NOTES ON BLINDNESS

Cognition is beautiful.

A FILM AND VIRTUAL REALITY EXPERIENCE BY
PETER MIDDLETON & JAMES SPINNEY

* PRESS NOTES *

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#NotesOnBlindness
2016 FESTIVAL SCREENINGS

Since premiering at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival in January, NOTES ON BLINDNESS and the sister VR project NOTES ON BLINDNESS: INTO DARKNESS have screened at a number of leading international film festivals, where they received the following accolades:

AWARDS - FILM

2016 San Francisco Film Festival, Special Jury Prize
2016 Sheffield Doc/Fest, Innovation & Storytelling Award, supported by the Wellcome Trust

AWARDS - VR

2016 Tribeca Film Festival, Storyscapes Award
2016 Kaleidoscope, Best Experimental Experience
2016 Sheffield Doc/Fest, Alternate Realities VR Award

INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL SCREENINGS

Jan – Sundance Film Festival (World Premiere)
Feb – Rotterdam International Film Festival (European Premiere)
Feb – Istanbul Independent Film Festival
April – Chicago DOC10
April – Cleveland International Film Festival
April – Tribeca Film Festival (VR Presentation)
April – San Francisco International Film Festival
June – Sydney International Film Festival
July – Karlovy Vary International Film Festival
July – New Zealand Film Festival

UK FESTIVAL SCREENINGS

June - Sheffield Doc/Fest
June - Open City Documentary Festival
June - East End Film Festival

RELEASED IN UK CINEMAS JULY 1ST
FILM & VR TOUR

The film and VR will be on tour across the country throughout June and July, courtesy of Curzon Cinemas and Sheffield Doc/Fest. They will screen at the following venues:

24th June: Close Up Film Centre, London
25th June: DCA, Dundee
25th June: Electric, Birmingham
28th June: Picturehouse Central, London
29th June: Tyneside Cinema, Newcastle
30th June: BFI Southbank, NFT 1, London

1st July: Glasgow Film Theatre, Glasgow
1st July: Curzon Bloomsbury, London
2nd July: HOME, Manchester
2nd July: Phoenix Picturehouse, Oxford
3rd July: Filmhouse, Edinburgh
3rd July: Arts Picturehouse, Cambridge
5th July: Belmont, Aberdeen
5th July: Watershed, Bristol
6th July: Duke of York, Brighton
6th July: FACT, Liverpool
7th July: FACT, Liverpool
7th July: Broadway, Nottingham
10th July: National Media Museum, Bradford

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PRAISE FOR NOTES ON BLINDNESS

WINNER - SPECIAL JURY PRIZE
San Francisco International Film Festival 2016

WINNER - STORYTELLING & INNOVATION AWARD
Sheffield Doc/Fest 2016

WINNER - BEST EXPERIMENTAL EXPERIENCE
Kaleidoscope World Tour 2016

“Miraculous... this is a beautiful, accessible and thoughtful work of art” ★★★★★
- CHARLIE PHILLIPS, The Guardian

“Elegant, evocative and deeply affecting”
- SCREEN DAILY, Wendy Ide

“One of Sundance’s most visually arresting documentaries”
- AMERICAN CINEMATOGRAPHER, Patricia Thomson

“Sensitive, moving and poetic” ★★★★
- TIME OUT, Dave Calhoun

“Remarkable... an elegiac, incredibly immersive portrait” ★★★★★
THE LIST, Allan Hunter

“Audaciously ambitious... revelatory cinema”
- SAN FRANCISCO FILM SOCIETY

“Profoundly emotional”
SHORTLIST, James Gill

“One of Sundance’s most visually arresting documentaries”
- AMERICAN CINEMATOGRAPHER, Patricia Thomson

“A beautiful example of how cinema can illuminate even the darkest reaches of the human condition.”
- POPOPTIQ, J.R Kinnard

“Creatively rearranging reality to put a viewer inside someone else’s head is the finest aim of non-fiction filmmaking, and this documentary pulls that off with both stylistic panache and emotional grace.”
- THE FILM STAGE, Daniel Schindel
PRAISE FOR NOTES ON BLINDNESS: INTO DARKNESS

