

CIAOfilm and Willow Films present



Changing has consequences,  
not changing also has consequences

# COBY

a documentary film by Christian Sonderegger

produced by MOIRA CHAPPELAIN-VAUTIER & MARIE-CASTILLE MENTION SCHAAR  
cinematographer GEORGI LAZAREVSKI sound mixer CHRISTIAN SONDEREGGER editor CAMILLE TOUBKIS  
sound editor OLIVIER LAURENT re-recording mixer FLORENT LAVALLEE colorist AIDAN OBRIST  
production CIAOFILMS & WILLOW FILMS with the support from LE FOND D'AIDE A L'INNOVATION DU CENTRE NATIONAL  
DE L'IMAGE ANIMEE and LA SOCIÉTÉ CIVILE DES AUTEURS MULTIMÉDIAS  
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World Premiere in Cannes ACID 2017

A First feature Creative Documentary

France – 2017 – HD – 77 min – 1:1.78 – 5.1 – English

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## SHORT SYNOPSIS

A small town smack bang in the American Midwest. Suzanna, aged 23, changes gender and becomes a boy: Coby. Her transformation deeply disrupts the lives of all who love her. Ultimately, Coby's chrysalis morphs into the transformation of a whole family compelled to modify their own perspectives. Not only a physical metamorphosis is at stake here, but also a spiritual one that eventually takes place under the director's bright, unusual eye.

"Changing has consequences. Not changing also has consequences."



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## LONG SYNOPSIS

Chagrin Falls, a small snow-covered village in the Midwest. This is where Jacob and Sara, a perfectly matched couple, live. But Jacob has a secret: before being a man, he was a woman...

At the age of 23 Susanna tells her family she wants to change her gender. This begins by taking testosterone pills. Surgery comes next: the removal of the breasts and then the uterus. Susanna decides to cut her hair short, to help her close friends and family used to the change. She dresses as a boy and chooses a transition name: Coby. It's a huge upheaval in the couple's intimacy. Here surrounding is disrupted too. Her mother, her father, her colleagues are all affected by this strange metamorphosis.

Coby's chrysalis emerges before the eyes of the world, even viewers on YouTube. A daily video shows each new step toward his new body. Strong images which are evidence of his physical transformation, but also of his psychological and emotional evolution. Change affects everything in Coby: his body, his voice, his feelings, his desires. Ultimately, Coby's chrysalis morphs into the transformation of a whole family compelled to modify their own perspective.

Jacob is now a man, with one important difference. There is still one more step necessary before the final transition is complete: hysterectomy. A one-way choice – all the more crucial as his partner Sara does not want to bear a child. So, if Coby decides to have his uterus removed, he renounces the precious ability of women: giving life.

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Not changing also has consequences ..."

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## CHARACTERS

Jacob Hunt

Sara Mound

Ellen Hunt

Willard Hunt

Andrew Hunt

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## CREW

Director, Screenplay, Sound mixing Christian Sonderegger

DOP Georgi Lazarevski

Editor Camille Toubkis

Sound Editor Olivier Laurent

Colorist Aïdan Obrist

Re-recording Mixer Florent Lavallé

Producer Moïra Chappedelaine Vautier  
(Ciaofilm)

Co-producer Marie-Castille Mention Schaar  
(Willow Films)

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## DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Christian Sonderegger was born in 1967, in Strasbourg, France. He has studied Cinematography at the Louis Lumière film school in Paris. He started working as director of photography for short-films, commercials and TV broadcasts.

In the late 90's, he worked as a screenplay writer for Lazennec film production.

Since 1998, he runs Ciaofilm production and directs several commercials and short-films awarded at international festivals. He also works as a director's assistant on features and as sound operator for documentaries.

He now develops and directs his own documentaries and feature lengths at Ciaofilm.

