been working on developing this style while making my experimental short films.

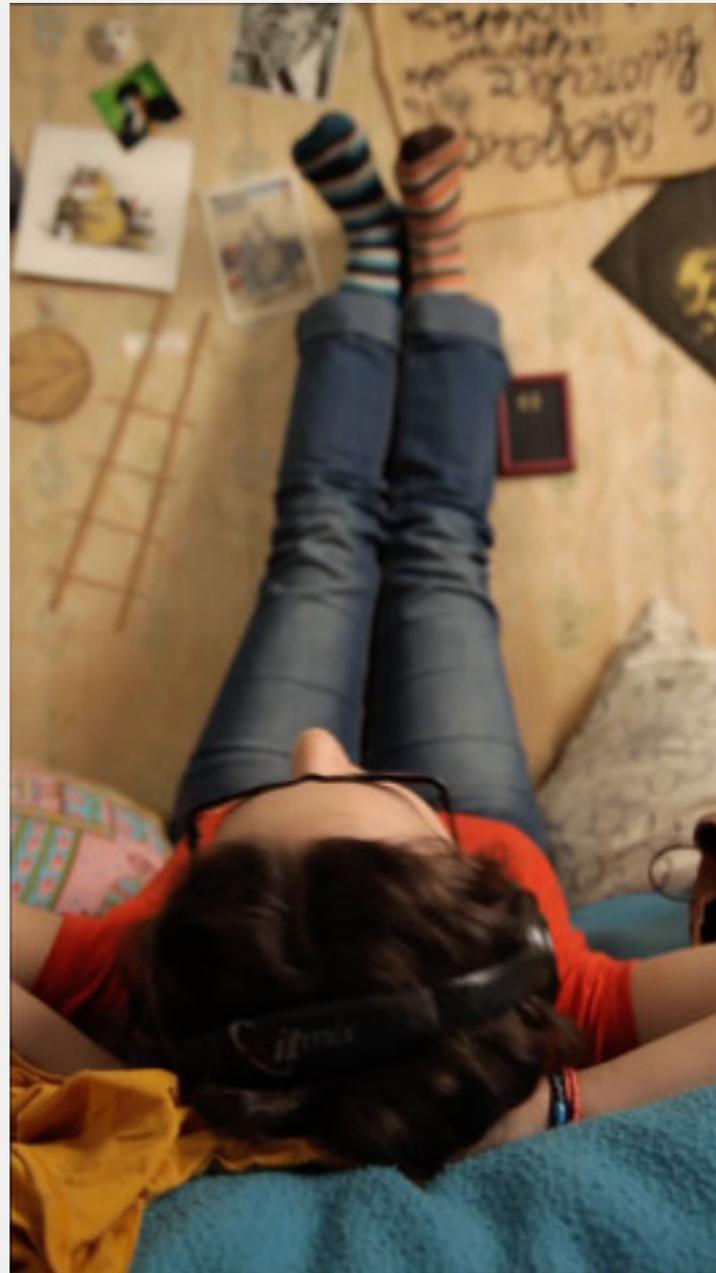


“Happily ever after”
short fiction, 2006



“Parts”
short fiction, 2007

Another important side of this storytelling approach is using “visual humour” by carefully crafted yet playful framing. I’ve been researching it in one of my most recent experimental shorts, combining a documentary story with fictional elements and meticulous framing.



“An ordinary life,” short fiction, 2016

Video.

An ordinary life

“An ordinary life” is short experimental fiction, created in a vertical format to be viewed on mobile devices.

Mixing documentary with fictional elements and filming approach it paints a humorous portrait of my family and its most ordinary life, trying to find at least something extraordinary about it.

1.50 min

director Lidia Sheinin

<https://vimeo.com/163459765>



TONE OF VOICE

Drama always goes hand in hand with comedy. I aim to stay true to this in my storytelling visual approach. To tell the joke I prefer to rely on framing and composition, rather than script, reflecting the irony in our lives and choosing showing over telling.



Magical realism will ultimately be the tone of this film, striving for the poetry of subtle details, an indirect impact via the evocation of a state of mind different from the one in the plot and true-to-life dialogues through image and sound.



thank you

