



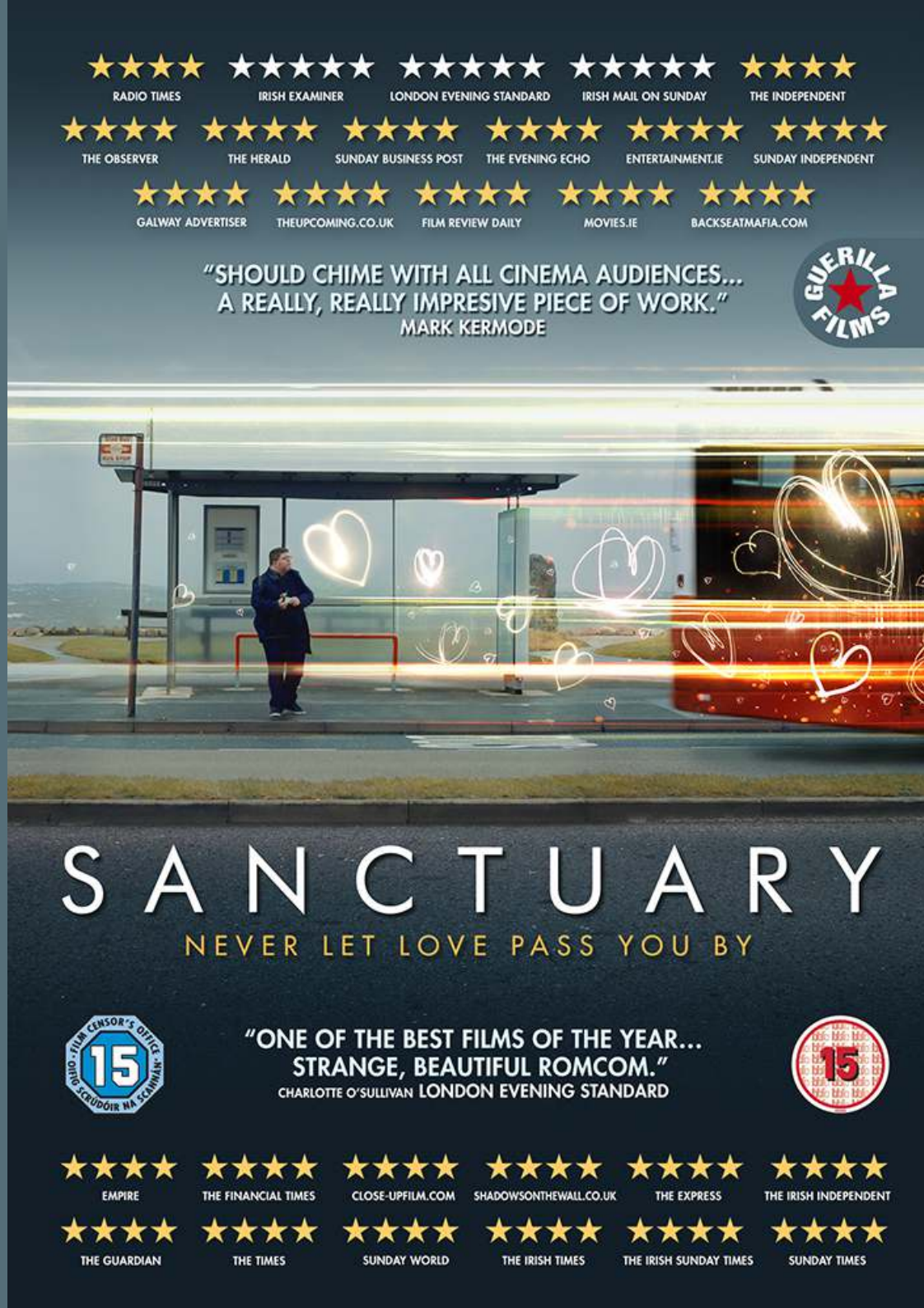
# SANCTUARY: A QUIET REVOLUTION



# SANCTUARY

NEVER LET LOVE PASS YOU BY

15 STRONG LANGUAGE



Type of output:  
Digital/Visual  
Media

DOUBLE WEIGHTED

by  
Len Collin

Cover:  
Sanctuary Quad Poster UK.