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## DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

### PASTERIES

cast: Martine Sarcey & Gilles Segal (14 min – HD - 2009)

Selection : Lucania International Film Festivals (Italy), Shnit International Film Festival Bern (Switzerland), Köln (Germany) Capetown (South Africa) - French-Romanian Film Festival (Romania), Salon de Provence (France)

### INDECENT

cast: Chloé Réjon & Marc Robert (20min - Super 16mm - 2001)

1st award at Valenciennes film festival (France) – First Award at Strasbourg film festival (France) – audience award Silhouette-Paris film festival (France) - International award of Hull Short film festival (UK) – Foreign Film award at Montecatini Film Festival (Italy) – Leading actress award at Moulin Film Festival (France). Selection : Toronto Shorts festival (Canada) – Brooklyn film festival (USA), Palm-Spring Film festival (USA)...

### A STEP INTO THE VOID

cast: Sami Bouajila & Sacha Bourdo. (8min - 35mm - 1999)

Selections: Valenciennes Film festival (France), Cognac Film festival (France), Metz Film festival (France), Sarlat (France), Kiev (Ukraine), Acapulco (Mexico), Manchester (UK), Rio (Brazil)...



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## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I left for the United States with precise ideas about how I was going to film my half-brother's gender change. But as shooting progressed, I felt that something deeper was at stake in the process.

Finally it was the whole family who opened up in front of my camera. I understood then that I was not simply going to document Coby's transformation, but I felt I had to understand how those who were close to him had been supporting him all along.

The factual approach turned into emphasizing the affective as well as the sensory aspects. We turn away from the body to get closer to the mind. The question then is not why, but how. The point is: what is at stake in the resulting changes within the family? So the movie was remodeled into a narrative relating the changes affecting not only Coby, but the whole family. Something which was vital to one of its members compelled the others to do some soul-searching. In their own way, they all had to overcome an ordeal. Eventually they emerged as more complete human beings.

This portrait of my half-brother has eventually turned into a metaphor for our capacity to evolve and adjust to the changes which we can't avoid - a situation which goes beyond the feeling of discomfort experienced by transgender people. As Will, Coby's father, aptly puts it during the interview: "Changing has consequences, but not changing also has consequences"

Christian Sonderegger



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*"Ah, that's black and white. That isn't psychological. She was born that way. She didn't have a choice. She had no choice. She didn't learn that. That I know from all my study here. People used to think, like, being gay was psychological... No, you're born with it."*  
(Coby's mother)



*"Well, there's consequences for not doing something that your heart is set upon, you know, that you feel so essential to your life, and you choose not to do it. Well, there's going to be consequences for that too. And so, what do you need to do to live better? What do you want to do? Because no matter what you do, there's going to be consequences."*  
(Coby's father)



*"It's kind of crazy how powerful the mind is in that you can make this transition, and something that feels it's going to be hopelessly awkward and hard to get right every time, you'll have to constantly make a mental shift, and, like, in months of just saying "he", and saying Coby.."*  
(Coby's brother)

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## CONVERSATION OF SARA AND JACOB IN A POPCORN SHOP

*"I feel that we do look heterosexuals. I feel, like, maybe sometimes I look at you and envision you having a penis, and you don't. Every dream I have of you, a sex dream, you have a penis. I don't know why. It's not something that I'm actively thinking or wanting you to have, but it's... When you grow up in a society where a man is a man and a woman is a woman, you just... I don't know. My brain subconsciously gives you a penis. It's a nice one; you're pretty big in my dreams."*



*"I mean, I don't mind being me. In fact, I think it's kind of interesting to be me, because I get to be a little bit of everything. I get to have the experience on both sides. Yet I don't get the experience I got before now, because people don't see me as female, so I can't live under that little umbrella. Although people that know me, and have known me for many years, and know me now, and know that I'm out, I think they do treat me a little bit differently, because they know that I'm a little bit... I don't even know how to explain it. I'm... I understand them. I understand the women that I'm around at work, and they know that I get it on a different level than men. Like, I'm more sensitive, and I can have a conversation with any of the nurses about something that's a lot more intimate that they would ever have a conversation with to just a man, because they wouldn't expect a man would understand it."*

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