

ARTISTIC LICENSE FILMS

a Wovie production

Group

a film by Anne de Marcken & Marilyn Freeman

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GROUP / s y n o p s i s

Nine women meet every Wednesday afternoon for 21 weeks of group therapy in this entirely original, ultra modern probe into the American psyche. Six unhidden and unexplained cameras capture this fast and funny, deep and bumpy ride into consciousness as these dauntless women simply try to find a little more happiness. Punk amputee; born-again Christian; control freak; sex-rocker; enigma; tramp; bigot; binger; and their therapist.

At the center challenging them all is Pipi, the fat, one-legged, punk walled up inside her own contradictions. Orbiting closely are Clansey, the Christian confounded by her own condemning judgments, and Grace, the hypochondriac desperate to stay above the emotional fray. In this microcosm of life wrought with prejudice, pettiness, and trauma, it's compassion that transcends all else with a level of reality rarely seen in fiction. Six simultaneous camera perspectives expand the story on screen with multiple frames and layered narratives. Unforgettably funny at times and riveting to the final moment, GROUP delivers a fresh, powerful view of cinema and humanity.

GROUP / p r o d u c t i o n s t y l e

GROUP is a feature-length fiction that follows eight characters through twenty-one weeks of group therapy. Work started on GROUP in 1999, inspired by Filmmakers Marilyn Freeman and Anne de Marcken's own experiences in therapy. Frustrated after four drafts of a traditional script, they took the concept to the next phase: they asked a therapist and seven actors to take a trial run through an improvised group session while documenting the experiment with several cameras simultaneously. Viewing the session, the filmmakers realized that the story's potential lay more in process than premeditation...they threw away the script.

Instead of writing lines for the actors, Freeman and de Marcken met with them for several months before shooting, fleshing out their characters and developing a twenty-one-week narrative arc for each of the women. Essentially scripting all of the off-camera action of the characters' lives in order to liberate the on-camera interactions of each hour-long therapy session.

Using six cameras shooting simultaneously, all natural light, no sound overdubs and no re-takes, the filmmakers stripped away the conventions commonly used to separate story from story-telling. The cameras are not hidden or explained, and the therapist is just that, a real therapist. The processes of therapy as well as movie-making are revealed. The audience is invited into the creation of the film and also into the minds and relationships of the characters.

The totally original on-screen look of GROUP is a further illustration of Freeman and de Marcken's desire to equalize the relationship between the filmmakers and the audience. Dividing the frame into six parts and showing the audience all six camera perspectives during every in-session moment of the movie is an invitation to viewers to become participants...each audience member is the editor of their own movie, choosing the shots they want to see and those they want to turn away from just as the group members choose in every moment between anger and patience, change and stasis, judgement and compassion.

GROUP / filmmaker biographies

Marilyn Freeman / producer / writer / director

Fusing her passion for writing, filmmaking and technology, Freeman co-founded the new media studio, Wovie (www.wovie.com). She has won multiple Artist Trust Grants for her screenplay, *SOPHISTICATED: THE HOLLYWOOD STORY OF MISS DOROTHY ARZNER*. Her award-winning short, *MEETING MAGDALENE* (1996), played festivals worldwide and garnered a book deal. She produced and directed *IN MY FATHER'S BED* (1995), which exhibited worldwide; and *AMERICAN VALUES*, a 12-part interview series on gay rights. Recent online credits include the animated series *A WORD WITH INDEX & THE BIRD*, *STICK FIGURES*, *THE CAT COUCH* and *CIVIL ENOUGH*. *GROUP* is a Wovie production and marks Freeman's feature directorial debut.

Anne de Marcken / **producer / writer / director of photography / production designer**

Anne is co-founder and creative director of the new media studio Wovie, (www.wovie.com). Recent online credits include the animated series *A WORD WITH INDEX & THE BIRD*, *STICK FIGURES*, *CAT COUCH*, and *CIVIL ENOUGH* as well as a number of award winning web sites. She graduated from The Evergreen State College in media arts, launched One Horse Productions and worked as a writer, designer, director and producer. Credits include Producer for Washington Interactive Television; Director of Development for Cupid & Psyche Studios; Development Director for KAOS radio; Art Director of the feature film, *TRUTH*.

Margery B. Brown / co-producer

Marge is co founder and director for the first eight years of the NW International Lesbian/Gay Film Festival. She produced the award winning live action film *MEETING MAGDALENE*, and her photographs have appeared in National Geographic and Audubon Magazine. Her live sound engineering includes such artists as Sweet Honey in the Rock, Holly Near, Ferron and Lily Tomlin. Marge has taught film, video, animation and experimental media for 18 years at The Evergreen State College and served in residence at the California Institute of the Arts. She is currently in development on the stopmotion animated short, *SERIOUS BISCUITS*.

TIM JENSON / EDITOR

Tim Jenson is an award winning producer and editor, who has also worked extensively as director, technical director, director of photography, writer, sound engineer, lighting director, narrator and actor. Tim has won awards for music videos and his work has been seen on national television programs such as "The Survivors" and "Oprah" as well as "America's Funniest Home Videos". He has produced hundreds of programs including documentaries, television series, music videos, commercials, and has directed dozens of live multi-camera performances ranging from stage plays and musicals to large music festivals.