Left:  
Sanctuary DVD cover.



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# SUMMARY

Collected in this folio is a body of creative and critical research that includes: *Sanctuary* (Dir. Collin), a feature film made with a cast of actors with intellectual disabilities; a book chapter, 'Shooting Actors Who Have Intellectual Disabilities', in *Disability and Dissensus: Strategies of Disability Representation and Inclusion in Contemporary Culture*; and *Altered Thinking: A Film Essay* (Dir. Collin), a reflexive feature documentary about the making of *Sanctuary*, exploring the landscape and history of disability in film.

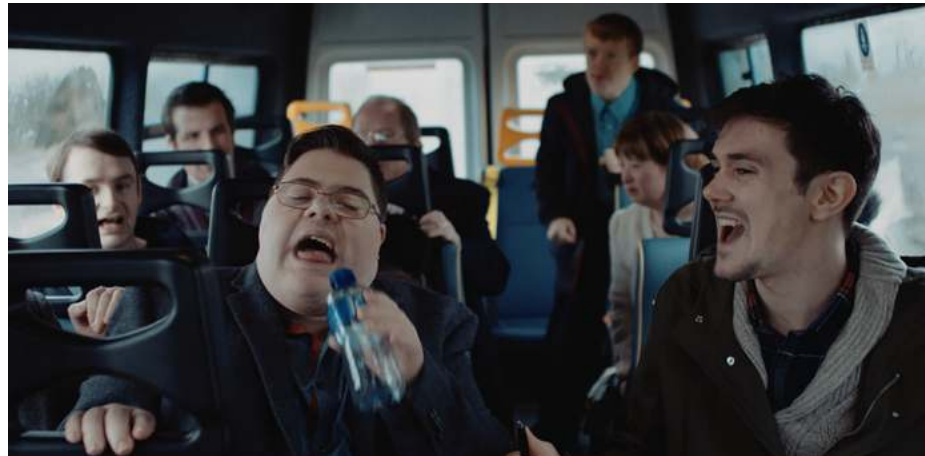
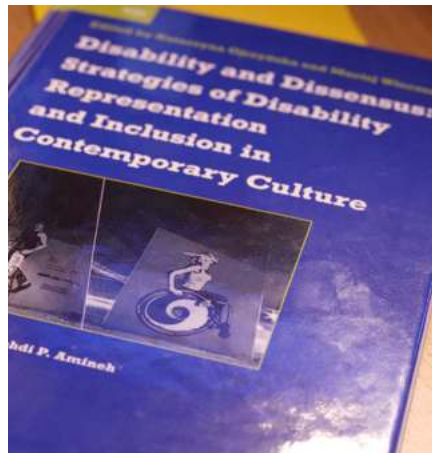
<https://vimeo.com/181475341>

Below left to right:

*Disability and Dissensus*, Published by Brill (2020);

Kieran Coppinger and Robert Doherty in a Scene from *Sanctuary*; and

Conor is interviewed in *Altered Thinking*.



The research focuses on the lack of authentic representation of people with intellectual disabilities (ID) in film and television, challenging the action of 'cripping-up' (McRuer 2007) where non-disabled actors are used to portray characters with intellectual disabilities on screen. More specifically, *Sanctuary* addresses issues raised in The 'Ruderman White Paper', (Squire, Kopic, and Mitchell 2016) by asking:

*In what ways might **authentic casting** encourage paradigmatic change in the representation of people with ID in cinema?*

*and*

*What changes to the **mechanics of production and improvisatory working methods** might need to be considered to bring this about?*

Directed and script-edited by Collin, *Sanctuary* (total funding EUR 740,000) is based on the play by Christian O'Reilly (Blue Teapot 2012). In *Altered Thinking* Collin expands upon the methodologies developed to move *Sanctuary*'s ID cast from the practices of theatre to film, paying particular attention to the specific physical and psychological pressures that the filmmaking process placed on the actors.

*Sanctuary*'s narrative is centred on Irish legislation (Section 5, Criminal Law Act, 1993) which made it illegal for unmarried individuals with ID to have a sexual relationship and the film's popular and critical success internationally is credited by Ireland's Minister for Disabilities, Finian McGrath, as having "a major impact" on the repeal of this legislation in 2017 through what McGrath described as a "quiet revolution".

