DOMESTIC LIFE
A FILM BY ISABELLE CZAJKA
ADAPTED FROM A NOVEL BY RACHEL CUSK: “ARLINGTON PARK”
SYNOPSIS
Juliette was simply not sure about coming to live in this residential suburb of the greater Paris metropolitan area. All the women here are in their forties with children to raise, houses to keep and husbands who return home late at night. Now, she is quite certain she doesn’t want to become like them. Today, Juliette is waiting to hear if she got a job, an important position in a publishing house. A job that would obviously change her everyday life.
INTERVIEW WITH ISABELLE CZAJKA

Why did you decide to adapt Rachel Cusk’s book, Arlington Park, for your third film, Domestic Life. 
Originally I wanted to make a film about a woman in her forties who was married, had children and a career. I was interested in exploring her daily life. To this end, I first considered making a contemporary version of Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse. But it turned out, completely by accident, that during the same time period I heard on the radio about Arlington Park, a novel written by the writer Rachel Cusk, who was inspired by Virginia Woolf. I bought it, read it and finally decided to adapt it, for it contained everything I was looking for, all the issues that were important to me.

What issues?
A desire to describe the minute details that come into play in Western, post modern, married and domestic life. Arlington Park outlines the destinies of several women in order to actually paint the portrait of women in the West today. So I read the book six or eight times, I took notes, chopped the narrative into small sections, sequence by sequence. Then I chose two female characters from the book to create a single character, my heroine, Juliette [played by Emmanuelle Devos]. And then I put the novel down and never looked back.

Following your last two films Next Year and Living on Love Alone, Domestic Life is your third film with a woman’s voice. Why do you prefer telling stories from a woman’s perspective?
I don’t think specifically about making a film for women or with female characters. It just comes naturally to me. There’s nothing deliberate about it. Besides, men have their own place as well. In fact, one of the challenges of the film was to show the roles that are given to both women and men as a consequence of how our society is organized. To do so, in a certain way, I dissected a woman’s everyday life: she wakes up in the morning, makes breakfast, brings the children to school and finds herself alone in the kitchen when everyone is gone. We are witness to an accumulation of concrete, pragmatic and real facts of everyday life that as a result place women, for instance and particularly my heroines, in a specific place in this micro-society that is the French suburban middle class.

How did you choose the film’s title?
The title came very quickly. I first tried to find a French geographical counterpart to the novel's title Arlington Park, but in the end I was more influenced by my reading - books such as Life, a user’s manual, or La vie matérielle (Material life)… Interestingly, once the title had been chosen, many things fell into place, taking on a deeper meaning. I also liked the idea that the word “domestic” has a double meaning.

What is your definition of “Domestic Life?”
It’s neither one’s love life, nor married life, nor family life. It’s domestic life, meaning the way women end up having to take on the responsibility of all these little everyday things that need to be done, without being specifically obligated to do so. And it all happens in an insidious, sly way. The women become their own torturers. In domestic life, all these things make up one’s daily life including the way women end up dispersing themselves— for it is true that it is more often than not women who are in charge of making sure that things run smoothly on a daily basis. They handle an array of diverse tasks, even when they have jobs, making sure that everything happens just as if they weren’t working. They do everything possible to make sure that work doesn’t disturb the course of daily life at home. Not only do they maintain the day’s continuity and cohesion, but also that of the month and the year - for example they plan vacations, etc. Yet despite the diversity of all of these tasks, they must maintain the unity of time as well as continuity over time.

In fact the film follows the principle of unity of time, as it takes place over a 24-hour period. That was the way the book was written. It is also a reference to Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway, which happens over the course of a day. Using the course of a day to express the narrative arc from a domestic viewpoint worked perfectly for me.
Who is Juliette, the film's heroine?
I belong to a generation of women who were told that they could have it all: work, career, children etc., that there was no problem and the world was now ready and adapted for this eventualty. I believed it. For a very long time I believed I had the right to have it all, and I tried to do it all. But it isn't quite true. It's much more complicated. Juliette, my heroine is like that. She also thinks that she can have it all. She has a degree, she has children, and she tells herself that she can have a house, a husband, a career. At the same time she has deeply invested herself – without anyone asking her – in the continuity of daily tasks. She set herself up without realizing it and over the course of the day when everything seems to close in around her, hemming her in, she decides that from then on she will no longer let herself be held back by all this.

There are a number of other women around Juliette (played by Julie Ferrier, Helena Noguerra and Natacha Régnier). They are all different types, but they are also all trapped in the same situation.
That's from the novel too; in particular the character played by Julie Ferrier who comes from a lower social class than the others, and who consequently more readily accepts this pitfall in exchange for the material comforts that go along with it. She handles the situation better than the others, even if it slightly disturbs her. Helena Noguerra's character is more carefree, she has kept her "little girl" side. She also feels trapped, but isn't entirely aware of it. Finally the character played by Natacha Régnier is much more aware of her situation, and therefore anxious. She is expecting her third child and hangs on to the idea that she is going to go back to work afterwards.

