



3B Productions & Indie Sales present



FRANCE

A FILM BY BRUNO DUMONT

Length: 2h13

International Sales

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Synopsis

France de Meurs is a star journalist running between a television set, a distant war and the hustle and bustle of her busy family life.

Her frantic high-profile world is suddenly turned upside down after a traffic accident in which she injures a pedestrian. This unexpected irruption of reality calls everything into question.

As France attempts to slow down and retreat into a simple anonymous life, her fame continues to pursue her until a mystified love affair seems to put an end to her quest.

Interview with Bruno Dumont Director

Was there one specific event that inspired the desire to make this film or was it more the general atmosphere of our media-driven world?

France is the story of a female star journalist with a 24-hour news station, set against the background of a world that is violently disrupted by the almost parallel one of the media and social networks.

Human societies have lost a share of their normality and natural balance in the concentration inherent in a digital and communal hyper-society. The hypertrophy of its new thinking results in a confusion that, with its inveterate digital rigorism, over-interprets reality, distorting and disrupting even more the natural proportions and dissimilarities.

All that results from this new digital optic - via the images and sounds of the media, along with their reconstructed and distorted reality – an optic that henceforth filters out reality and that hyper-connectivity sets ablaze.

However, beneath the layers of hyper-media, reality continues to sputter.

The North of France is like a pure reality where the cinema dwells. Where true good and true evil exist, regained. Could the natural fiction of the big screen - the cinema - have spread naturally to all our digital screens, even to the most resistant of them, those of the news media, which are supposedly focused on reality? Could reality have become a fiction there, accompanied by the dysfunctional problems of such a divergent tropism for users?

Fiction clearly influences the everyday (reality). Fiction is at work on all digital screens where the natural narration of images and sounds, cut off from the real world and edited, irrevocably creates a parallel world.

And so, today, this new fiction is causing cinema to escape from the movie theatre and its natural environment. The demarcation lines between reality and fiction have been shattered, leading to a schizophrenia symptomatic of the new digitized world we live in. Reality becomes fiction, the real a parallel world.

There is a lot of «cinema» everywhere (in every sense of the word!). In the media industry in particular.

The media industry is a mass industry that exploits this infinite and unacknowledged possibility of fiction for its own ends. Reality in the news media today is not so much the real, given the way in which it is distorted. Instead, we have a «half-reality» that becomes the new world reality. A media power above all, exposed to the shortcomings of every other form of power, in other words carried away by all the «transfigurations» of reality.

The collaboration of journalists in this transfiguration of reality is both tragic and heroic as it constitutes the human element within an ideological and commercial industrial system.

The sincerity of journalists is often pitiful for, while adopting the form of their function, they still believe themselves to be free; free, whereas if they are on the air, it is precisely because they conform to the system that employs them (or instantly excludes them, as we see now and then).

This media spectacle - and the star system it generates through its televisual «cinematic» and «cinegenic» aspects - says a great deal about modern society, about the parallel world of reality, and about each one of us, for we are part of it.

This is a magnificent subject for the cinema. Magnificent, because the cinema is at stake, because the imaginary world overflows into the real one, but magnificent above all because humans always resist!

France de Meurs is a fine example of a star journalist of the media system, a genuine film heroine, a tragic conscience, perfectly enlightened and perfectly human. France is an allegory of a media system that has become a machine focused on making noise and creating a buzz. You show how, especially on television, the representation of an event counts much more than the event itself. The film shows this with irony and cruelty. Is the goal to make us aware of this situation, or is it already irreversible?

The general public's well-known distrust of the media and journalists shows, if not the awareness, at least the intuition that everyone has in relation to a system that preaches reality while being overwhelmed by fiction and its representations.

The audience thus has a muddled perception of the spectacle of reality through the media. Television remains a form of entertainment, even in current affairs where, paradoxically, its fiction fascinates viewers, delights them even, through the novelistic aspects that emerge from its «staging» of both the news and the whole range of political, economic and social current affairs which, as in TV series, are now equal to, or even unequalled by, the best fictional plots.

The ambivalence of reality and fiction in news stories is complex, and the media fortunately differ in their treatment of it and the resulting toxicity.

The fact remains that the media mould reality to their own ideology, opportunely exploiting current

events as a continuous source of indoctrination, events exploited and produced according to the hierarchy of their industrial values and for their permanent propaganda, simplifying reality to conform to their standard: a fiction, therefore, of a reconstructed, schematic and geometric reality.

Fortunately, this «cinematography» of current affairs, its fiction, is also its salvation. It still retains the freedom of a virtually true representation of reality. The turpitude of the media demi-monde is therefore not fatal and is only matched by this alternative possibility of its art.

