

Indie Outlook

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Gaite Jansen on “Supernova”

August 16, 2016 · by [Indie Outlook](#) · in [Indie Spotlight](#) ·



There are few films that provide as fitting an accompaniment to the waning days of summer as Tamar van den Dop’s “Supernova.” It was made and released in the Netherlands in 2014 before making its American premiere at the Chicago International Film Festival. I gave it a favorable review in my festival coverage, and during subsequent viewings, the film has grown on me more and more. Though it has yet to receive a theatrical run in the U.S., it thankfully can be found via [Vimeo On Demand \(https://vimeo.com/ondemand/supernova\)](https://vimeo.com/ondemand/supernova).

“Supernova” is, quite frankly, the most hot and bothered movie I’ve ever seen. It is a deep dive into the hormonal angst experienced by its teenage protagonist, Meis (Gaite Jansen), as she remains stuck living with her parents in a house dangerously perched at the corner of a desolate road. The possibility of a car ramming through her home serves as a comfort, since it carries the promise of something actually *happening*. Not much does during the film’s first hour, and yet I was mesmerized from the first frame onward. Everything from Gregor Meerman’s gorgeous cinematography to the textured sound design fully immerses us within the sensory experience of Meis, and Jansen’s performance is a marvel of wit, vulnerability and tremendous strength.

Though much of the actress’s work is currently unavailable in America, “Supernova” has made me a lifelong fan, and I was thrilled to interview her via e-mail for Indie Outlook. In the conversation that follows, Jansen discusses “Supernova” along with her performances in Paul Verhoeven’s “Tricked,” Joost van Ginkel’s “170 Hz” and the third season of Netflix’s “Peaky Blinders.”

What initially attracted you to acting at a young age?

I started going to acting classes when I was six years old. What exactly drove me to going to those classes I don't remember, but I do remember that I loved them. Especially the performances we did once a year. Those were my absolute favorite and if sometimes I didn't like the lessons, I just reminded myself that there would be a performance at the end of the year. That hobby became my passion and that passion just never went away. I still have a hard time believing that this is actually a way to make a living.

"170 Hz" by Joost van Ginkel FEST 2012 Offic...



Growing up in the Netherlands, what were some of the performances you saw (either in film, TV or theatre) that left a lasting impact on you?

There are many since my fascination with acting started so young. I remember watching "Sesame Street" and wanted to be part of that. In my teenage years, I watched the films "Revolutionary Road" and "Heavenly Creatures," which had a huge impact on me acting-wise. The series "Friends" gave me a great perspective on what comedic acting could be like. On stage, I watched many plays put on by Theatre Group Amsterdam, and recently I've seen [Sebastian Schipper's] film, "Victoria," in which Laia Costa did an outstanding job. But there are so many performances that moved and motivated me, I could use pages to answer this question.

How did you go about preparing for the role of a deaf teenager in "170 Hz"? I'm really hoping that film receives a U.S. release one day.

A U.S. release would be cool! Preparing for "170 Hz" was a process that still warms my heart thinking of it. Michael Muller and I got sign language lessons from two deaf teenagers and a sign language interpreter. On the weekends, since I was still in high school, they would teach us how to deliver [the lines in] the script and we would hang out together. I got to know their world for a little while, and I learned a lot. Other than the sign language, we talked a lot with director Joost van Ginkel about the script, the scenes and the importance of the movie. And we watched films that inspired him to make the film, such as "Babel" (and many, many more).

Your 2012 film, "Tricked," premiered this year in the U.S. What was it like acting in a film without a completed story? How challenging was it incorporating the crowd-sourced suggestions into your vision for the character?

It was weird. We had no clue what our scenes would be and where the story would go. Luckily, we all knew that Paul Verhoeven is a great director. To me, it was kind of disappointing that the audience chose such an obvious story line for my character. But I did like the process of not

knowing and considering we had a great team, I would do it all again. I like the unknown and I like an experiment.

The Pheromones - Dangerous Games



I loved your performance in “Supernova.” How did you become involved in the film?