WINNER - TRIBECA STORYSCAPES AWARD
Tribeca Film Festival 2016

WINNER - ALTERNATE REALITIES VR AWARD
Sheffield Doc/Fest 2016

“Notes on Blindness: Into Darkness is one of the first great virtual reality experiences” - ALPHR.COM, Thomas McMullan

“Undoubtedly one of the most extraordinary digital experiences of these past years” - IMM3RSIVE

“A magical VR experience... a major leap forward in the form”
THE GUARDIAN, Charlie Phillips

“Mesmerizing... the best virtual reality experience at Tribeca Film Festival”
MOTHERBOARD. VICE

“Poetic and timeless”
LE MONDE

NOTES ON BLINDNESS: INTO DARKNESS
A VR JOURNEY INTO A WORLD BEYOND SIGHT

EXPERIENCE THE AWARD-WINNING VR PROJECT IN SELECTED UK CINEMAS

24 June Close-Up Film Centre - London
25 June Dundee Contemporary Arts - Dundee
25 June The Electric Cinema - Birmingham
28 June Picturehouse Central - London
29 June Tyndale Cinema - Newcastle
30 June BFI Southbank - London
1 July Curzon Bloomsbury - London
1 July Glasgow Film Theatre - Glasgow
2 July HOME - Manchester
2 July Phoenix Picturehouse - Oxford
3 July Arts Picturehouse - Cambridge
3 July Filmhouse - Edinburgh
5 July Belmont Filmhouse - Aberdeen
5 July Watershed - Bristol
6/7 July Duke of York’s Picturehouse - Brighton
7 July Picturehouse at FACT - Liverpool
10 July Broadway - Nottingham
10 July Picturehouse at NMM - Bradford

Discover more at NotesOnBlindnessFilm.com
LOGLINE

After losing sight, John Hull knew that if he did not try to understand blindness it would destroy him. In 1983 he began keeping an audio diary, documenting his extraordinary journey into ‘a world beyond sight’.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

In 1983, after decades of steady deterioration, writer and theologian John Hull became totally blind. To help him make sense of the upheaval in his life, he began documenting his experiences on audio cassette.

Following the Emmy Award-winning short film of the same name, NOTES ON BLINDNESS takes a creative approach to the documentary form. Actors lip-sync to the voices of the family, embedding John’s original audio recordings within compelling cinematography and textured sound design. The result is a poetic and intimate story of loss, rebirth and transformation, documenting John’s extraordinary journey into ‘a world beyond sight’.

LONG SYNOPSIS

In 1983, after decades of steady deterioration, writer and academic John Hull became totally blind. To help him make sense of the upheaval in his life, he began keeping a diary on audiostream. Over three years he recorded over sixteen hours of material, a unique testimony of loss, rebirth and renewal, excavating the interior world of blindness.

Published in 1990 under the title ‘Touching the Rock’, the diaries were described by author and neurologist Oliver Sacks as, ‘A masterpiece... The most precise, deep and beautiful account of blindness I have ever read.’

NOTES ON BLINDNESS is a multi-platform project based on John’s original audio recordings. The project includes a feature length documentary and virtual reality project released alongside the film.

Film website: www.notesonblindness.co.uk

A new edition of Touching the Rock was recently reissued by publisher SPCK, with artwork and a quote from Wendy Ide’s Observer review adorning the front cover.
Early 1980. John Hull (Dan Skinner), a professor at the University of Birmingham, England, is making a home with his new wife Marilyn (Simone Kirby). In the weeks before the birth of their first son, John grows increasingly alarmed by the progress of black disks creeping across his field of vision. After a series of unsuccessful operations, he suffers a dramatic collapse of his sight. Within two years he has lost the last traces of sight. At this point he begins keeping an audio diary.

‘I knew that if I didn’t understand blindness, it would destroy me.’

- JOHN HULL

To the outside world John appears to be adjusting well. But alone with his tape recorder, he describes his quiet desperation. He identifies the pain of the newly blind as a ‘hunger’. His mind longs for visual stimulation as the lungs gasp for air. His memories, too, no longer replenished and renewed, are forever suspended in the past. By September 1983, John realises these precious memories are beginning to fade. He is forgetting what his wife and children look like.

In sleep – his last remaining state of visual consciousness – John is haunted by visions of crashing waves sweeping away his family. He describes a recurring nightmare of being trapped in a coal truck descending deep into a mineshaft, looking back at the receding pinprick of light. He longs for it to stop, but it remorselessly carries him deeper and deeper.