GROUP / ACTRESSES BIOGRAPHIES

Carrie Brownstein / Grace Carrie formed Sleater-Kinney with Corin Tucker in 1994 and since then, the band has achieved a great deal of success and critical acclaim. They've been written up in Time, Rolling Stone, and The New York Times. They have put out five albums, toured all over the world, and were named one of the most important bands of the 90's by Spin magazine. Carrie has acted in numerous music videos, been seen in the Priceline.com commercial with William Shatner, starred in GETTING STRONGER EVERY DAY by Miranda July and DEAR TYLER directed by Brett Vapnek.

Kari Fillipi / Claire Kari comes from an eclectic theater background that includes THE PINK PANTHER STRIKES AGAIN, ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE, and VETZ HAZARYAK, a collection of Armenian folktales told through puppetry. Kari lives in Seattle with her husband.

S. Ann Hall / Tody S. Ann attended Mount Holyoke College and received her BA in Theatre Arts. In addition, she attended the British American Drama Academy of London, a theatre conservatory. Her favorite roles while in college included Huld in Kafka's THE TRIAL, Lysistrata in LYSISTRATA, and Eleanor in the LION IN WINTER. Beginning in May 2001 she will be touring with Missoula Children's Theater.

Vicki Hollenberg / Violet Vicki was born in Seattle and attended Cornish College of the Arts where she earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts. Since 1982 Vicki has been working in theater throughout the Northwest. GROUP is Vicki's third feature.

Tracy Kirkpatrick / Rachel After spending four years in the Marine Corps as a corrections officer, Tracy discovered theatre. She has studied and performed in Seattle and New Mexico. Her most recent roles include "poop shoe girl" in the short film PENDEMONIUM, which premiered at the 2000 Seattle International Film Festival and Lucy in SHERRI WITH AN I, for Theatre Babylon. She has been involved with the Seattle Fringe Festival for the past four years.

Nomy Lamm / Pippi Nomy is a life-long Olympia resident, a writer, activist, musician and drag performer. She has written for magazines and anthologies including MS., Seventeen, "Listen Up," "Body Outlaws," and "Sex and Single Girls" (all on Seal Press). She co-wrote THE TRANSFUSED, a full-length gender-defying post-apocalyptic rock opera, with local band The Need, and is currently co-conspiring to produce DOCTOR FROCKROCKET'S VIVIFYING (RE-ANIMATRONIC) MENAGERIE AND MEDICINE SHOW. She was named one of MS. Magazine's 1997 "Women of the Year," and in 2000 she was one of Out magazine's "Out 100."

Ruby Martin / the therapist Ruby is a group facilitator and professor who lives and works in Southern California. She teaches in the California School of Professional Psychology, The San Diego Psychoanalytic Society and Institute, and University of California, San Diego. In addition, she trains therapists in Holland and Italy.

Lola Rock N' Rolla / Rita Lola has written two albums, one for the band Get it Gurl and one for Megababe. Her bands have opened for Marilyn Manson, Joan Jett, Presidents of USA and Lydia Lunch. Lola has appeared on Bill Nye the Science Guy, Donkey Kong TV (for the web), LOVE SHARON and THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES on HBO. Lola lives in New York and is currently in production on her rock opera PSYCHOTIC AMERICAN HOUSEWIFE.

Tony Wilkerson / Clansey Tony's stage credits include Eliza in MY FAIR LADY and Shelby in STEEL MAGNOLIAS. She lives in Tacoma with her endlessly supportive husband and two darling boys. She has been blessed with many acting opportunities and roles, from Seattle to Los Angeles to New Mexico, but claims her favorite role is "motherhood."

GROUP / c a s t & c r e w

The Cast

Carrie Brownstein Kari Fillipi S. Ann Hall	Grace Claire Tody	Vicki Hollenberg Tracy Kirkpatrick Nomy Lamm	Violet Rachel Pipi	Ruby Martin Lola Rock N' Rolla Tony Wilkerson	Ruby Rita Clansey
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The Crew

directed by	Marilyn Freeman	continuity supervisor	Sean Savage
produced by	Anne de Marcken Marilyn Freeman	continuity	Kirk Elliott Trevor Smith Jason Miles Will Rozon Lucy Gentry
story by	Anne de Marcken Marilyn Freeman in collaboration with the cast	wardrobe mistress & makeup Artist	Aura Perrica
psychological consultant	Lynn Damiano	make-up & wardrobe assistant	Jamie Lee
co-producer Brown	Margery B.	hair stylist	Jody Daisa
director of photography	Anne de Marcken	key grip	Pat Maley
editor	Tim Jenson	production sound mixer	Zenaida Vergara
production design	Anne de Marcken	production sound assistant	John Greenland
technical architect	Raoul Berman	web unit manager	Pat Maley Marilyn Freeman
audio mix	Tim Jenson	music supervisor	John Greenland
production sound design	Eddie Sams	master carpenter	Nik Arnold
production sound recorder	Pat Maley	craft services	Jesalyn
associate producers	Lia Friedman Joel Reynvaan Mary McCallum	assistant craft services Greenland	Lisa Brice Si Thacker Elliat Graney Saucke Kai Pugh Sarah Watters Laurian Weisser
assistant director	Annie Callaghan	production assistants	Steve Jeffries
production manager	Tim Jenson	massage therapist, LMP	Mary McCallum
production coordinator	Lia Friedman	documentary camera	Carol Zahorsky
camera operators	Anne de Marcken Margery B.	publicist	Anne de Marcken
Brown	Phoebe Owens Deirdre J. Coulter Liz Sales Ju Pong Lin	title Design	M. J. Huetter
first assistant camera	Joel Reynvaan	Production Accountant	
second assistant camera	Jason Miles		

GROUP / o n e - p a g e r

Synopsis / Nine women meet every Wednesday afternoon for 21 weeks of group therapy in this entirely original, ultra modern probe into the American psyche. Six unhidden and unexplained cameras capture this fast and funny, deep and bumpy ride into consciousness as these dauntless women simply try to find a little more happiness. Punk amputee; born-again Christian; control freak; sex-rocker; enigma; tramp; bigot; binger; and their therapist.