Right:  
Collin confronts his hidden  
disability in *Altered Thinking*.



# TIMELINE

2013 - 2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<p>Christian O'Reilly adapts the play into a script. Collin edits the drafts giving notes, and also writes drafts and adds materials to the script. (Uncredited).</p> <p>Collin workshops the actors - He uses improvisational techniques to earn trust and dig deeper into the issues faced by each actor. Using these workshops to inform the work on the script.</p> <p>Len takes the actors to real world locations and films scenes from the script. (Proof of Concept Film).</p> <p>Shortlisted for IFB Catalyst Scheme.</p>	<p>September: Present Paper at University of Łódź, Poland. Conference: Negotiating Space for (Dis)ability in Drama, Theatre, Film and Media.</p> <p>This will become the Chapter in <i>Disability and Dissensus</i>.</p> <p>IFB award funding: €225,000 BAI award funding: €300,000 RTE award funding: €16,000 Section 481 tax relief: €189,000 Zanzibar films: €9,000</p> <p>Pre-production begins early November, Principle Photograpy 30th November - Filming 6 day weeks for a total of 30 days. The film wraps on time and on budget 16/01/2016.</p>	<p>Post-Production January-March</p> <p>Special screening of <i>Sanctuary</i> at Lancaster University Disability Studies Conference.</p> <p>Film Premiere's Galway Film Fleadh 10/07/2016 Wins Best First Irish Feature.</p> <p>Recieves first reviews in Ireland from local press in Galway and Film Ireland magazine.</p> <p>Content Media acquire sales rights for world wide distribution.</p>	<p>Festival Run begins including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ADIFF - Wins Michael Dwyer Award for the cast.</li> <li>• Opens Reelabilities New York.</li> <li>• Irish Film Festival - Chicago/Australia/Rome/Luxembourg.</li> <li>• 3<sup>rd</sup> Bentonville Film festival - USA.</li> <li>• 25<sup>th</sup> Camerimage -Poland</li> <li>• Newport Beach International Film Festival - USA (Winner - Best Director) Jury Award.</li> </ul> <p>Film released Theatricaly in Ireland by Eclipse Pictures.</p> <p>Voted Best Irish Film of 2017 by Irish Times Ticket Awards.</p> <p>Voted Best Irish Film of 2017 by Dublin Film Critics Circle.</p> <p>Released in the UK - late December.</p> <p>Section 5 of the Criminal Law Act 1993 is ammended in February as the film Debuts in Dublin at ADIFF.</p> <p>Minister for Disabilities Finian McGrath TD attends the screening.</p>	<p>Film plays around UK in select cinemas and is critically very well received.</p> <p>Charity events organised such as with Downs Syndrome Organisation.</p> <p>Film continues on Festival circuit including: Glasgow Film Festival Reelabilities Boston and LA Indus - Barcelona. European Film Festival Jordan and Lebanon. Downtown Film Festival Cairo. Breaking Down Barriers - Moscow (Winner-Best Film).</p> <p>Clare Harrison instigates work with Cheshire West Voluntary Action and Vivo Care Choices.</p> <p><i>Sanctuary</i> bought by Hulu (USA) on two year deal.</p> <p>Collin begins work on <i>Altered Thinking</i> documentary.</p>	<p>Filming interviews and GV's in Galway for <i>Altered Thinking</i>.</p> <p>Filmed Interview with Minister for Disabilities Finian McGrath TD at Dail Eireann.</p> <p>Filmed Interview with Sarah Lenon at Inclusion Ireland.</p> <p>Workshops with Vivo Health Care Choices in Chester.</p> <p>Filming Interviews in Chester for <i>Altered Thinking</i>.</p> <p>Requests continue to come in from Universities / Social Welfare Organisations / and other concerns : to screen <i>Sanctuary</i>. Including Leeds University (Law), Deakin University Melbourne, Goldsmiths College.</p> <p>Work on <i>Dissability and Dissensus</i> Chapter ongoing.</p>	<p>Final approvals for chapter in <i>Disability and Dissensus</i>.</p> <p>Covid-19 prevents planned filming for <i>Altered Thinking</i> documentary.</p> <p>Filmed interviews at Vivo Care Choices in Chester talking with Clients and other stakeholders.</p> <p><i>Disability and Dissensus</i> published in September. Collin's chapter - <i>Shooting Actors with Intellectual Disabilities</i> included.</p> <p><i>Altered Thinking</i> - Documentary premiere's online via Vimeo. Over Three hundred views in the first week.</p>