After a severe panic attack over Christmas, John insists he will never be able to accept blindness. He equates acceptance with defeat, with the breaking of his will, with death.

The arrival of New Year 1984 brings a small epiphany: John notes how the sound of heavy rainfall gives shape, detail and contour to his environment. The experience offers him a lifeline, a sense of reconnection to the world.

Inspired by this discovery, John begins to use the tape recorder not only to document his inner thoughts but also to record tender interactions with his wife and three young children. In turn, blindness becomes a world of adventure, awakening a new appreciation of sound and touch, and an expanding sense of territory and control. He resolves that he must not reside in ‘the nostalgia’ of sighted life, but ‘live in reality and become blind.’

With this growing sense of confidence, the family embarks on a holiday to Australia – the first time John has returned to his country of birth since losing sight. But any hope of a joyful reunion soon dissipates. Struggling to communicate with his elderly parents – and unable to reconnect with the landscapes of his childhood – John is gripped by an acute sense of separation from his past self. The experience sends him into free fall, a profound existential crisis that threatens to engulf all he holds dear.
Returning to England, John is relieved to be in familiar surroundings, to find his world restored. He feels a renewed sense of belonging, which in turn inspires a new conviction. Having at first rejected the idea of ever accepting blindness, John registers a profound transformation in his state of consciousness. He now feels ‘more excited, more adventurous, more confident than I have ever felt in my life’.

Following the birth of his fourth child, we find John a confident and contented father. With this newfound sense of stability, he comes to view himself not as someone hindered by a disability, but empowered by a new capacity. At the close of the film, John re-conceives blindness as a ‘gift’ which, after almost five years of refusing, he is finally able to accept.

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MATERIAL AND APPROACH

Upon publication, John’s diaries were described by author and neurologist Oliver Sacks as ‘a masterpiece… The most precise, deep and beautiful account of blindness I have ever read.’

The recordings are an astounding first person testimony, excavating the interior world of blindness. In a style defined by a searching, often poetic precision, they document the incremental changes in his state of consciousness, charting the long journey through confusion and despair to insight, inspiration and epiphany.

John’s original diaries and home recordings have never before been heard in public, lying undisturbed on a shelf in John’s study for over quarter of a century. To compliment this archive material, the filmmakers recorded over twenty hours of audio interviews with John and his wife Marilyn. These audio interviews are interwoven throughout the film’s soundtrack, forming a lyrical narration, with the couple reflecting on events from a distance of thirty years.

This wealth of documentary audio material is embedded within cinematic interpretations, in which actors play John and his family, lip-synching to this documentary audio. This innovative creative approach liberates the scope of the film to explore the interior aspects of John’s journey into blindness – John’s dream life, his memories and flights of imagination. The result is a poetic and deeply moving story of loss, rebirth and transformation, challenging the conventions of the documentary form.

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For blind and partially sighted audiences

Notes on Blindness is available with three soundtrack options:

The **standard** version is the original film soundtrack with no extra description or sound effects.

The **audio-described** version uses a spoken description to relate what’s happening outside of the dialogue. Find the audio described version of the film’s trailer [HERE](password=NotesOnBlindness)

The **enhanced soundtrack** version uses more original narration from John and Marilyn to tell the story, along with extra sound design and music. It’s a version that evokes the action, rather providing a literal description.

If you’re not sure which soundtrack to choose, we’ve made a short comparison video which illustrates the different options. Find it [HERE](password=NotesOnBlindness).

How to access the audio described and enhanced soundtracks

**Audio description - in cinemas**
To make sure you can use audio description at any cinema, we’ve partnered with MovieReading. This free app allows you to use your own smartphone and headphones to synch the film with your choice of soundtrack. You can download the MovieReading app from 1st July.

If you’re watching in the cinema but don’t have a smartphone, many cinemas will offer the audio-described version of the soundtrack via a wireless headset. We recommend you check with cinema staff in advance that a headset will be available for you.

**Enhanced soundtrack - in cinemas**
The Enhanced Soundtrack will be screened in UK cinemas alongside the standard version. A list of screenings will be available soon.

**On-Demand**
If you’re using an On-Demand service such as Curzon Home Cinema or the BFI player, you can choose which of the three soundtracks you’d like to play. You can still use the MovieReading app if you’re playing the film within a group who prefer different soundtrack options.