At the center challenging them all is Pippi, the fat, one-legged, punk walled up inside her own contradictions. Orbiting closely are Clansey, the Christian confounded by her own condemning judgments, and Grace, the hypochondriac desperate to stay above the emotional fray. In this microcosm of life wrought with prejudice, pettiness, and trauma, it's compassion that transcends all else with a level of reality rarely seen in fiction. Six simultaneous camera perspectives expand the story on screen with multiple frames and layered narratives. Unforgettably funny at times and riveting to the final moment, GROUP delivers a fresh, powerful view of cinema and humanity.

Starring / Carrie Brownstein / Kari Fillipi / S. Ann Hall / Vicki Hollenberg / Tracy Kirkpatrick / Nomy Lamm / Ruby Martin / Lola Rock N' Rolla / Tony Wilkerson

A film by / Anne de Marcken & Marilyn Freeman

Director / Marilyn Freeman

Director of Photography / Anne de Marcken

Producers / Anne de Marcken & Marilyn Freeman

Story / Anne de Marcken & Marilyn Freeman in collaboration with the cast

Editor / Tim Jenson

Co-producer / Margery B. Brown

Music by / The Aislors Set / The Gossip / Internal/External / Marine Research / Mirah / The Need / Sarah Dougher / Sleater-Kinney

Marilyn Freeman / Fusing her passion for writing, filmmaking and technology, Freeman co-founded the new media studio, Wovie (www.wovie.com). She has won multiple Artist Trust Grants for her screenplay, SOPHISTICATED: THE HOLLYWOOD STORY OF MISS DOROTHY ARZNER. Her award-winning short, MEETING MAGDALENE (1996), played festivals worldwide and garnered a book deal. She produced and directed IN MY FATHER'S BED (1995), which exhibited worldwide; and AMERICAN VALUES, a 12-part interview series on gay rights. Recent online credits include the animated series A WORD WITH INDEX & THE BIRD, STICK FIGURES, THE CAT COUCH and CIVIL ENOUGH. GROUP is a Wovie production and marks Freeman's feature directorial debut.

Anne de Marcken / Anne is co-founder and creative director of the new media studio Wovie, (www.wovie.com). Recent online credits include the animated series A WORD WITH INDEX & THE BIRD, STICK FIGURES, CAT COUCH, and CIVIL ENOUGH as well as a number of award winning web sites. She graduated from The Evergreen State College in media arts, launched One Horse Productions and worked as a writer, designer, director and producer. Credits include Producer for Washington Interactive Television; Director of Development for Cupid & Psyche Studios; Development Director for KAOS radio; Art Director of the feature film, TRUTH.

GROUP / b a c k g r o u n d

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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GROUP Background

OLYMPIA, WA - - Showcasing the versatility and inventiveness of independent film at its finest, GROUP is a highly improvisational, mock documentary by filmmakers Marilyn Freeman (director/writer/producer) and Anne de Marcken (cinematographer/writer/producer). Launching in the film festival circuit this spring, GROUP is the collaborative vision of the filmmakers and the first feature to be created by their Pacific Northwest-based, new media studio, Wovie.

A stirring and comic film, GROUP is an adventure in consciousness and compassion that nine women start the moment they begin twenty-one weeks of therapy. Stereotypes are turned on end in this ultra-modern probe into the American female psyche. The characters -- a queer punk amputee, a born-again Christian, a hypochondriac, a sex-rocker, an enigma, a tramp, a bigot, a binger, and their therapist -- meet every Wednesday afternoon for this fast and funny, deep and bumpy ride as each woman tries to find a little more...happiness.

At the center challenging them all is Pipi - played by Ladyfest founder Nomy Lamm -- the big, one-legged, queer punk walled up inside her own contradictions. Circling closely are Clansey, the Christian, confounded by her own judgments; and Grace - played by indie rock band, Sleater Kinney, founder, Carrie Brownstein -- the hypochondriac desperate to stay above the emotional fray. In this microcosm of life laden with intolerance, pettiness, and trauma, compassion transcends all else. Six simultaneous camera perspectives expand the story on screen with multiple frames and layered narrative while an evocative indie-rock soundtrack deepens the intimacy. Riveting to the final moment, GROUP delivers a poignant, powerful view of cinema and humanity.

An incredibly unique production process is key to the strength of the film and is among the reasons why the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival programmers call GROUP "A startlingly original indie-movie fusing the boundaries between reality and drama."

"Rather than working with a traditional script, we tightly guided the actors in the development of their characters and their individual story scenarios," comments Freeman. "The actors came together for the first time the first day of shooting. They knew nothing about one another's characters, just as it would be in therapy. We shot the therapy sessions consecutively over a two-week period with six cameras, without interruption, and without retakes. But we did have a real therapist playing the therapist. By capturing the active pursuit of self-awareness, we were able to bring a level of reality and consciousness to the screen that is rarely seen in fiction."