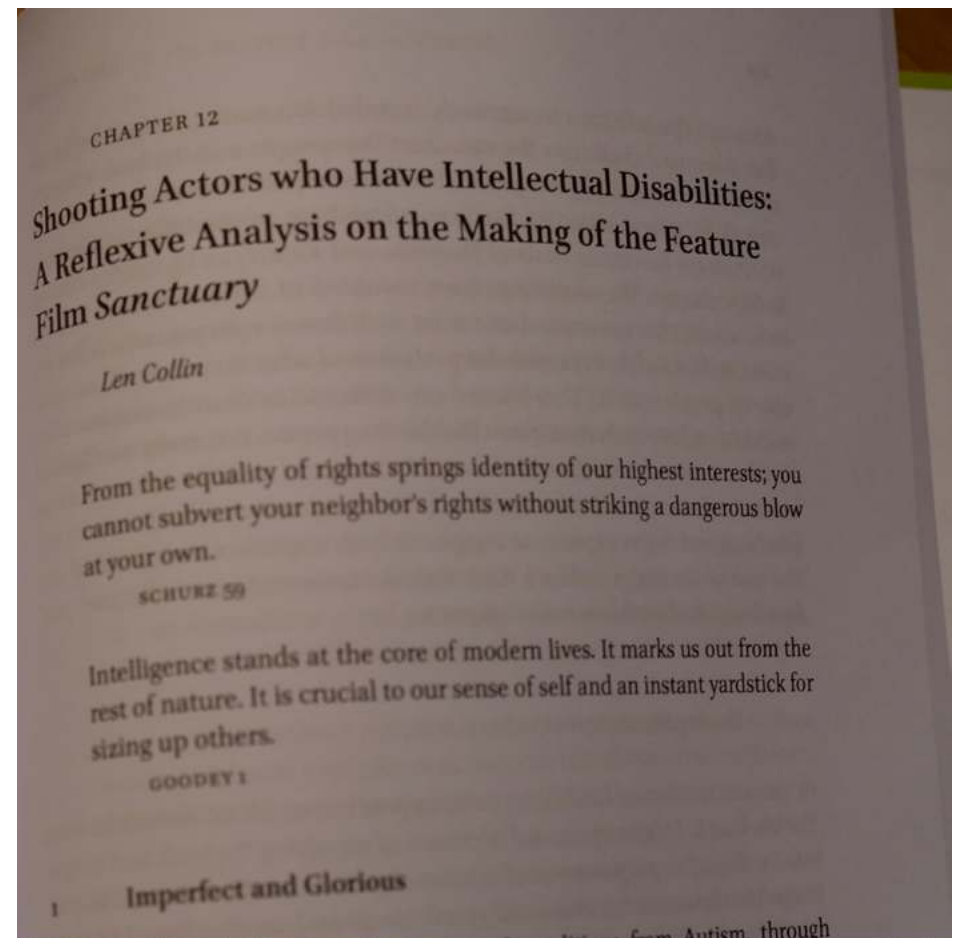
# RESEARCH CHALLENGE

Intellectual Disability (ID) is a term that covers a range of conditions including Autism and Down's Syndrome. Historically, there has been a chronic lack of authentic representation of ID in film and television and even contemporary portrayals still largely appear as regressive, reinforcing negative or inaccurate stereotypes, often using non-disabled actors to play ID roles.

Collin's research identified the need to explore ethical changes to film production norms required when working directly with ID actors and in doing so, focussed on two specific areas of research questioning:

**Authentic casting and character:** In what ways might authentic casting encourage paradigmatic change in the depiction of people with ID in mainstream cinema?

**Production Processes and actors with ID:** What changes to the mechanics of production and improvisatory working methods need to be considered when working with actors with ID?



