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Present

SPECIAL TREATMENT

A film by Jeanne Labrune

With Isabelle Huppert; Bouli Lanners;
Richard Debuisne and Sabila Moussadek

35mm Length: 95 min 1.85 Dolby Digital

International Sales

Films Boutique GmbH
Skalitzerstr. 54a
10997 Berlin
Tel.: +49 30 6953 7850
Fax: +49 30 6953 7851
info@filmsboutique.com

Contact in Toronto

Jean-Christophe Simon
simon@filmsboutique.com
+49 173 591 57 67

Contact PRESS

Unifrance booth TORONTO
Hyatt Regency
Caroline Aymar

Tel: +33 6 85 42 87 26
caroline.aymar@unifrance.org

Film First Co.

Jessica Edwards
jessica@filmfirstco.com
+1 917-620-8529
Kia Muhammad
kia@filmfirstco.com
+1-215-837-1643

Synopsis

Alice, a luxury-prostitute in her forties got tired of her job and seeks a therapist to change her life. Xavier, a well-established psychologist, gets more and more annoyed by his clients' monologues. When his wife leaves him, he meets Alice.

Interview with Jeanne Labrune

“Special Treatment” is your eighth full-length feature film, why did it take six years since “Cause toujours!”?

In 2004-2005, I wrote, with Richard Debuisne, “Those we love are strangers.” The producer really liked the project but the film was stopped for financial reasons when I was just starting preparations. It was very difficult and painful. I then instantly began writing a novel: “L’obscur” (*the Obscure*). The novel has nothing to do with the movie; however, all the energy gathered earlier to make the film was thrown into writing the book.

And then, one day, I happened to come across a book by Jacques Lacan evoking the “pass,” the moment when someone who is in psychoanalysis becomes the analyst in turn - a passage. Yet, in French the word “passe” is also the word used for a prostitute’s trick, and this struck me. I spoke about it to Richard Debuisne, with whom I co-wrote my latest films, and, together, we started thinking about making a cinematographic connection between psychoanalysis and prostitution; it was almost just a game at first. We realized that there were several points in common between the two professions. The location is generally discreet and enclosed, there is a couch or a bed, a given session length giving rise to payment - in cash for prostitution (although there are psychoanalysts who want to be paid in cash as well) - and above all a limit set by money: in prostitution, money means that the prostitute rents her body and only her body, that there should be no question of feelings; in psychoanalysis, money means that the analyst rents his time, his “presence,” and possibly some of his mind, but that nothing else is to be expected either in terms of feelings or a physical relationship - strictly prohibited, as any other form of acting out in the analytical rite. Location, rite, duration, money, the prohibition of love; on one side flesh, on the other a “listening” presence, both for sale; for us, it all became a realm for reflection, writing and moviemaking, and we also talked about the opposite of prostitution, that is love and gratuity. Starting from this, I wrote the initial draft of the screenplay, which we worked on together and rewrote afterwards.

Have you ever been in analysis?

Yes, for a few years, two then three sessions per week; that was in the ‘80s. In some ways psychoanalysis is to life what prostitution is to love, an interlude, a substitutive experience which works with frustration, need and can create a kind of addiction. In prostitution, the addiction is of a fairly simple nature. The idea is, I imagine, achieving pleasure and sometimes even just fulfilling a simple need; when the client leaves, he is “satisfied” and, if not, he can change partners each time. In psychoanalysis, things are obviously more complex, for there isn’t ever a sense of “satisfaction” at the end of a session. Indeed, it is dissatisfaction which brings the analysand back to the analyst. This appointment with one’s self, via another person, can become an addiction and, as in any other addiction, there is as much pleasure as there is pain. Yet sometimes, through analysis, one is led to laugh - laugh at oneself, one’s own need for closure; one tires out and finds detachment from oneself.

Does the film deliberately take part in the current debate on psychoanalysis?

No, since we wrote it three years ago. In 1999, when I wrote and directed "Tomorrow's Another Day," I already had an ironic look at psychoanalysis and questioned the relation between body and mind that we have again here. "Special Treatment," which was written in 2007 and shot in 2009, is coming to movie theaters with this polemical backdrop and I don't mind, as long as the debate doesn't lead people to watch my film through a reductive prism. My film doesn't aim to prove anything. It starts from a point of awareness, the emotional states experienced by the characters as they examine their own lives and change.