**DVD**
All three soundtracks will be options on the DVD, which is released on 22nd August 2016.

**For the hard of hearing**
HOH subtitles can be accessed in cinemas using the MovieReading app, and at home via Curzon Home Cinema and BFI Player.
Disembodied voices populate John’s account of blindness. ‘Your voice’, he reflects, ‘is not connected with your body’. Elsewhere, ‘people cease to have bodies’. They ‘become disembodied voices speaking out of nowhere and disappearing into nowhere’.

We first met John and Marilyn Hull in late 2010. Another short documentary project had led us to John’s remarkable first-person account of blindness, TOUCHING THE ROCK. We interviewed him in his office at home, among shelves lined with boxes of audio cassettes.

Within these boxes we would later discover a cast of disembodied voices. There were the voices of the army of readers John had amassed in the early 1980s to record libraries of academic texts that were quickly becoming inaccessible to him. The voices of John’s family – his wife Marilyn and their children – recorded at Christmases, birthdays, baptisms, or in conversation at bedtime. The voice of John’s mother and father, captured during a traumatic visit to his hometown in Australia in the summer of 1983, and in spoken letters sent back and forth to the UK. The spirited voice of John’s eldest daughter, Imogen, whose ‘Radio Hull’ broadcasts delivered weather and news reports, musical performance and variety shows.

And of course, the solitary voice of John himself, alone with the tape recorder, recording a diary of total blindness and its impact on his dreams, his memories, his sense of time and place, his relationships with his wife and children. And his eventual discovery of ‘a world beyond sight’.

After completing our first collaboration with John and Marilyn, we remained in contact. We began to discuss the idea of a longer piece, charting John’s full journey into blindness. Over the next four years we worked our way back through that period with John and Marilyn, recording their reflections on the events from a distance of thirty years. We were interested in the interplay between voices – theirs and others, then and now – in how memories are reprocessed and reinterpreted in the present.
These were formative events for their relationship: the collapse of John’s sight took place within a year of their marriage – the final failed operation the same week as the birth of their son Thomas, in August 1980.

The challenge of how to represent John’s account of blindness on film became entwined with the question of how to present these disembodied voices. We began to build on the idea of the dislocation of sound and image as the aesthetic premise for the film. All the central voices in the film would be authentic documentary audio (with the exception of a handful of lines performed by a supporting cast – the social worker or librarian, for example). Conversely, everything on screen would be a visual interpretation. John, Marilyn and the family would be played by actors, lip-synching to these voices.

This worked in a number of different ways. John’s diary entries would become narration, for reflective passages exploring, for example, how visual memory fades or the loss of eye contact. Or as voiceover detailing John’s dreaming life, which remained visual even as he became totally blind, manifesting visions of seeing his children’s faces for the first time; waves sweeping his family away; or being dragged to the depths of the ocean.

The diaries also document a number of dialogues – such as a moving series of conversations about blindness between John and his son Thomas – recorded on the day they took place, which are restaged in the film, lip-synched by the cast. Similarly, hours of home recordings provided the basis for audio ‘actuality’ scenes which we interwove with John’s account of events, such as a traumatic episode on Christmas Day 1984 when John’s struggles to engage with the family are so painfully audible on the tape. Tape recordings from the family’s visit to Australia allowed John’s mother, Madge, with whom he so yearned to connect after having become blind, to become a character in the film.

Working with contemporary recordings, too, we experimented with presenting reminiscences as dialogues, at times incorporating the act of recollection within the depictions of the memories themselves, so that the memory and its remembrance fold in on one another.

Actors Dan Skinner and Simone Kirby learned the rhythms and cadences of John and Marilyn’s words to master the lip-synching technique. Instead of having a sound recordist on set, we had a ‘playback engineer’. Each line of dialogue was prompted by a series of audio pips to help timings. An important reference for this technique was Clio Barnard’s The Arbor, (a film with whom we shared our casting director Amy Hubbard). The cast were also able to draw upon several television documentaries made with John and the family in the early 1990s, which helped to inform the physical side of Dan’s performance.