I auditioned for the script when I was about 17. I had fallen in love with the script and with Tamar immediately. The film had some problems getting financed and it took another three years before we could actually make the movie. Tamar wanted a younger girl at that point, but we both had grown into the thought of me playing it, and so she decided to make the character a little bit older, which I think worked out better for the story. The script appealed to me because I know Meis. I know how she feels. I know the boredom and the willingness of something to happen as a teenager so well. I think it’s a beautiful coming of age story that is so close to reality. Whilst shooting it, I became Meis and Meis became part of me. She still is.

What was your collaboration with Tamar like in terms of developing the character of Meis? Was the comfort you developed with Tamar crucial in preparing you for the scenes requiring nudity?

Tamar and I became really close. I understood what she wanted to make and she gave me the freedom of developing Meis in all the ways I wanted, even though—of course—it was her script. We talked about the nudity and how I dislike being nude on screen (duh). But she explained to me everything I wanted to know. I knew what she wanted to make and I completely stood, and still stand, behind this story. I think “Supernova” is a great example of functional nudity.

Honest depictions of female sexuality are still stigmatized in American cinema, with few of them managing to reach a wide audience. Does a similar stigma exist in the Netherlands?

It does. I think a similar stigma still exists almost all over the world, but I also feel like we are making progress. I feel like slowly but surely, more and more interesting stories are written about and around woman.

Your sardonically funny and poignant narration in “Supernova” is one of the rare instances in which an actor’s voice-over truly seems to be emanating from their character’s mind. How did you approach recording the narration?

That’s another great compliment about “Supernova,” thank you! We had one day to do all the voice-overs. Tamar had written them and we had great fun doing them. Often we would burst out laughing because we just love Meis so much and we understand her so well. I always felt freedom during the process of making “Supernova.”



It's been thrilling to watch you go toe-to-toe with Cillian Murphy on season three of "Peaky Blinders." What has it been like inhabiting such an unpredictable character?

"Peaky Blinders" has been truly amazing to do. It was great to immerse myself in the time period. Working with Cillian was a real honor, he is such an amazing actor. And of course, the character. I loved playing Tatiana Petrovna. She is unpredictable and has an extreme power. Every day on set was a completely different day for me because Tatiana was completely different every day. I had a great connection with Tim Mielants, the director. I feel really lucky that I had the chance to play such an extreme character, completely different from who I am in my day-to-day life.

The plays that you have posted on your official site ("Hamlet Vs. Hamlet," "Medea," "The Hidden Force") all look fascinating. What does theatre offer you creatively that cinema does not?

The interaction with the audience, the time to rehearse and the repetition of the play, which gives you a chance to get to know all the different layers of your character. I would always want to do both. Film and theatre excite me in two completely different ways.

What projects are you currently working on, and do you have aspirations to write and/or direct in the future?

The projects that I'm working on now have to still be kept silent for a little bit. My aspiration is to continue working abroad. That will be my main focus for now. I will definitely not exclude writing or directing, but it is not my main focus at this moment or anytime soon.

For more information on Gait Jansen, visit her [official site \(http://www.gaitejansen.nl\)](http://www.gaitejansen.nl). "Supernova" is currently available on [Vimeo On Demand \(https://vimeo.com/ondemand/supernova\)](https://vimeo.com/ondemand/supernova), while "Tricked" and "Peaky Blinders" are available on Netflix and Amazon.

Tags: [170 Hz](#), [Amazon](#), [Babel](#), [Chicago International Film Festival](#), [Cillian Murphy](#), [Gait Jansen](#), [Gregor Meerman](#), [Hamlet Vs. Hamlet](#), [Heavenly Creatures](#), [Indie Outlook](#), [Joost van Ginkel](#), [Laia Costa](#), [Matt Fagerholm](#), [Medea](#), [Michael Muller](#), [Netflix](#), [Paul Verhoeven](#), [Peaky Blinders](#), [Revolutionary Road](#), [Sebastian Schipper](#), [Sesame Street](#), [Supernova](#), [Tamar van den Dop](#), [The Hidden Force](#), [Theatre Group Amsterdam](#), [Tim Mielants](#), [Tricked](#), [Victoria](#), [Vimeo](#)