This dilemma is indeed that of heroes - which we must be on our own individual level - who continue to wage the worthy human battle. The media system is not deprived of this by the human element at work within it: hence its fully cinematic, alternative and paroxysmal heroine, France de Meurs.

As France's tribulations unfold, both on a personal and professional level, we come to understand that the true subject of the film is fecklessness. Nothing matters anymore, nothing is serious. What we say, what we do, nothing matters now. Is the media hubbub responsible for this destruction of our values?

The perpetual fiction of reality defuses everything because reality does not have its place in the

media and social network circus. Natural balances are upset, disproportion abounds, decadence lurks...The apocalypse itself slumbers in this regime if fiction does not return to its theatre, where religious fiction, for example, would already benefit from being put back on its stage.

The subculture has played a part in the overflow of fiction into the streets where extreme violence spreads unchecked, no longer sublimated and contained by true works of art, which are underestimated and sidelined by this culture of total entertainment. It is impossible to avoid thinking in informing, educating and entertaining - that the current media and their inveterate subculture are at work in today's society. Cultural poverty is the cause of everything and it is spreading like a plague.

Only an emergent consciousness, of which France is the heroine and the outline, could launch the process of elevation out of a system of media alienation.

Human nature finds a way out of every awkward situation and, here, does so through the cinema, which through its art, extracts us from our barbarity. Television too can aim higher. Beneath its splendour and trappings, cinema is also capable of the worst. The question is never aesthetic, it is always political: if you want this or that, the rest follows... Today, everything is institutionally established - the establishment - so that the world is as it is, and above all remains so despite the contradictory pressures of laws, rules and customs that interact in such a way that everything remains the same and immobilism flourishes.

For now, television stations live in a vacuum; we always see the same faces (artists, journalists, politicians, experts, etc.), all of them «pure consciences», who invite each other to their shows. swagger, talk, go around in circles and reproduce among themselves. This media enclosure is a resolutely industrial choice (of standardisation) whose «actors», routine and, in many cases, made paranoid by such a regime, are both officials and menials. This too is a fiction, through its minority reduction. self-containment and repetition. It is a long way from the real world with its diversity, masses and evanescence. The virtuous industrial addition of new minorities will further worsen this new self-righteous segregation in its totalitarian fiction overflowing with contrition and commiseration.

As the film progresses, the character played by Léa Seydoux slowly realizes that she is only a (very pretty) reflection of this shift from information to superficial representation. She comes to understand this through various trials that are like stations on her way to the cross. You make her a heroine, both superficial and moving, manipulative and sincere. How do you manage to write and then film such a

crystallisation of opposites?

Human nature is contrary. Deep down and on the surface. Filming it correctly means showing it in its different aspects and superimposed shadows without ever giving in to the uniform and sudden moralization of these asperities in order not to endure them.

This puritanical vision prevents any accomplished form of cinematography and spiritual elevation. This televisual cinema remains a form of alienation and entertainment of our human reality. France is gradually illuminated before our eyes, not with total clarity but, rather, through a continuous enlightenment of her consciousness and so of ours. Not without suffering, not without tears. France embraces the trials and tribulations of human nature, becoming that very nature which is embodied cinematically by Léa Seydoux who serves it, focused on France's personal development and paroxysm, growing and beating in the heart of the audience before emerging from the sluggish numbness of reality.

You film France like the heroine of a photo story. In her life, nothing is «for real». Her car has no doors, her apartment looks like a museum, everything is just a representation in a tale that is too good to be true, like her romance with the stranger she meets at the

health spa. One has the feeling that nothing in her life is real, everything is exaggerated, as if she were constantly the heroine of her own existence. Why?

Because this is ostensibly cinema, and precisely so we will not think that it's the real world! Everything is a representation, not of what we see, which is conveniently «false» and «photo-story»-like. It provides a view of the beyond which would remain invisible without that: a transfigured view of the whole impregnable expanse of the spiritual life that underlies it, the inner truth. Alteration is the arcane. Alteration is the process of this transfiguration of appearances into the representation of interiority, and the viewer is the beholder. The film is not the account of a journalist, but the universal melting pot of souls passing through human life and whose openings are the incantatory pendants tending towards the infinite. France is the absolute heroine of our own life, brought to its munificence and strengthened by our own turpitude, perhaps not without grace. Only the viewers see. They see, beneath this theatre, the other side of what is shown to them, however incomplete, so that they fill in what they themselves are the accomplishment of and of which the film was the beginning. France does not exist but, rather, incites the audience to reflect upon itself and to emerge transformed from what it has seen.

Similarly, France exists only through her job.