We worked with cinematographer Gerry Floyd to devise creative restrictions for the visual approach. All characters besides John and Marilyn would elude the camera, often framed only in fragments, especially avoiding eyes to suggest the loss of eye contact John mourns in blindness.
We used longer lenses, never shooting establishing shots that might give the audience a privileged understanding of the space. We wanted the camera to be sensitive to tactile details to foreground the new primacy of touch, and often designed scenes based around their potential for sound design.

With supervising sound editor Joakim Sundström, the audio drawn from a wide variety of personal archive and interview sources was brought together to form a unified soundtrack. No on-set sound was recorded during the shoot (it was entirely re-recorded with foley) and the supporting cast re-recorded their lines using ADR, continuing the dislocation of sound and picture which had become a guiding principle.

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FOR JOHN AND MARILYN

We write this exactly a week before the film’s premiere, having just watched the finished film with Marilyn. It’s a great sadness that John was not able to experience this with us. He passed away in July last year, shortly after filming began.

We’ve repeatedly been in awe of the generosity with which John and Marilyn approached the project, a process they sometimes compared to ‘re-opening an old wound’. John said that some of the interviews made him re-conceptualize parts of this period, which shows the energy he and Marilyn invested in them, and is no doubt what gives their narration so much of its power. For this reason we were pleased, in one of our final conversations with him, to notice John refer to the project as ‘our film’, mirroring our own sense of a collaboration which had developed over a number of years. Having now watched the film with Marilyn, we can only imagine the complex emotions it evokes, only deepening our respect for her and John and their having gifted their voices to the project.

John subtitled his book, TOUCHING THE ROCK, ‘an experience of blindness’, and was keen to emphasise that blind people differ from one another as much as sighted people do, that his was just one experience, just one voice. Recognising and celebrating a plurality of voices was a major aim of John’s writing. We hope that the film is a continuation of this spirit, and of his attempts ‘to bridge the divide between blind and sighted experience’ in order to ‘foster a common humanity’.

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NOTES ON BLINDNESS – A RESPONSE FROM MARILYN HULL

From my perspective, there are two clearly differentiated phases in the making of this film: the work which happened before John died on 28 July 2015, and the period since. Of course, the family’s direct involvement was almost entirely in the first of these, because his death occurred actually during filming. But the emotional response is clearly very different now that he is gone and we can no longer together appreciate, wince, laugh, check out and generally celebrate what was, in essence, a defining experience of the second half of his life and something into which the rest of us were simply caught up.

As to the first of these phases, helping to create material for the film has been a unique experience. We had made the occasional film before as a family, including two substantial documentaries about living with blindness. But this was very different. Far more personal; interpretative and much more searching at the deepest level.

For John at first, then increasingly for me, there has been the extraordinary re-constructing, or perhaps more accurately, ‘re-imagining’, of our life in those years. In a series of conversations and recordings with Pete and James over many months we were drawn into the past by perceptive questions and patient listening. Indeed, we often wondered what they were getting out of all this as the period in question seemed now to us so far away that we really struggled to remember certain kinds of detail. Still, the homework had been well done, and we were in the hands of consummate professionals, who we became convinced knew far more about us than we did about ourselves!

As to my reaction now that the real centre of this story can no longer speak for himself: well, I know that John would have been immensely proud and pleased with the work of these young and gifted directors and their team. As an extension of the considerable work he had already made on the literature of blindness, he would have said to the film, ‘Go well, with my blessing. I hope for some of the people who see it there will be good and useful outcomes’.

For myself there have been three enduring gifts. The first is to have had such a rare opportunity to examine and re-examine through the filters of memory and time and love a painful but also utterly transformative part of my own life. The second is to have been part of an artistic conversation which speaks through its own truth to that dynamic creative process which can only arise between the artist and the subject. The third is of course the film itself! What an extraordinary, abiding gift to our family, and perhaps especially to the grandchildren who will never have known him.

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INTO DARKNESS: ‘A VR JOURNEY INTO A WORLD BEYOND SIGHT’

‘As one goes deeper into blindness one begins to live by other interests, other values. One begins to take up residence in another world.’

- JOHN HULL

Alongside the premiere of the feature film, Sundance 2016 saw the unveiling of NOTES ON BLINDNESS: INTO DARKNESS, an immersive virtual reality project produced by Ex Nihilo, ARTE France, and AudioGaming.

John’s original diary recordings form the basis of the project, a six-part interactive documentary using binaural audio, VR and real time 3D animations to explore his sensory and psychological experience of blindness.