To say a few words about the debate sparked off by Michel Onfray's book, I was surprised by the violence expressed in some articles. Michel Onfray's book starts with a very complete analysis of Freud's work and refers to all the texts available. Onfray always cites his sources and is very honest from the beginning by writing about his initial discovery of Freud's texts, what they brought to him and then how and why he conducted his questioning of Freud's work. All systems, and psychoanalysis is one, deserve to be scrutinized, especially when they become a school of thought. I don't see why psychoanalysis should escape such scrutiny, nor why Freud's work should not be questioned based on elements that are provided by the texts that he himself wrote.

Still, the film does criticize analysts and their relationship with money rather severely.

I don't think that analysts are any greedier than most. And unless an analyst claims to be "curing," there is no ambiguity. When I talk about addiction, yes, there is a risk, yet why wouldn't we pay to talk about ourselves, to think. Many people pay to work out, spend their money on leisure activities or interior decoration and are "addicted" to a good many things. I don't see why you wouldn't pay for an intellectual workout, to think about language, attachment and detachment. What is disturbing and unacceptable is the claim that psychoanalysis can cure anything. Freud and many others played with this lie to perpetuate a system and establish a form of power. We've seen many dramatic instances when a psychoanalyst sneaked into his patient's weakness and used his or her pain to draw profit from it. Marilyn Monroe's case is a famous example of that. Psychoanalysis is a dangerous game, "costly in every way," between oneself and oneself via another person, it is not a therapy.

The relationship with money is being questioned in the film because it is a tentacular obsession in today's society. That which should only be a means of exchange has become something of value. And yet money has no value in itself and the accumulation of money, as well as the lack thereof, should in no way give those who have it a higher value than those who don't.

Robert Mass, the first psychoanalyst that Alice goes to see, is a cynical person who doesn't conceal what he is; his violence makes others face their own ambiguity. In the scene where Xavier and he confront one another, Xavier avoids him, he is not brave enough to face him and this is what disturbs his wife (Valérie Dreville). She can see he doesn't know where he's at, that he is swaying in his convictions, and this breaks something between them. He doesn't show interest in much anymore, he is bored, indifferent, shifty, only bestowing his interest on objects. However, owning an angel doesn't make you one... This is what's at stake in the auction scene. Cassagne acquires the angel for a dear sum, but he can just as well exchange it for a less expensive, and less angelic, object without feeling wronged; the object itself has no value. Even though Cassagne sets no particular condition for this exchange, Xavier is troubled. In a world where everything is for sale, generosity ends up creating unease. When someone doesn't join in the common game, which is often the only possible game, he is questioning the validity of the rules and disturbing the game, the status quo. The

incessant questioning of the rules is a necessity. To make the perversity of a rule appear, one first has to show how it works and how it does wrong; this is what the film does, at the beginning, by mirroring the state of things.

Today the rules of the game are those of the market, you have to be “marketable” at all costs, even if it means being a fraud. To sell oneself, learning to sell oneself, to sell one’s image, to become a brand and comply with what others supposedly wish for, these are the rules, the laws that govern. All this is exposed as an imperious necessity which one ought not disregard and which is often presented as fate. We are not far from prostitution.

This is what is being questioned in your film through the character of Alice...

Prostitution is a practice that shows in the most obvious manner the relationship between a person and money. She embodies the question: what do you sell of yourself in your work? You always sell something, even if only your time. And the more of yourself you put into your work, the more you sell “yourself.” Yet there is often a service, a skill or an object being produced which keeps this line of questioning at a “respectful” distance. The specificity of a prostitute’s work is that she has to do “what she is asked to do” docilely, she has to slip into the client’s desire and comply with it. She must not express any form of revolt; if she thinks something, she mustn’t show it; she isn’t paid to think. She sells herself as an object. Using someone and disposing of this person “after use” is not a practice limited to prostitution. It is an ever-expanding practice in the labor world in this period of liberalism in crisis where only what produces money is considered as having any “value” and where gratuity and generosity are “undervalued”; where a person has no value for him or herself and where “complexes or hang-ups” should be done away with, which can also mean to do away with anything complex, to no longer have any scruples to go simply and brutally to what counts: money.