She has no past, no family, no parents. She has a husband whom she despises because she earns more than he does, a son with whom she has no relationship. Is this to better focus on her media image, which has become her only reality? Is she an unconscious victim or a submissive creature?

It's all part of the balance. France de Meurs is only half-human. She is a film heroine, in other words a cinematic counterweight. A weight on the audience's scales. The audience reacts to what it sees and estimates the value of it. France de Meurs is a cinematic ectoplasm whose astonishing and human appearances force the audience to question the reality of which she is merely a spirit. If France were real, she would not be as effective and only rehash appearances. France upsets the world through which she passes because of the artifice of her presence, the excess and excessiveness of her species. France de Meurs has to cut through the thickness of the order, habit and tradition that are at work in the system and condition us. Her malignity is merely the counterpoint to her goodness, which is always in tune with her and so with the audience since she is its avatar.

France de Meurs is the star journalist of a 24-hour news channel. As a result, and for this goal alone, she is relieved of the weight of normality from which she has freed herself thanks to her notoriety. France has taken the form of her function in the media system that employs her. Only her consciousness emerges from it to show the tragedy that unfolds and whose duplicity she reveals in order to be part of it. France is not a moral conscience - a pure conscience - but a human conscience struggling with the contradictions of its condition. Her elevation is not that of a hypostasis or a saint, but a very human elevation, with its moments of repentance and its highlights. The film is not a breviary, nor is it a moral lesson in the style of those right-thinking people who make art like priests. Enough of pure consciences! France is simply the present, the moment when we see her. The audience is the target.

Beyond her beauty, what made you choose Léa Seydoux? What type of actress is she? Cerebral or instinctive? How did her personality make the character of France evolve (or not)?

France de Meurs and Léa Seydoux devoured one another. Léa Seydoux's beauty is nothing compared to the precision of her acting and delivery. Léa Seydoux brings harmony and discord to all the entrenched layers of the ballet of human emotions. She is a very singular film actress who articulates her character perfectly and who always come up with something extremely apposite. She is a very moving woman who shares both twilight zones and brighter moments. No rehearsals, just a few takes to create the character. Her sense of humour and natural drollery enriched France with her geniality.

Blanche Gardin embodies the symbol of this media system: a grotesque, superficial woman. Like a theatrical character, a ridiculous person. Did you choose Blanche Gardin because her personality, known to be lucid and scathing, counterbalances the hysteria of her character and puts it at a distance? Does it reinforce the allegory of the film?

Lou devoured Blanche Gardin wholesale. The grotesque is so close to intelligence in Lou that it speaks volumes about the turpitude of the elites so devoted to the alienation of the masses. In any system, each collaborator inexorably takes the form of his or her function: Lou is the embodiment of a media system where only the audience determines the value of acts, regressing into a kind of media barbarism where the worst is the best. Blanche Gardin admirably portrays this apocalyptic underhandedness which collaborates in all industrial systems to help them achieve their goals. She is probably the most realistic character and therefore the funniest here.

How would you describe the character played by Benjamin Biolay?

Fred de Meurs is the natural husband of this exceptional woman. A sensitive and fine man,

«castrated» by his wife's excessiveness, yet not effeminate. The struggle is not to his advantage, so he intelligently remains in the background. France's self-love has eaten away at her love for her husband. Film heroes are inhuman since they are the counterparts of the viewers who struggle and rise up. They are excess and emptiness. And so Benjamin Biolay's skilled acting fits in with modern notions of low-key, subtle and reclusive virility. Fred is also an abstraction lacking a fair share of his masculinity, which the audience can complete.

After the ordeals, lucidity: France learns to be content with the present, to make do with it. This is when we return to Northern France. There is no more irony. Only a moment of grace, even if we've just experience horror. Do you think that the beauty of nature is the only thing that can mend us?

We are the human terminations of fields and pastures, as well as of hedges, streams, animals and the wind, we are, little by little, all parts of a whole whose unity we feel, just like its vortex that sweeps us up. The cinema reveals this mystical link that unites everything and everyone cut from the same cloth. The North is a land of perpetual grace where the cinema mystically raises everything in its luminous light and shows the spirituality of the world beneath its monumental exterior, in unison with a united whole. Thus, France accomplishes in the North the resolution of the Evil of which she was only an echo because this is where hell lies. How she is lightened by the monstrous nature of the man and the blessing of this woman, his wife. How she is lightened by the monstrous nature of the monster, which television feasts on for its deep-seated fictional view of the absolute evil of humanity, for which France weeps sincerely and of which her light crew, heads lowered, feels the burn while all the beauty of the world around them and its goodness are at their feet while the wind lashes at them.