The project was awarded the Storyscapes Award at the 2016 Tribeca Film Festival and the Alternate Realities VR Award at Sheffield Doc/Fest 2016.

It will be exhibited alongside the theatrical release of the feature film and be made available for download for Samsung Gear, Google Cardboard and 360 on Android and iOS.

View the teaser trailer for the VR:

www.arte.tv/notes-on-blindness
CAST BIOS

DAN SKINNER (John Hull) delivers a tour-de-force performance as the central character in NOTES ON BLINDNESS, spending almost the entire duration of the film on screen. Dan’s preparation for the role involved weeks of memorising lines from John’s audio diaries, so he could deliver perfect lip-synch without breaking the suspension of disbelief required for such a unique documentary performance.

Aside from the sheer number of hours Dan spent on camera, the role required several hours in make-up every day as Hair and Make up Designer Lisa Mustafa painstakingly re-created a prosthetic beard true to the film’s 1980s period setting. The mental and physical disorientation of playing a character who is blind for the majority of the film was likewise particularly demanding, and a testament to Dan’s craft and resilience as an actor.

Dan’s recent credits include Ben Wheatley’s adaptation of the J.G. Ballard novel HIGH RISE and the upcoming BBC Films adaptation of SWALLOWS AND AMAZONS, as well as acclaimed Sky series YONDERLAND and BBC period comedy THE KENNEDYS.

SIMONE KIRBY (Marilyn Hull) brings extraordinary emotional depth, tenderness, and nuance to her portrayal of Marilyn Hull, who provides unconditional love and support as her husband comes to terms with his life-changing condition.

Like her co-star, Simone’s mastery of the lip-synching technique produces moments of electrifying onscreen drama, as she inhabits Marilyn’s character and words completely. The subtlety of Simone’s performance allows us to see John’s story through the lens of Marilyn’s own grief, bringing even greater poignancy to their ultimate determination to face such adversity together.

Simone recently finished filming on HOUDINI AND DOYLE, a new show for Fox/ITV, and has a string of prestigious screen and stage credits to her name. Other recent roles include Tyva Hightopp in ALICE THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS, Maria Roche in the BBC NI feature film THE TRUTH COMMISSIONER, (based on the novel by David Park), Annette Rane in CLEAN BREAK, a new four-part drama for RTE, and Irene O’Donnell in PEAKY BLINDERS.

Simone was nominated for the Lead Actress in Film award at the 2015 Irish Film and Television Awards for the role of Oonagh in Ken Loach’s JIMMY’S HALL.

Simone has also worked extensively in theatre, at The Abbey, The Old Vic, Shakespeare’s Globe, The Gate Theatre, The Irish Rep (New York), and with Druid, Rough Magic, and many others. She was nominated for Best Actress at The Irish Theatre Awards for her performance as Mae in MUD (Wri. María Irene Fornés; Dir. Annie Ryan).

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FILMMAKER BIOS

PETER MIDDLETON and JAMES SPINNEY have been working together for the past six years on a range of fiction, documentary and multi-media projects. During this period they have adapted John Hull's diary material into a series of award-winning short films. The first of these, RAINFALL, won the Best Short Documentary Award at Hot Docs 2013. This was followed in 2014 by the Emmy Award-winning short, also entitled NOTES ON BLINDNESS, which screened at the Sundance Film Festival and won Best Documentary at Encounters Short Film and Animation Festival. NOTES ON BLINDNESS is their first feature.

Peter & James are also producers on the project, bringing their deep personal connection with John and Marilyn to every aspect of the production process and underpinning the film's documentary integrity.

MIKE BRETT & STEVE JAMISON (Producers) are co-founders and managing partners of award-winning independent production company, ARCHER’S MARK. The pair’s debut feature NEXT GOAL WINS won the Moët British Independent Film Award for Best Documentary in 2014, earning them recognition as two of BAFTA’s 2014 Breakthrough Brits and as Screen International Future Leaders for 2015.

JO-JO ELLISON (Producer/Impact Producer) produced the Emmy Award-winning New York Times Op-Doc NOTES ON BLINDNESS, upon which the feature film is based. As both Producer and Impact Producer on the feature film, she is co-ordinating an ambitious outreach and engagement campaign, supported by the Bertha BRITDOC Connect Fund.