Following several months of one-on-one character development sessions with each actor, de Marcken and Freeman scripted each character's story arc -- a delineation of a character's life experience through the duration of film story time. The actors walked on the set with only their characters' weekly life outlines -- scripts of week-by-week plot points.

GROUP / b a c k g r o u n d c o n t i n u e d

"The character development the actors and Marilyn accomplished together was so impressive and inspiring," explains de Marcken. "The depth of their characters made it remarkably easy to develop life story events that would incite real transformation."

De Marcken and Freeman originally wrote the screenplay for GROUP in 1999. In order to take the concept to its next phase, de Marcken and Freeman conducted an experiment: they engaged a therapist and seven actors to walk through an actual group therapy session. In viewing the session, the filmmakers realized the richness of the work had its roots more in the process than in the scripting. They decided to free the film from traditional narrative and create a character-centered architecture to incite the authentic, powerful, poignant and often humorous group therapy process.

"I approached making GROUP with a deep belief in the creative processes of theater, therapy and inventive filmmaking," adds Freeman. "Theater springs from spiritual rituals that inspire transformation, and therapy is all about transformation - what profound processes to anchor a film story to. GROUP has that intangible, complex, sometimes messy, sometimes hysterically funny, multi-layered power of therapy, of getting more conscious, more accountable, and ultimately more compassionate."

The filmmakers chose to reveal the cameras and camera operators throughout the film.

"The presence of the cameras is a metaphor for the exposure one feels in therapy", Freeman adds. "And just as it goes in therapy, the self-consciousness of the exposure fades from the active view and becomes just part of an unfolding tapestry of awareness."

"It was a conscious effort to use exclusively women camera operators," says cinematographer de Marcken. "While we wanted that metaphor of exposure, we didn't want to reinforce the cultural Emale gaze , but rather integrate a sort of liberating supportive view."

The GROUP soundtrack includes some of independent rock music's finest bands: Sleater Kinney, The Need, The Gossip, and Marine Research, to name a few. "Finding the right music for the movie was as sacred a process as casting the actors," says de Marcken who put in an around-the-clock search at last summer's "Yo Yo A Go Go", the annual music festival with international acclaim in the indie rock world. Pat Maley, festival producer and owner of Yo Yo Records, served as the production sound recordist and music supervisor on the movie. The movie soundtrack will be released by Yo Yo Records this spring.

Commenting on the filmmakers' collaborative vision and unique production style, de Marcken says, "I had worked on projects that sacrificed creativity and meaning to entrenched ideas about 'how things are done in The Industry.'" With GROUP, Marilyn and I committed ourselves to serving the story and not convention." Freeman adds, "Because of our experimental art backgrounds, and because we are women, we were willing and able - actually excited - to do things differently. To truly collaborate. Group is a far richer and deeper film by virtue of how we worked together, challenged each other - still challenge each other!"

The innovation goes on - the filmmakers are using the power of the web to add dimension to the film in a way that can only happen with today's technologies. The website, www.groupthemovie.com, not only contains all the usual features of a movie site (i.e., actor bios, character backgrounds, production notes), it will also feature as many as 100 bonus clips from the

GROUP / b a c k g r o u n d c o n t i n u e d

production. The bonus clips give generous presence to the characters, documenting in far greater detail each character's journey and the session-by-session highlights not captured in the theatrical film. The first session's bonus clips are already online; the others will be added to the site as the film releases over the coming six months.

Group will make its world wide premiere at the 16th London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival on April 5, 2002. An early-cut, sneak preview of the movie brought down a full house with the hometown crowd at the 18th Annual Olympia Film Festival in October.

An award-winning new media studio, Wovie also produces online entertainment content, entertainment-based web strategies, and the web environments to contextualize them. Marilyn Freeman and Anne de Marcken founded the company in June 2000 to explore their passion for filmmaking in fusion with the Web's potential for innovation. For further information, access GROUP's web site at www.groupthemovie.com or Wovie's web site at www.wovie.com, email Wovie at info@groupthemovie.com or call the studio at 360.236.1605.

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GROUP / r e v i e w s

Reviewed for the British Film Institute by Briony Hanson

The flyer on the corner-store window says “queer-friendly sliding scale downtown” - our cue for a startlingly original indie-movie fusing the boundaries between reality and drama. Inspired by the filmmakers’ own experience of therapy, *Group* follows eight woman through 21 weeks of group therapy.

Originally setting out to make a traditional movie but frustrated after four drafts of a tired script, the filmmakers asked a therapist and a group of actors to take a trial run through an improv-session while six cameras watched. Splitting the frame into six parts (à la *Timecode*) allows us to follow every glance and get right under the skin of our wildly differing women – sex rocker, evangelical christian, queer punk amputee, and bigot – all coming clean about their own real-life traumas.

Complete with cool indie-rock credentials signalled by great lead performances from Sleater Kinney’s Carrie Brownstein and Ladyfest founder Nomy Lamm, and with a stirring soundtrack from the likes of The Need and Marine Research, this is absorbing, different, innovative cinema – not always easy to watch but always worth the effort.

Reviewed for the 16th Annual London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival by Barbara Mella

This is a demanding and rewarding film, for the filmmakers, actresses and for the viewer. Inspired by the director and the producer’s personal experience with therapy, the film explores the uncomfortable interaction of seven women attending group therapy over a period of 20 weeks. The acting is so superb and convincing that you often wonder whether these women are not just being themselves. After various attempted and failed scripts, Marilyn Freeman (writer/director/producer) decided to opt for an unconventional approach. She met each protagonist before and after session to discuss their progress, while allowing each one to improvise and respond to the others. A real therapist guides the group through this ‘fake’ tumultuous exploration of personal neurosis and fears, so that deep and painful issues come to the fore: sex, rape, cancer, betrayal, depression, etc.