Right:  
*Disability and Dissensus: Chapter 12*

# CONTEXT

*Sanctuary*, directed and script-edited by Collin, is based on the play by Christian O'Reilly (Blue Teapot 2012). The film features a principal cast with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) - a term that covers a range of conditions including Autism and Down's Syndrome - with the narrative centring on Irish legislation (Section 5, Criminal Law Act, 1993) which made it illegal for unmarried individuals with ID to have a sexual relationship.

Recent scholarly assessments of the importance of authentic casting in theatre and performance (Rogers and Thorpe 2014, Warwick 2016) and contemporary media industry debate about authentic casting in film and TV (Holloway and Lang 2016, Lang 2019, Ryan 2018) has largely centred on non-white and non-trans actors in BAME and trans roles, rather than focussing on the authentic casting of disabled actors. The creative research activity of Collin aimed to address this gap, pushing back at established industry norms which customarily take the contentious route of telling stories about disability by casting actors without disabilities to play those roles. (e.g. Dustin Hoffman in *Rain Man* 1988).



Top right:  
Sir John Mills in *Ryan's Daughter* (1970).



Right:  
Sir Ian McKellan in *Walter* (1982).



Drawing upon McRuer (2007) Collin identifies such practices as “cripping up” by non-disabled actors and turns instead towards the insights of queer theory and disability studies to help “create critically disabled spaces.” In particular, his research addresses issues raised in ‘The Ruderman White Paper’ which examines the links between authentic casting of actors with disabilities and representation on TV (Squire, Kopic, and Mitchell 2016). The report found that practice in the film industry of casting actors authentically was rare, at 5% in 2016. This, it concludes, leads to tropes and stereotypes being repeated in the industry, perpetuating poor on-screen representations of people with disabilities.



Top right:  
Paul Connolly filming *Sanctuary* from *Altered Thinking*.



Right:  
Len Collin directing *Sanctuary* from *Altered Thinking*.

# METHODS AND PROCESSES

The body of research that constitutes this flio was begun in 2014 when Collin began to conduct workshops for camera with the Blue Teapot Theatre Company, Galway – a company of actors with intellectual disabilities who had already performed *Sanctuary* as a play, written by Christian O'Reilly.

Below:  
Collin directs a rehearsed reading  
of 84 at Druid Theatre, 2012.

Due to technological innovations in digital film, it was possible to film, edit and screen the actors' work in the workshops. This was important as the actors grew to understand continuity editing, camera set-ups and shot sizes. They could see themselves on screen and adapt their performances accordingly. Collin took the workshops into real locations such as a park, cinema and hotel room to familiarise the actors with the processes of filming. The research conducted over this period developed footage that was used as proof of concept to attain funding in 2016 from: RTE – EUR 16,000; Irish Film Board - EUR 225,000; BAI – EUR 300,000; Zanzibar Films – EUR 9,560; and from Section 481 Tax Relief scheme – EUR 189,440.



By refashioning improvisatory ways of working with actors, Collin and his crew were drawing on the practices and scholarly knowledges of existing film directors who create authentic character in British cinema including Mike Leigh and Francis Lee (Frost and Yarrow 2016) whilst extending and adapting this knowledge within the highly specific context of working with ID actors. In workshops and tutorial sessions, Collin began testing the annunciation and articulation of words and sentences with each actor and their understanding of the dialogue. This informed Collin's development of the screenplay by testing the authenticity of the script against the individual experience and ability of each actor. As Collin observed, the actors' familiarity with the play was both a boon and a burden. "I gained the insight that some of the actors learned their lines like lyrics to a song. If the lyrics are learned to a certain rhythm and melody, then it is almost impossible to break that rhythm and melody down" (Collin 2020). The workshops were thus used to allow the actors to play each other's roles as a way of relearning their "song".



Right:  
First day of principal Photography.

Collin also drew on Critical Disability Studies - in particular (Barnes 1992) to develop methods of direction and editing that influenced cast, crew and audience alike. For example, the actor playing the lead character Larry, experienced difficulty unbuttoning his shirt whilst filming; conventionally, this would be edited out or re-shot, but Collin focusses on the actor's prosaic struggle thereby allowing the audience to understand the difficulty Larry would later face trying to use a condom. The scene also demonstrated to the crew (who had not worked with such actors before) that an actor with ID is more than capable of improvisation and agency – Larry solved the problem of the next button by pulling the shirt over his head.