ALEX USBORNE (Producer) runs 104 FILMS – the world leaders in disability cinema. The company has produced six feature films (including SPECIAL PEOPLE, SEX & DRUGS & ROCK & ROLL and I AM BREATHING), over 60 short films and runs a raft of training and development programs for disabled film talent.

Supervising Sound Editor JOAKIM SUNDSTRÖM has worked with acclaimed directors including Michael Winterbottom, Kevin Macdonald, and Fernando Meirelles, with whom he collaborated on the Oscar-winning THE CONSTANT GARDENER (2005). In 2013 he won the BAFTA for Best Technical Achievement for Peter Strickland’s BERBERIAN SOUND STUDIO (2012) and his work has received nominations from the MPSA’s Golden Reel, the Moët British Independent Film Awards, and the International Press Academy’s Golden Satellite.

Co-Producer DAVID COUJARD graduated from the renowned French cinema school La Fémis 10 years ago, before joining AGAT Films & Cie / EX NIHILO. Executive producer of a cultural TV magazine show for 4 years, and subsequently of TV fictions and documentaries, he is now an Associate Producer. After producing
documentaries for CANAL+, France Télévisions and Arte, alongside several interactive projects, he now develops fiction for TV and cinema.

Co-Producer and VR Creative Director ARNAUD COLINART of AGAT Films & Cie / EX NIHILO is particularly interested in applying new technologies and interactive mechanisms in the conception of narrative works, whether documentary or fiction. His productions include the video game TYPE:RIDER (Appstore Editor's Choice, SXSW 2014 Gaming Award Nominee, Webby Award Nominee – Best Mobile Game, Best Visual Design), the transmedia experience ‘Hubot Market’ and ‘Atsugi Robotics’ for the Swedish TV series REAL HUMANS and recently the graphic tribute to the TV series PEAKY BLINDERS by the American designer Nigel Evans Dennis (Lovie Award 2015 – TV Category & People Lovie Award 2015).

Executive Producer (VR) AMAURY LA BURTHE completed a Masters in Acoustics and Signal Processing at IRCAM in Paris, before working as a researcher for Sony-CSL and as lead audio designer for video game company Ubisoft. Through his professional experiences he developed expertise in both the technical and creative elements of sound design and interactive experience creation. He founded the start-up AUDIOGAMING, focused on creating innovative audio technologies and immersive experiences.

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COMPANY BIOS

ARCHER’S MARK

Founded by Director-Producers Mike Brett & Steve Jamison, ARCHER’S MARK is a multi-award-winning independent production company based in London, England.

The company’s commercial arm has helped shape the identities of brands including Nike, Samsung, Honda and Skype, and continues to provide both infrastructure and resources for the development and production of feature-length projects.

Archer’s Mark’s feature film division launched in April 2014 with the release of NEXT GOAL WINS. The film premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival, going on to win multiple international awards and universal critical acclaim.

Political thriller WAR BOOK (Wri. Jack Thorne / Dir. Tom Harper) marked the company’s first foray into feature-length fiction, starring Academy Award nominee Sophie Okonedo as part of a stellar ensemble cast. The film earned widespread critical praise after its premiere at the BFI London Film Festival and an opening gala slot at the 2015 International Film Festival Rotterdam.

NOTES ON BLINDNESS is the company’s third feature-length film, and embodies Archer’s Mark long-term goal of fostering collaboration between emerging and established talent to create bold, strongly authored and ambitious projects which explore the lines between fact and fiction.
AGAT FILMS & CIE / EX NIHILO

AGAT Films & Cie / EX NIHILO is a Paris-based collective consisting of eight associate producers.

The company’s founding ethos allows it to maintain a balance between the collective and the individual, allowing freedom for each filmmaker to develop, produce and promote their work according to their own vision, but with the creative and financial security offered by a collective structure.

Our output always expresses our belief that the cultural value of filmmaking must not be defined solely by market forces. We staunchly defend the value of public television, which we believe is the best guarantor of artistic creation, and of the renewal of its forms and talents.

We apply this philosophy to all of our work, from cinema and television to new media – and likewise to fiction just as much as documentary and the performing arts. This allows us to spread the risks inherent in our roles as producers.

AGAT believes that the arrival of digital technology and the fragmentation of the broadcasting model places ever greater importance on the creation of the kind of distinctive, high-quality producer-driven work in which the company specializes.