There is palpable tension and discomfort as tears are shed and arguments arise. The participants discuss frankly and openly while six hand-held cameras keep rolling for a whole uninterrupted hour each time. This is a film dense with emotions, spurred by agonising despair, nervous laughter and need of attention or love. In a culture so saturated with yearnings to enter other people’s secret lives and thoughts through TV programmes like Big Brothers and through gossip magazines, *Group* allows pure voyeuristic satisfaction, as we are invited to watch unobserved. The pain is so vivid that the emotionally squeamish should refrain from viewing. Despite it not being an overtly lesbian film, the therapy is advertised as ‘queer friendly’, which prompts frustrated comments and discussions about gender, sexuality and biology.

GROUP / r u b y s l i p p e r i n t e r v i e w s

Interviews by: lulu

The film's producer/writer/director, Marilyn Freeman, was kind enough to answer some questions for us at Slipper, as well as one of the film's stars, Carrie Brownstein (you probably know her best from Sleater-Kinney)...the first thing that caught my attention about this film was the improvisational concept it was created from. It's a unique and significant step in filmmaking, and delves into a topic that has become a staple of modern living: therapy. *Group* also features Nomy Lamm, Tony Wilkerson, Kari Fillipi, Tracy Kirkpatrick, S. Ann Hall, Vicki Hollenberg, Lola Rocknrolla, and Ruby Martin- the real life therapist. Read on, and Marilyn and Carrie will fill you in more....

MARILYN FREEMAN

1) How are you doin? Need a pillow? Cookie? Anything?

Yeah thanks...I need tea.

2) Ok now that I've been personable and youre comfortable-let's dig into the movie..hehe...when did you come up with the concept for the film?

We came up with the idea for *Group* about three years ago. We were headed north on Interstate 5 from Olympia to Seattle. It was daytime and I don't remember why we were going to Seattle, but my partner, Anne, and I were talking about concepts cool enough to sustain us through the long process of making a feature. We've both been very into therapy, so we thought, hey..... And from the moment we talked about doing a movie about therapy it seemed like a real possibility. It never felt like a fleeting idea. Neither of us had ever been in group therapy, but we thought if we did a film about therapy it would have to be about group therapy. Even without having been in group, the dramatic and comedic, the overall story-telling possibilities seemed richer.

3)The method of creating 'Group' is pretty daring...having the actors build into a character but work without a rigid script...how did this idea come about and how tough was it on the actors?

That day on the Interstate when we originally thought about doing a group therapy movie we talked about casting really interesting actors and then improving so that it would be as close to authentic as we could get. But then we got all caught up in a more traditional process, thinking there'd be too much risk in improvisation and too little control in the story telling. We got concerned that we'd do this improv thing and there'd be no climax, no real story structure. So, we wrote a script and rewrote it a few times and each draft felt contrived. We got a therapist, Lynn Damiano, to read the script and talk with us from a psychological perspective about the characters we were creating. After a series of meetings with Lynn on the psychology of our characters and the dynamics of group therapy we decided to do a sort of lab where we could workshop our characters a bit, get a better understanding of how group therapy might really look and sound, and play around with shooting styles. So, we gathered about seven actors and gave each a one-page character bio and asked them to show up in character prepared for the first session of a therapy group. Lynn facilitated the group and ran the session exactly as she would any new group.

It was riveting.

GROUP / r u b y s l i p p e r c o n t i n u e d

After that we did one more script rewrite trying to capture the spirit of what we witnessed in the workshop and finally agreed, after lots of debate, to throw away the script and come up with some sort of structured improv process. All this time we kept reading and learning more about group therapy - who does it and why, what makes a group effective, what therapists do in group, what the point if it is, how group therapy started and why. And as writers we embarked on a rigorous psychological character development study in working with Lynn.

We began casting.

We specifically invited three actors to do the movie - Nomy Lamm, Lola Rock N' Rolla, and Vicki Hollenberg. The others - Tony Wilkerson, Tracy Kirkpatrick, S. Ann Hall, Kari Fillipi and Carrie Brownstein - came to us through open calls, with the exception of the therapist.

We knew we had to have an actual therapist play the part of the therapist. Lynn declined, but as it turned out another woman who was working in our company at the time suggested we meet her mother, a therapist in southern California named Ruby Martin who has a private practice and teaches group therapy to therapists around the world. We met Ruby, she loved our concept and we loved her.

The actors were all incredibly brave. Each person signed on knowing we would not be using a traditional script, that they would be guided through a very intense character development process, and that they would be required to personally bring a lot to the work.

Anne and I began to devise a method for how to work with the actors to develop their characters. We combined the stuff we were learning from Lynn, with guidelines Ruby uses to work with groups, and basic theatrical character development techniques. We met with the actors as a group only once right after we finished casting (though the actors did not meet Ruby until the first session) and took them through an initial writing exercise. Then we began giving the actors assignments. For weeks I met with each actor one-on-one. They were required to keep daily character journals (which we would have access to) as well as private personal journals about their experience (which we would not ask to see). And every other day or so I'd email a character development question which they'd have to somehow work into their character's life and journal. When I met with each actor we talked about their journal work, sometimes read parts of it, talked through issues and ways the character either related to the actor directly or didn't. We kept getting more and more thorough, and going deeper and deeper.