You refer to social classes. Is the subject of social classes still a relevant one in your opinion?
Yes, in the sense that social classes are still there. It's very, very important to speak about this. I show women from every social class whose common point is the heroine. She is the one who connects them all, because of her professional activity. Every age is accounted for in the film as well. There are little girls, teenagers, women and older women. But getting back to social classes, I fully believe it is a decisive factor in life. That's how I see it. Contrary to what we believe, a woman from a modest social class for example doesn't have an easy time changing her social category. It is difficult, it's like being a woman and working, it's much the same yoke. It's always there.

A yoke of social conventions symbolized by two neighboring yet dissimilar suburbs, one rich and the other poor?
Exactly. There is a geographical resonance in the film. Meaning that these women live in a protected area. Then, when they go to the shopping mall, they go through much more precarious areas. That's what social classes are – spheres that touch but don't mix, or rarely ever mix. Just like these suburbs, the women are impervious to one another.

Another theme present in Domestic Life is conjugal love. One thing all these women have in common is that they are in a couple and they are loved. Was it important to show couples who love one another, and in particular the heroine's couple?
Very. I absolutely did not want the film to be diverted to any other subject than that of domestic life – no stories of cheating, jealousy, or even farce. These are not couples in crisis. They love each other and the couple played by Emmanuelle Devos and Laurent Poitrenaux love each other very much. They enjoy one another, are happy together and have a full life. After years of marriage they are still sleeping together. Their couple is very much alive.

How did you work with Emmanuelle Devos?
In my mind, Emmanuelle Devos is one of the only actresses who can personify with such credibility the role of a mother, friend, lover; a cultivated woman who is therefore able to look squarely at domestic life. Emmanuelle is sensual. She is a woman who “takes it all in,” meaning she is able to embody all of these registers.

Filming this particular woman within an exclusive residential area is all the more striking.
It's true that I wondered how to film Emmanuelle Devos within such an archetypal environment. She really isn’t integrated. Yet, instead of being a character who is trying to escape, she is one who is trying to resist. She isn’t tempted to take refuge in depression, or to run away, on the contrary, she wants to do things, accomplish things with her family life, her husband and children. She also believes she is stronger than her environment, that she can resist it.
The husband is played by Laurent Poitrenaux. Laurent was a magical encounter. You write a role, and then you see an actor play it exactly as you had imagined it. That’s what happened with Laurent in *Living on Love Alone*. After that I wanted to work with him again. He is very elegant. Like Emmanuelle Devos. I knew that his natural elegance and humor would protect his character from being perceived as detestable, trivial, or as a caricature. It was also very important for the audience to feel the marital love between his character and Emmanuelle Devos’.

The characters are only seen in contemporarily decorated interiors. In fact they seem to be deliberately stereotyped. Why? Indeed, with the exception of a few nuances, the characters develop among new things and standard furniture that can be found everywhere. That aspect was important to me because it is a reflection of a subject that is dear to me: the relationship of women and commerce, the pressure that is put on women to consume. Women are the ones who buy. Thus, the prescriptive weight that is put on women to fit into the fold through consumption is incredible. Homes are decorated in the same fashion. Everyone dresses alike. I’m not disputing it, I do exactly the same thing; I’m merely stating a fact. Commercial pressure is especially put on women. It’s very unnerving to find yourself standing in front of a-mile-long choice of yogurts! You have to choose! Moreover, women receive all sorts of orders and commands through consumption. They have to be young, desirable, active, organized, loving…

What has this film taught you? I don’t know yet. Maybe this film has helped me from a personal standpoint to find my way out of domestic life. Yes, thanks to this film I’m leaving domestic life behind. And in a good way.
DIRECTOR’S FILMOGRAPHY

2002 LA CIBLE (THE TARGET) - SHORT
SACD award for first work of fiction - Clermont-Ferrand film festival 2003

2006 NEXT YEAR
Leopard for first work of fiction - Locarno film festival 2006

2007 UN BÉBÉ TOUT NEUF (A BRAND NEW BABY) - SHORT

2009 LIVING ON LOVE ALONE

2013 DOMESTIC LIFE
CAST
Juliette Emmanuelle Devos
Betty Julie Ferrier
Marianne Natacha Régnier
Inès Helena Noguerra
Thomas Laurent Poitrenaux
Grégoire Michaël Abiteboul
Bertrand Sava Lov
Didier Grégoire Oestermann
Nicole Marie Christine Barrault
Mathieu Laurent Capelluto
Cindy Agathe Schlenckler
Paloma Océane Mozas
La voisine Catherine Vinatier
Le CPE David Geselson
Mia Louise Coldefy

CREW
Director Isabelle Czajka
Screenplay, Adaptation and dialogue Isabelle Czajka
Based on the book “Arlington Park” by Rachel Cusk
Cinematographer Renaud Chassaing
Sound Guillaume Valeix, Hervé Guyader, Emmanuel Crosset
Editing Isabelle Manquillet (LMA)
Music Eric Neveux
Assistant director Ferdinand Verhaeghe
Costumes Christel Birot
Production designer Valérie Saradjian (ADC)
Production manager Marie Frédérique Lauriot-dit-Prévost
Unit production manager Claire Langmann
Producer Patrick Sobelman - AGAT Films & Cie
Co-producer France 2 Cinéma
With the participation of France Télévisions, Canal +, Ciné +
In association with A plus Image 4, Indéfi Ims
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International Sales Films Distribution