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A DEDICATION FROM THE FILMMAKERS

John Hull, whose life and work comprises the main subject of both the film and VR project, sadly passed away during principal photography, three months after celebrating his eightieth birthday with family and friends.

So intrinsic was John to the creation of both of these projects that it is difficult to quantify the effect of his loss on all of those who knew and collaborated with him during this involved and deeply fulfilling creative process.

We would therefore like to dedicate the film and VR project to John’s memory, and the unwavering support that he, his wife Marilyn, and their children – Imogen, Thomas, Lizzie, Gaby and Joshua – have given to both projects since their inception.

We dearly hope that NOTES ON BLINDNESS can stand as a tribute to John’s life and work, both for those whose knew him so well, and those whose lives have been touched by his ideas and scholarship.

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JOHN HULL – A BIOGRAPHY

John M. Hull taught for 30 years at the University of Birmingham until his retirement in 2002. He was the first professor of Religious Education in the UK and recipient of the prestigious William Rainey Harper award from the Religious Education Association of the US and Canada. This award is only held by 12 international scholars, and is presented to ‘outstanding leaders whose work in other fields has had a profound impact upon religious education’, including luminaries such as Marshall McLuhan, Margaret Mead and Paolo Freire.

He was founder and President Emeritus of the International Seminar on Religious Education and Values (ISREV) and was Editor of the British Journal of Religious Education from 1971-96. His degrees include PhD (Birmingham), LitD (Cambridge) and he has honorary doctorates from universities in Germany and the Netherlands.

His writings on blindness include Touching the Rock (1990), On Sight and Insight (1997), In the Beginning was Darkness (2001), The Tactile Heart (2013) and Disability: The Inclusive Church (2014). In 2012 the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) granted him a Lifetime Achievement Award for his contributions to the literature of blindness. His writings in education, theology and disability have been translated into a dozen languages.

The Guardian’s obituary for John can be read here: http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/aug/16/john-hull

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NOTES ON BLINDNESS

FILM CREDITS

PRINCIPAL CAST
JOHN HULL
MARILYN HULL

DAN SKINNER
SIMONE KIRBY

CREW LIST
WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY
PETER MIDDLETON
JAMES SPINNEY

MIKE BRETT
JO-JO ELLISON
STEVE JAMISON
PETER MIDDLETON
JAMES SPINNEY
ALEX USBORNE

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS
LIZZIE FRANCKE
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JENNY RASKIN

CINEMATOGRAPHER
GERRY FLOYD

PRODUCTION DESIGNER
DAMIEN CREAGH

EDITOR
JULIAN QUANTRILL

CASTING DIRECTOR
AMY HUBBARD CSA CDG

SUPERVISING SOUND EDITOR
JOAKIM SUNDSTRÖM

ORIGINAL MUSIC
JAMES EWERS & NOAH WOOD

NOTES ON BLINDNESS is an Archer’s Mark production, in association with Fee Fie Foe Films and 104 Films, and in co-production with Agat Films & Cie and ARTE France. It has been supported by Creative England, the BFI, Impact Partners, ARTE France, BBC Storyville, Cinereach, BRITDOC, New York Times and PROCIREP-ANGOA.
NOTES ON BLINDNESS: INTO DARKNESS
VR EXPERIENCE CREDITS

PRINCIPAL CAST
VOICE OF JOHN HULL HIMSELF

CREW LIST
CREATIVE DIRECTORS ARNAUD COLINART AMAURY LA BURTHE PETER MIDDLETON JAMES SPINNEY

ART DIRECTORS BÉATRICE LARTIGUE FABIEN TOGMAN ARNAUD DESJARDINS

LEAD CREATIVE CODERS THOMAS COUCHARD FLORENT DUMAS ROBIN PICOU

PRODUCERS ARNAUD COLINART DAVID COWARD MIKE BRETT

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS AMAURY LA BURTHE

NOTES ON BLINDNESS: INTO DARKNESS is a VR and interactive experience produced by Ex Nihilo, ARTE France, and the French start-up AudioGaming, in co-production with Archer’s Mark. It has been supported by the TFI New Media Fund and Ford Foundation – JustFilms, Centre National du Cinéma et de l’Image Animée (CNC) and Région Midi-Pyrénées.

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