To go back to the character, Alice does indeed sell herself with full knowledge of the facts but as she is a sensitive and clear-sighted person, she can only do so by disguising herself as if it were another person she was selling, keeping for herself and for Juliette who she really is. This stratagem (of which she is fully aware since she is already thinking of no longer prostituting herself in the restaurant scene where she has lunch with Juliette) shows its limitations the day she is physically attacked. It is no longer the character she plays who is defending herself but her true self, her person as a whole. The facts destroy the subterfuge. Cleaving is no longer an option. And what she realizes then is that she had underestimated the danger. Her decision to undertake psychoanalysis comes from the wish to assemble the broken pieces. However, the hard blow she went through, this extreme danger, has already led her to “pull the pieces together.” Even if, after this ordeal, she accepts to play her role one last time for a “final” client, she can no longer play her role the same way. Something in her has already changed. Xavier asks her: “But here, now, is it you?” Alice can’t help turning around to make sure she’s really the one he is speaking to, as if there was a double standing behind her. Once she has found her integrity again, and she no longer lies to herself, it becomes impossible and unbearable for her to prostitute herself. When she is faced with Robert Mass, the psychoanalyst, and his harshness, she sees herself. In the harsh and ironic power struggle that she starts with him, she discovers herself also. After that, the two “tricks” she turns with Xavier will be failures as such. Failure, for she can no longer “sell herself”, nor sell substitute love or “play,” and failure for him as well, for he can no longer “buy,” as he is already questioning money because of his wife’s observations. And this is when it becomes interesting for Alice and Xavier: they exposed themselves to each other, unintentionally, unknowingly, and they reach a certain truth; they can embrace each other for good, person to person not persona to persona, before separating. They have brought one another to a new place.

But then the film could have ended there?

No, in fact, because in some aspects it is the beginning of Alice's story, the story of Alice as a single, whole person. She asks Xavier to give her a colleague's business card, which in itself shows she trusts him, and he gives her the card of a man whom he trusts intuitively, although he doesn't know him, on the grounds that they've had a troubling exchange at the auction room and that after being surprised, after having wanted to "pay" for the present, Xavier accepted it. Alice trusts Xavier and goes to meet Cassagne.

Then why does Cassagne refuse to analyze Alice?

When he meets her, he doesn't see a torn woman but a woman who knows exactly what she's all about, what she wants, who doesn't "play" a role and who is already "out of trouble." The very fact that she tells him so quickly that she feels at ease with him signals to him that what Alice is really looking for is simply love. In analytical lingo, this would be called an instant "transference," but it could in more simple terms be called a desire for love, to love and be loved. Yet Cassagne isn't someone who plays with love. If he told her that, it may be of no use and may even cause further attachment on her part, so he faces up to his responsibilities and says "no." This "no" is the acknowledgement of her strength, of the fact that she can go on by herself and he tells her so. This is why it is legitimate for us to wonder why Xavier, who is a psychoanalyst and has other colleagues, sent Alice to Cassagne; and what the meaning of this exchange is, as if, through Alice, he in turn offered him a present.

And then why does Cassagne, when Alice comes to the hospital, ask her to wait for him, why doesn't he just tell her to go?

When we wrote the scene, we didn't even ask ourselves that question. For us, it was obvious that it had to happen that way, that he couldn't reject her, that saying "no" did not mean abandoning her. He leaves her with Bruno, in a place where people who are lonelier than her live on the margins of society and social games. Cassagne takes care of these people and visibly gives them more than medication: attention, affection and energy. He recognizes them as persons. He too gives Alice a card, for a potential job; since she wants to stop prostituting herself, he gives her another chance, a job involving books and knowledge. Alice understands very well the positive value of his refusal, an understanding that she expresses through sending him the angel that Xavier gave her. Cassagne, in turn, will give it to his patients; he keeps nothing, he passes things on.

An angel is not an insignificant object, it is an intermediary between God and men. Moreover, why are there so many objects in your films?

The word "angel" comes from the Greek word *angelos* which means "messenger," and in the Christian tradition it is a messenger from God. Here, however, it is a messenger between men, it doesn't represent anything religious and it doesn't transmit any message from any god. The last person to receive it, from Cassagne's hands, says: "Oh, what a beautiful doll!" This sentence wasn't in the screenplay, it came spontaneously out of Marie-Christine's mouth and we kept it because, deep down, it was full of sense, or nonsense, like the [French] title of the film. No one escapes the metaphysical question, we all wonder, at some point and sometimes often, about the meaning of life, although there is no answer to this question. Yet wondering about it is the only way not to live like an animal. It is a civilizing question, as philosophical hypotheses are, while religious answers are, as all beliefs, dubious, and like all certainties, they spawn dogmas and fanaticism.