It was challenging for the actors and at the same time inspiring and motivating. I told each actor that I would not ask them to do anything I wouldn't do myself, and I wouldn't ask them to risk anything I wouldn't risk. I knew that for each person this would be a huge personal adventure. And likely scary at times.

While I was off meeting with actors Anne continued meeting with Lynn. Together we kept kind of melding this theatrical character development process with a psychotherapy process. And Anne keyed into a really critical thing very early - the need to ask each actor what they needed in order to feel safe. The answer was different from each actor and I think the fact that we simply asked it went a long way toward building trust.

I know that to varying degrees the character took over the respective actor's life. The closer we got to the shoot date the more intense the questions, the journal work, the exercises and our meetings got. Each actor was finding their character's walk and posture and voice. And each actor really needed to know everything about their character in order to talk about whatever came up in

GROUP / r u b y s l i p p e r c o n t i n u e d

therapy. And most importantly, each actor needed to ground their character in an emotional truth central to their own core.

Without question these actors are portraying characters, not themselves. However, each actor did an incredible job of building a character out from an essentially truthful emotional and psychological center through which they could solidly act, be present, be authentic in their emotional responses and not look like they were acting.

As a final stage in the process before shooting Anne and I together wrote each character's story line for the 21 weeks of film story time. We gave each character a clear story arch, a goal, obstacles - pretty traditional story stuff. We wrote these storylines in a sort of outline form, week-by-week so that each actor would know exactly what was going on in their character's life each week before walking into therapy. But no actor knew anything about the other characters; each actor had only their own character's storyline. Anne and I counted on the idea that a master story would emerge through and within the process of group. And it did.

We left it up to each actor - what they actually talked about in group from session to session, if they talked at all and how they got along with others in the group and the therapist. And that's where the real improving happened. Each actor was thoroughly equipped with a well-drawn character and a clear story - and once they stepped into group they were off book and acting without a net.

It was spellbinding.

4) Is editing all of this footage absolute hell?

Not at all. Post-production is its own sort of hell, to be sure, but editing this story has been exhilarating. Directing the film I saw the master story emerge very clearly.

Even though we hadn't written a climax, I saw it when it happened. I knew clearly the moment it was happening - and it was most transcendent to me as a writer and director. After all of the work and structuring and learning Anne and I had been doing in order to facilitate this story of a group therapy adventure, of bringing meaning to one's life through therapy, I wept in the climactic moment when I saw that it's all about compassion. Who knew it all comes down to that?

Viewing the original twenty hours of sessions was a bit arduous, but we quickly cut that to four hours and forty minutes. We expected getting it down to a hundred minutes from there would be awful, but it wasn't. We knew the story. We have cut out all sorts of wonderful scenes but we're planning on using the web site to add a dimension to this film rarely explored in movie stories.

So, we're down to a 93-minute rough cut but still adding some music-driven scenes so we'll need to cut a bit more in order to make room. We're getting there.

I continue to love the story more and more so posting the movie isn't hell. Our editor is a guy named Tim Jenson. He absolutely loves editing. I've worked with him a lot and he's a very talented editor. At this point the three of us, Anne and Tim and I are hashing over and rehashing every scene and moment. We probably help keep each other going.

Plus we can't walk down the street in Olympia without somebody asking how the movie's coming along, so we're forever talking about it. We're into it.

GROUP / r u b y s l i p p e r c o n t i n u e d

5)How did you choose your cast? Friends? Neighbors? Notorious chicks on the scene?

We invited three actors and held open calls to find the others. We invited Nomy Lamm to work on the movie having seen her work on the rock opera she staged, The Transfused. I was very taken with Nomy. Oh, and we invited Vicki Hollenberg, she studied acting with me at Cornish in Seattle. And we invited Lola who'd been a student of mine at Evergreen. Both Vicki and Lola had acted in the initial Group lab we shot early in the process.

You may be most interested in hearing about casting Carrie Brownstein. Carrie showed up in response to an open casting call. I didn't know who she was. I knew of Sleater-Kinney but I didn't know their music and had never seen the band play.

Carrie's audition was wonderful; she was very vulnerable. She was nervous and said so, so I gave her some direction...a way to work with her audition piece. And she took the direction incredibly well. Her vulnerability is a very compelling quality. Her audition was moving because she was so present in her nervousness and fear. She used what she was feeling really well. I talked to her about performing as a musician...about singing...I wondered how deeply she feels when she's performing with her band. I asked her if she ever cries when she sings onstage. She answered yes to that with a kind of quiet admission-like quality, almost like letting go of a secret. With that answer and the level of personal exposure that came with it along with her audition, she locked up a roll in the movie. Whether she really does cry on stage or not, I don't know for sure. But I believed her; she was convincing.

The call back auditions were rigorous. With the advice of our consulting therapists we focused on three things: the actor's ability to self reflect; the ability to articulate personal issues clearly; and having had the experience of making personal changes based on their ability to self reflect. Each actor really had to hit those marks in order to do the movie and those we cast did it well.

6)Do you think this method of filmmaking brings about a more sincere performance and story?

Absolutely.

8)Gimme yr top 3 filmmaking heroes/heroines....

Thomas Vinterberg, Christine Vachon, and Dorothy Arzner.

9)If budget were no object and you could have any actors to work with- daydream your next project....

Our next project is called In the Way of Intimacy...it's got lots to do with sex and I can't say yet who I'd like in it.....