An important aspect of Collin's methodology was to develop the ethical changes to film production norms required when working directly with ID actors, for example, the attention to the cast's welfare in the light of the specific physical and psychological pressures that the filmmaking process placed on them, as well as demonstrating, through practice, the capacity for autonomy that ID actors have when authentic casting is adopted.

Below:

Kieran Coppinger, Charlene Kelly and Collin on the set of *Sanctuary*.





# DISSEMINATION

“Sanctuary is an important film and a fresh look at social filmmaking”

Rob Aldam,  
Backseat Mafia

In his book chapter *Shooting Actors with Intellectual Disabilities* (2020) Collin outlines the innovative practice-based methodologies of narrative feature-film production that were trialled to explore how the actors could develop greater agency in the filmmaking process, resulting in more accurate on-screen representations of ID. The nuanced methodologies evolved by Collin – for example to move the ID cast from the paradigm of theatre to film – were further explored in his subsequent film essay, *Altered Thinking* (2020) about the making of *Sanctuary* where Collin communicates his methods through the visual, spoken and editorial language of documentary filmmaking in reflexive detail.



Right: Reelabilities New York Q and A.

*Sanctuary* has toured to every continent, receiving multiple awards, screening at film festivals, as well as within educational, and welfare settings. Premiered at the Galway Film Fleadh in July 2016, *Sanctuary* was then screened at the Audi Dublin International Film Festival 2017 where it was announced by Sarah Lennon (Inclusion Ireland) that thanks to the popular and critical success of the film, Section 5 of the Criminal Law Act 1993 had been repealed in the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament).



Left:  
Interviewed for *Altered Thinking*, Ireland's Minister for Disabilities, Finian McGrath TD, praised *Sanctuary* for the "quiet revolution" it has caused, helping to pass amendments to Section 5 of the Criminal Law Act and helping pass the UN convention of rights for People with Disabilities in Ireland.



*Sanctuary* has since been awarded Best Film at Moscow's Breaking Barriers Film Festival (2018), Best Irish Film by the Dublin Film Critics Circle (2017) and Best Director at the Newport Beach Film Festival (2017). The cast won the Michael Dwyer Discovery Award at the Audi Dublin International Film Festival (2017). *Sanctuary* opened the ReelAbilities New York Film Festival and was further screened at: Camerimage, Poland; Geena Davis' Bentonville Film Festival; and the Irish Film Festival in Melbourne, Australia. Collin has been invited to speak about *Sanctuary* at several international panels including What's The Diff? Deakin University Melbourne (2020) and the Sao Paulo XV Symposium of Irish Studies in South America (2020), as well as chairing a panel at Breaking Down Barriers International Film Festival, Moscow (2020).

◀ BACK



## SANCTUARY

Sanctuary

### Irish Cinema Review

Cinematographer: Richard Gleeson

Director: Len Collin

Producer: Edwina Forkin

Writer: Christian O'Reilly

Production designer: Sonja Mohlich, Eleanore Wood

Larry and Sophie are in love. What could be more natural for them than to want to be alone together? They convince the feckless Tom to book them into a hotel for an afternoon's tryst and look forward to getting to know each other, like countless couples before them. But Larry and Sophie aren't just any couple – they both

SEMINARS, MEETINGS AND  
WORKSHOPS ▶

The Facebook page for *Sanctuary* has 5640 followers, many of whom are linked in to academic, educational and social welfare networks. Through these pathways the film has been disseminated to a wider target audience of social workers, carers and educational establishments resulting in the film's screening and Collin's academic contribution to:

2015 CFP: Negotiating Space for (Dis)Ability in Drama, Theatre, Film and Media Conference, University of Łódź, Poland.

2016 Lancaster University CeDR Conference.

2017 Pacific Rim International Conference on Disability and Diversity.

2018 MeCCSA London (+ paper) You can change the law, but changing minds is another matter: The ghettoization of Diversity.

2018 University of Leeds (Law and Social Justice).



Left:  
Deakin University Melbourne -What's  
The DIFF Q and A with Len Collin.