To go back to objects, each of us sees something different in the same object, gives it a different meaning, an interpretation, reveals something of him or herself when talking about it, projects onto it his or her own imaginary world (as was already the case in my three previous fictions, one starting from a dresser, another from a bouquet of flowers and the third from a minuscule insect: a moth). The true value of an object is its imaginary value. This is a reflection we can also find at the heart of artistic creation.

How do you work with actors?

In a different manner with each of them; I try to feel out what each of them needs. I barely speak about the screenplay, almost never about the meaning. No explanations, no psychology. We build the character together based on tangible things; the choice of an item of clothing, a pair of shoes, a lipstick or a belt can keep us busy for a very long time. Through these choices, we learn to know each other and we draw the characters in successive strokes. I don't have the impression I'm working, I am there. I can evoke a few specific moments with them:

Bouli Lanners had never played this kind of role. He is from Liège. I took the train and he came to meet me at the station; we drove through the town on his scooter, my arms tight around him. We had lunch on a terrace and spoke freely; a bond formed between us, the kind of trust that dispels doubt and brings energy.

Sabila Moussadek is a stage actress. I offered her a small part in a whorehouse where Xavier goes one night. She is the one who, naked, has to walk a pig on a leash as an allusion to Pornocrates. Since she's not used to working with cameras, I proposed that she come to the screen tests. She came. Spontaneously, she took her clothes off. I could feel that she was bracing herself, that it was difficult, but she was doing it. In the light I could see her peach complexion, her long hair, her tutelary goddess-like stature, I listened to her deep, slightly husky voice and I suggested filming a take with Isabelle. There she was, naked, behind Isabelle and she had to take her in her arms. We filmed the scene. The contrast between the two actresses was superb, there was a true harmony between them, I could see that they were comfortable with each other. I offered Sabila the part of Juliette. She would play this clear-sighted and generous prostitute who is also a strong and protective friend. This made her happy, and me too. I didn't speak of the character or the film any further. There is something of Anna Magnani in her that I love. She is cut out for powerful roles. I am proud to have her debut in movies, with Isabelle.

Valérie Dréville was on tour when we were preparing the movie, so we spoke on the phone. She was far, I didn't know where. But with her voice, I associated her peaceful face, her interiority, her reserve and whatever little we said was enough. One evening at the hotel, while shooting the film, she told me about a trip she took to India. The following day, I shot her scene in a different manner, yet it had nothing to do with India.

Richard Debusne has consistently been embodying, in my films (which are his as well when he's co-written them) the person who brings the truth out of people, underneath their appearances and the postures they adopt to protect themselves. As every actor, he fleshes out a role in his own way and, for this film, he did it by spending time with the group of actors for the hospital scenes, as well as with doctors and nurses; still there is in him, as in Isabelle, something enigmatic. He has this ability, once the camera is rolling, to completely forget the character, to become the character, in this "here and now" of the take, in direct and emotional relation to his partners. When we were filming the scene between Isabelle and Cassagne, in his office in town, since the set was small I had to watch the takes from a screen. I don't like doing this, I prefer being with the actors, near the camera. We started by filming the scene looking at Richard. At some point, the silence was growing a little long

between lines of dialogue, I could see on Richard's watchful and troubled face that there was something going on but I couldn't understand why the silence was lasting such a long time. It's the moment when, in the reverse shot, Isabelle's eyes are filled with tears. Richard was looking at her, he was with her, he was a man who looks at a woman who is crying; time standing still. It was the same with Karim Leklou and the hospital's actors, former "sick people," he was all sensitivity and trust.

Isabelle Huppert and I have worked in the "here and now". From the first meeting, when she told me she wanted to be in the film, until the last day of shooting. We never spoke about the screenplay, but we did, in a few words, agree on the traits of the character. We saw each other a lot for the costumes, wigs, accessories. I watched her transform completely before my eyes; she'd fully and instantly inhabit the costume. It was almost like a dance, her body language would change from one costume to the next; she was a new person each time. I could feel that she was allowing herself and allowing me to go quite far into these transformations, and into exposing herself, that she was ready to go as far as possible together, that her demanding nature and mine were akin. Once the long period of work on costumes, wigs, makeup and screen tests was over, we each retired to our own quarters. For Isabelle it was her dressing room with her team, for me it was the set with my crew; for both of us, separate hotel rooms, the movie between us. Our own solitude and our lives, and that which is our work and our passion. We would see each other in hallways, in the passageways of the sets but we wouldn't linger. She would do her work, I'd do mine. But the common junction point, the line of sight was the film. Isabelle, an apparently fragile body, seemingly "neutral", I'd say, in her natural, unaffected beauty, is an instrument inhabited by a sensitive, extremely intuitive and powerful spirit. We spoke very little off screen; it wasn't really necessary. But on the set she was there. Entirely there, and so was I. There was this tension between us to get things just right, to achieve a goal set together from one take to the next. Our point of convergence; what we were striving for. Sometimes, she would ask me: "and there, don't you think that..." And I would answer: "there I think you..." and she'd have already understood and would stop me with a movement of her hand. OK. Let's go. We moved on. Sometimes she would ask for a retake, sometimes I would. There is something rite-like, mysterious, in her acting. Isabelle Huppert is a performer.