With every degree of Evil, in the North or in her «other worlds», France is sanctified on a human level, up to the death of her husband and son which connects to all the human deaths of which the slaughtered little neighbour is the fruit. Nature has finally rid itself of God to clothe itself in its original splendour for which the Almighty was only a front, a powerful lapidary splendour that France glimpses in the wet furrows of ploughed fields leading down to the valley. Our conscience is finally illuminated by France, who undertook this emancipating mission and for whom the North was a place of glory. The North where the residual interpenetration of the finite and the infinite is so strong and visible that one understands and accepts that, in human life, one never comes to the end of anything without desiring it desperately. At this mystical junction of the finite and the infinite in the countryside, with

its inhabitants, hearts are comforted and exalted.

Thus, France demystifies the cinema in this manner in order to re-mystify it again in this new light. The restoration is carried out. By the cinema.

What instructions did you give Christophe? The music in the film is always without irony, even rather lyrical at times. Was this your intention?

In the old days of cinema, music had to provide an explanation. Deep down, music often reaches the most remote corners of our heart, touching the spirit and the soul, reaching the arcane where everything is in ferment and, without any more clarity, those depths previously explored with Jeanne. Music should explain to us what is going on in France's heart. Especially when it is difficult to understand or to follow. Christophe worked directly on the editing of the film and the areas in question where the articulations of the story are laid bare. It's a very psychological score. France carries human contradiction to its limit, so this is often counterbalanced by music that is contrary to her actions or words, and which already announces the internal palinode of her existence. Moreover, France is not human, but rather a song, the song of humanity in the turmoil of life. Christophe understood all that: he had already explained Péguy by half-reading him. The musical lyricism that dominates Christophe's work is the

echo of the great tragedy underlying this modern life in which this woman struggles. Grace seems to be fate, fatum, whatever happens or occurs. A human and fatal grace whose strings are literally stretched at the end. The musical composition marks out the united and melodic whole of the continuous breath and blood of the heart of this woman carried to the confines of unfulfilled love, but which she suspects, and of death that defeats her, returning her to the human glory of banality and perseverance. France finally becomes human. Just as we do, cinematically, through her.

Christophe passed away a few weeks later, having seen the final cut with all his music finished. We were happy with our work: how his music explained everything.

Biography

Bruno Dumont directed his first feature film at the age of thirty-eight: The Life of Jesus in 1997, shot in Bailleul, his native town. This film earned him immediate recognition: selected for the Directors' Fortnight, it received a Special Mention for the Caméra d'Or. Exploring a demanding, singular, raw cinematographic path, Bruno Dumont returned to Cannes in 1999 with Humanity, in Official Competition. He was awarded with the Grand Prix and a double prize for the interpretation of the two non-professional actors. Bruno Dumont moved away from the North of France to shoot in the California desert, Twentynine Palms, a road movie selected at the Venice Film Festival in 2003. In 2006, Flanders, a harsh film about the ravages of war, received the Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival. Bruno Dumont then directed two films on the themes of religion, mysticism and their drifts: Hadewijch and Outside Satan. After a biopic with Juliette Binoche (Camille Claudel 1915), Bruno Dumont opened up to a new audience with the brilliant success of the mini-series Lil' Quinquin, a much more comical project than his previous works. He continues on the same burlesque path with Slack Bay, which was presented in Official Competition at the 2016 Cannes Film Festival. He then turned his attention to the tragic fate of Joan of Arc and directed the musical Jeannette: The Chilhood of loan of Arc, selected at the Directors' Fortnight in 2017 and then Joan of Arc selected at Un Certain Regard in 2019 where he received a Special Mention from the jury.

Filmography

2019 Joan of Arc Jury's Special Mention - Un certain Regard **Coincoin & the extra-humans** (Miniserie) 2018 Pardo d'onore - Locarno Film Festival 2017 Jeannette: The Chilhood of Joan of Arc Official Selection – Directors' Fortnight 2016 Slack Bay Official Competition - Cannes Film Festival 2014 Lil' Quinquin (Miniserie) Official Selection – Directors' Fortnight 2013 Camille Claudel 1915 Official Competition - Berlinale **Outside Satan** 2011 Official Selection - Un certain regard 2009 Hadewijch 2006 Flanders Grand Prix - Cannes Film Festival **Twentynine Palms** 2003 Official Competition – Venice Film Festival 1999 Humanity lury's Grand Prix, Award for Best Actress and Award for Best Actor - Festival de Cannes 1997 The Life of Jesus Special Mention for the Caméra d'Or Cannes Film Festival