In July 2017 and December 2017, *Sanctuary* was released in Cinemas across Ireland and the UK respectively. The film was also made available to Access Cinema - a company that is funded by the EU to take cinema to remote and unusual locations – winning the **Access Cinemas award** for the film that made the most impact on their circuit for 2017. At the Odyssey cinema, St Albans, a fundraiser for Downs Syndrome Association was held and a Q&A hosted by actress Sally Phillips, the films UK distributor David Wilkinson and Professor Tom Shakespeare.

*Sanctuary* is being used by educators at secondary school level and higher to teach sex education, social awareness around disability and to educate carers, in institutions as far afield as Canada, Poland, Russia and Australia with Collin working directly with Social Care providers such as VIVO and Chester West Voluntary Action.

Below left: Sky Planner

Below: London Evening Standard review.



**Film**

## Sanctuary review - care, chaos and comedy in the community

★★★★☆

Aided by their care worker, a couple in love embark on an illegal tryst in an unsentimental romcom played with terrific gentleness and honesty



▲ Sophie and Larry, played by Charlene Kelly and Kieran Coppinger, in Sanctuary.

**Peter Bradshaw**  
 @PeterBradshaw1  
 Wed 27 Dec 2017 15:00 GMT

69 11

Below left: Peter Bradshaw gives *Sanctuary* four stars.  
 Below: Film Inquiry article and Interview.


**FILM INQUIRY**




NOW READING: **SANCTUARY: HOW A SMALL FILM AFFECTED A BIG CHANGE IN IRISH DISABILITY LAW**

FILM REVIEWS, INTERVIEWS

## SANCTUARY: HOW A SMALL FILM AFFECTED A BIG CHANGE IN IRISH DISABILITY LAW

FEBRUARY 23, 2018



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Click on the picture to go to the film - *Sanctuary* (<https://vimeo.com/181475341>)



Click on the picture to go to the film – *Altered Thinking* (<https://vimeo.com/user2823780/review/479650283/77e7d0d3ad>)



# LINKS

[Link for Sanctuary with Captions](#)

[Sanctuary Facebook Page](#)

[Online survey form for viewers of Sanctuary](#)

## Academic Q&As

[Disability Film Festival. Deakin University, Australia](#)

[XV Symposium of Irish Studies in South America, Brazil](#)

## Awards

[Sanctuary receives Access Cinemas Award for Impact](#)

[Sanctuary wins Dublin Film Critics award for Best Irish Film 2017](#)

[Sanctuary wins Irish Times readers poll for Best Irish Film of 2017](#)

[Len Collin wins Best Director - Jury Award – at Newport Beach Festival](#)

## Interviews

[Ray D'Arcy show interview with actors Kieran and Charlene](#)

[Article written by Collin for Frontline Magazine \(Ireland\)](#)

[Interview with Len Collin for Film Ireland](#)

[Interview with Collin for the Ruderman Foundation \(USA\)](#)

[Interview with Len Collin for Movies.ie \(Ireland\)](#)

[Interview with Len Collin for Hot Press \(Ireland\)](#)

[Interview with Collin for POPplanet.biz Australia](#)

[Interview with Collin for Thalo.com New York \(USA\)](#)

[Interview with Len Collin for Film Inquiry \(UK\)](#)

[Interview with Len Collin for IFTN.ie \(Ireland\)](#)

[Short interview with Len Collin for the BAI](#)

[Interview with Len Collin, Kieran Coppinger and Charlene Kelly for The Sun \(Ireland\)](#)

[Interview and Article for The Journal.ie \(Ireland\)](#)



Above: Collin in *Altered Thinking*.

# REFERENCES

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Why films about learning disabilities need to be more than merely feelgood Saba Salman. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/oct/15/feelgood-films-learning-disabilities-hollywoodthe-peanut-butter-falcon>

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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More broadly, the research was supported by: Staff and Members of Blue Teapot Theatre Company, including Sonja Brodie & Petal Pilley; The Cast and Crew of *Sanctuary*; Edwina Forkin; Christian O'Reilly; Vivo Care Choices Chester; Chester West Voluntary Action; Clare Harrison; Professor Tom Shakespeare; David Wilkinson of Guerrilla Films; Greg Phillips of Kew Media; Colin Barnes; Katarzyna Ojrzynska and Maciej Wieczorek (Editors; Disability and Dissensus).

Finally, thanks to the film festival organisers and publics who have supported *Sanctuary*.



Still from *Altered Thinking*