To summarize, we could say that your film is a film more serious than it seems about money and human relations.

Several people who had read the screenplay thought this film would be along the lines of my previous fictions. It is, in the sense that my work has been consistent, from my first films, serious and sometimes dark, until the last few fictions I filmed, which are dark underneath but with a light and ironic tone. By choosing Isabelle and the other actors, with the sets and the light, what was taking shape was really the unveiling of the other side of the human comedy, the lifting of smiling masks. Since the beginning, my films have had in common the fact that they tell a story about overcoming something. How can one try to give life meaning, how can one overcome the bitter traits of human nature, how can one remain lucid, make it through despair and achieve a certain lightness? What should we do to defeat the stupidity and violence inside of us, which are lurking like a beast that we constantly need to tame, that we need to shake off, untangle within ourselves and out of ourselves? My films are all about this struggle.

Jeanne Labrune

Selective filmography.
Feature films

LA PART DE L'AUTRE 1985

OF SAND AND OF BLOOD 1987

SANS UN CRI 1991

BEWARE OF MY LOVE... 1998

VATEL (screenplay adapted into English by Tom Stoppard for Roland Joffé) 1999

TOMORROW'S ANOTHER DAY 2000

SPECIAL DELIVERY 2002

CAUSE TOUJOURS! 2004

SPECIAL TREATMENT 2010

Novel: L'OBSCUR. (Grasset 2007)

Richard Debuisne

An assistant director on fifty some-odd feature films (Jean Luc Godard, Jean Pierre Mocky, Maurice Pialat, Serge Gainsbourg, Catherine Breillat, Jeanne Labrune, Ritty Panh...), Richard Debuisne played a role for Godard in CHANTONS EN CHŒUR, and continued acting in increasingly important roles for Jeanne Labrune in her films.

2010: SPECIAL TREATMENT

2004: CAUSE TOUJOURS!

2002: SPECIAL DELIVERY

2000: TOMORROW'S ANOTHER DAY

Since 2002 (SPECIAL DELIVERY), he has been collaborating with Jeanne Labrune, co-writing her screenplays.

He is currently adapting LA VOIE ARDENTE for the screen, based on the novel by Dominique Vieux.

In 2005 he spent a year on stage with the Magasin theater theatrical troop (Marc Adjadj).

Cast list

Alice Bergerac	Isabelle HUPPERT
Xavier Demestre	Bouli LANNERS
Pierre Cassagne	Richard DEBUISNE
Juliette	Sabila MOUSSADEK
Hélène Demestre	Valérie DRÉVILLE
Robert Masse	Mathieu CARRIÈRE
The happy and sad man	Didier BEZACE
The transvestite	Frédéric LONGBOIS
The pipe collector	Christophe ODENT
The pedophile client	Jean-François WOLFF
The elegant athlete	Gilles COHEN
François Briand	Frédéric PIERROT

Credits

Director	Jeanne LABRUNE
Screenplay by	Jeanne LABRUNE & Richard DEBUISNE
Produced by	Jani THILTGES
Coproducers	Patrick QUINET Claude WARINGO
Executive Producer	Serge ZEITOUN
Original music	André MERGENTHALER
Cinematographer	Virginie SAINT-MARTIN
Set decorator	Régine CONSTANT
Costumes	Claire FRAÏSSÉ
Editor	Anja LÜDCKE
Sound	Carlo THOSS
Sound Mixer	Luc THOMAS
Sound Editor	Fred DEMOLDER Valène LEROY
First assistant director	Matthieu BLANCHARD
Unit production manager	Brigitte KERGER-SANTOS
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