10)Whats the best reason for girls to see 'Group' or check out Wovie.com?????

The best reason to see Group is that it is utterly compelling, it's an all-girl movie and the girls in it are awesome (and gorgeous).

Wovie is the name of our production company. Best reason to see visit Wovie.com is, for the moment, that's where you can find out about Group and see the trailer. We'll be launching the movie site next month.

GROUP / r u b y s l i p p e r c o n t i n u e d

CARRIE BROWNSTEIN

1) So this isn't your first brush with acting, but the concept isn't conventional....

Is this a question? No, this isn't my first experience with acting although I had never been in a film before. I took acting classes as a kid and also performed in jr. high and high school plays. Theatre is much more immediate than film, not unlike live music, it is very visceral. I liked acting in 'Group' because it was improvisational and therefore had the spontaneity of live performance.

2) Tell me a little bit about your character, Grace....do you see a lot of her in yourself or no?

Grace is a young woman who is afraid to feel emotions. She would rather have her feelings manifest themselves as physical ailments because she perceives physical pain to have boundaries, thus she thinks it can be contained and eliminated. Unfortunately, Grace's hypochondria becomes debilitating and she is forced to face her own vulnerability. Grace and I are very different but I can relate to her.

3) Is it easier for you to portray someone similar to yourself or someone completely different?

Both are difficult but I think I enjoy portraying people that I initially perceive of as different from myself. In these situations it is inevitable that I discover a multitude of similarities between me and the character, which is a profound experience.

4) This project is yet another oly art scene product...how did yr community get so tightly knit???

This is an impossible question to answer because anything so insular thrives on inexplicability. It all comes down to the mathematical concept of an oscillator—a unit whose natural dynamic causes it to repeat the same cycle of behavior over and over again. Systems, in this case the Olympia art "scene", oscillate because it is the simplest thing you can do if you don't want to remain still. Thus, in order to resist stagnation, we enact something called bifurcation in which periodic oscillations grow out from the original steady state like a ripple on a pond growing out from its center. For further information one can look up the German mathematician Eberhard Hopf.

5) Can you see acting as something you want to get into on a more regular basis?

Yes, it is one of the many things I want to pursue though I don't know with how much frequency. I am very busy these days: training for a triathlon, coaching tennis, and translating the poems of Rilke.

6) What was the BEST part of contributing to a project like this?

It was great to be a part of a very profound and original concept formulated by two amazing minds.

7) yr top 3 films- GO!

Too reductive for me. Sorry, I can never think of these things, they are constantly changing.

8) How excited are you to have not only this movie coming but playing with Patti Smith?

GROUP / r u b y s l i p p e r c o n t i n u e d

Very excited.

9)What are your plans for the next couple of months? Music? Promoting this film? More?

Writing music, teaching, a research project in the field of sociolinguistics, reading.

10)Whats the best reason that someone should buy a ticket to see Group?

The gratuitous sex, the surprise ending, to support independent films.

GROUP / p r e s s c l i p # 1

Group therapy - uncensored

Olympia filmmakers keep cameras rolling, invite public to watch online

Ross Raihala, The Olympian

Violet shakes as she describes the sexually active teen-age niece that has been foisted upon her. Grace attempts to hide her anger behind a meek facade as she tells about her father's affair with a high school student. Rachel breaks into tears as she wonders aloud whether she can trust the other eight women in the room.

This is group therapy, and there are no boundaries. Addiction, attraction, ambition and assault - sexual and otherwise - are discussed frankly and openly.

But there are six cameras rolling to capture every emotion and reaction, from waves of nervous laughter to stinging tears of despair.

And we're invited to watch it all.

Welcome to GROUP, the first feature-length film from Wovie, a recently launched local media company.

Currently filming in Wovie's downtown Olympia studio, GROUP follows eight characters - portrayed with an almost uncomfortable conviction by regional actresses - through 20 weeks of group therapy. The cast includes Olympia activist Nomy Lamm and Carrie Brownstein of the Olympia-bred punk rock trio Sleater-Kinney.

Overhead camera

To feed the voyeuristic tendencies of a culture fascinated by "Temptation Island" and gossip about Russell Crowe's latest bed partners, the public is invited to watch the process of creating GROUP live on the Internet.

Each day, an uncensored overhead camera broadcasting live on wovie.com shows the entire day's action, from the tedium of sweeping the floors to the excitement of the actual filming.

Marilyn Freeman and Anne de Marcken gave birth to GROUP, which threatens to become a model for adventurous 21st century independent filmmaking.

"Whenever we've encountered a problem during this entire process," Freeman says, "we've asked ourselves, 'What serves the story best?' That has been our rule. And it's answered all our questions."

With a cast and crew of more than 40 - the majority of whom are women - GROUP is scheduled to shoot through April 9.

Therapy sessions

The story unfolds over 20 group therapy sessions, each of which is shot in an hour of real time.

GROUP / p r e s s c l i p # 1 c o n t i n u e d

The eight actresses - in character - are guided through each session by an actual therapist.

Instead of following a traditional script, Freeman and de Marcken meet privately with each actress before and after each session to discuss her character's motivations as well as issues that need to be revealed.

Once the six cameras start rolling, the actresses improvise their way through an uninterrupted hour. Freeman keeps a watchful eye over the process from the balcony while de Marcken darts in and out of the action with a handheld camera.