Cast

Léa Seydoux – France de Meurs

First noticed in Christophe Honoré's The Beautiful Person in 2008, Léa Seydoux has become one of the most sought-after actresses of her generation both in France and internationally. Awarded many times, including the Palme d'Or for Blue is the Warmest Colour by Abdellatif Kechiche in 2013 at the Cannes Film Festival, she alternates between auteur and popular films with the same success. She has been seen in Dear Prudence and Grand Central by Rebecca Zlotowski, Farewell, My Queen and Diary of a Chambermaid by Benoît Jacquot, Saint Laurent by Bertrand Bonello, Oh, Mercy! by Arnaud Desplechin or Spectre by Sam Mendes with Daniel Craig. She was in Cannes in Competition with The Lobster by Yórgos Lánthimos in 2015 and It's Only the End of the World by Xavier Dolan in 2016. She will soon star in the new James Bond film No Time to Die by Cary Fukunaga, The French Dispatch by Wes Anderson, and Deception by Arnaud Desplechin.

Selective Filmography

- 2019 Oh, Mercy! by Arnaud Desplechin
- 2016 **It's Only the End of the World** by Xavier Dolan
- 2015 Spectre by Sam Mendes
- 2014 Beauty & the Beast de Christophe Gans
- 2013 **Blue is the Warmest Colour** by Abdellatif Kechiche

Benjamin Biolay – Fred De Meurs

Revealed to the general public with the album «Chambre avec vue» by Henri Salvador, Benjamin Biolay has had a dazzling career since then, awarded 6 times with the main French music prize. Author, composer, musician, arranger and producer, he knows how to play his multiple talents for his own account or for the greatest: from Julien Clerc to Vanessa Paradis, from Bernard Lavilliers to Juliette Gréco, etc.

At the same time, Benjamin Biolay made his first steps in the cinema and was nominated for a César in 2009 for the best supporting role in the film *Stella*. In 2011, he gets the lead role in *Pourquoi tu Pleures* ? by Katia Lewkowicz, accompanied by his own music inspired by the film.

Between multiple collaborations and numerous appearances on the big screen (*Hopefully* by Benoit Graffin, *Faultless* by Sebastien Marnier, *The Poisoning Angel* by Stephanie Pillonca-Kervern, *Number One* by Tonie Marshall, *Memoir of War* by Emmanuel Finkiel), Benjamin Biolay continued to write with genius and released in 2020 the album «Grand Prix» awarded album of the year and the artist of the year in France. His hit «Comment est ta peine» is in everyone's mind as he will start a masterful tour until the end of 2022.

He also played recently for Christophe Honoré in *On a Magical Night* in 2019 or Bruno Dumont in France, in official selection this year in Cannes.

Selective Filmography

- 2021 **France** by Bruno Dumont
- 2020 Appearences by Marc Fitoussi
- 2019 **On a Magical Night** by Christophe Honoré
- 2017 Memoir of War by Emmanuel Finkiel

Cast

Blanche Gardin – Lou

Blanche Gardin began her career in stand-up comedy through the Jamel Comedy Club. In parallel to her activity as a comedian, she is recognized as an actress and turns in 2020 with Benoît Delépine and Gustave Kerven in *Delete History* awarded at the Berlinale and nominated for a César.

Selective Filmography

- 2020 **Delete History** by Gustave Kervern & Benoît Delépine
- 2020 **#IAmHere** by Éric Lartigau
- 2019 **Selfie** by Thomas Bidegain, Marc Fitoussi, Tristan Aurouet, Cyril Gelblat & Vianney Lebasque

Léa Seydoux	France De Meurs
Blanche Gardin	Lou
Benjamin Biolay	Fred De Meurs
Emanuele Arioli	Charles Castro
Juliane Köhler	Mme Arpel
Gaëtan Amiel	Jo
Jawad Zemmar	Baptiste
Marc Bettinelli	Lolo

Crew

Director	Bruno Dumont
Screenwriter	Bruno Dumont
Executive Proudcers	Jean Bréhat
	Rachid Bouchareb
	Muriel Merlin
Coproducers	Dorothe Beinemeier
	Fabrizio Mosca
	Marcantonio Borghese
	Andrea Paris
	Matteo Rovere
	Ines Vasiljevic
	Geneviève Lemal
Photography	David Chambille
Editing	Nicolas Bier
Editor Supervisor	
Sound	
	Gert Jensen
	Romain Ozanne
	Emmanuel Croset
Original Soundtrack	Christophe
Director of production	,
& postproduction	Cédric Ettouati
Ist Assistant Director	
Script Supervisor	Virginie Barbay
Costumes	
Make-up Hairdressing	
Casting	
Set Design	
Location Manager	0

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