When the film wraps production on April 9, Freeman and de Marcken will be left with 20 of these sessions, each captured from six different angles. The duo will edit those 120 hours of footage down to a 100-minute finished product. They'll then enter GROUP into national and international film festivals and shop it around to distributors.

Along the way, the pair will fill the Web site groupthemovie.com with the vast amount of material that won't make it into the final film. Audition clips, behind-the-scenes interviews and snippets from journals will further explore the characters and their motivations.

In theory, the GROUP Web site will develop into a fully functioning and equal entity that enhances the film instead of simply promoting it.

Inspired by experience

Freeman and de Marcken started work on GROUP in 1999, spurred by their own experiences in therapy. After four drafts of a traditional script, they decided to experiment with a more nontraditional approach.

They asked a therapist and seven actresses to take a trial run through an improvised group session, shot it on several cameras and realized they found a innovative plan of attack for GROUP.

The duo cast the film, recruited a crew and spent months in pre-production preparation, meeting extensively with the cast and conducting test runs with all the technology.

And after Thursday, the first day of the shoot, they found the formula was more than a novel idea.

"All the work we've done has paid off," says Freeman. "The acting, the concept and the technology all came together beautifully."

The only hitch they've encountered thus far is that they've already got too much of a good thing.

"The first two hours of footage are so fabulous," says de Marcken, "it's hard to imagine cutting this all into just one movie. We're going to want to make eight movies. Or 20 movies."

Freeman smiles and adds: "That's a good problem to have."

GROUP / p r e s s c l i p # 2

Group session comes to an end...and that's a wrap.

Ross Raihala, The Olympian

After two weeks of filming and two years of pre-production, the cast and crew of the movie GROUP have called it a day.

Monday was the last day of shooting on the largely improvised film, which follows eight women through 20 sessions of group therapy.

Creators Marilyn Freeman and Anne de Marcken will spend the next six months editing the vast amount of footage into a 100-minute film. This fall, they plan to show GROUP at film festivals and shop it around to distributors.

The experience of filming was more emotionally taxing than the actresses could have imagined.

"In the beginning, I had in mind what I wanted for this character," said Kari Fillipi. "(But) this character started telling me what the character was going to be. By the end, I almost didn't have input anymore."

GROUP represents an ambitious experiment in filmmaking. Freeman and de Marcken based the film on their own experiences in therapy and employed actual counselors as consultants to ensure authenticity.

The duo gave each actress a rough sketch of a character and guided her through the process of fleshing out that persona. The actresses wrote journals under the guise of the role they were playing and developed a personality that transcended mere words on a page.

That's because GROUP didn't follow a traditional script. Instead, the crew shot the 20 therapy meetings over 10 days. Each hour-long session unfolded in real time, with the actresses given only an outline of the issues that needed to be discussed.

The process proved stressful for some.

Nomy Lamm, a lifelong Olympia resident and activist, wondered how to keep from essentially portraying herself.

"So there's this person who is fat, Jewish, fake leg, punk, queer and lives in Olympia," she said with a laugh. "Who else could that possibly be? Of all the characters out there like that, I can play them."

Lamm coped by finding a midway point, drawing from her own life as well as experiences she witnessed in friends. Her character morphed into a new, yet familiar, entity.

Others worried about the amount of necessary independent thought and effort.

"I put a lot of pressure on myself on how I was going to make this character interesting," said Vicki Hollenberg. "I'm not a writer. What do I know? I don't know anything ... that's why I'm an actor."

"It scared me that I wouldn't draw a character with enough depth to survive group therapy."

GROUP / p r e s s c l i p # 2 c o n t i n u e d

Those fears proved unfounded, at least according to Freeman and de Marcken. They deemed the shoot, however demanding, a success.

Before filming began, they purposely kept the actresses - most of whom are from the region - separated. The idea was to keep the women from coming into the shoot with preconceived notions.

For all intents and purposes, the eight women got to know each other through the process of portraying other people on film.

And that led to some blurred lines of reality.

"We didn't know who the real person was and who the made-up person was," said Lola Rock N' Rolla, an actress and musician from New York.

On camera, Rock N' Rolla played a gruff, prickly woman named Rita.

"And I was Rita, being a total a----- and then (off camera) I was, like, by myself at the coffee machine thinking everybody hates me."

She wasn't alone.

"The first few days I went for a walk right after the shoot," said S. Ann Hall. "Trying to step out of (my character) was so hard, I had to clear my head."

Those worries faded, however, during the long days on the set. It was difficult for the women not to become friends given the amount of time they spent together. And soon enough, they learned how to keep the most extreme emotions corralled to the times when cameras were rolling.

"As everybody got to know each other better," said Rock N' Rolla, "we (realized) it's an acting exercise. If we got into something heavy, we always knew to wink at each other after."

Still, the sheer amount of effort the actresses devoted to their characters made the GROUP shoot an all-consuming endeavor.

"I am in a little bit of denial about my real life and having to go back and deal with it," said Tracy Kirkpatrick.

Carrie Brownstein, guitarist for the punk rock trio Sleater-Kinney, said she felt cut off from her friends during GROUP.

"I've only been able to hang out with other people on the cast," Brownstein said. "I can't really talk about this to other people yet. It's very insular ... I'm looking forward to rejoining real life and being there for my friends again."

The cast and crew of more than 40 people celebrated with a party Monday night. They reflected on the joys and pains of GROUP and left the project with positive, if intense, feelings.

"The biggest bummer is that it's come to an end," said Tony Wilkerson of Tacoma.

"I'm going to miss these great people."